

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
Fourth Quarter 2014: *The Book of James*
Lesson 2 “The Perfecting of Our Faith”

Read for this week’s study

James 1:2, 3; 1 Pet. 1:6, 7; Phil. 3:12–15; James 1:19–21; Luke 17:5, 6; Luke 12:16–21.

Memory Text

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2, NIV 1984).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Faith Lasts
- III. Perfection
- IV. Asking in Faith
- V. The Flip Side of Faith
- VI. The Rich and the Poor
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Moderator: Zdravko Stefanović

JAMES 1:2-11

A. Introduction

1. Life of the early Christians
2. External afflictions (persecutions)
3. Overarching theme (1:2 & 5:13)
4. Profiting from trials – Jesus’ life and teaching

B. Joy in Trials (1:2-4)

1. James begins and ends his book with the topic of suffering. Do the believers today face more or fewer trials than the unbelievers?
2. The author calls for joy in the face of trials. Isn’t this insensitive and even shocking to some of us?
3. The word “perfect” could mean “spiritually mature.” Is joy to be found in the trials themselves or in the end-results of the trials?

C. Wisdom in Trials (1:5-8)

1. Some scholars consider the sequence ‘trials leading to patience leading to wisdom’ to be a formula or a three-stage program for growth. Isn’t there an easier way to acquire wisdom?
2. Ancient Babylonians believed that wisdom is a gift of the creator god(s). What does the Bible teach about this topic? (Job 28)
3. Is wisdom different from knowledge? How?
4. For James the restless sea is a fitting metaphor of instability. Why is it that a double-minded person cannot fully trust God?

D. Rich and Poor before God (1:9-11)

1. The rich and the poor are on the opposite sides of the social structure. What do both of these have in common?
2. Wealth possession is temporary and it cannot buy a favor with God. What is wealth then good for? What did Jesus teach about material possessions?
3. The verbs “to be” and “to have” are frequently used in conversations. How often did ancient Hebrews use them?

**Wise is he who learns from every person.
Strong is he who masters his passion.
Rich is he who is content of his fate.
Honored by people is he who honors others.**

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

My conviction is that Paul could read James and say, "Well said!" and vice versa. I see no conflict at all between the two. So what do you suppose led to this feeling? Is it possible that there had been so much legalism, in Luther's day, that he just went too far in the other direction for awhile? Ellen White has an interesting comment. "We've heard a great deal about faith, it's time now we heard a little more about works." A matter of balance. Isn't it true that faith without works is a dead faith? Is anyone saved by a dead faith? So you don't really trust. I don't see any disagreement between the two at all.

Now, if a man tries to be saved by works without any faith; I mean, can God save those who do not trust Him? No matter how hard they work? No. There must be trust. But the man who says, "I trust You, but I don't have time to listen, and I don't intend to follow Your instructions, because if I were to follow Your instructions, that would be works." That makes nonsense out of faith. "I trust You, but I'm not going to do what You say." Try that on your doctor.

You say, "I'm very sick, and I trust you."

And the doctor says, “do the following.”

“Oh no! It would only be faith if I can go to bed tonight and wake up well in the morning.”

Well, it doesn't come that easily, does it? It's a faith that works. Faith is a willingness to listen and to carry through with the instructions as best one can. Now it's true, our efforts may not be at all perfect—quite fumbling. But the trust must be complete. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in All 66 – 1&2 Peter and James*, recorded July, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:* <http://pkp.cc/pogia66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/pogia66> (Part 2)

LV: People want to know about perfection.

AGM: Well, fortunately we have two hours coming up. We have a whole evening entitled, "God can perfectly heal the damage done or completely heal the damage done." I think it's that important, because a misunderstanding of perfection is a heavy burden and puts God in a very bad light. Now, I believe God can perfectly heal the damage done. No question about it. And perfection also needs to be understood as maturity and growing up, the need to be so settled into the truth and grown up in the truth that we can survive the time of trouble. But as for not making mistakes—a mistake is not a sin. And I think it's so important to be relieved of that. In the hereafter, you could plant your pomegranate tree too close to where you are living, and the Lord come by later and say, "You know, you put it too close, didn't you. You might as well move it." That is not a sin. Sin is rebelliousness. Sin is distrust. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, session 4 with Lou Venden, "God's Way of Restoring Trust" recorded February, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/4MMCAG>

If God is not going to allow the closing events to occur until He has a generation like Job—mature enough and settled into the truth, to pass through the time of trouble, thoughts that pass through my mind in that connection are this: I think we have assumed it takes a very, very long time to grow up from rebirth to maturity. I notice that when Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he suggested that they could be grown up much sooner. And in Hebrews, it was just a few years later that he said, "By now you should be teachers, but I see you are still babes in the truth." I think that we could encourage people to believe they could grow up from rebirth to maturity much sooner, and it would be much more exciting. You know, when we're baptized, we think, "I've launched myself on sixty-five years of slow sanctification." I think, "No, why not grow up without delay as quickly as possible and be settled into the truth?" But then when we have an absolutely out-of-sight, forbidding conception of perfection, we think "well, I'm not going to make it anyway." The conception of perfection we find in the Bible is the conception of an individual who is so convinced of this truth about God, that if Satan should come as an angel of

light, even as Christ, and say God is arbitrary, vengeful, unforgiving and severe, a twelve year-old might be able to say, "That's not true and I will not believe it." So I think we have made the difference too extended in there, and God can, under the accelerating, energizing events of the close of time, He can produce a generation of grown-up Jobs of all ages. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, session 4, "God's Way of Restoring Trust" recorded February, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/4MMCAG>*

Recommended Listening:

Conversations About God session 14 "God Can Completely Heal the Damage Done" is available at: <http://pkp.cc/14MMCAG>

Perfection: Requirement or Generous Offer? is available at:

<http://pkp.cc/1MMPERFECT> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/2MMPERFECT> (Part 2)

Further Study with Ellen White

The fact that we are called upon to endure trial shows that the Lord Jesus sees in us something precious which He desires to develop. If He saw in us nothing whereby He might glorify His name, He would not spend time in refining us. He does not cast worthless stones into His furnace. It is valuable ore that He refines. The blacksmith puts the iron and steel into the fire that he may know what manner of metal they are. The Lord allows His chosen ones to be placed in the furnace of affliction to prove what temper they are of and whether they can be fashioned for His work. {MH 471.2}

Faith is the gift of God, but the power to exercise it is ours. Faith is the hand by which the soul takes hold upon the divine offers of grace and mercy. {PP 431.2}

Jacob's history is also an assurance that God will not cast off those who have been deceived and tempted and betrayed into sin, but who have returned unto Him with true repentance. While Satan seeks to destroy this class, God will send His angels to comfort and protect them in the time of peril. The assaults of Satan are fierce and determined, his delusions are terrible; but the Lord's eye is upon His people, and His ear listens to their cries. Their affliction is great, the flames of the furnace seem about to consume them; but the Refiner will bring them forth as gold tried in the fire. God's love for His children during the period of their severest trial is as strong and tender as in the days of their sunniest prosperity; but it is needful for them to be placed in the furnace of fire; their earthliness must be consumed, that the image of Christ may be perfectly reflected. {GC 621.1}

It is faith that familiarizes the soul with the existence and presence of God; and when we live with an eye single to His glory, we discern more and more the beauty of His character. Our souls become strong in spiritual power, for we are breathing the atmosphere of heaven, and, realizing that God is at our right hand, we shall not be moved.... We should live as in the presence of the Infinite One.... {OHC 324.5}

Divine wisdom will order the steps of those who put their trust in the Lord. Divine love will encircle them, and they will realize the presence of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. {OHC 324.6}

The trials of life are God's workmen, to remove the impurities and roughness from our character. Their hewing, squaring, and chiseling, their burnishing and polishing, is a painful process; it is hard to be pressed down to the grinding wheel. But the stone is brought forth prepared to fill its place in the heavenly temple. Upon no useless material does the Master bestow such careful, thorough work. Only His precious stones are polished after the similitude of a palace. {MB 10.3}

None who receive God's word are exempt from difficulty and trial; but when affliction comes, the true Christian does not become restless, distrustful, or despondent. Though we can not see the definite outcome of affairs, or discern the purpose of God's providences, we are not to cast away our confidence. Remembering the tender mercies of the Lord, we should cast our care upon Him, and with patience wait for His salvation. {COL 60.4}

Through conflict the spiritual life is strengthened. Trials well borne will develop steadfastness of character and precious spiritual graces. The perfect fruit of faith, meekness, and love often matures best amid storm clouds and darkness. {COL 61.1}

Often when we pray for the graces of the Spirit, God works to answer our prayers by placing us in circumstances to develop these fruits; but we do not understand His purpose, and wonder, and are dismayed. Yet none can develop these graces except through the process of growth and fruit bearing. Our part is to receive God's word and to hold it fast, yielding ourselves fully to its control, and its purpose in us will be accomplished. {COL 61.2}

God leads His children by a way that they know not, but He does not forget or cast off those who put their trust in Him. He permitted affliction to come upon Job, but He did not forsake him. He allowed the beloved John to be exiled to lonely Patmos, but the Son of God met him there, and his vision was filled with scenes of immortal glory. God permits trials to assail His people, that by their constancy and obedience they themselves may be spiritually enriched, and that their example may be a source of strength to others. "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil." Jeremiah 29:11. The very trials that task our faith most severely and make it seem that God has forsaken us, are to lead us closer to Christ, that we may lay all our burdens at His feet and experience the peace which He will give us in exchange. {PP 129.2}

It is by close, testing trials that God disciplines His servants. He sees that some have powers which may be used in the advancement of His work, and He puts these persons upon trial; in His providence He brings them into positions that test their character and reveal defects and weaknesses that have been hidden from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to correct these defects and to fit themselves for His service. He shows them their own weakness, and teaches them to lean upon Him; for He is their only help and safeguard. Thus His object is attained. They are educated, trained, and disciplined, prepared to fulfill the grand purpose for which their powers were given them. When God calls them to action, they are ready, and heavenly angels can unite with them in the work to be accomplished on the earth. {PP 129.3}

Not in freedom from trial, but in the midst of it, is Christian character developed. Exposure to rebuffs and opposition leads the follower of Christ to greater watchfulness and more earnest prayer to the mighty Helper. Severe trial endured by the grace of God develops patience, vigilance, fortitude, and a deep and abiding trust in God. It is the triumph of the Christian faith that it enables its followers to suffer and be strong; to submit, and thus to conquer; to be killed all the day long, and yet to live; to bear the cross, and thus to win the crown of glory. {AA 467.3}

God bids us fill the mind with great thoughts, pure thoughts. He desires us to meditate upon His love and mercy, to study His wonderful work in the great plan of redemption. Then clearer and still clearer will be our perception of truth, higher, holier, our desire for purity of heart and clearness of thought. The soul dwelling in the pure atmosphere of holy thought will be transformed by communion with God through the study of Scriptures. {COL 60.1}

Those who really desire to be taught of God, and to walk in His way, have the sure promise that if they feel their lack of wisdom and ask of God, He will give liberally, and upbraid not. The apostle says, "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." . . . Believe; believe that God will do just what He has promised. Keep your prayers ascending, and watch, work, and wait. Fight the good fight of faith. {SD 210.4}

All things are possible to those that believe. No one coming to the Lord in sincerity of heart will be disappointed. How wonderful it is that we can pray effectually, that unworthy, erring mortals possess the power of offering their requests to God! {HP 81.5}

What higher power can man require than this—to be linked with the infinite God? Feeble, sinful man has the privilege of speaking to his Maker. We utter words that reach the throne of the Monarch of the universe. We pour out our heart's desire in our closets. Then we go forth to walk with God as did Enoch. {HP 81.6}

There is spiritual power for all who will seek for it with intensity of purpose. These will become partakers of the divine nature, for they have cooperated with God. Influence will be given

them, to be increased by a right use. They will be given an enlargement of power proportionate to their desire to do the will of God. . . . {HP 294.3}

Jesus declares that the Father is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him than parents are to give good gifts to their children. The Holy Spirit understands man's every necessity. He will bestow upon the earnest seeker that for which he hungers and thirsts. The blessings that God has to bestow are unlimited. We cannot comprehend their height and depth and breadth. All heaven is at the command of those who, realizing their lack of wisdom, come directly to the source of wisdom. To such ones God gives liberally and upbraids not. But let them ask in faith, nothing wavering. . . . The one who receives wisdom from on high is the one who holds fast to the promise, the one who feels his need, and will not be turned aside. . . . {HP 294.4}

Many hold faith as an opinion. Saving faith is a transaction by which those who receive Christ join themselves in covenant relation with God. Genuine faith is life. A living faith means an increase of vigor, a confiding trust, by which the soul becomes a conquering power. {DA 347.1}

We are witnesses for God as we reveal in ourselves the working of a power that is divine. Every individual has a life distinct from all others, and an experience differing essentially from theirs. God desires that our praise shall ascend to Him, marked by our own individuality. These precious acknowledgments to the praise of the glory of His grace, when supported by a Christ-like life, have an irresistible power that works for the salvation of souls. {DA 347.3}

Those who desire to doubt will have plenty of room. God does not propose to remove all occasion for unbelief. He gives evidence, which must be carefully investigated with a humble mind and teachable spirit. All should decide from the weight of evidence. {RH, September 16, 1873 par. 10}