

Wise Fatherhood from James

Becoming a Gospel-Shaped Dad

“A Journey Through James”
Sermon 13

Texts: James 1:17-18; Genesis 26:3-5; Deut. 6:1-7; James 1:22-25

James 1:17–18 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. ¹⁸ **In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.** (NASB95)

Genesis 26:3–5 “Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. ⁴ “I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; ⁵ **because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.**” (NASB95)

Deuteronomy 6:1–7 “Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments **which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it, ² so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.** ³ “O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁴ “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! ⁵ “**You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.** ⁶ “These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. ⁷ “**You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.** (NASB95)

James 1:22–25 *But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.* ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. ²⁵ **But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.** (NASB95)

Introduction:

Today is the day we have dedicated to honor our fathers.

The first Father's Day took place on June 19th, 1910. In 1924, President Calvin Coolidge supported plans for a national Father's Day which was finally recognized by Congress in 1956, and declared a national holiday in 1966 by President Lyndon Johnson. In 1972 President Richard Nixon signed a law establishing the 3rd Sunday in June as Father's Day.

Father's Day is the fifth most popular occasion for buying greeting cards and by far, the most popular gift for father's is the necktie! Which is why I am wearing one this morning! Each year more than 1 billion dollars are spent purchasing more than 100 million ties as gifts for dads.

I decided I would look into the history of this amazing article of clothing. The first known wearing of a tie was in 210 BC by the first Emperor of China. Shortly after the time of Christ, the Roman Emperor Trajan erected a column celebrating the military triumph of his legions and on that column his legionaries are shown wearing something very similar to ties around their necks. Cowboys wore bandanas and bolo ties in the old West. Sailors wore neckerchiefs. Military officers wore ties signifying their branch of service. Fashionable Frenchmen wore cravats. For 200 years no well-dressed European gentlemen would appear in public without some form of tie. And it was the time-honored tradition that Father's would teach their sons the important, elusive secret skill of properly tying a tie. In fact, outside of teaching their sons the art of shaving, teaching the art of knotting a tie is one of the most time-honored rituals many dads share with their sons. There are over a hundred ways of tying a tie; there are 8 major types of knots; and most men use at least two different methods of tying their ties – and this manly wisdom was generally taught to them by their father.

While teaching our sons how to tie a tie may be an interesting and socially important skill, James is going to remind Christian fathers of a much greater and spiritually significant skill they must teach their sons and daughters – ***knowing how to use the wisdom of God to shape their life and cultivate a living faith that is whole-hearted, single-focused, and fully trusting in God and in His Word.***

Two interesting references to fatherhood in James:

James mentions the concept of “fatherhood” in two specific places that provide important context for our understanding of Biblical Fatherhood in our own spiritual and familial relationships.

1. God is described as the Father of Lights (James 1:17-18)

*Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from **the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.** ¹⁸ In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.*

- God is the Father of Lights – He is the creator and sustainer of all of His creation and all the creatures that dwell within its boundaries.
- Because God is a good Father, every good and perfect gift comes from His wise heart and omnipotent hand for our good and His glory.
- Although Creation (lights) has wandered from its original purpose, God never wanders from His purposes and plans.
- God is unchanging in His character, goodness, and in His purposes for His creation. ***He is consistent in His love, dependable in His promises, and constant in His faithfulness.***
- God uses one of His good and perfect gifts – the Word of Truth – to grant us new birth, give us eternal life, and display New Creation realities in and through us. We are prototypes of what is yet to come when the Messiah comes to establish His kingdom.
- Because of the life and death of Jesus Christ and by means of the gospel, God is “our Father.”

2. Abraham is identified as our Spiritual Father (James 2:21).

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

- How is it that Gentiles can call Abraham their father? In what sense is Abraham their ancestor?
- James is talking about spiritual ancestry, not physical.

- In other words, Abraham is our father because we share the very same kind of faith in the very same God – ***a living faith that faithfully obeys the word of the Living God.*** And because we possess the same faith as Abraham, ***we also share in the same promises that God gave to Abraham.***
- The Pharisees were physical descendants of Abraham, but Jesus revealed they were not spiritually related to him and would not share in the promises God made to Abraham.
- ***What makes a person a true child of Abraham is not physical lineage but whether he does the faith generated works that Abraham did.***
- Listen to the incredible words Jesus said to them in John 8:39-44:

They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham.”⁴⁰ “But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do.”⁴¹ “You are doing the deeds of your father.” They said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God.”⁴² Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me.”⁴³ “Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word.”⁴⁴ “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Four important conclusions we should draw:

1. God graciously gives wisdom as a good and perfect gift from above, has located this wisdom in His Word, makes it available to those who ask, and promises to bless those who become doers of that word. (James 1:5; 1:21-25)

2. Abraham believed and obeyed the Wisdom (James 2:21-23; Gen 26:5)

James 2:21–23 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?²² You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and he was called the friend of God. (NASB95)

Genesis 26:5 because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.”

3. Moses wrote down this wisdom and commanded fathers to live and teach it to their children. (Dt. 6:1-7)

Deuteronomy 6:1–7 “Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it,² so

that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. ³ *“O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.* ⁴ *“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!* ⁵ *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.* ⁶ *“These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.* ⁷ *“You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. (NASB95)*

4. James exhorts us to follow Abraham’s example of faithful obedience to God’s Word in our own lives and with our own families and promises to bless our efforts to do so.

James 1:25 *But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.*

So How are we to do this? What wisdom does James have for dads who desperately want to love God with all their hearts, follow God in all their ways, and serve God for all their days? How should the Gospel impact our lives and our roles as Dads?

How can Christian dads live out a whole-hearted, single-focused, fully trusting faith before our wives and children? More importantly, how can we partner with the Holy Spirit to develop that same living faith in them?

James reveals **five important commitments** every Christian dad must make if he wants to pass on God’s Wisdom from Above to his children.

I. Receive God’s Wisdom Eagerly (James 1:21)

Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

- God’s wisdom is the “Word of truth” that gives us eternal life (1:18)
- It is the “Perfect Law” that grows and matures our spiritual life (1:25)
- It is the “Law of Liberty” that frees and maximizes our daily life (1:25)
- Because of what God’s Word is and does, we must display our eagerness to receive this Word and to do it in ways that are both clear and credible before our children.

- Do your children know I value the Word enough to read it regularly, joyfully, and carefully?
- Do they see clear evidence that I eagerly seek to employ the Word of God to shape my life as I make decisions about the way we do life as a family?
- Do I share what God is teaching me from the Word with them?
- Is the Bible a sacred text or is it a living, authoritative Word from God that defines who I am and what I do as a dad?
- In other words, do my children see the perfect law of liberty perfecting me and liberating me from my sins?
- If they don't see this in me, why would I expect to see it in them?

II. Persist in God's Will Joyfully and Unflinchingly (James 1:2-4)

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- James makes clear that part of how God grows and matures our faith is through the tool of ongoing, prolonged, and painful trials that force me to turn to God and trust in His Wisdom OR become the reason I turn from God and lean on my own understanding.
- What do my children see in me when unexpected difficulty comes upon our family? ***What responses do they see when unanticipated prolonged suffering, disappointment, or hurt comes into my life?***
- Do I joyfully point them to the faithfulness of Christ? Do I remain faithful to God and to the work He has given me? Or do I abandon the will of God and depart from the place of His appointment in an effort to get relief from the trial or to find a more comfortable life.
- James puts the issue front and center for us in this text – either we will evaluate the prolonged seasons of trials that come often as an occasion for joy because of what they produce in us OR we will fail to endure because we value our own wisdom (about what our life should be and how it should unfold) above His wisdom.

III. Hope in God's Promises Unwaveringly (James 2:21-25)

A. Trust and Obey like Abraham (James 2:21-24)

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? ²² You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; ²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God. ²⁴ You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

B. Persevere and Wait Faithfully Like Rahab (James 2:25)

In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

- My children hear my claim to have faith – but do they experience the validation of my faith by means of my faithfulness to God and to His Word?
- Like Abraham, am I quick to hear God's Word and respond to it?
- Do my children see me trusting and obeying God when the way seems hard or dark like as Abraham obeyed?
- Have my children ever seen me do a hard or risky thing for God like Rahab? Do they see evidence of my confident expectation that God will keep His promises to me and to our family as He did for Rahab and her family?
- How can I encourage my children to trust and follow hard after God unless they see it first in me?
- How will my children remain faithful to God out of unshakeable confidence in His faithfulness to keep His Word if I do not model that confidence and faithfulness before them?
- In short, does what is coming out of my life affirm and confirm that I truly have a living faith that will save me?

IV. Embrace God's Values and Priorities Unswervingly (1:1b)

To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion . . .

- James writes to remind us that there are two kingdoms in view – the Kingdom of God (composed of His Church) and the Kingdom of the World (composed of all the little kingdoms of the world).
- When you became a follower of Jesus Christ, you became a member of His family and a citizen of His kingdom.

- However, until He comes to establish this kingdom on earth, He has sent us to live distinctly for His Kingdom in all the little kingdoms of the World. This means two things for us:

A. We must Embrace the Values of God’s Kingdom (1:9-10)

But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; ¹⁰ and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away.

- One of the primary ways we display Kingdom values to our children is our approach to wealth and poverty.
- Do we truly rejoice in the right thing – that our true and lasting wealth is in His coming Kingdom? Or are we just like our unsaved neighbors who covet and strive for the wealth and possessions of this fading away world?
- Do we view our possessions as owners or stewards? Do we use our possessions to build God’s kingdom or to make our kingdom bigger, better, and more comfortable for ourselves?

B. We must Live by the Priorities of God’s Kingdom (5:13-15)

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” ¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.”

- James speaks forthrightly and directly to where many of us live – what priorities are evident in the way you currently navigate life? What are you living for? Which kingdom matters most to you?
- Either our priorities are driven by success and significance as defined by the Word (living our life, doing our business, and making money) OR they are shaped by our desire to know and do the will of God for our life.
- We are either driven by preserving, advancing, and enjoying our life in the kingdom we are building or we are driven by spending our life to build and advance the Kingdom of God.
- Jonathan and Rosalind Goforth spent their entire life in China opening up the Northern province of Honan. The work was difficult, the danger real, and the personal price unthinkable.

- When Hudson Taylor (president of their mission board) heard they desired to go to this province he wrote them these words: *“We as a mission have tried for ten years to enter that province from the South, and have only just succeeded. It is one of the most anti-foreign provinces in China. Brother, if you would enter that province, you must go forward on your knees!”* And that is exactly what Jonathan and Rosalind determined to do. Years later, she noted *“Our strength as a mission and as individuals, during those years so fraught with dangers and difficulties, lay in the fact that we did realize the hopelessness of our task apart from Divine Aid.”*
- Her life along with that of her husband was marked by a remarkable dependence on prayer. And for 40 years they saw remarkable answers to their prayers.
- Their story (and that of other missionaries who opened up continents for Christ) makes me long to pray as they prayed and more importantly, to receive the answers to my prayers that they so clearly received from God to theirs.
- Recently as I was reading the prayer journal of Rosalind Goforth, she said something that struck me as the reason behind the remarkable answers to prayer they received from the Lord as well as the reason why I often do not.
- She said this, *“During those first weeks and months hundreds and even thousands crowded to see us. Day by day we were literally besieged. Even at mealtimes our windows were banked with faces. The questions ever before us those days were, how to make the most of this opportunity which would never come again after this period of curiosity was past; how to win the friendship of this people who showed in a hundred ways their hatred and distrust of us; and how to reach their hearts with the wonderful message of the Saviour’s love? The answer to this prayer, as is often the case, depended largely on ourselves. **We had to be made willing to pay the price that the answer demanded.**”*
- So, what was the price Jonathan and Rosalind had to be willing to pay? And how did God help make them ready and willing to pay it?
- Here is what she wrote when Jonathan shared that God was leading them to evangelize the large, unevangelized northernmost regions of the

province: *What this proposition meant to me can scarcely be understood by those unfamiliar with China and Chinese life. Smallpox, diphtheria, scarlet fever, and other contagious diseases are chronic epidemics and China, outside the parts ruled by foreigners, is absolutely devoid of sanitation. Four of our children had died. To take the three remaining little ones, then with me, into such conditions and dangers seemed literally like stepping with them over a precipice in the dark and expecting to be kept. . . . in my innermost soul I knew the call was coming from God but I would not pay the price. My one plea in refusing to enter that life was the risk to the children. Again and again my husband urged that the safest place for myself and the children was in the path of duty; that I could not keep them in our comfortable home (back at the mission station) but God could keep them anywhere!"*

- What do you say to a couple like this – after giving their lives to serve Christ away from their homeland, friends, church, and family? After burying five of their nine children? Here is what one helpful Christian acquaintance wrote to them: *"Say, old boy, have you lost any of that flaming optimism you carried with you to China? Has getting down to brass tacks changed your view on foreign missions?"*
- How would you answer a question like that given the cost you and your wife had already paid to be in China, with more cost surely to come in the years ahead?
- Here is what Jonathan Goforth said to his wife as he read the letter to her, *"Oh, that the eyes of Christians at home could be opened to their responsibility towards these neglected millions! Optimistic! How could I help but be when I believe with Carey that the prospects are as bright at the promises of God!"*
- No wonder God used such servants to open China and impact an entire nation with the Gospel of Christ!
- If we will live by these priorities and teach them to our children, who knows what God will do ***for them*** and ***through them***?

V. Develop Grace-flavored, Gospel-shaped Relationships Boldly:

James 5:19–20 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back,²⁰ let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

A. Be a friend of God and not of the World (4:4)

You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

B. Love Others Genuinely and Selflessly (1:27)

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

C. Serve People Impartially (2:1)

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

D. Maintain an Unstained Gospel Presence in the World (1:27b)

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

E. Endure Mistreatment Patiently and Graciously (5:7-10)

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains.⁸ You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.⁹ Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.¹⁰ As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Conclusion:

James reveals the outcome of a life lived in these ways – God will use our life and our words to turn a wandering sinner back to God, to save his soul from death, and to deal graciously and mercifully with a multitude of sins (mercy triumphs over judgment).

And perhaps the one whose heart is turned back to the Lord, whose soul is saved from sin, and whose many sins are met with mercy in this life and not judgment in the next will be our own son or daughter!

Let me speak to every dad here this morning -- James' wisdom for us is not just hard; it is impossible. How in the world are we to live out this wisdom consistently on a day-by-day basis? How can anyone of us here this morning live as James calls us to live?

James tells us how – *“But He gives more grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.’”(4:6-8a)*

Are you willing to do this? Are you willing to humble yourself? Are you willing to come to God and ask Him to reorient your life so that He forms in you a whole-hearted, single-focused, fully trusting faith . . . ***regardless of what that might cost you in this momentary, passing away life?***

God has made you the same promises He made to Abraham and Rahab. Are you willing to dwell in “tents” for the duration of this life because you are looking for the city whose builder and maker is God?

If not, are you willing to do what Rosalind Goforth did and ask Him to make you willing?