

Series: Unhindered

“The Hindrance of Doubt”

James 1:5-8; Numbers 13-14

This morning we continue our study called “Unhindered” where we are focusing on the fact that God wants us to live unhindered, free from obstacles and distractions that will prevent us from living a victorious life in Christ. We can all understand what it means to be hindered in something. It means that we are prevented, deterred, or impeded by something. We use this word in many ways. We may say, “I intended to be on time for my meeting, but the road work hindered me from arriving on time.” Or “I was planning to attend the soccer game, but I was hindered because I became ill.” Or “I wanted to experience something, but I was hindered from doing so.” There are many ways that we use the word, but each time we are describing an obstacle or situation that hindered our plans or progress. Fortunately for us, most of the hindrances are minor in nature and the effects are insignificant. However, there are some hindrances that can be quite costly and quite severe. I am convinced that many Christians are living their lives ineffectively because they are hindered. A Christian is someone who has believed in Jesus Christ and confessed Him as Lord and Savior. This means that they have received God’s gift of eternal life by faith. However, this doesn’t automatically mean that they are living the abundant, victorious life that is available to all who have received eternal life. There are many Christians who are living their life defeated, discouraged, and disheartened. Simply put, there is something in their lives that is hindering them from living the life that Jesus has called them to.

There are many things that may cause us to be hindered. These things hinder us from being effective in our prayers and from other aspects of Christian growth. Paul understood this personally. In 1 Thessalonians 2:18 he confessed that he wanted to go to the city of Thessalonica to preach the Gospel, but he sadly said, “Yet Satan hindered us.” He knew what it was like to be prevented and deterred from something. He also understood how Satan uses various hindrances to get us off course to divert us away from the path that God wants us to go. This is why he would look at the Christians in **Galatians 5:7** and say, “You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?” Paul was saying, “You were doing so well. You were living for Jesus. You were honoring Him in your life and actions, but something happened. Something or someone hindered you, and you’re now going the wrong the direction.” Some of the hindrances we face, like unexpected circumstances and trials, we have absolutely no control over. However, most of the things the Bible identifies as hindrances are things that we do have control over. We can’t control what may happen to us or what may come against us, but we can control how we respond. The quickest way I know to discover the specific things that will hinder us is to study the things that hinder us from growing in a right relationship with the Lord. So far, we have discovered two things that hinder our Christian walk – disobedience to God’s Word and division with others. Today we come to a third hindrance that we must take note of and, with God’s help, overcome.

Show Text (James 1:5-7)

One of my favorite passages of Scripture in all the Bible is James 1. This chapter has encouraged me and convicted me personally in many different seasons. Also, as a pastor I have quoted these verses and taught them repeatedly. The context of James 1 is largely dealing with the trials that we face in life. We can all relate to trials and difficulties because we all face them. Regardless of our age, background, sex, or personality – we all face circumstances. In verses 2-4 of James 1 we are reminded of this fact. Then, verse 9 carries on the theme again. Normally when I direct people to James 1 that is exactly what I am referring to. However, nestled in between these key passages are four little verses that teach powerful truths about living life in a way that pleases God. We all know what it is like to be in the middle of a trial and have all sorts of questions: “God, why is this happening? What are You doing? How are You working in this? What is the goal? What am I supposed to see? What are You wanting me to do?” There are all kinds of questions that flood our mind in times of difficulty. It is in that context that God gives a powerful promise in verse 5, “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” This is a wonderful promise from God. If you lack wisdom, simply ask it of God. Notice that God gave no conditions on who could ask this of Him, nor did He give limits on what subjects you could bring to request wisdom. If you need wisdom in a business decision – ask of God. If you need wisdom in your parenting – ask of God. If you need wisdom in your marriage – ask of God. If you need wisdom dealing with a neighbor – ask of God. If you need wisdom with a medical decision – ask of God. There is no limit. He invites us all to acknowledge our need for Him and to ask for His wisdom for our lives.

It is wonderful and encouraging to know that God desires for us to come to Him in relationship to ask of Him. In fact, He delights in it. However, God does give us one key condition in verse 6. He says that we “must ask in faith **without any doubting**, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” God is showing us that when we pray, we must pray in faith. We must be trusting completely in God. **Hebrews 11:1,6** shows us, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen... And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” So, when we pray we are to pray in faith, believing that God is able to work and move even in what seems to be impossible situations. **Warren Wiersbe** said it well, “The greatest enemy to answered prayer is unbelief.” James says that we are to pray in faith without any doubting.

Praying without doubt, living without doubt – sounds too good to be true, doesn’t it? Maybe you are wondering, “How can I pray without doubt when I don’t know the outcome? How can I pray without doubt when things seem so contrary? How can we live without doubt if we don’t know what the future holds?” I don’t pretend to have all of the answers today, but I do believe that God’s Word has much to say about the topic of doubt and how we can live in victory today.

I. The Problems with Doubt (Numbers 13-14)

There are a few positive results of doubt. For example, it can help keep us humble. It can also help us to realize our need for help, which can draw us closer to the Lord and to others. It can possibly help us be more intentional and deliberate with our time. There are some potential positive results,

but by far and large, the problems with doubt far outweigh the pros. We see this clearly throughout God's Word and certainly in Numbers 13-14.

I imagine that it has been quite some time since you have read through the Old Testament book of Numbers, but this often-ignored book in God's Word gives us a powerful illustration of the issues surrounding doubt. The book of Numbers tells us about the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. You might recall the history of the Israelites when they were in Egypt serving as slaves, when God raised up a leader named Moses who went to Pharaoh and said, "Let my people go." After a series of plagues, God rescued the Israelites from Egypt and, through Moses, began to lead them to the land of Canaan – their promised land. God promised to be with them. He supernaturally led them through the wilderness. He miraculously fed them and took care of them in every way possible. He gave Moses specific instructions and directions for leading the people every step of the way. This journey through the wilderness would not be in vain. They weren't just wandering through the desert, they were headed to a land that God promised to give them. In fact, at this point God had already told them several things about this land. He told them that it would be great and fertile. He told them that the land was flowing with milk and honey. God had already gone before them, and He knew exactly what He was leading them to. It is here that we pick up the story.

Numbers 13:1-3, 17-21, 25-27 (Show Text)

As we read these verses all seems well, but there are some things behind the scenes that suggest that there was already some trouble brewing. God had promised to give the Israelites this good promised land and had even described it to them in detail, but that wasn't enough for them. According to **Deuteronomy 1:22**, it was actually the people that approached Moses and begged him to send a small group of men to go and spy out the promised land. While that makes logical sense to us, the fact of the matter is that it was a sign of their unbelief. They were basically saying, "We know what God says about the land, but we want to see it for ourselves." They were showing that they didn't really trust God's Word and plan. So, Moses goes and talks to God and tells Him about the issue with the people and God now says, "Go ahead, send out men to go see the land and bring back a report." Notice, the mission was to go through the land, observe, and bring back a report. The mission wasn't to make a decision. God had already decided. His will was for the people to claim the land. So, Moses did exactly what God said. He sent out 12 men to go and look at the land. Over the next 40 days these spies travelled approximately 500 miles throughout the land and then returned to the Israelite camp. Here's what they found. They discovered that everything God had said was true. They didn't find anything in the land that God hadn't already told them. It was exactly as God had described. In fact, in **verse 27b** they said, "It CERTAINLY DOES flow with milk and honey." They brought back some of the gigantic fruit to verify that God's Word was true. Things seemed hopeful at the moment, but things were about to take a negative turn because of the doubt that existed in their hearts. From their example, I want us to see four sad truths about doubt:

A. Doubt is Common (Numbers 13:28-33)

The spies came back with the good report that everything was as God had spoken. At this point they should have moved forward in faith and obedience, but that sadly was not the case. **Verse 28-33** show us the negative shift (**Show Text**). The turning point for the spies occurred when they took their eyes off God and put them on themselves. Yes, they knew what God had promised. Yes, they had confirmed that God's description was true. Yes, they had seen God do countless miracles to deliver them from Egypt. However, in this moment they were only focused on the physical things in front of them. They saw these large, powerful cities with massive walls and locked gates. They looked at the people and saw that they were huge like giants. They looked at themselves and said, "We are like grasshoppers in our own sight." It is amazing that their sight was the real issue. They were walking by sight and not by faith. They were depending on what they could see, what they could feel, what they could determine, etc. They weren't looking to God and trusting Him. If only they had looked to God, they would know that no city and its walls are a match for Him. He spoke the whole world into existence, surely by His Word He could conquer a city. If only they had looked to God, they would remember that God had already spared them from the most powerful and cruel leader of the day. In fact, God had destroyed Pharaoh and his entire army. God was far greater than these supposed giants. When we walk by sight every hill becomes an insurmountable mountain, but when we walk by faith every insurmountable mountain is completely removed.

We understand this, and likely wrestle with the same exact thing. We naturally walk by sight, but we must spiritually learn to walk by faith. We aren't alone in this struggle. We see this all throughout the Bible. We quickly recall Abraham's faith that God would lead him to a new land and make him the father of many nations, but we tend to forget that it was doubt that led him to take matters into his own hand by sleeping with his wife's servant and bearing a child out of marriage. We quickly recall Moses' faith to stand before wicked Pharaoh with boldness, but we tend to forget his doubt when God called him, and he made every excuse in the book. We quickly recall the faith of David when he stood before a giant named Goliath, but we tend to forget the doubt and fear of all the mighty men of Israel, including King Saul. Even those who walked with Jesus daily had the same struggle. I am reminded of Peter in **Matthew 14:22-33**. The disciples were in a boat at night and they were facing a severe storm. Jesus came towards them walking on the water. They were afraid and thought it was a ghost. Jesus said, "Don't be afraid, it's Me." Peter said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." And Jesus said, "Come!" So, Peter shows great courage and faith as he throws his legs over the boat and leaps out into the sea. He begins walking on water, making his way to Jesus. Suddenly, Peter took his eyes off of Jesus and began to focus on the storm and crashing waves and he was afraid. He began to sink and he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus stretched out His arm and helped him, but He asked Peter, "You of little faith, why did you **doubt**?" Peter started out well in that moment with his eyes on the Lord, but as soon as he was distracted by the storm he doubted and began to sink. Doubt is common for all of us. Any time we allow human reason to overshadow faith in God, sinful doubt is the result. No matter how logical our reasons may seem, God has made foolish the wisdom of the world, and His seemingly foolish plans are

far wiser than man's. God's ways are not our ways, so we must seek His ways and trust them in our lives.

B. Doubt is Contagious (Numbers 14:1)

We see that doubt is common through the fact that 10 of the 12 spies brought a negative report to the people. We see that doubt is contagious through what happened next. (SHOW TEXT) As soon as the negative report was shared aloud, doubt and discouragement began to sink in. It spread from heart to heart all throughout the camp. It's amazing how quickly negativity can spread among people. Caleb and Joshua had tried to turn the people back to the promise of God. They had tried to quiet down the people as they were getting stirred up. They assured them of God's promise, His protection, and His provision, but it was of no use. The people had heard the negative report and chose to trust the prediction of the 10 spies instead of the promise of God. As you know, negative words of doubt and criticism always have a way of spreading. Things quickly spread from doubt, to disappointment, to discouragement, and then to complete despair. ****ILL:** Soccer game recently. Player kept saying, "Coach Matt, we're gonna lose." After a while, I noticed that the other player, who is usually more positive, was also saying, "Yeah, we're probably going to lose." So, you know what I did? I had them start keeping statistics for me of positive things that were happening. Why? Because I wanted them to focus on the good things, not just on the bad things that were causing them to lose hope. Doubt is contagious and when we speak words of doubt it hinders others in a powerful way. It's not a deal breaker when we are talking about a recreational soccer game, but it's a big deal when we are talking about God's Word and God's will. God had already promised the land. God had already called them to go claim it. God had already promised to be with them every step of the way. God had already shown them that He could defeat their enemies without them even having to use force. The Israelites had every evidence that God was with them and that He was for them. All they had to do was trust Him and obey, but they doubted Him and His promise. The sadness swept through the camp that night as the people mourned and wept. Because they had taken their eyes off of God, all they could do was walk by their own sight. And their sight led them to believe there was no hope, no chance, and no reason to move forward.

C. Doubt is Controlling (Numbers 14:2-4, 10)

The problem with doubt is that it is never just a thought or a perspective. Doubt will most certainly influence our actions. When we allow doubt to exist in our hearts and minds, it will take control and influence us in all sorts of ways. Remember **James 1:6b** says, "The one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind." Nothing is more uncertain, unstable, or unpredictable than a wave in the middle of a storm. Now I love to walk on the beach right when a storm is about to approach. I love the feel of the breeze and the chaotic nature of the waves. It is awesome...when you are safe on the beach. The last place I want to be is actually in the water. Why? Because it is powerful and controlling. ****ILL:** Going to Mexico. Trying a paddleboard for the first time. I psyched myself up. "I've got this. Be a man. No fear." But I admit that I had very little control over that board. I was fine in the shallow water, but once I got out deep enough that I couldn't see the

bottom and then I saw some fish and then I saw a small shark, all of a sudden every ripple of water that came over that board was a monstrous wave. I could give a little direction, but those waves were ultimately controlling the success of my journey that day.

In the case of the Israelites, their doubts controlled them in such a way that it influenced and impacted their actions. Notice what they did in **Numbers 14:2-4 (Show Text)**. When we put our focus on ourselves and our circumstances, we lose perspective and do all sorts of foolish things. This was certainly true of the Israelites. It started with their complaints. They are upset and angry because they have already concluded that they are going to die. They have completely left God out of the equation. They have concluded that they know more about the situation than God does, so they murmur and complain. Since they are now operating by their own logic, they determine that it would be better for them to return to Egypt. They say, “Let’s get us another leader who will take us the way that we want to go.” From verses 5-9 Moses and Aaron fall on their faces as a sign of grief and begged the people to believe God’s promises, to move forward in faith, and to obey God. Sadly, the Israelites were so influenced by their doubt and disbelief that they rose up against them. **Numbers 14:10a** says, “But all the congregation said to stone them with stones.” What is going on? Moses and Aaron have served them, prayed for them, led them, encouraged them, instructed them, and explained to them all the ways of the Lord. Sadly, it is not uncommon for those whose hearts are set on doing wrong, to rage at those who give Godly counsel. **Matthew Henry** said it well, “Those who hate to be reformed hate those who would reform them and often count them their enemies because they tell them the truth.” When doubt consumes our thoughts, our actions are sure to follow. This led the Israelites to defiant obedience against God’s Word for them.

D. Doubt is Costly (Numbers 14:11, 22-24)

There is no doubt that the people thought they were right. They thought they could do what they wanted without any consequence. They thought they could deny God’s Word and doubt His promises without any repercussions. However, when we doubt God’s Word and refuse to trust His promises there is always a high cost. Remember, **James 1:7-8** says of the one who doubts God, “That man ought not to expect that he will receive **anything** from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” James was referring to the man who asked something of God but didn’t really believe God was going to do it. If we doubt while we ask, we won’t receive anything because we are double-minded and unstable in all of our ways. In Moses’ day, he saw the double-minded nature of the people in the way that they heard the promise of God, confirmed what God had described, but then doubted His power to fulfill it. Look at **Numbers 14:11, 22-24 (Show Text)**. Doubting God is always costly. They had already experienced that to an extent. That evening should have been a time of celebration. If they had believed God and obeyed, this would have been a time of rejoicing. Instead, it was a time of weeping and mourning. Why? Because doubt and distrust of God is a sin that is its own punishment. One writer said it well, “Those that do not trust God are continually tormenting themselves.” God announced the cost in three ways: First, the nation would wander in the wilderness, one year for every day that

the spies were in the land – a total of 40 years. Second, during those forty years, the older generation who had doubted Him would die in the wilderness. Third, there was immediate judgment for the 10 spies who discouraged the people from trusting God. The people of Israel had forfeited their opportunity to enter the land and claim what God had promised. They missed their opportunity because they doubted the promise of God.

II. The Prescription for Doubt

So, what is the prescription? What are we to do with our doubts? Sadly, we don't read of a prescription for the Israelites at this point in the passage. Unfortunately for them, they had already made up their mind and would prove time and time again that they were only interested in going their own direction, and they suffered the severe consequences for it. However, it doesn't have to be that way with us today. We are still living. We are still here today. We are still listening and learning. How can we overcome doubt and defeat this hindrance? I believe that there is only one way. I gave that illustration of me on the paddleboard earlier. I psyched myself up for it. I had a friend beside me encouraging me, "You've got this. It's a piece of cake." These things helped for a period of time, but once I got out into the deep, I wasn't so psyched and I no longer had my friend cheering me on. It was then that the doubts began to creep in. So, how do we overcome doubts completely? There is only one way – through faith. The world with all of its negative voices and negative influences wars against us but God assures us in **1 John 5:4b**, "This is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith." And how do we have faith? **Romans 10:17** explains, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ." In other words, God gave us His Word so that we might grow in our faith. Once we understand what God has done in the past, what He has promised us for the present, and what we can expect from Him in the future, we are able to act in faith instead of doubt. We must remember, though, that there is no shortcut. ****ILL:** A doctor can evaluate, prescribe something, write down instructions, etc., but we have to follow through. The same is true with God. He evaluates where we are. He convicts us through the Holy Spirit, and He has given us His Word so that we can know Him and grow in our faith. He hands it to us, but what we do with it from there is up to us. My prayer is that we will apply the prescription. **James 1:22-25** summarizes, "But prove yourselves doers of the Word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 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; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 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." Friends, the Lord has a perfect plan for each of us, but we can only experience this if we get in His Word, walk by faith, and obey. I pray today that you will chose to trust God and not doubt Him. If there is an area of worry, fear, anxiety, insecurity, or doubt in your life today, please surrender that to the Lord and trust Him. Get in His Word and let His promises be your joy and His precepts be your guide. This is how you can overcome doubt and live unhindered for Him.