

The Need of God's Wisdom

James 1:5-8, "*If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.* ⁶ *But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.* ⁷ *That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.* ⁸ *Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.*"

Intro

It is estimated that over four billion online searches are made every day. We live in a time of unprecedented access to information. The rate of knowledge continues to increase. What people could never have imagined is now common knowledge. For those over 50 years of age, the science of today is the science fiction of our childhood. Advances in information and technology continue at a breathtaking pace.

But, is this enough? Are we any wiser? Do we know how to wisely use that knowledge? Technology cannot deliver to us what God can. God is the source of wisdom, and the Bible shows us that when we trust Him, we too become wise.

Context of James

Last week in the book of James we looked at "*Facing Trials with Joy.*" (James 1:2-4). We learned that trials are the testing of our faith and that testing produces perseverance. Also that perseverance results in making us perfect and complete. That means mature, lacking nothing.

When we are going through trials we need a special measure of wisdom to help us to bear the trial and to help us go through it. That need of wisdom should drive us to ask God to supply us with wisdom. When we face times of testing – whether they are physical, emotional, moral or spiritual – we have a special need of God's wisdom.

We need to get a good handle on what James meant by wisdom. If we do that then we can see its great necessity and usefulness in trials. This wisdom that James talks about is the "skill to bear trials." His idea of wisdom implies something that helps the believer to both stand and take action through life's demands.

"If any of you lacks wisdom" (James 1:4)

Wisdom seems to be in short supply these days. Perhaps you're facing tough decisions at work, at home, or in life generally for which you feel you need strong guidance.

The first step in gaining such wisdom is the consciousness of our need for it. "*If any of you*" indicates that this consciousness of a wisdom shortage must come as an individual realization of our need. You have to admit your need of it.

But what is this wisdom which James talks about? The word that James uses for wisdom is *sophia*. It is the ability to judge correctly and to follow the best course of action, based on knowledge and understanding. *Sophia*, wisdom is used frequently in the New Testament to describe the ability to discern and conform to God's will.

All true wisdom is found only in God, He is the source of true wisdom.

Example of Daniel

Daniel was in a bind and facing a huge trial that would cost his very life. King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and he wanted his wise men to interpret without telling them what he dreamt. The king wanted them to tell the details of his dream and then give the interpretation. If they couldn't do that then they would be killed. It was absolutely impossible (Daniel 2:13, 16-19). But Daniel being one of the wise men and his life on the line, prayed to God. He sought God's wisdom and it was revealed and granted to him. It prompted Daniel to declare...

"Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him. And it is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men, and knowledge to men of understanding. It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him" (Daniel 2:20-22). This is God's wisdom in a time of trial.

"You should ask of God" (James 1:5)

James uses the present imperative verb which commands the reader to continually pray and make this request of God whenever he or she senses their need. You must see your need for wisdom to drive you to God to supply the need.

By nature, all of us are self-sufficient know-it-alls. Remember when you were young, "Mother, please, I can do it by myself!" Most cultures idolize the strong person who seems to have it all together, because pride is endemic to the human heart.

To come to God, we must humble ourselves and admit that we do not know what we need to know in order to face trials with joy. In fact, the reason that God sends trials is to humble us from our pride, so that we look to Him. Thus a prerequisite to obtaining wisdom from God is to recognize our lack of wisdom.

God is the source for all wisdom. To ask God for wisdom implies that He can deliver. The Bible plainly states, *"For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding"* (Prov. 2:6).

Pastor Warren Wiersbe tells about a secretary of his who was going through difficult trials. She had a stroke; her husband had gone blind, and then he had to be taken to the hospital where, as far as they knew, he would die. Wiersbe saw this woman in church one Sunday and assured her that he was praying for her.

She startled him by asking, "What are you asking God to do?" He replied, "I'm asking God to help you and strengthen you." "I appreciate that," she said, "but pray about one more thing. Pray that I'll have the wisdom not to waste all of this, this trial!" Wiersbe observed, "She knew the meaning of James 1:5."

John Piper, a well-known pastor from Minneapolis was diagnosed with cancer. He has written a booklet on the illness called *Don't Waste Your Cancer*. He took his physical disease and transferred it into the spiritual realm. God gave him wisdom in facing his trial of cancer. This is what he wrote: *"You will waste your cancer if you treat sin as casually as before."* He continues, *"Cancer is designed to destroy the appetite for sin. Pride, greed, lust, hatred, unforgiveness, impatience, laziness, procrastination—all these are the adversaries that cancer is meant to attack. Don't just think of battling against cancer. Also think of battling with cancer. All these things are worse enemies than cancer. Don't waste the power of cancer to crush these foes. Let the presence of eternity make the*

sins of time look as futile as they really are." Wow, what an insight! What wisdom! God gave him the wisdom that he needed to face his great trial.

God promises to give His wisdom to anyone who needs it and will ask for it. This is amazing! Wisdom in the Bible is the capacity to understand how life works and the character to live accordingly. This is available to anyone who wants it.

The Condition

We read in James 1:6-7 says, *"But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord."*

The condition for the fulfillment of this promise of wisdom in our lives is faith.

1/ The faith required is **confident faith**. We are to pray expecting God to give the wisdom He has promised. Do not waver in believing. In 1 John 5:14-15 we read, *"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him."*

We must be like Elijah in James 5:17 who *"prayed earnestly"* because he was convinced that what he was asking God to do was something God was willing to do. We are to pray for the wisdom and guidance we need.

2/ This faith must be **persistent faith**. Those with fainting, failing faith will sink as Peter did when he took his eyes off the Lord (Matthew 14:22-36). They will not obtain what they seek. Also we read in Luke 18:1, *"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up."* It was the parable of the persistent widow. We too need to be persistent in our faith.

3/ This faith must be **committed faith**. A double-minded believer wavers between doing the will of God for their life and just doing what they want to do. The one who gets wisdom from God must be committed to do whatever God shows them what they should do.

"Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do." (James 1:8)

What does it mean to be double-minded? Although a person claims to be a believer, yet their action reveals that they are an unbeliever. When a believer goes through a difficult trial, they turn to human resources rather than trusting God for answers and for help. On one hand they believe to a certain degree and on the other they doubt God. That folks is being double-minded!

The person knows something of God's word and of His love and grace but the person refuses to avail themselves of the divine resources. James speaks of this later in his letter especially in James 4:8, *"Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded."*

In essence a double-minded person is trying to serve two gods. Jesus said, *"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other"* (Matt. 6:24).

My Personal Experience

My experience as a Christian and working in full-time ministry has been to pray earnestly for guidance and wisdom, as James 1:5 teaches. When the situation involves a deadline, I ask the Lord that I need

to have the wisdom by such-and-such a time. If there is no necessary deadline, I leave the decision-making open until I have a clear leading from the Lord.

There have been times that I will tell the Lord what I think the right thing is for me to do, based on His Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit. If I am wrong about it, I want the Lord to show me my error before I take the step. Otherwise I will move based on the wisdom I believe He has given me and trust Him completely. God has committed Himself to a clear promise in James 1:5 and we should not doubt Him by second-guessing later. Don't be double-minded.

How many times I have seen Him reveal His will during periods when I was seeking His mind! How many times I have seen Him work His will through decisions I made as a pastor, as a husband, as a father, and as a servant of Christ, even when I did not have a strong feeling of confidence when I made the decision, but I put my trust and faith in God's absolute integrity and reliability! It is a great way to live! We walk by faith not by sight! (2 Cor. 5:7).

Conclusion

The first chapter of James does not give the final and only reference to wisdom in the book. Also James 3:13-17 teaches us how praying for wisdom regularly will change our lives. In that passage James talks about 2 types of wisdom.

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere."

I will preach on this text when we get into chapter 3 of James.

A life characterized by praying for wisdom and then living according to the wisdom that descends from above will be a life characterized by good behavior, meekness, purity, good fruits, sincerity and peace. It is the life required of all believers and especially church leaders where they are expected to be, *"People of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom"* (Acts 6:3).

Remember, don't waste your trials. Ask God for wisdom on how to face them with a strong faith knowing that He is in control of everything that happens in our lives. Trust Him!

"Be confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).