

PRAYING FOR WISDOM James 1:5-8

A certain man was given a tour of heaven in a dream. As the tour ended, he noted that a particular building that was skipped over. The angel warned him that he did not want to see that building. But this only heightened the man's curiosity. So the angel showed him. It was a building filled with beautifully wrapped presents. When the man asked what these were, the angel answered that these were gifts that God had prepared for his children that were never claimed in prayer.

If there is a building in heaven that houses unclaimed gifts, many boxes would contain the unwanted gifts of wisdom. When we are going to face trials, we pray for provision, healing, strength, protection, intervention, miracles, deliverance, and many other things besides wisdom. We ask how to get out of trials when we should ask what to get out of them. We should pray for the unclaimed but greatly needed gifts of wisdom.

James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." This verse is a continuation of the previous paragraph. Verses 2-4 says, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." Then it seems James abruptly shifts to praying for wisdom. But the two passages are connected. The link is the word "lack." Verse 4 says the ultimate purpose of trials is that you become "perfect and complete, lacking nothing." Verse 5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom."

It is God's will for you to become a mature Christian that lacks no good thing. But we need to grow up. Our faith is still incomplete. We lack some of the virtues that we need to live out the teachings of Christ. One of things we lack is wisdom. In fact, God uses trials to expose our need for wisdom. James 1:5-8 teaches that God freely provides wisdom to face life's trials to those who come to him in believing prayer. VANCE HAVNER said it well: "If you lack knowledge; go to school. If you lack wisdom, get on your knees!" How can you access the wisdom you need to face life's various trials?

I. ASK GOD FOR THE WISDOM YOU NEED.

Verse 5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." This verse states a problem, issues a prescription, and declares a promise.

A. THE PROBLEM

Verse 5 begins: "If any of you lacks wisdom..." This conditional statement does not suggest there are those who do not need wisdom. We all lack wisdom. Yet James states that fact in a way that requires each person to examine himself and be humble enough to confess that you need wisdom.

What is wisdom? In scripture, wisdom is not something academic, philosophic, or intellectual. Wisdom is not knowledge. Of course, wisdom requires knowledge. But you can

have knowledge and not be wise. You can be an educated fool. Our world is filled with them. We live in the most skilled, educated, and advanced generation that has ever lived. We also live in the most profane, violent, and hedonistic generation that has ever lived. We have knowledge. But we do not have wisdom. ROGER ELLSWORTH delineates the two: “Knowledge is information; wisdom is application. Knowledge is comprehending facts; wisdom is handling life. Knowledge is theoretical; wisdom is practical.”

How does one grow from knowledge to wisdom? Ironically, it begins with a certain kind of knowledge. Psalm 14:1 says, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” But Proverbs 9:10 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.” This knowledge of God comes through God’s self-revelation of himself in scripture. The wisdom of God is found in the word of God. 1 Corinthians 1:20-25 says, “Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles. But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

The Lord Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God. Colossians 2:3 says Christ is the one “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they made fools of us all. But God sent his Son into the world to live a righteous life, die on the cross for our sins, and rise from the dead to give us new life. This good news is able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ. But saving faith does not automatically produce perfect wisdom. Just because Jesus is the answer does not mean that you are excused from facing the difficult questions of life. Proverbs 4:7 says, “Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.”

B. THE PRESCRIPTION

Verse 5 says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God.” God is the ultimate source of true wisdom. To receive the wisdom, you need to face life’s trials, you must ask God for it. This prescription for wisdom is simple yet dynamic. James does not say you need time or experience or education to be wise. He says, “If any of you lacks wisdom – including the young, naïve, and unlearned – let him ask God.” Proverbs 15:22 says, “Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisors they succeed.” Yet James does not instruct us to seek the counsel of wise people. He says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God.”

It’s personal: “let him ask God.” You need godly people in your life who can intercede for you. But there are some things that you need from God that you can never receive as a result of the prayers of others. Wisdom is one of those things. James says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God.” You must ask God for yourself. If you need wisdom, you do not have to go to your pastor, visit a counselor, inform your prayer partners, read the experts, or go to your family and friends. The wisdom you need to face life’s trials is only a prayer a way. In verse 5, James gives four reasons why you should go to God in prayer for wisdom.

GOD GIVES. After commanding us to ask God for wisdom, Jesus describes the character of God that makes him inclined to grant our request. First of all, James says God gives. God is a giving God. It is wrong to view God with clenched fists that must be pried open. God's arms are outstretched. God's arms are full, open, and ready to give. God's pitcher is always tilted toward his children to pour his blessings into our lives. Matthew 7:11 says, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

GOD GIVES GENEROUSLY. This word generously means to be simple, single, or sincere. It is that which is pure. James uses the word to say that God's gifts are truly gifts. Proverbs 23:1-3 says, "When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you, and put a knife to your throat if you are given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food." Sometimes a person's generosity is not true generosity. But that is not the case with God. Romans 11:35 asks, "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" God never gives to repay a gift he has received in the past or to be prepaid for the gift he gives in the future. God gives generously, liberally, purely, sincerely, and freely.

GOD GIVES GENEROUSLY TO ALL. Divine generosity is nondiscriminatory. God does not play favorites. He is no respecter of persons. The Father is generous to all of his children. In Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus tells a parable about a landowner who kept going to the marketplace to hire workers. He hired some guys early in the morning. And he hired some guys right before the end of the workday. But he chose to pay them all the same things. The early birds grumbled against the landowner. The landowner responded with a powerful question: "Don't I have the right to do what I want with what belongs to me?" So it is with God. He has the right to do what he wants. But in his sovereign grace, he chooses to be generous to all.

GOD GIVES GENEROUSLY TO ALL WITHOUT REPROACH. You may know people who would and could help in your time of need. But they are the last people you want to help you, because of the lecture you would hear when you ask for help. And you would never hear the end of it after they helped you. But God will not chastise you for asking him for wisdom. You do not have to worry that he is too busy running the world to help you. You do not have to worry that he may mock you for not knowing how to face life's trials on your own. You do not have to worry that he will become irritated because you keep asking him for the same thing. Psalm 103:13-14 says, "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." God generously gives wisdom to all without reproach, fault-finding, or condescension.

C. THE PROMISE

When young Solomon became king of Israel, God signed a blank check and gave it to him. In 1 Kings 3:5, God said to Solomon, "Ask what I shall give you." What would you ask for if you had a guarantee that God would grant your request? In 1 Kings 3:9, Solomon answered, "Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?" Solomon asked for wisdom. This request so pleased God that he gave Solomon wisdom and

threw in wealth, longevity, and success. The wisdom God gave to Solomon was not an exclusive gift. God has signed a check and made it out to any believer in Christ who asks for wisdom. All you have to do is endorse it. Verse 5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."

James 1:5 promises that those who ask God will receive wisdom, not answers. Many times answers become idols. We are like Job who demanded to interrogate God as he was going through his trials. When God finally took the witness stand, it was Job who was interrogated. God blitzed Job with questions and never answered one of Job's questions. Yet Job emerged with greater wisdom. This is how God works. Wisdom is not a spiritual navigation system with turn-by-turn directions. It is spiritual alertness to see the potholes in the road or the guy that darts in front of you and respond in a way that does not ruin your Christian witness, dishonor the Lord, or discourage other believers. CHARLES SWINDOLL said it best: "Wisdom is the God-given ability to see life with rare objectivity and to respond to life with rare stability."

II. TRUST GOD FOR THE WISDOM YOU NEED.

There is a natural progression in this text. First, James teaches that trials demands wisdom. Then he teaches that wisdom demands prayer. Then James teaches that prayer demands faith. In verse 5, James commands us to ask God for wisdom. In verses 6-8, James explains how to ask God for wisdom. Verse 5 is an open promise every Christian can claim. Verses 6-8 establish an essential condition for receiving the promise. You must trust God for the wisdom you need.

A. GOD RESPONDS TO THE ONE WHO PRAYS IN FAITH.

Verse 6 says, "But let him ask in faith." God generously gives wisdom without reproach to all who ask him. But he requires that those who ask for wisdom do so in faith. This faith requirement applies to anything you would ask of God. Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." Whatever you ask God for in prayer must be asked in faith. But James specifies here that when you pray for wisdom you must ask in faith. In Mark 11:22-24, Jesus says, "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."

B. GOD REJECTS THE ONE WHO PRAYS WITH DOUBT.

Verse 6 says, "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting." There is a sense in which doubt is a friend of faith, not its enemy. Doubt is the ants in the pants of faith. It keeps faith alive and awake and alert. Yet James speaks commands us to ask in faith with no doubting.

It is a prohibition against spiritual indecisiveness that wavers between trust and doubt. When you are tempted to doubt God, you should doubt your doubts and believe your beliefs.

LEAVE IT THERE. LEAVE IT THERE.

TAKE YOUR BURDEN TO THE LORD AND LEAVE IT THERE.

IF YOU TRUST AND NEVER DOUBT, HE WILL SURELY BRING YOU OUT.

TAKE YOUR BURDEN TO THE LORD AND LEAVE IT THERE.

In verses 6-8, James gives two reasons why we should pray to God with no doubting. First, James gives THE DESCRIPTION OF WHAT GOD THINKS ABOUT THE DOUBTER. Verse 6 says, “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.” This marine analogy is one of many images from nature in this letter. Growing up with his older brother Jesus near the Sea of Galilee, James was familiar with the severe storms that arose on the Sea of Galilee. The wind would drive the waves in one direction and then in another. And the winds would toss the waves, lifting them high and then crashing them down. It is the kind of storm the disciples experienced that caused them to wake up Jesus and ask, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” (Mark 4:38) The one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

Likewise, James gives THE DILEMMA OF WHAT THE DOUBTER THINKS ABOUT GOD. The doubter lives with a foolish assumption. He supposes that he can pray with doubt and receive an answer to his prayers. She supposes God will grant her request even though she really does trust God for what she requests. The doubter who thinks this way is confused about who God is and how God works. James would disabuse the doubter of this erroneous supposition. Verse 7 says, “For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.” In verse 2, James addresses his readers as “brothers,” a term of spiritual communion used throughout this letter. But James addresses the doubter in verse 6 as “that person,” disassociating himself from the one who prays with doubt.

“For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.” This word “anything” is not absolute. Matthew 5:45 says God “makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” This is called “common grace.” It is the favor of God poured out on all humanity – believers and unbelievers. James does not mean God refuses to do absolutely anything for the one who doubts. This word “anything” must be understood in the context of prayer. God does many things for doubters. But the doubter should never think he or she will receive anything they ask God for in prayer. James states this as a divine command: “For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.” Doubt receives God’s rejection slip that reads: “Request denied due to insufficient faith.”

Verse 8 gives finally a final, devastating description of the one believes but doubts: “he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” This word “double-minded” is unique to this epistle. Scholars believe James coined the term. It means to have two souls. It is to be two different people. Yet the term does not suggest duplicity or deceitfulness. It describes something far worse: doubt rooted in divided loyalties. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 declares, “Hear,

O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” There is only one God. And God demands your total devotion. Double-mindedness is the opposite of total devotion and a great offense to the living God. James 4:8 says, “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” The double-minded has a sinful heart that needs to be purified to draw near to God

This is how James describes the one who doubts. He is a double-minded man. He is a fence-straddler. He is “Mr. Facing-Both-Ways.” He is a walking civil war. He trusts but he doubts. He hopes for the best but expects the worst. He tries to be a friend of the world and friend of God at the same time. In 1 Kings 18:21, Elijah the prophet confronts the double-minded children of Israel: “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” How long will you live in double-mindedness? If God is God, trust him.

Faith says yes. Unbelief says no. Doubt says yes and no at the same time. James says, “He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” Like a staggering drunk, the double-minded man takes one stumbling step toward God. But the next step lurches away from God. He is unable to stand firm in faith. The double-minded is not just unstable in his prayer life. He is unstable “in all his ways.” The person who cannot trust God is a person who cannot be trusted. He is unstable in all his ways. But turn this verse insight out and consider the inverse: “A single-minded man is stable in all his ways.” Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

**I TRUST IN GOD WHEREVER I MAY BE,
UPON THE LAND OR THE ROLLING SEA
FOR, COME WHAT MAY, FROM DAY TO DAY
MY HEAVENLY FATHER WATCHES OVER ME**

**HE MAKES THE ROSE AN OBJECT OF HIS CARE,
HE GUIDES THE EAGLE THROUGH THE PATHLESS AIR
AND SURELY HE REMEMBERS ME
MY HEAVEN FATHER WATCHES OVER ME**

**I TRUST IN GOD, I KNOW HE CARES FOR ME
ON MOUNTAIN BLEAK OR ON THE STORMY SEA
THO' BILLOWS ROLL, HE KEEPS MY SOUL
MY HEAVENLY FATHER WATCHES OVER ME**