

### #3 in series “Doing What We Believe” (A Study in the Book of James)

We are continuing our series through the book of James, entitled “Doing What We Believe”.

Today we will be in James 1:5-8.

So far, we have seen that James is a servant leader of the early Jewish Christians and he is writing to them as they learn to live the faith...

Last week we considered what we need to know and do when we are facing trials in our lives. We learned that it is possible to face a trial with an attitude of joy, because we know that God is using that trial for greater good in our lives. He uses those challenges to mature and equip us...

Today, as we continue in our study, we come to address another critical matter in our lives... and that is our need for *wisdom*...

I’ve entitled this message; “*How to Gain Wisdom*”... I know there are many of us who may experience an immediate aversion to the title because of the “*how to*” title... You can peruse most any bookstore today and you will find a “*how to*” section that is filled with all kinds of conflicting information... There are too many pastors whose default style of preaching is some “*how to*” sermon... They give “10 reasons for this”, “4 steps to accomplish that”, and “3 decisions you must make in order to change your life” – type of sermons... Many of us have become tired of those man-centered, emotionally driven type of sermons...

Rather, the default of every pulpit should be the verse-by-verse exposition of God’s Word – which is His gift to us for all the truth we need in order to know and love Him, and one another...

So, why the “*how to*” title?... Well, when God gives us clear instructions on “how to” accomplish something – I don’t want to let a well-intended aversion cause us to miss a good instruction.

If there is any place in God’s Word that gives us a clear “*how to*” message, James 1:5-8 is one of those passages...

James 1:5-8 (NASB)

<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> But he 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. <sup>7</sup> For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, <sup>8</sup> being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Let’s just jump right into the passage...

First, as we consider *How to Gain Wisdom*, we need to –

#### 1. Realize Our Need for Wisdom (:5)

<sup>5</sup> 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.

If *wisdom* is something that we desperately need, and we are being told to seek God for it – then perhaps we should begin by simply trying to define it.

We have considered various definitions of wisdom in the past... Among my favorite is –

“Wisdom is the combination of knowledge, experience, and judgment that leads to proper decisions, thoughts, and actions”.

Another of my favorite – is also one of the most succinct and precise definitions of wisdom you will ever read ... In his book Knowing God, which is a book I highly commend to you, **J.I. Packer** defines wisdom in the following way –

“Wisdom is the power to see and the inclination to choose the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it.” (Knowing God, p. 90)

Job 28:12-28 records one of the most beautiful poems in the Bible, and the subject has to do with wisdom... In short, wisdom is more valuable than anything the world can offer you. In fact, no earthly value can compare to it. And the source of wisdom is found only in God...

As we will see later in the book, James says that –

Jam. 3:17 (NASB) “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.”

That wisdom – is something we desperately need and should be something we desperately want!

Today, we will see God’s appeal through James for us to seek wisdom and to seek it in specific and certain ways...

James says “if any of you lacks wisdom”.

It is assumed that there are those who lack wisdom... Does that describe you?... In fact, can we all just be transparent and say – that includes all of us?... Everyone will have seasons in their live when they are in desperate need for wisdom!

There are times when we simply do not know what is the best thing to do next – what is the path we should follow in a given moment...

Remember in last week’s message that James says in verses 2-4 that trials help make us complete.

Again, an implication is there that we are not yet complete – so God uses trials to equip us with the endurance and maturity needed to make us complete... Well, a part of our *incompleteness* is our lack of wisdom...

By nature, all of us are self-sufficient know-it-alls... We start early by saying things like: “*Mother, please, I can do it by myself!*” In America, it’s the spirit of rugged individualism, or the self-made man. But I’m sure that every culture idolizes the strong person who seems to have it all together by himself, because pride is rampant in the human heart.

When we realize we have a need – that in itself is a call for us to humble ourselves and admit that we do not know what we need to know in order to live joyfully in the face of trials... In fact, a main reason that God sends trials is to humble us from our pride, so that we would look to Him...

In Rev. 3:17, we read about the Laodicean church and how she was so full of pride and thought that they were rich and had no needs – but God’s view was that they were “wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked”.

Rev. 3:17 (NASB) “Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked”

So a prerequisite to obtaining wisdom from God is to recognize our lack of wisdom. And what are we being told to do, when we realize that we are lacking wisdom? The answer is direct and strong – ask God for it!

That brings us to our second observation. How do we gain wisdom? First, admit our need for it, and –  
2. Turn to God (:5)

<sup>5</sup> 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.

God is the Creator of the universe – and as such – we see that He is also the Creator of all good things, all capacities for intelligence, beauty, emotions, and all admirable attributes, including wisdom... He is not only the Creator of these things, He is also the *Giver* of these things...

Pro. 2:6 (NASB) “For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.”

In fact, God’s Word gives us a warning that –

Pro. 21:30 (NASB) “There is no wisdom and no understanding And no counsel against the Lord.”

In other words, if worldly “wisdom” contradicts or goes against God, it is false “wisdom.” Only God’s wisdom stands.

I have a college degree in philosophy. “Philosophy” comes from two Greek words meaning, “the love of wisdom”... But I discovered that worldly philosophers are not so much in love with wisdom as they are with their own wisdom! They are not so much interested in how to live wisely before God, whose existence they question or deny, but rather in showing how wise they are in being able to win arguments...

Paul was writing to those who took pride in the great Greek philosophers, and contrasted the so-called wisdom of this world with God’s wisdom that is revealed in the cross of Christ (1 Cor. 1:18-30). He sarcastically asks –

## 1 Cor. 1:20-21 (NASB)

<sup>20</sup> Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

The point is, if you have not come as a sinner to the cross of Christ to obtain God's mercy through faith – then you do not know God and so you are stuck... Without knowing God – you cannot gain the wisdom that comes only from Him.

So – you need to be a “believer”, which is a “committed follower” of Christ if you are to enjoy the promise God gives in this passage...

And notice some great truths – some great characteristics about God's giving of wisdom that we need to consider:

- God gives wisdom generously.

God possess the unlimited supply! It's up for the taking! We simply need to go to God for our much-needed wisdom!

<sup>5</sup> But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously...

Further –

God gives wisdom without criticism.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

God does not give wisdom reluctantly or with any idea of condemnation for our lack of it... He does not “scold” us, or “shames” us for our need to come to Him...

God gives wisdom indiscriminately.

It does not matter the background, the knowledge, intelligence, how economically limited, mistaken, or confused a believer may be ... We are commanded to pray for wisdom and are given the certain and trustworthy promise that we can receive wisdom from God!

There's no need to feel that you have all the wisdom that you need because you indeed do not! At the same time, there's no need to be ashamed of your lack of wisdom, because we're all in the same boat, and God will give it to us all!

The last part of verse 5 says, “and it will be given to him”.

God will indeed give us wisdom if we seek it... And just *how* does He go about the business of dispensing His wisdom?... Listen carefully –

God gives wisdom through His Word!

**Steven J. Cole** – a contributor to Bible.org, says in his commentary on this passage – “God's wisdom comes directly from God and is revealed in His Word. It especially centers in the knowledge of Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3; see also, Col. 1:9; Eph. 1:16-17). God reveals His wisdom by the Holy Spirit to those who are spiritual (1 Cor. 2:6-16). That wisdom has to do with knowing how to apply biblical truth to particular situations in life. Thus if you are not spending consistent time learning God's Word, you will not have the wisdom that you need when trials hit. The time to seek wisdom from God is before the calamity hits (Pro. 1:20-33).”

God wants us to be wise and He is generous in giving out wisdom.

Next, we see that there is a requirement that must be met before we can experience the wisdom God is providing... We must –

### 3. Exercise the Prerequisite (:6a)

<sup>6</sup> But he must ask in faith ...

So, we are told that when it comes to seeking wisdom we are to ask God in faith!

Heb. 11:6 (NASB) “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.”

It would be silly to ask something of a Being that you weren't sure existed. Or, if He did exist, you weren't sure if He cared about your request or if He had the power to grant it! So, to ask for something from God – you must believe that He exists – that He personally cares for you – and He is able to give you the wisdom that you need.

Now, let's make some clarifications regarding this discussion about faith.

Faith exercises trust in, and commitment to God.

First all, James is not saying that we need to be perfect Christians; he is saying that we need to be committed Christians.

We shouldn't be unsettled between the things of God and the things of the world. We can't be going back and forth. We need to be committed to God and to trust that He is Who He says He is and He can do what He says He can do!

Do we believe that God can give us wisdom? That's the point! Complete trust in God and His ways is the type of faith that we are to have!

Faith leaves the matter with God.

James is not a modern-day heretical “Prosperity-Gospel-Preacher”... James is not offering a “name it, claim it” theology...

Name-it-and-claim-it theology says that if I name something, if I want something, then all that I have to do is claim it as my own and it will be mine... That is the heresy being offered today by people like Jesse Duplantis, Kenneth Copeland and so many others that greaves me to even mention their names...

You really don't have to even know their names – but you know them every time you turn on “Christian” television and you see someone making their pitch for you to “sow your seed of faith” – which really means – send them your money – and you can then claim from God whatever you want...

That is NOT Biblical faith! That is an appeal to your fleshly greed – masked in so-called Biblical terminology, with such words as *faith*

James is saying that if God commands something, and if God gives that gift generously, then His people are to ask Him for it.

Our faith should not be in ourselves, our faith should be in God.

If He wants to give something according to His will, then He will give it!

God may not want you to be the most handsome or beautiful person in the room; He may not want you to have that house, or car, or jet; He may not want you to go to that school, or play on that team; He may not want you to be healed from that disease at this time; but you can count on the fact that God wants you to have wisdom! So, pray for it in faith!

That's the kind of faith that we are to have.

Finally – to gain wisdom, we are to ...

### 4. Heed the Warning (:6b-8)

... without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the

wind. <sup>7</sup> For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, <sup>8</sup> being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

We are not to doubt!...

If you doubt God's existence or His ability to give you wisdom for your need – James says (1:6) that you're “is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind”.

The surf does not direct itself... It is totally at the “will of the wind”. It is completely unstable and chaotic... It can be a destructive force – able to batter a boat and smash it against the rocks... That's a picture of the person who lacks faith in God.

Notice that the root of this *unbelief* is being double-minded. Double-minded is literally “two-souled” or two-minded, a soul divided between God and the world.

The person who constantly and consistently doubts God is a person who is not committed to obeying God... Their heart is not fully surrendered to God and His will. Such a person may be curious about God’s will, only to see if they agree with it – but they are not committed to doing God’s will if it involves hardship or inconvenience... That person, James says, “ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord” (1:7).

Why should we not expect to receive anything from God? Because we are double-minded and unstable! Well, why are we considered double-minded and unstable if we doubt?

Basically, it boils down to this: we profess that we trust God, so if we don’t, in fact, trust Him, we should not expect to receive anything from Him.

We cannot both trust and not trust God at the same time! That is double-minded and unstable.

To be double-minded means that we have two 🙌 minds. One that trusts God and the other that does not.

James’ point here is that we cannot both say that God is Creator of all things and can do all things, and at the same time doubt that He can provide us wisdom.

This rebuke by James does not point to a single moment of doubt, but a consistent doubt. James is talking about an inconsistent person who claims to be a believer but does not really live it out. This is inadequate faith.

If we’re not convinced that God’s ways are best for us, why would we ask anything of Him?

However, the person who trusts in God; he or she can ask God for wisdom and He will provide it.

I think the lesson we need to learn at this point was best articulated by –

**J.I. Packer** – “Not until we have become humble and teachable, standing in awe of God's holiness and sovereignty, acknowledging our own littleness, distrusting our own thoughts, and willing to have our minds turned upside down, can divine wisdom become ours.” (Knowing God, p. 101)

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Some final thoughts:

What if we don’t have faith, what should we do?... We should ask God! If He is the giver of wisdom, He is certainly also the giver of faith.

God wants us to have faith, so we should ask Him to increase our faith.

As in Mark 9:24 (NASB) where the father of the demon-possessed boy said to Jesus, “... I do believe, help my unbelief!”

One of the things we will continuously encounter in the book of James – is that there is no middle ground between belief and unbelief. You either believe in and trust God, or you don’t. You either trust God to provide wisdom for you, or you don’t.

So we see that when we ask for wisdom, that the basis of our confidence is not in our faith itself, but in the One in Whom we have faith!

Think of a situation this week where you might need wisdom:

Difficult conversations; big decisions; going through trials; whatever it may be – and ask God for wisdom.

Ask God to increase your faith in Him.

He wants to. Don’t be unstable.

Seek the Lord deeply. Ask Him for wisdom; ask Him for faith.

Question: Can we ask God to give others wisdom?... YES!

You can, and God may grant that. However, I believe God’s design is that we would seek it personally by going to Him.

Questions to consider in Community Group:

- What is wisdom – how do you define it?
- Why do believers turn quickly to the world's wisdom (psychology, self-help programs, etc.) when God offers His wisdom?
- What were the four truths about how God gives us wisdom that was stated in the message? (generously, without criticism, indiscriminately, and through His Word) Which of those truths might you struggle with the most?
- Why is it so important to look to God's Word for wisdom – rather than trusting impressions or feelings?
- What is faith, and why would it be considered a “prerequisite” to obtaining wisdom from God?
- How would you counsel a doubting Christian to get back to faith in God? Where should he begin?
- What are your thoughts about J.I. Packer's quote – “Not until we have become humble and teachable, standing in awe of God's holiness and sovereignty, acknowledging our own littleness, distrusting our own thoughts, and willing to have our minds turned upside down, can divine wisdom become ours.” (Knowing God, p. 101)
- Are there situations for which you are seeking the Lord for wisdom, that you would be willing to share with others – so we can also be in prayer?