

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*If Any of You Lacks Wisdom Let Him Ask of God.*"

Go ahead and open your Bibles to James 1.

We've reached an important point in our series. You could say we've been building up to this sermon. I said I wanted to preach on wisdom, and in particular how wisdom helps us navigate through trials, and that's the topic of this message. The previous sermons laid the foundation for this one.

----

Let me begin with a story that illustrates why this is so important to me...

When I became a Christian in my early twenties I knew almost nothing about the bible. One of God's graces was surrounding me with men who had two things in common. First, they knew the bible well. Second, they were happy to answer all my questions. And there were many of them.

One of the influential men in my life at that time was Barry Branaman. I've mentioned him a few times before. He would stay up late after the study that took place at his house helping me understand the Bible. He died unexpectedly a few years ago, and I'm thankful for any opportunity to honor his name.

**Heb 11:4** says **Abel speaks even though he is dead** and I feel like Barry still speaks even though he's dead through his investment in me.

Hopefully on this side of heaven we're all investing in people and we speak through them long after we're gone.

----

One other thing Barry did for me, was direct me to a few wonderful Christian books that he knew would be helpful. One of them was *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer. I'm thankful that I read what this book said about wisdom, because it helped me avoid falling into many of the charismatic pitfalls. In particular, the idea that having wisdom means knowing why God does what He does...which nobody knows, but God.

I've alluded to this up to this point. Now I want to give you the illustration from Packer's book, and I'll use a lesson to help you remember it...

## LESSON 1: WISDOM (PART I) IS NOT BEING "IN THE SIGNAL BOX."

J.I Packer writes...

*If you stand at the end of a platform at [a train] Station, you can watch a constant succession of train movements which, if you are a railway enthusiast, will greatly fascinate you. But you will only be able to form a rough idea of the overall plan in terms of which all these movements are being determined.*

In other words, you can watch the trains start, stop, turn, leave the station, enter the station...but have no real idea why they're doing what they're doing.

*If, however, you are privileged enough to be taken up into the magnificent signal-box [above the station], you will see on the wall a diagram of the entire track layout for miles, with little glowworm lights moving or stationary to show where every train is. At once you will be able to look at the whole situation through the eyes of those who control it: you will see why this train had to [stop], and that one had to be diverted from its [track], and that one had to be parked temporarily. The why of all these movements becomes plain once you can see the overall [picture].*

*Now, the mistake that is commonly made is to suppose that this is what God does when he bestows wisdom: to suppose that the gift of wisdom [is] a deepened insight into the meaning and purpose of events going on around us; an ability to see why God has done what he has done in a particular case, and what he is going to do next.*

In other words, some people think being wise means you know why God does what He does.

*People feel that if they were really walking closely to God, so that he could impart wisdom to them freely, then they would find themselves in the signal-box; they would discern the real purpose of everything that happened, and it would be clear every moment how God was making all things work together for good.*

This is the end of Packer's first illustration, explaining what wisdom is NOT.

There are a few big problems with this understanding of wisdom.

First, when people think of wisdom this way, it causes them to try to understand things that God doesn't expect them to understand. They spend time wondering: "*Why did God do this or that, and why didn't he do this instead.*"

Second, sometimes they can think they know why God did what He did...when in fact they have no idea, and when they claim to know, they're little more than false prophets.

Third, when people can't understand why God is doing what he's doing, how do they feel?

Discouraged!

They wonder why God hasn't revealed it to them:

- Maybe they aren't spiritual enough.
- Maybe God doesn't love them enough.
- Maybe they aren't mature enough.

At the least they're forced to think they aren't wise enough to know.

----

So now that we know what wisdom is *not*, let's talk about what it is...

## LESSON 1: WISDOM (PART II) ALLOWS US TO “HANDLE THE CURVES WELL.”

Let me briefly dispel something about trials so we can better understand wisdom...

Trials are kind of like temptations in that we tend to think if we're wise enough or mature enough we won't experience them.

But you can be the wisest and most mature person and still experience trials and temptations. We know this because the wisest and most mature person still experienced them. Jesus experienced trials and temptations.

----

So to be clear wisdom doesn't help us avoid trials.

So what does wisdom do?

There are lots of ways to think of wisdom:

- We might say wisdom is the correct application – or use – of knowledge.
- Or we might say wisdom is making the morally correct decision in any situation...in other words, wisdom is knowing the right thing to do.
- Or we might say wisdom is godly behavior in difficult situations, or in trial.
- Or we might say wisdom is practical skill needed to live life to God's glory.

I think these are all good ways to view wisdom.

----

Let me share Packer's illustration of wisdom...

*If another transportation illustration may be permitted, it is like being taught to drive. What matters is the speed and appropriateness of your reactions to things and the soundness of your judgment. You do not ask yourself why the road should narrow or turn just where it does, nor why that van should be parked where it is, nor why the driver in front should hug the crown of the road so tightly.*

In other words, when you drive you don't try to figure out why there's a turn or the road goes up or down.

*[Instead], you simply try to see and do the right thing in the actual situation that presents itself. The effect of wisdom is [the same]. It enables [us] to do just that in the situations of everyday life.*

In other words, wisdom helps us handle the curves of life.

----

With this in mind look with me at **verse 2**...

**James 1:2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**

You recognize these verses. They're some of the most well-known in scripture. I've preached on them, and Pastor Nathan preached on them in May. So I'm not going to spend much time on them.

But there is one thing I want you to notice: it says trials test us.

And this brings us to Lesson 2 on your inserts...

## **LESSON 2: TRIALS ARE TESTS REQUIRING WISDOM.**

Briefly look down at verse 12...

**James 1:12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast UNDER TRIAL, for when he has STOOD THE TEST he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.**

So he says a trial is a test.

The Greek word for **trial** in **James 1:2** is *peirasmos* (pr: pie-ross-moss), it occurs 21 times in the NT, and it means: "*adversity, affliction, trouble sent by God and SERVING TO TEST or prove one's character, faith, holiness.*"

Trials test us!

----

The Greek word for **test** in **verse 3** is *dokimion* (pr: doh-key-me-on) and it means, "*that by which something is tried or proved, A TEST.*"

This word only occurs in one other place in Scripture and that's **1 Peter 1:7** where it also says trials are tests.

As I read these verses, consider how similar they are to **James 1:2-3**...

**1 Pet 1:6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various TRIALS, 7 so that the TESTED genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is TESTED by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**

So just like James, Peter says trials are tests.

----

Think about when God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac...

**Genesis 22:1** After these things God TESTED Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” 2 He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.””

This was a test and a difficult trial.

----

Keep this in mind and to look at **verse 5**...

**James 1:5** If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Sometimes people draw a clean break between verse 4 and verse 5 as though there's no relationship between them:

- They'll teach on verses 2 to 4, and talk all about trials.
- They'll teach on verses 5 to 8 and talk about wisdom.

But they won't discuss the connection between verses 2 to 4 and verses 5 to 8.

We know context is important and when people don't connect these verses they're missing something huge...

- It's not as though James was talking about trials and then started talking about wisdom as though they have nothing to do with each other.
- Instead he started talking about wisdom BECAUSE he was talking about trials...b/c we need wisdom during trials.

----

Let me get you to notice something important ...

At the end of **verse 4** God says trials will allow us to **be perfect and complete, LACKING IN NOTHING.**

Then he begins **verse 5** by saying...

**If any of you LACKS WISDOM, let him ask God**

Notice the parallelism?

God says he doesn't want us **lacking anything**, but if we do lack wisdom we can ask for it and He'll give it to us...b/c He doesn't want us lacking anything.

And this brings us to Lesson 3...

**LESSON 3: GOD WANTS TO GIVE US WISDOM DURING TRIALS.**

Let me give you a brief theology lesson...

Bible scholars classify God's attributes in two categories: *incommunicable* and *communicable*.

*Incommunicable* simply means those attributes He does not communicate to us. His:

- Immutability – He never changes...we do change.
- Sovereignty – His power and control over creation...we don't have power over creation.
- Omniscience – He knows all...we don't know all.
- Omnipresence – He's everywhere...we're only in one place.

The second group of God's attributes are called *communicable* because when God created us, He "communicated" some of them to us. This is what it means to be **made in the image of God**.

Some of the communicable attributes are:

- Freedom – Like God we're able to make decisions for ourselves; we're not robots
- Mercy – Like God we can show mercy toward others
- Creativity – Like God we can be creative

For this morning, wisdom is another communicable attribute.

God is all wise and He gives some of that wisdom.

Consider this verse about how much wisdom God has...

**Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!**

This is all about how much wisdom God has.

He has so much of it he doesn't need to be stingy with it. He can be generous with it.

----

So in these verses we see two things that God graciously does w/ trials:

1. First, as verses 2 to 4 explained, he uses them for our maturity.
2. Second, as verses 5 to 8 explain, he gives us wisdom to handle them well. He doesn't introduce trials into our lives and then leave us to deal with them alone.

God wants trials to drive us to Him. He wants them to cause us to depend on him.

One way trials drive us to God and cause us to depend on him is that we seek wisdom from him. They create a desperation we don't have otherwise.

----

The way **verse 5** is worded is interesting. It says **if any of you lacks wisdom**...as though there are some of us who don't lack wisdom.

That's not what it means. It means **if any of you lacks wisdom...**at certain times, and in particular when we're going through trials.

That's when we most need wisdom so we can navigate the trial well.

----

But instead of asking for wisdom what do we typically ask for during trials?

If you're anything like me, your prayers sound like this:

- *Lord, please make this trial go away.*
- *Father, please end my suffering.*
- *God, will you make this stop?*

We're supposed to bring all things before the Lord, so I'm not criticizing these prayers. I don't think there's anything wrong with praying for God to take away trials.

But one thing we should ask for is wisdom.

----

When people are going through trials I don't always know what's best for them. I don't know whether the trial should stop or continue or change.

But I know is they need wisdom, so I'll pray for God to give them wisdom.

----

James doesn't just tell us to ask for wisdom...he also tells us how to ask for it. Look at verse six...

**James 1:6 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.**

Notice this first starts with the word But. James is saying ask, BUT ask in faith...and this brings us to lesson 4...

#### **LESSON 4: DOUBTING PRODUCES UNSTABLE LIVES.**

**Heb 11:6** communicates a similar truth that when we approach God, we must do so believing...

**Hebrews 11:6 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.**

Whenever we draw near to God – whether to ask for wisdom or anything else – we must do so with faith.

----

Doubting is strongly condemned because it shows a lack of faith. We might not think of doubting as sin, but it is...

**Romans 14:23 Whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.**

In other words, when we lack faith and doubt we sin.

-----

When this verse talks about **doubting** it has the idea of doubting God's willingness to give us wisdom.

It's someone who thinks God doesn't want to do what **verse 5** says and give wisdom generously.

----

The comparison is fittingly made to a restless wave in the ocean.

Paul used similar language to describe people who don't know what they believe theologically...

**Ephesians 4:14 We [should] no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.**

These people hear one thing, so they're swayed that way, and then they hear something else, so they're swayed that way.

James says the same thing can happen to people during trials when they ask for wisdom...

One moment they trust God and the next moment they doubt...at times we've probably been like this during trials too.

-----

Think of Peter when he was walking on the water and you'll have a good physical illustration of what this looks like spiritually...

Peter had faith at first. He got out of the boat and started walking on water. Then he saw the wind and the waves and started to **doubt**.

**Matthew 14:31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, WHY DID YOU DOUBT?"**

Peter was like a wave of the sea that was driven and tossed. One minute he had faith and the next minute he doubted.

----

It's important to read this here, because when can we be most tempted to doubt God?

During trials!

- We're tempted to doubt God's love us.
- We're tempted to doubt God will work things together for good.
- We're tempted to doubt that He'll give us the wisdom we need.



James says, “*Don’t doubt. When you’re in a trial, ask God for wisdom and have faith that he will answer.*”

----

Look what we should expect if we doubt...

**James 1:7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.**

If we pray to God and ask for wisdom but doubt He’ll give it to us...then we must also expect He won’t give it to us.

----

The double-minded man can’t figure out what to do; he’s unstable.

This makes so much sense!

If wisdom helps us figure out what to do, then people without wisdom don’t know what to do. They are unstable.

----

And I want you to notice it doesn’t just say unstable in trials, it says **unstable in all his ways**.

We need wisdom in all areas of life, and when we don’t have it we are **unstable in all ways**, or in all areas of life.

- We don’t know how to navigate the situations we face.
- We don’t know how to handle life’s curves.

----

But let me tell you something very encouraging...

This isn’t what God wants for us!

I want you to notice – and I think it’s important – that one of the clear points of these verses is God wants us to have wisdom!

Look at the inviting language. **If any of you. Let him ask God. He gives generously. To all. Without reproach. It will be given.**

It couldn’t be written in a more encouraging way.

----

Just think about why it would be the case that God wants us to have wisdom....

He’s for us!

- He wants us to handle trials well...
- He wants us to pass the tests we face...He isn’t looking for our failure...He’s looking for our success.

He knows we need wisdom...and He wants to give it to us.

----

We see this in the Book of Proverbs...

You've got a father speaking to his son, and what does the father want to give his son?

Wisdom!

Wisdom to handle all of life's issues.

---

And the father in Proverbs reveals the heart of our Heavenly Father.

He wants to give us wisdom, and let me close with this...

The greatest wisdom he wants to give us is found in Christ!

**1 Cor 1:24 Christ [is] the wisdom of God...30 Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God.**

Our Heavenly father gave us wisdom in the Person of Jesus Christ and we are to receive it without doubting or being tossed to and fro.

What does this look like?

If it means fully trusting in the sacrifice that Jesus made.

- If you have done this you have received the greatest wisdom available, because you have received the gospel.
- If you haven't done this, you have made the most foolish decision because you have rejected the gospel and stand condemned before God.

Repent of your sins and look to Christ to be saved.

Let's pray.