

JAMES – PRACTICAL LESSONS IN SPIRITUAL MATURITY

WISDOM

1. OVERVIEW: JAMES 1:5-8

A. James 1:5-8 (NASB) “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. 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. 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.”

B. NOTE: VERSE 5 IS PLACED AFTER VERSE 4 AND BEFORE VERSE 6 FOR A REASON.

1. AND BECAUSE JAMES PUT IT IN THE OPENING PARAGRAPH, IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO UNDERSTAND VERSE 5 BOTH CONTEXTUALLY AND SPECIFICALLY.

2. WHEN WE LOOK AT VERSE 5 IN CONTEXT WE RECOGNIZE THAT WHAT JAMES IS SAYING ABOUT “WISDOM” IS DIRECTLY TIED TO WHAT HE JUST SAID ABOUT “TRIALS” AND WHAT HE IS ABOUT TO SAY REGARDING HOW WE SHOULD ASK FOR “WISDOM”.

C. THE PHILLIPS TRANSLATION PARAPHRASES VERSE 2, “WHEN ALL KINDS OF TRIALS CROWD INTO YOUR LIVES, DON'T RESENT THEM AS INTRUDERS, BUT WELCOME THEM AS FRIENDS.”

D. IN VERSES 2-4, JAMES URGED HIS READERS TO RECOGNIZE THAT “TRIALS” ARE A PRIVILEGE WHICH GOD THE FATHER ALLOWS HIS CHILDREN TO EXPERIENCE IN ORDER THAT, WE MIGHT BECOME “MATURE AND COMPLETE AND NOT LACKING ANYTHING”.

1. NOTE: WHEN THAT IS OUR PERSPECTIVE, THEN AND ONLY THEN, WILL WE BE ABLE TO DISCOVER “JOY” IN THE MIDST OF OUR “TRIAL”.

E. THAT MAY SEEM TO BE COUNTERINTUITIVE AND IT IS CERTAINLY COUNTERCULTURAL.

1. COUNTERCULTURAL BECAUSE “JOY” AND “TRIALS” DO NOT COEXIST IN OUR CULTURE.

2. IN FACT, IN OUR CULTURE “TRIALS” ARE THE ANTITHESIS OF “JOY”.

a. THEREFORE, OUR CULTURE SAYS, IF YOU WANT TO HAVE “JOY”, YOU NEED TO REMOVE “TRIALS”.

F. JAMES SAYS “NO, THAT IS NOT TRUE!” ... AND PARADOXICALLY, HE PLACES “JOY” AND “TRIALS” IN RELATIONSHIP TOGETHER.

1. THE WAY CHRISTIANS CAN UNDERSTAND THE CULTURAL PARADOX IS IN RELATIONSHIP TO GOD'S ULTIMATE PURPOSE WHICH IS THAT WE BECOME COMPLETE BY BEING CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF JESUS CHRIST THROUGH “TRIALS”.

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a. JOHN THE BAPTIST UNDERSTOOD GOD'S PURPOSE AND SAID... John 3:30
(NASB) "He must increase, but I must decrease."

G. TO PARAPHRASE: JAMES SAYS THAT WE SHOULD "COUNT IT ALL JOY WHEN WE FACE TRIALS OF VARIOUS KINDS", BECAUSE THE TRIALS IN OUR LIFE CAN ACTUALLY PRODUCE PERSEVERANCE, AND WE WILL GROW TO BE MATURE AND COMPLETE CHRISTIANS, AND BECOME CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF JESUS CHRIST... WHICH IS GOD'S PRIMARY GOAL FOR CHRISTIANS.

1. NOTE: HOWEVER, JAMES ADDS IN VERSE 5 THAT IF WE FIND OURSELVES REACTING TO "TRIALS" WITH FEAR, ANGER, CONFUSION, OR DOUBT... AND, IF WE ARE TEMPTED TO REJECT WHAT HE SAID ABOUT "JOY" IN "TRIALS, THEN WE SHOULD ASK GOD FOR WISDOM, BECAUSE WE WILL NEED WISDOM IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE REAL PURPOSE OF "TRIALS".

H. THE PHILLIPS TRANSLATION IS HELPFUL HERE BECAUSE HE TIES VERSES 4 AND 6 TOGETHER IN RELATIONSHIP TO ONE WORD, AND THE WORD IS "PROCESS".

1. James 1:2-5 (Phillips) "When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends! Realize that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance. But let the process (the process of maturing through trials) go on until that endurance is fully developed, and you will find you have become men and women of mature character with the right sort of independence. And if, in the process, any of you does not know how to meet any particular problem (trial) you only have to ask God - who gives generously to all men without making them feel foolish or guilty - and he may be quite sure that the necessary wisdom will be given him. But he must ask in sincere faith without secret doubts as to whether he really wants God's help or not.

I. TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THIS SECTION, WE CAN ASK THREE QUESTIONS, AND THEN FIND THE ANSWERS IN THE TEXT.

1. QUESTION NUMBER ONE... WHAT DO WE NEED?
2. QUESTION NUMBER TWO... WHAT SHOULD WE DO?
3. QUESTION NUMBER THREE... WHAT WILL WE FIND?

2. QUESTION NUMBER ONE, WHAT DO WE NEED?

A. ANSWER... WE NEED WISDOM.

1. WHY?... BECAUSE WE NEED WISDOM IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE REAL PURPOSE OF "TRIALS".

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a. JAMES IS VERY **INCLUSIVE** IN THE WAY HE APPROACHES THE **QUESTION...** **"IF ANY OF YOU LACK WISDOM"**.

B. **NOTE: WISDOM IS MORE THAN EDUCATION!**

1. **WISDOM IS NOT SIMPLY MENTAL... WISDOM IS ALSO MORAL.... IT IS THE BEHAVIOR THAT COMES FROM A BELIEF SYSTEM.**

a. **WISDOM IS GOD'S WORD IN ACTION.**

1) **Matthew 7:24-27 (NASB)** "Therefore everyone who **hears** these **words of Mine** and **acts on them**, may be compared to a **wise man** who built his house on the rock. "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. "Everyone who **hears these words of Mine** and **does not act on them**, will be like a **foolish man** who built his house on the sand. "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."

b. **THAT IS RADICALLY DIFFERENT FROM THE CULTURE IN FREDERICKSBURG AND IT WAS RADICALLY DIFFERENT FROM THE CULTURE IN CORINTH.**

1) **1 Corinthians 1:18-21 (NLT)** "The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. As the Scriptures say, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent." So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? **God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish.** Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe.

2) **1 Corinthians 3:19 (NASB)** "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS"

3) **THOSE VERSES AREN'T AN ARGUMENT FOR PEOPLE NOT TO DO THEIR VERY BEST IN TERMS OF THEIR INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT, BUT THEY SHOULD RECOGNIZE THAT THERE IS A RADICAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD AND THE WISDOM OF GOD.**

4) **NOTE: THAT'S WHY JAMES SAYS, YOU WILL NEVER UNDERSTAND THIS PARADOX UNLESS YOU GET WHAT YOU NEED... AND WHAT YOU NEED IS WISDOM!**

c. **REMEMBER: WISDOM AND PRIDE ARE MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE... WE WILL NEVER BE WISE AND PROUD.**

3. **QUESTION NUMBER TWO, WHAT SHOULD WE DO?**

A. **ANSWER... WE SHOULD ASK GOD FOR WISDOM.**

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1. **James 1:17 (NASB)** “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights (GOD), with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”

a. JAMES SAYS WE SHOULD “**ASK GOD**” FOR **WISDOM** BECAUSE **HE** IS THE “GIVER OF EVERY GOOD THING” AND “EVERY PERFECT GIFT”.

B. **QUESTION: HOW SHOULD WE “ASK”?**

1. **ANSWER: SIMPLY AND PROPERLY.**

a. **SIMPLY:** “DEAR GOD, **WILL YOU PLEASE** GIVE ME **YOUR WISDOM** BECAUSE I'M **TEMPTED TO RESENT** THIS “**TRIAL**” AS A **MAJOR INTRUSION** IN MY LIFE... **INSTEAD OF AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SPIRITUAL MATURITY?**”

b. **PROPERLY:**

1) **THE WRITER OF HEBREWS SAYS, Hebrews 10:21-22 (NASB)**

“and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, **let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith**, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

2) **JAMES SAYS, WE “must ask in faith without any doubting”.**

3) **THE PHILLIPS TRANSLATION SAYS, “He must ask in sincere faith without secret doubts as to whether he really wants God's help or not.”**

4) **“PROPERLY” IS TO COME TO GOD IN CHILDLIKE TRUST, ASKING HIM TO HELP US TO UNDERSTAND THAT OUR “TRIALS” ARE “LIGHT AND MOMENTARY AFFLICTIONS, NOT WORTHY TO BE COMPARED TO THE GLORY THAT IS GOING TO BE REVEALED IN US”. (2 Corinthians 5:17).**

i. **NOTE: IT TAKES GOD'S WISDOM TO UNDERSTAND THAT “TRIALS” CAN BE “LIGHT AND MOMENTARY AFFLICTIONS, NOT WORTHY TO BE COMPARED TO THE GLORY THAT IS GOING TO BE REVEALED IN US”!**

4. **QUESTION NUMBER THREE, WHAT WILL WE FIND?**

A. **THE ANSWER IS STATED IN THE POSITIVE AND IN THE NEGATIVE:**

B. **POSITIVE:** James 1:5 (NASB) “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.”

1. **IF WE COME TO GOD SINCERELY AND IN HUMILITY (NOT “DOUBTING”), JAMES SAYS HE WILL GIVE “WISDOM” “GENEROUSLY TO ALL WITHOUT FINDING FAULT”.**

a. **GOD DOESN'T MAKE US FEEL GUILTY OR FOOLISH FOR ASKING FOR “WISDOM”, OR FOR ASKING FOR IT OFTEN.**

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C. **NEGATIVE:** James 1:6-8 (NASB) “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. 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.”

1. James 1:6-8 (PHILLIPS) “But he must ask in **sincere faith without secret doubts** as to **whether he really wants God's help or not**. The man who trusts God, but with inward reservations, is like a wave of the sea, carried forward by the wind one moment and driven back the next. **That sort of man cannot hope to receive anything from God, and the life of a man of divided loyalty will reveal instability at every turn.**”

D. **MORE ABOUT HOW “DOUBT” AFFECTS “WISDOM” LATER.**

5. **WISDOM: IS THE NEXT SECTION IN JAMES AFTER** “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various **trials**, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” **IS TO ASK GOD FOR WISDOM.**

A. **BECAUSE THAT IS THE MOST PRACTICAL SOLUTION “WHEN” WE ARE IN A “TRIAL”.**

1. **AND JAMES IS THE MOST PRACTICAL BOOK IN THE NEW TESTAMENT!**

B. **REMEMBER KNOWLEDGE IS NOT WISDOM.**

1. **SOME OF THE SMARTEST PEOPLE DO SOME OF THE DUMBEST THINGS.**

a. **DISCUSS**

b. **THEY MAY HAVE KNOWLEDGE BUT THEY ARE NOT VERY WISE.**

1) **EXAMPLE STEPHEN HAWKING WAS AN ATHEIST.**

c. **Proverbs 3:5-8 (NASB) 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 your paths straight. **Do not be wise in your own eyes;** Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones.

d. **Job 28:12-15,20,23,28 (NASB) "But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? "Man does not know its value, Nor is it found in the land of the living. "The deep says, 'It is not in me'; And the sea says, 'It is not with me.' "Pure gold cannot be given in exchange for it, Nor can silver be weighed as its price. ... "Where then does wisdom come from? And where is the place of understanding? ... "God understands its way, And He knows its place. ... "And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding.'"**

C. **James 1:5 (NASB) 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.**

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D. “WISDOM” DEFINITIONS:

1. **KNOWLEDGE** IS THE **ABILITY** TO TAKE THINGS **APART**... **WISDOM** IS THE **ABILITY** TO PUT THEM **TOGETHER**.
2. **WISDOM** IS THE **PROPER APPLICATION** OF **KNOWLEDGE**
3. **WISDOM** GIVES CHRISTIANS **INSIGHT** INTO **UNDERSTANDING** THE **WORD OF GOD** AS WELL AS THE **WAY IT IS TO BE APPLIED**.
4. **WISDOM** IS **ESSENTIALLY PRACTICAL**... IT IS **KNOWLEDGE** WITH **MORALITY** THAT IS TURNED INTO **ACTION** IN THE **DECISIONS** AND **PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS** OF **EVERYDAY LIFE**.
 - a. **WISDOM** IS **NOT** **PHILOSOPHIC SPECULATION** OR **INTELLECTUAL KNOWLEDGE, OR LOGIC**.

E. **CONCLUSION: WHY** DO WE NEED **WISDOM** WHEN WE ARE GOING THROUGH **“TRIALS”**?

1. ... SO WE WILL **NOT WASTE OPPORTUNITIES** TO **MATURE/GROW SPIRITUALLY** BY **REACTING** TO THE **“TRIAL”** IN **ANGER, CONFUSION, FRUSTRATION, OR FEAR**.
 - a. **WISDOM** HELPS US TO **UNDERSTAND HOW** TO USE **“TRIALS”** FOR OUR **MATURITY**.