

“Pray for Wisdom”

April 1, 2012

Text: James 1:5-8

**In our study of the first chapter of James, we began by
viewing ourselves as the slaves of God & of Jesus X.**

Then last Sunday, we explored the implications of James’ words
in verses 2-4=> *“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you
encounter various trials.”*

James explained that God uses trials as tests of our faith to
strengthen it, & to produce spiritual endurance in us.
He added that endurance produces the blessing of spiritual
maturity, in which we are *“lacking in nothing.”*

Someone might have responded=> “As far as I’m concerned,
spiritual maturity isn’t reward enough for being subjected
to the pain/turmoil of trials/tests.

So James is going to answer that objection in today’s text,
telling us that, if we feel that way, we do lack
something=> wisdom.

And because we lack wisdom, we should pray for it.

James is certainly the right book in which to learn about wisdom.

Although there’s a good bit of wisdom literature in the OT
(incl. Proverbs/Ecclesiastes/Job & parts of Psalms),
James is the best example of Jewish wisdom
literature in NT.

**In order to understand what James means when he tells us to
pray for wisdom, let’s clarify what wisdom actually is.**

1) Wisdom belongs-to, and comes to us from, God.

He is a wonderful/loving God, and wisdom is one of His greatest gifts to men/women.

In Rev 7, all the angels and the elders standing around God's throne, worship Him, saying=> "*Blessing & glory & **wisdom** & thanksgiving & honor & power & might, be to our **God** forever & ever. Amen*" (7:12).

Praying for wisdom is asking God to help us see all of life and all of history as He sees it: the working out of His predestined, redemptive plan to bring His elect to glory, even as He causes "*this [evil] age*" to pass away.

That's what Paul means in I Cor 2:6-7=>

*"We do speak **wisdom** among those who are mature; a **wisdom**, however, **not of this age**, nor of the rulers of this age, who are **passing away**; / We speak **God's wisdom** in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God **predestined** before the ages to **our glory**."*

Wisdom adopts the perspective of the eternal age to come, & lives in light of that truth here/now.

It sets its mind on the things above, not on the things that are here on earth (Col 3:2).

The discomfort of trials we suffer here is far outweighed by our future "*eternal weight of glory*" (2 Cor 4:17).

Knowing our trials are producing that glory, enables us to view them with joy.

2) Wisdom is also a moral attribute of God, seen in His goodness.

James 3 describes “*the **wisdom** from above*” (God’s wisdom) as=> “*first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy & good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy*” (3:17).

Wisdom is living in this heavenly way while we’re still here on earth.

I.e., it’s living as Jesus lived.

So praying for God’s wisdom is asking Him to help us take on His goodness—both in attitude/behavior, thus preparing ourselves for life in the age to come.

James 3:13=> “*Who among you is **wise** & understanding? Let him show by his **good behavior** his deeds in the gentleness of **wisdom**.*”

For a believer who truly hungers/thirsts for righteousness, tests/trials here in exchange for righteous character like God’s, is worth it; in fact, it’s a bargain.

3) Wisdom is a characteristic of our Savior, Jesus X.

In Rev 5:12, myriads of men/angels say=> “*Worthy is the **Lamb** that was slain to receive power & riches & **wisdom**.*”

When Jesus was born, He was the embodiment of God’s heavenly wisdom, come to earth as a man (I Cor 1:24).

And yet Lk 2:40 says=> “*The Child continued to grow and become strong, **increasing in wisdom**.*”

Having emptied Himself and imposed our ignorance upon Himself at His incarnation, Jesus as a child lacked the knowledge of Scripture that is a prerequisite to wisdom.

When He learned the Word, and then applied it to Himself, the X-Child grew in wisdom.

So wisdom is acquired by learning Scripture truth, & then applying it to our own lives.

This is what we ask God to help us do, when we pray for wisdom, knowing that He may well use trials to enable us to apply the Truth to ourselves.

But in the process, we'll become more like our Savior.

This leads us to wisdom-principle 4=>

4) Wisdom is to be the believer's whole approach to life.

It is a blessed mode of existence, in which we live before God, ever-mindful of His will and final purpose for our lives, & keenly aware of our need for His strength.

God gives wisdom to believers as a precious gift, which is why Paul prayed for the Ephesian Xns=> *“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may **give to you** a spirit of **wisdom**”* (Eph 1:17).

But having received wisdom as a gift, Xns are then to grow in it, which is why Paul prayed for the Colossians that they might be=> *“**filled** with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual **wisdom**”* (Col 1:9).

And wisdom, once attained, changes the believer's whole lifestyle, so Paul then added in the next verse (1:10),
*“that you may **walk** in a **manner worthy** of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every **good work** and increasing in the knowledge of God.”*

In this morning's text, we will consider 4 aspects of our praying for wisdom...

- * The Prompting to Prayer
- * The Promised Answer to Prayer
- * The Prerequisite of Answered Prayer
- * The Prevention of Answered Prayer.

*** The Prompting to Prayer**

James prompts us to pray to God for wisdom, so that we might view our trials from God's eternal perspective and find joy in them, rather than grief.

God, being our good/loving Father, is pleased to answer our prayers, and to give us the wisdom for which we ask.

[James 1:5]=> *“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask [make a request] of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach,”*

James is saying, “If you are having trouble linking your trials to joy, it's because you lack the wisdom to do so. Therefore, pray for it.”

“If any of you lacks wisdom” doesn't mean some Xns do, but others don't—we all lack it, and we all need more of it.

But not every Xn recognizes his need for wisdom.

So wisdom begins w/ an awareness that we lack it, and
that's why we are finding it difficult to maintain a
joyful attitude while we're being tested/tried.

We haven't yet learned to look at our trials from heaven's
perspective.

Our sour attitude is a clear indication we need wisdom.

In Psa 73, Asaph is on the verge of stumbling as he sees how
easy life can be for sinners, whom God doesn't test/try.

Psa 73:3-4 (Asaph)=> *"For I was envious of the arrogant,
As I saw the prosperity of the wicked. / For there are
no pains in their death; And their body is **fat** [well
fed]."*

73:11-12=> *"And they say, 'How does God know? And is
there knowledge with the Most High?' [they mock
God, and seem to get away with it]. / Behold, these
are the **wicked**; And always at **ease**, they have
increased in **wealth**."*

Asaph looks at his own life, and says, "I don't get away with
anything; God always chastens me. What's the deal?"

73:13-14=> *"Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, And
washed my hands in innocence; / For I have been
stricken all day long, And chastened every morning."*

There's an unasked question lurking behind Asaph's
statement=> "Isn't God really good, after all?"

That's exactly what Satan wants us to question.

Now Asaph goes to the Temple, and looks at the whole situation
of the wicked through God-given wisdom.

He realizes sinners aren't really getting away w/ anything.

They'll pay for all their iniquity in eternity.

73:16-18=> *“When I pondered to understand this, It was troublesome in my sight / Until I came into the sanctuary of God; Then I perceived their end. / Surely Thou dost set them in slippery places; Thou dost cast them down to destruction.”*

God had given Asaph the wisdom he needed, to see things as they really were.

Here we have a good example of viewing one's trials (and sinners' lack of trials) through God's eternal perspective, and finding reason to rejoice in His using trials to our spiritual advantage, to increase our wisdom and mature us spiritually.

God illuminated Asaph's mind, giving him the wisdom of moral/spiritual discernment, enabling him to see the situation in a way that was consistent with God's will/purpose.

It produced a good attitude and righteous behavior in Asaph, recognizing his own accountability before God (which the sinner ignores).

In our own text, James says, “*Let him ask [wisdom] of God.*”

This appears to be giving him permission to ask for it, but it's actually a command to do so, and to keep on asking.

James further prompts us to ask God for wisdom, by reminding us, what a generous/kind-spirited God He is.

“Generously” refers to the fact that He has no ulterior motives, simply wanting to bless His children.

“Without reproach” reminds us that He doesn’t rub our faces in our own failures/foolishness, and scold us because of past gifts He has given us, which we have squandered/misused/misplaced.

James says God gives wisdom *“to all,”* who will ask Him for it.

* Even to Xns who have been disobedient to Him.

* Even to non-Xns who, if they will respond w/ wisdom to His general revelation, will receive the special revelation of the gospel, so they might become saved.

“Wisdom” is one of the best gifts we can ask for, from God.

Prov 3:17 says of wisdom=> *“Her ways are pleasant ways,
And all her paths are peace.”*

It enables us to see everything from heaven’s perspective,
and to relax by simply trusting in God’s
wisdom/grace/power/goodness.

**One of God’s primary purposes in subjecting His own
children to trials is to draw them to His throne, where
they belong—resting in Him.**

He has all the wisdom we could ever need, but He wants us to ask Him for it, so He can give it to us as a gracious gift from a loving Father.

And we never have greater need of wisdom than when we pass through trials/difficulties.

They bring us back to humble reverence before our God—a reverent fear of Him that is the beginning of wisdom.

*** The Promised Answer to Prayer**

[Verse 5b]=> “...and it will be given to him.”

This is a surprisingly-direct guarantee that God will answer all men’s prayers for wisdom.

There *are* prayers that God will not answer.

E.g. Jms 4:3=> “*You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.*”

Most of the prayers prayed in name-it/claim-it churches today are prompted by selfish motives, because the people are encouraged to pray that way.

God’s Word assures us He will not answer prayers that are out of keeping w/ His will, and selfishness is definitely not His will for His people.

But a sincere prayer for true/godly wisdom is a prayer prayed with proper motives, and James says God will answer it.

There are also other factors that might disqualify our prayers.

Jms 5:16=> “*The **effective-prayer** [not *proseuche*, the more generic word for prayer, but *deesis*—fervent supplication] of a righteous man can accomplish much.*”

Sometimes Xns pray casually for things they don’t really want.

E.g. they may pray for holiness, knowing they’re supposed to desire that.

But they have a pet sin, which would have to go, if they really gave themselves over to holiness.

And not really being convinced that holiness is more desirable than that sin, they pray for holiness with a lack of sincerity/fervency.

Others may pray, “Lead me not into temptation,” then go directly to a place where they know they’ll be tempted.

When they yield to the temptation, they may inwardly blame God for letting them fall into sin.

This is game-playing—a trifling with God that is nothing short of mocking Him.

But when God uses trials/tests to drive people to His throne, seeking His help, they come w/ a sincere sense of urgency.

They have been purged of lackadaisical half-heartedness, and are ready to get down to business with the Lord.

God says to them, “If you pray that way for wisdom in order to see this trial in its proper perspective, so you can endure it w/ joy, I will give you the wisdom you ask for.”

There is also another condition for answered prayer, which James brings up in verse 6.

*** The Prerequisite of Answered Prayer**

[Verse 6]=> “*But let him ask in faith without any doubting,*”

James says faith is a basic prerequisite to answered prayer.

Heb 11=> “*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” (11:6).*

Faith is the only basis upon which man can form a relationship with God.

It is wholehearted trust-in/dependence-upon Him, as He has been revealed in Jesus X.

God requires that we ask for wisdom w/ genuine faith/trust in His character, as He has revealed Himself in Scripture. Our own text shows Him to be sincerely/totally generous. I.e., a benevolent rewarder of those who sincerely seek Him.

To cast doubts on that claim is to call God a liar, which is to question (even attack) His character.

We are to believe not only in His ability to answer our requests, but also in His willingness to do so when our prayers are in keeping w/ His holy character/purposes.

Those who pray w/ faith, are like the Israelites in 2 Chron 20.

They were about to be attacked by the Moabites/Ammonites.

And this is how they prayed=> *“Should evil come upon us, the sword, or judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house [the Temple] and before Thee (for Thy name is in this house) and cry to Thee in our distress, and Thou wilt hear and deliver us” (II Chron 20:9).*

This is a great statement of their faith.

I.e., Lord, should we be attacked, we're going to stand right here before You & pray—we have no other plan/strategy.

Faithful believers are to face trials/tests with that kind of faith/resolve, with endurance, & w/ the conviction that God will use it all to bring about a joyous result, because He's such a good God.

The Lord answers their prayers of faith, & provides the wisdom to keep the crisis in its right perspective.

Doubters, by contrast, turn-back, look-back, & turn-away from the Lord.

E.g. * Whenever the OT judges of Israel died, Judges 2:19 says the people often “*turned back*” to their wicked ways, & “*The anger of the LORD burned against Israel.*”

* In Gen 19:26, Lot's wife looked back fondly at Sodom instead of fleeing as the angel had commanded her. God judged her, she died, and she became a pillar of salt.

* Gal 4:9 (Paul)=> “*Now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you **turn back** again to the weak & worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?*”

* Jesus (Lk 9:62)=> “*No one, after putting his hand to the plow & **looking back**, is fit for the kingdom of God.*”

Trust in God, and faith in Jesus X, are not options that a believer is free to exercise/not-exercise at will.

They are to be unequivocal/nonnegotiable commitments to Him.

The word “*doubting*” refers lit. to an inner debate with oneself.

It’s a moral struggle caused by our wanting the things of God (on the one hand), while longing for the things of the world/flesh on the other.

And it’s a struggle which alienates us from God, by equating Him w/ false/worthless objects of worship.

Jms 4:4=> “*You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*”

God doesn’t answer His enemies’ prayers.

Unwillingness to settle the issue & choose finally between God & the world is a default choice for the world, with spiritually discomfoting consequences.

[Verse 6b]=> “*...for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.*”

This is a picture of the faithless/uncommitted person’s instability, like a boat being tossed about on a stormy sea.

Over/over, it’s raised up on the crest of a wave, then dropped into a trough, as the wind swirls it about in various directions.

It is powerless, helpless, & at the mercy of gigantic and uncontrollable forces.

In the same way, those who doubt are restless souls with no inner strength to stand up to the powerful spiritual forces around them, or the sinful nature within them.

Isa 57=> *“The wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet & its waters toss up refuse & mud. / ‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked’” (57:20f).*

Doubters pay a terrible price=> the loss of inner stability/peace.

But they think they are just keeping their spiritual options open, between sin’s pleasures; & a guilt-free conscience.

Doubters seek the freedom to go either way, depending on how they may feel at the moment.

People like this are utterly unstable, and utterly untrustworthy.

If/when they pray for wisdom, they don’t really mean it, and their prayers go unanswered.

*** The Prevention (better, Preemption) of Answered Prayer.**

Being so full of doubts, doubters cannot pray with effectual faith, so God never answers doubters’ prayers.

[Verse 7]=> *“For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord,”*

“*That man*” is a term of derision, because James has no respect for those who doubt God’s power/promises, even though James personally had once been a doubter himself regarding Jesus’ Messiahship.

But when he finally believed in X, he never turned back.

We all struggle with moments of doubt—even Abraham did.

James isn't talking about those who must ward off doubt once in a while, but about those who are inveterate doubters and who are content to never really settle their doubts or the issue of God's power/promises, in their own minds.

They pray prayers that they never expect God to answer.

They may be respectful/eloquent, but they're faithless prayers, from hearts that don't mean what they pray.

Again, Heb 11:6=> *"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."*

Doubters don't really believe God will reward them, by answering their prayers.

In Mk 9, an epileptic boy's father brought him to Jesus for healing, saying, "If You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!"

Jesus responded=> *"'If You can!' All things are possible to him who believes."*

To which the man responded=> *"I do believe; help my unbelief"* (Mk 9:22-24).

This was a fortunate man because he had identified his problem as weak faith, & prayed that Jesus would strengthen it, in addition to healing his son.

Many Xns aren't as sure as this man, why God isn't answering their prayers.

We should all pray for stronger faith, and for the wisdom that can produce it, even through trials.

Now James puts his finger on the root cause of doubt.

It is a split personality, that wants 2 things which are exact opposites=>

- * A strong faith that can result in answered prayer
- * A desire for self-sufficiency & independence from God.

[Verse 8]=> *“being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”*

God wants us to pray to Him, because He wants to be our God, and to be glorified in His answers to our prayers.

He is our kind/loving Father, and He wants to play that role in our lives by granting our requests.

The *“double-minded man”* wants to live apart from God, calling on Him only when it fits his self-centered purposes.

The lit. wording means he is “two-souled,” behaving as if he had 2 souls, in conflict—1 wanting to live like a Xn, the other wanting to live however it pleases.

Today he looks/sounds like a Xn, tomorrow like the world.

This struggle is the reason why such people have no spiritual power and no peace.

And God makes no promise of wisdom to them.

In some cases, these folks may simply be very fleshly Xns.

They can say with Paul in Rom 7:15=> *“That which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.”*

Their inner man is struggling against their flesh.

But in many cases, they aren't Xns at all, & it's to these
double-minded folks that James will write in

Jms 4:8=> *"Draw near to God & He will draw near
to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; & purify
your hearts, you **double-minded**."*

Double-minded people are "*unstable in all their ways*."

By that, James means they never take a definitive stand on
anything, therefore their minds are always unsettled.

This mental habit affects the decision-making in every area
of their lives.

As a result, they become unstable/unreliable people, w/
preferences/opinions, but no convictions at all.

It becomes impossible for them to develop strong
convictions about anything.

So they lock themselves into foolishness/immaturity.

There's a sort of peace to be had in giving oneself over to sin.

It's the peace of a seared conscience, which never feels
guilt about anything.

Then, there's the peace that passes comprehension that is
available to those who wholeheartedly give
themselves over to X.

However, there's neither peace/answered-prayer for the
doubters, who try to find a middle ground between
sinner/saint.

But God has wisdom/peace/answered-prayer for those who
endure trials w/ joy, firmly believing He is exactly what He

has revealed Himself to be=> a good/loving/fatherly God
who gives to all men graciously/generously, and w/o
reproach.

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1. Someone might say that spiritual maturity is not reward enough for trials and tests; if we feel that way, we lack [14 wisdom].

Jms 1:2-4

Let's clarify what wisdom actually is...

- *2. Wisdom belongs to and comes from [8 God].

Rev 7:12; I Cor 2:6-7; II Cor 4:17

- *3. Wisdom is also a moral attribute of God, seen in His [20 goodness].

Jms 3:17, 13

- *4. Wisdom is a characteristic of our [14 Savior], Jesus Christ.

Rev 5:12; Lk 2:40

- *5. Wisdom is to be the believer's whole approach to [10 life].

Eph 1:17; Col 1:9, 10

In this morning's text we will consider four aspects of our praying for wisdom...

*** The Prompting to Prayer**

[James 1:5]

6. Wisdom begins with an awareness that we lack it and that is why we are finding it difficult to maintain a [14 joyful] attitude while we are being tested and tried.

[Psa 73; 3-4, 11-12, 13-14, 16-18]

7. James further prompts us to ask God for wisdom by reminding us what a [18 generous], kind-spirited God He is.

Prov 3:17

*** The Promised Answer to Prayer**

[Verse 5b]

Jms 4:3

8. A sincere prayer for true, godly wisdom is a prayer with proper motives, and James says God [10 will] answer it.

Jms 5:16

*** The Prerequisite of Answered Prayer**

[Verse 6]

Heb 11:6

9. God requires that we ask for wisdom with genuine faith and trust in His [20 character] as He has revealed Himself in Scripture.

II Chron 20:9; Judg 2:19; Gen 19:26; Gal 4:9; Lk 9:62

10. Trust in God and faith in Jesus Christ are [8 not] options that a believer is free to exercise or not exercise at will; they are to be unequivocal, nonnegotiable commitments.

Jms 4:4

[Verse 6b]

Isa 57:20-21

11. Doubters pay a terrible price: the loss of inner [20 stability] and peace.

*** The Prevention of Answered Prayer.**

[Verse 7]

Heb 11:6; Mk 9:22-24

12. We should all pray from stronger faith, and for the [14 wisdom] that can produce it even through trials.

[Verse 8]

Rom 7:15; Jms 4:8

13. Double-minded people never take a definitive stand on anything, therefore their minds are always [20 unsettled].

14. God has wisdom, peace, and answered prayer for those who endure trials with joy firmly believing He is a good, [14 loving], fatherly God.