

## The Path to Obtaining Wisdom # 3

James 1: 5-8

Who among us has faced a situation or circumstance in which we simply did not know what to do or how to respond? In your Christian journey, has there ever been an occasion that you wished the Lord were standing before you so that you could ask a question and get a direct answer? I am sure that most, if not all of us, have faced similar situations. The fact is we all could use more wisdom than we possess.

In our text this evening, James is dealing with wisdom and our need for it. James understood that wisdom was elusive for many, and those who possessed it had spent much time and effort acquiring wisdom. So, in order to obtain wisdom, we must first understand what wisdom is. Wisdom is more than mere knowledge. It involves skill, tact, and expertise. It deals with skill in the affairs of life, practical wisdom, sound judgment, and good sense. Someone has said, *“Knowledge can be memorized. Wisdom must think through. Wisdom is the something that enables us to use knowledge rightly.”* An Arabian Proverb describes wisdom like this:

1. *He that knows not and knows not that he knows not;  
He is a fool—shun him!*
2. *He that knows not and knows that he knows not;  
He is simple—teach him!*
3. *He that knows and knows not that he knows;  
He is asleep—wake him!*
4. *He that knows and knows that he knows;  
He is a wise man—follow him!*<sup>1</sup>

James sought to convey the need for wisdom to the church. In order to fully appreciate what we have read, we must keep this passage in its context. The church was scattered abroad, facing divers temptations and much trying of their faith. It is evident that they were dealing with less than desirable circumstances. It is in this context that James speaks of wisdom. He knew they would need God’s wisdom to endure and live in light of His grace.

Our existence is much different, but each of us has, and will, face trying times. We too need the wisdom of God if we are to endure. I want to examine the [disciplines](#) concerning wisdom conveyed to us as we think on: [The Path to Obtaining Wisdom](#).

**I. The Pursuit of Wisdom** (5a) – [If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God](#). Consider:

**A. The Hindrance in Wisdom (5a)** – James speaks of those who **lack** wisdom. This has the idea of “*being deficient in or destitute of, to lack.*” Apparently many of them lacked the ability to properly understand their situation. It is likely that some had grown weary in the faith, beginning to question their own faith, and even the love and care of God for them due to their difficult circumstances.

- James knew they lacked wisdom and he encouraged them to seek the Lord for understanding. Rather than seeking to understand the “why” of their problems, James wanted them to come to a fuller understanding of “Who” was in the midst of their problems. They lacked wisdom and understanding because they were looking at their circumstances through worldly reasoning rather than godly wisdom.

- I am certain that we all need more wisdom in our lives, especially when we are forced to deal with unpleasant or undesirable circumstances. We have all been guilty of asking why rather than leaning upon the Lord and seeking to understand what God desires to teach us when we don’t understand. We will never gain what we lack until we begin to look through eyes of faith toward the Lord.

**B. The Hope in Wisdom (5a)** – ***If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.*** There is a profound truth in the text that a hurried reading would miss. James is speaking to specific and special group that lack wisdom. He does not speak of a casual request. He charges us to **ask** for wisdom of God. It has the idea of “*desiring, craving, literally begging; the inferior seeking diligently from the superior, the poor beggar seeking from Him who is able to give, a helpless child seeking provision from a parent.*” He urges them to seek diligently from the Lord, recognizing their lack and God’s ability to provide that which is lacking.

- We ask for much when we pray, but I fear that an earnest request for wisdom is seldom mentioned, and even if it is, it isn’t sought in an urgent manner. We need the wisdom of God desperately in our day. We face much that is beyond our ability to handle. We live in a society that in large part is ignorant of the Bible and the ways of God. If we are to endure in this life and be effective for the Lord, we must not be lacking in wisdom! That is not say that we will ever reach the place that we have all the wisdom we need, but it is evident that we suffer from a lack of wisdom.

### **I. The Pursuit of Wisdom (5a)**

**II. The Prayer for Wisdom (5)** – ***If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*** This reveals much in regard to our plea for wisdom in prayer. Consider:

**A. The Source of Wisdom** – *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.* James knew they lived in a day where perceived wisdom was abundant. Society was greatly influenced by the philosophies of those who were regarded as the “great minds” of their time. There may have been some practical application to portions of the accepted philosophies of the day, but James knew genuine wisdom was available from only one source, God Himself. Rather than looking to men or the latest philosophical fad, he urged them to look to God for the wisdom they needed.

- We live in an information age. There is more information readily available today than at any other moment in time. Through the internet we can access books, magazines, news sources, and every imaginable piece of information without even leaving our homes. Many young people assume if it’s on the internet, it must be true. We have developed a new catch phrase: Google it! Information can be useful, but I fear that the vast majority are looking in all the wrong places for wisdom and direction today. This world and its ideas do not have the answer for the problems we face. If we are to possess the wisdom we need, it must come from the Lord.

- We need to understand that wisdom is usually not received immediately. If we are to obtain the wisdom of God, we must be willing to seek Him in prayer, read His Word, and meditate upon Him. *Job 28:12-15 – But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? [13] Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. [14] The depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me. [15] It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. [23] God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. [28] And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.*

**B. The Supply of Wisdom** – *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally.* James reveals that God’s wisdom is not limited or scarce. There is no danger of it running in short supply. He will give to those who seek it *liberally*. It is given “*sincerely, uncompounded, clearly, and bountifully.*”

- There is no limit to the wisdom of God. He is more than able to provide all we need, and will give it without measure if we sincerely desire to receive it. We lack wisdom because we do not ask God, expecting to receive it! We may suffer disappointment and confusion due to a lack of wisdom, but our lack is never due to God’s lack of generosity. *Jam.4:2 – Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.*

**C. The Sympathy in Wisdom** – *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.* Here we discover a very comforting thought. God knows our weakness and our inability. He knows that we lack wisdom and often make

troubling decisions as a result. How many times have we sought the Lord for direction and help for the same problem or one very similar in nature? I know there have been times when I was almost ashamed to even come before the Lord because I had been before Him with similar circumstances many times before.

- We can come before the Lord in full assurance that He will be sympathetic to our need. He gives wisdom liberally, and [upbraideth not](#). That means God will not “*rail upon us, reproach us, revile or rebuke us; we need not fear Him responding with abusive words.*” God is loving and patient. We often grow weary with repeated requests, especially when we sense a lack of sincerity or effort on the part of those who ask, but God will respond when we seek Him for wisdom, even if it is a repeated or similar request. [Heb.4:16 – Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.](#)

### **I. The Pursuit of Wisdom** (5a)

### **II. The Prayer for Wisdom** (5)

**III. The Prerequisite for Wisdom** (6-8) – In the remaining verses of our text, James mentions a couple of elements that are essential prior to receiving wisdom. Notice:

**A. The Petition in Faith** (6a) – [But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering](#). James mentions a simple truth that is often overlooked and neglected. For many, God has become some “cosmic Santa Claus” who is expected to be on standby until they need Him and then respond immediately to whatever request is asked. When we seek the Lord, for wisdom or any other need, we must come to Him in faith, fully believing that He can and will meet our request in a manner that pleases Him and benefits us. That is not to say that God will always answer our request in a manner we are pleased with, but that we trust Him to always do what is right.

**B. The Persistence of Faith** (6b-8) – James elaborates on the petition of faith in regard to our persistence in seeking the Lord. Having our needs met will often not happen with a one-time, hurried prayer. We must be persistent in seeking the Lord. Consider:

**1. The Example** (6, 8) – [But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. \[8\] A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.](#) Here we find an example of those who waver in their faith. They are like a wave in the sea, tossed to and fro, driven by the winds. We cannot come before the Lord being unstable in our faith in Him.

- As we come to the Lord for wisdom or other needs, we must be consistent with our petition in faith. We cannot waver, questioning whether or not God can or will meet our need. We must come to Him each and every time in absolute faith, knowing He will respond in the proper way.
- Have you ever sought the Lord for a need in your life or for wisdom to deal with a situation, and even while you were praying doubted that you would receive your request? Have you ever brought a need to the Lord, expressing your inability to handle it yourself, and yet picked the burden up and took it with you as you rose from prayer? Such actions are that which James speaks of. We cannot doubt or question God's ability when we seek Him. We must come in full assurance of His ability and complete faith that He will provide.

**2. The Expectation** (7) – [For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.](#) If we expect to receive wisdom or any petition we ask of God, we must ask in faith. If our prayers are offered with doubt, not genuinely expecting God to hear and answer our prayer, we need not expect to receive anything from the Lord. He will respond to a prayer of faith, but prayers offered in doubt will not receive what we need or desired.

- That has challenged me in my prayer life. We know we must pray in faith if our prayers are to be answered, but this has reminded me yet again that our faith has a direct impact on receiving our requests. If we expect to receive, we must know that God is able to provide!

Surely we all need more wisdom in our lives. Where are you looking for the wisdom you need to navigate the course of life? Are you willing to earnestly seek the Lord for the wisdom and direction you need? Do you possess the faith necessary to receive your request?

As I thought of all that we have discussed, I was reminded of the abundance that we have in Christ. We can enjoy the fullness of God because of our relationship with Him. The lost do not enjoy the benefits associated with being a child of God. If you have never trusted Christ as your Savior, I urge you to come to Him. You will never regret trusting Christ in salvation.

<sup>1</sup> Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations: Signs of the Times.