

WISDOM

- James 1:5-11

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5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. 9 Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, 10 but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. 11 For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.

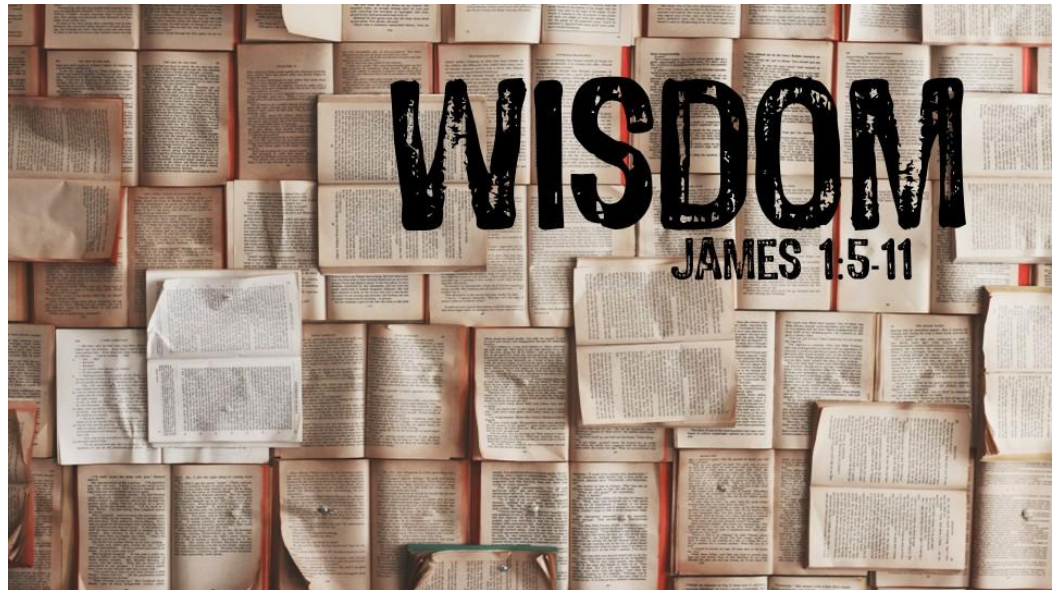
1:5

Our world today is rushing headlong into the growth of knowledge. A man by the name of Buckminster Fuller created the “Knowledge Doubling Curve”; he noticed that until 1900, human knowledge doubled approximately every century. By the end of World War II, knowledge was doubling every 25 years. Today, things are not as simple; different types of knowledge have different rates of growth. For example, nanotechnology knowledge was doubling every two years as far back as 2014 and clinical knowledge every 18 months. But on average, human knowledge has been doubling every 13 months. According to IBM, the build out of the “internet of things” will lead to the doubling of knowledge every 12 hours and some say we are already there.

Yet while mankind seems to be forever learning, we still have obvious shortcomings when it comes to wisdom. 2 Timothy 3:7 warns of such, telling us that mankind is “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” As an example of this, growth in knowledge has not stopped man’s inhumanity toward others. Genocide is still prevalent throughout the world, hunger ravishes entire countries, disease, wars, murders and political power struggles still have planet Earth in a stranglehold. Then, of course, there is the prevalence of earthquakes, typhoons, droughts, floods, and other natural disasters that can’t be controlled and defy reason and understanding.

Earlier in this chapter, James spoke of the trials and tribulations that are an innate part of this life in which we walk. And the fact is, all of the knowledge in the world will not prevent such issues from coming to us. It will not resolve or prevent such, and often it will not keep us from the pain that accompanies them. But James is making the point that we, as God’s kids, don’t have to be perplexed by such trials and try to face them with our own natural, fallible understanding and strength. Instead James says that if we find ourselves in a trial and lack spiritual insight, our way as believers should be to go to our Father and ask Him for His wisdom, which is the practical application of His Word toward our everyday situations.

Solomon, way back in the book of Proverbs, pointed out that wisdom is not the same thing as knowledge. While knowledge most often comes from laboratories, books and classrooms, wisdom seems to best come through experience. Verse five begins by pointing out that such an open door as this is available to any and all. In 1 Cor 1:25, we read, “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” Yet James says, “If any...” Though it is available to us all that are His, we must indeed **be His** in order to have that ticket, to gain that kind of access. Scripture tells us that God is the source of all wisdom, but God is not Google. His wisdom is personal, intimate, limitless and supernatural. He doesn’t pass all the secrets of the universe to you in some sort of “Spock” mind meld.” The fact is, much of the wisdom we receive from God is experiential. Thus, we must actually engage Him and the mission we are called to in order to truly experience Him! Such a wisdom as this actually often comes through trials and tribulations, not just through joyous and fun experiences. So be careful what you ask for! And don’t come to Him and ask with predetermined ideas of just how He is going to deliver! All of this is part of the experiential “gnosko” (Gr) knowledge that God gives us. The world knows nothing of this wisdom!



1 Co 3:19 says, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their own craftiness.'"

Spurgeon used to tell about seeing a weather vane which had the text "God is love" inscribed above it. When he asked the owner why he put the verse on top of it, he said so that it would speak to people at all points of the compass and say to them, "God is love, whichever way the wind blows." You see then that faith in God and God's wisdom counts upon His goodness and faithfulness in the face of all conditions and in spite of all hindrances. We might say, "God is good all of the time."

In classic style, our God does not tacitly respond, but rather "gives to all...liberally...and without reproach."

1:6

When we read this passage, its words can often be somewhat daunting and even discouraging. Because most of us feel that since we indeed do doubt at times, we are "voiding the warranty." And such may indeed be the case! But the answer generally isn't to embrace a "mind over matter" approach to things. You see, the problem is so often that we misunderstand this thing called faith to begin with. Faith isn't believing that God will come through in a certain way or with a certain answer. That's not faith in God, but faith in you, in events, faith in faith, or faith in something. But it's not God faith! God faith is that God *will* answer. That God hears you. That He loves you and has your back. The scripture tells us that God will give us such, so when we ask in faith for Him to give us wisdom, we can trust He will.

The problem usually comes when we want to lay specifics on Him too! That He must work *this* way or answer *that* way. That He has to deliver *specific* wisdom, at a *specific* time, in a *specific* way, and in a *specific* style. That will likely not go well, and then we think we have failed to chant the magic incantation in the correct order, or maybe we have some sort of sin in our lives that we are unaware of that is blocking our heavenly phone calls. You cannot have real faith unless it incorporates the reality that God is in control and that you are going to trust Him to answer, how He wants, when He wants, and using whatever methods He so desires. None of us are going to put God in a box or boil this faith thing down to a simple math equation. It isn't, "I have faith that God will give me this, or God will do that." It is rather, "I have faith in God; in God to do right by me, that God is a righteous judge and an all-consuming Lord. That He is aware of me and my situation and is righteously engaged even if I can't see it. Faith is in the person of God, not in His actions. Faith is essentially trust. I *trust* God. If your faith does not at times lead you...*answers*...in a way that you did not expect or did not want, then you are not living by faith. You are living by *you*."

1:7-8

This passage has a dark side too. It says that if I do fail in this matter, I will not see the hand of God fully manifested in my life. Not because God lacks the desire to do so, but my failure to trust God to take care of me and allow Him rule in my life is essentially my decision to not move ahead into God's perfect work.

People often ask, "Can I be a Christian and not be a disciple?" The answer, in its strictest aspect, is "maybe," but certainly not for very long. The innate change that occurs when one is born again goes on to impassion and compel one to follow. Its not an optional addendum but a mandatory evolution. He *will* transform you! You cannot change that innate trait of salvation. And without faith, you cannot be a disciple, because faith is a mandatory ingredient to God having the "keys to your car."

If that's true, and you are not therefore a disciple and are lacking in faith, then you are not pleasing God, because "it is impossible to please God without faith" (Heb 11:6). The verdict of it all is that even if you one day do know life in heaven, you will never know God's full presence and plan for you in this life, *your* life. And that's a bummer. Because you will still feel the trials and tribulations of passing through this life, you just won't often know why. And let me ask you this: Can you really actually become born again with merely a desire to escape hell? Can salvation take place without love for Christ? Without repentance? Without surrender? Without new passion and new direction? I sincerely doubt it, and I know I won't play fast and loose with MY eternity! Job 13:15 says, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him."

James says such a man is a "double minded man." Double mindedness is evidence of an unsubdued will. A heart, mind, and life that has not surrendered to God. It's a terrible place to be. A place where there is a battle with in and out for control of one's life...one's entirety. The fruit of such a life is confusion, bad decisions, lack of fulfillment, and inevitably, great loss. Loss of time, loss of purpose and direction, loss of friends and the love that travels with them. Loss of joy. Loss of peace. Until there is a single God on the throne of your life, you will always be a double minded man. Like Reuben, the son of Jacob, you will be as unstable as water.

All of this comes to us because of a lack of faith in God. You see, we all will have faith in someone or something, and most often, our faith in God is exchanged for a faith in someone we trust more: *us*. Ourselves! So we move through the days, weeks, months, and years of our lives in a constant tug-of-war between ourselves and God. And sadly, so often, He just lets me win. And in that context, winning invariably sucks.

1 Kings 18:21 says, *"Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, 'How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!'"*

Each one of us must decide whether he truly believes God, and whether he is convinced that God will keep His word. That information comes through a decision to believe, but also through a great experiential knowledge and applied wisdom as we actually walk this Christian life thing out. We must first read and know His promises, then live and experience those promises in our lives. Without BOTH of these, we will live "tossed to and fro, carried about by every wind..."

The best example I can think of when we consider perfect faith, is those boys facing death by being thrown into a fire-filled furnace in Daniel chapter three. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego told the king in verses 17-18, "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up." They didn't know how God would do it, or even if He would act specifically to save their lives, but they knew that God had their backs and that nothing was going to happen that He didn't approve of. And most of all, no matter what God did or did not do in that situation, they still were not going to deny Him, they still were not going to disobey. Now that is real faith!

Truth be told, many of us are still honestly unsure that we truly want to walk in Christ. We are day by day changing our minds. In such a life, one will never know peace or joy, and stands in danger of eternity.

Matt 6:22-25 says, "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"

We must be focused on the singular path before us because Satan and the world will continue to besiege us with distractions. It takes discipline, consistency, and commitment in order to continue unabated. We must truly be in love with our Master. For if that is covered, I shall not be moved!

1:9-11

Living in a world that is setting its own earthly priority and value system, we as children of God can oftentimes be slow to embrace the immediate blessings that come with our salvation. If we are not attentive, we are apt to adopt the world's values, forgetting that we are just passing through this world. We, as King's kids, are living in a spiritual Kingdom that adheres to different values and priorities. We may be poor in the eyes of this world, yet as believers we are rich in ways this world cannot understand and will not value. No amount of money is able to buy happiness, nor will it be able to purchase eternal life.

Scripture, on more than one occasion, warns that the rich stand on the precipice of damnation. It is so easy to trust in finances and material possessions to save us from everything. From discomfort to crisis. It seems we must be constantly reminded of the simple premise that unless we are the raptured generation, nothing can save us from eventual death, and either way, there is the judgment that will follow. Then on the other side, earthly riches will not matter at all, for there we will all stand equal before God. God is no respecter of persons. He doesn't care whether you are rich, have an Oscar for best film, or even a Grammy. Kings and rulers will stand before Him as sure as Bob from Wheeler.

This is where the idea of faith is clarified. Even in this world, the rich are not immune from the uncontrollable dangers of life anyway. Stock market crashes, business closings, sickness, as well as natural disasters are beyond their control, and no amount of money thrown at a problem will make it go away. When those kinds of issues come, the rich man will stand as helpless as the poor man. In those times, the rich man will fade away, leaving just a *man*. But the child of God, the guy who lives each moment of his life in the shadow of his Creator and Lord, knows God is still on the throne and in control. Perhaps a day of sitting in the waiting room of an intensive care wing would give us that needed insight!

Solomon prayed that great prayer at the beginning of his reign, asking God for the spiritual wisdom that he lacked:

"Oh Lord...Give me the wisdom and knowledge to lead them properly, for who could possibly govern this great people of yours? God said to Solomon, 'Because your greatest desire is to help your people, and you did not ask for wealth, riches, fame, or even the death of your enemies or a long life, but rather you asked for wisdom and knowledge to properly govern my people. I will certainly give you the wisdom and knowledge you requested. But I will also give you wealth, riches, and fame such as no other king has had before you or will ever have in the future!'" (2 Chr 1:10-12)

Having went on to actually experience God, through the good times and the bad, Solomon later penned in Proverbs 2:6, "*The LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.*"

Author and artist Elbert Hubbard said it so clearly when he was quoted as saying, "God will not look you over for medals, degrees, or diplomas, but for scars."

Job 23:10-12 says, "But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot has held fast to His steps; I have kept His way and not turned aside. I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."