

Men to Men Ministry
Lesson: Three of James
Wisdom and Knowledge

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James 1:5-11 NASB

5) 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.

6) 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.

7) For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord,

8) being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

9) But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position;

10) and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because alike flowering grass he will pass away.

11) For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

Introduction

We learned from last week that there is no escaping from trials. All life on this earth is a trial. I have often said, "We are spiritual beings, living an earthly existence." Our choice, our test is what we are going to do with trials in our life. We also must realize that this letter, written by the brother of Jesus was pointed toward a people that were well acquainted to trial. Their whole history was one of grand undulations of behavior. Highs of walls falling down at the feet of Joshua, and God giving a set of unbending laws by which the people could live righteously. There were also great lows, of Egyptian slavery, Babylonian captivity, and Roman rules. To the Christian Jews they were going through an additional low of persecution from their own people. Both highs and lows, when seen through God's eyes were all trials.

The trial is whether we choose God's solution or our own. Things we withhold from God, our own struggles are trials that demand decision. When we withhold something from God we are failing the test. It may be a little thing, held closely to your heart, but your

are consciously telling God, with a fist in the air, “You can have all of me, but I have this thing that I cannot give up. It could be an inner grudge against someone you simply cannot forgive. It is one thing in your life that steals your joy at the most inopportune moment. It haunts you. It destroys you from within. You may call it by many names: pride, shame, me, private, a self-suffering, self-sufficiency, and personal desire. But whatever the name it is your trial and you are failing as long as you say, “I can handle it,” or “I can do it on my own.”

Nothing withheld from God, will become a temptation. Anything hidden away will become a constant draw of temptation.

Here you must know you are not alone, I Corinthians 10:13 states for all to hear, **“There is no temptation that overcomes you but is common to man.”**

Scripture Parallels

James seems to mimic or speak with the same ideas the Jesus spoke about the struggle of man needing more than self:

- James 1:5 **“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”,**
- Matthew 7:7, **“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”**
- Matthew 21:22, **“And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”**
- Matthew 5:3, **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**

Further it is a contrast between the rich and the poor in the wisdom literature in Proverbs:

- Proverbs 30:8,9, **“Keep deception and lies far from me, Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, That I not be full and deny You and say, “Who is the Lord?” Or that I not be in want and steal, And profane the name of my God.”**

Exposition James 1:5-11

Circumstances of ASKING

I discovered in a Bible web blog not too long ago that when one Christian meets another there are many ways to start the encounter by saying:

1. “How are you today?” Most of the time the response is “I am fine”, conversation over.
2. “How are you doing today?” This requires a little more thought but again it usually ends the conversation with, “I am getting along”.
3. We could ask as John Wesley asked, “How is your soul today?” This usually takes a little more time to respond because it is asking about your spiritual status.
4. We could ask about family, “How is our family?” Again, unless there is total chaos happening there is again the pat answer, “Just fine”.
5. “How’s it going?” results in “good”.
6. But the real question for a Christian to a Christian to stop them in their tracks and really look deeply into their soul the question should be, “How are you suffering

today?” There is no pat answer, there is not easy way to push the questioner away. It requires honesty and frankness.

As Christians we need to know your struggles, that we may help, that we may sympathize, that we may empathize, that we might get involved. Because that struggle, that suffering is the trial they are going through right now. Is physical pain a trial? Yes, it is. Is not knowing where the next dollar comes from a trial? Yes, it is. Is struggling with addiction a trial? Yes, it is. Is not knowing how to cope with a struggle a trial? Absolutely, it is. If you are experiencing suffering or a struggle of any kind it is a trial.

The issue arises that the solution to the trial is often far off, an unknowable, intellectual puzzling, and simply baffling. And the scripture before and after our portion seems to tell us any trial can become a temptation. A temptation that can lead to our ruin.

Trials are evidence of God working,
because trials change us on a spiritual level.

Trials require an eternal perspective. That external perspective is knowing the difference between the process and the purpose. The process is the daily life of the Christian. The constant spiritual battle to see God in all that happens to you. In the hard times God is there. In the not so good times, God is still there. In the terrible earth shattering, knock you down and step on your stomach time, God is still there. He is there because there are spiritual lessons to be learned. It is God’s purpose in the ups and downs of life is your cause spiritual growth. There are sweet offerings of wisdom for the next time.

There are things we must comprehend and instill within our spiritual life: First, don’t ask God to get out of the trials, because he will not. Second, do ask of God what He wants you to get out of it.

The Big IF

Our portion of Scripture starts with an IF. **“IF any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God.” What is wisdom?**

The “IF” in the beginning of this phrase tells me of four kinds of people.

1. There are some that have wisdom and no one listens. For whatever reason those around him refuse to listen. Because of some character flaw, or prideful attitude, or conceit, or whatever other characteristic the wisdom holder may have simply disqualifies him from sharing his wisdom. The external out ways the internal. Others around him see all the trials the wisdom keeper may and see all the failures. A successful manager was once asked what his secret to success was, he answered, “Good decisions”, as a follow up it was asked how he got there, the manager did not hesitate to reply, “many bad decisions.” This kind of person has wisdom that is all head knowledge and no heart wisdom.
“I can do all things, but no one cares.”
2. Some don’t know they need wisdom. This group has accidentally or purposefully attended a place in life where their own self will and strength has always been enough to handle anything. They do not need God in their trials.

Their wit and bravado has carried them through all they have encountered in life. When they encounter a trial, they simply say I can handle it and laugh.

“I can do all things.”

3. There are some that know they need wisdom but don't ask. These are the ones who simply give up. The trial of life is simply too much. “I can't do it and I am just going to give in and allow the fire and brimstone of my life to consume me.

“I can't do anything.”

4. There are some that need know their lack and ask of God. It is this fourth type that God will endow with wisdom. This type of person realizes that whatever the trial may be that God has to be a part of it. And no trial that is common to man can sever the relationship with God. He is a person of prayer and faith

“I can do all things, IN Christ with strengthens me.”

Wisdom

Remember here the key to success in trial is not toughing it out or resignation. but Godly wisdom to understand the trial and discover the method by which we succeed.

What is this trial changing wisdom? Wisdom is not academic, or philosophic, or even intellectual. Wisdom is not knowledge. A person can have a PHD and not be wise but an educated fool. We live in the most skilled, knowledgeable, technically advanced generation ever. But we also live in the most profane, violent, self-centered, and the most divided generation ever. We have knowledge and it results in nothing but chaos. We need wisdom in our government, in our marketplace, in our homes, in our churches, and in our lives. For without wisdom, we are nothing but the sound of waves bashing itself against an immovable shore all sound and fury signifying nothing.

The wisdom God gives is not necessarily information to get out of our troubles, but rather insight on how to learn from ones difficulties. Proverbs 29:16 **“The rod and a rebuke give wisdom, But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.”** It is not more information about how to avoid times of testing and trial, but a new perspective on trials. The wisdom of God begins with a genuine reverence for the source of all wisdom. It is a steadfast confidence that God uses circumstance to guide us to His good will. The wisdom word mentioned here is “Sophia” which means “the capacity to understand and to function accordingly.” It has specific application to spiritual, eternal, Godly wisdom. It is a wisdom that God imparts to those who are close to God. It is allows for good judgment in the face of human and specifically Christian needs.

The audience of James had problems with their praying as we shall see in later sections of James 4:1-3 and 5:13-18. When we are going through trials, what should we pray about? James gives us the answer: “Ask God for Wisdom.” Why do we need wisdom instead of deliverance in the middle of our trial? Why not ask for strength? Why not ask for grace? Why not ask for deliverance? It is for this reason: we need wisdom so we will not waste the opportunities God has allowed to mature. Wisdom helps us understand how to use these circumstances for our good and God's glory.

Paradox of provision

God's word is filled with paradoxes, A paradox is defined as "as a statement which is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true." Some examples of biblical paradoxes:

- Paul said, "**When I am weak, then I am strong**" 2 Corinthians 12:10.
- Jesus said, "**Anyone who finds his life will lose it, and anyone who loses his life because of me will find it.**" Matthew 10:39.
- Jesus said, "**Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant.**" Mark 10:43.
- Paul said, "**We own nothing, and yet we have everything.**" 2 Corinthians 6:10.
- Jesus said, "**The last will be first and the first last.**" Matthew 20:16

All these statements catch our attention because they sound contradictory until you make closer inspection. A paradox is a powerful tool for truth because it makes people stop and think, to cause them to consider the premise more closely.

Two Paradoxes

There seems to be two expressed uses of PARADOX here.

1. The paradox of absolute provision supplied by God and the restriction of faith.
2. The paradox of the rich and the poor. "the poor rich, and the rich poor"

Paradox of absolute provision and absolute response

James flatly states if we ask for wisdom then there will be provision of that wisdom: James 1:5 "**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.**" In that verse there are no qualifications, no "Maybe", "When I get around to it" or "Someday."

1. If I lack wisdom (the need),
2. let him ask (the method),
3. God (the provider),
4. will provide (the promise),
5. to all (the scope),
6. generously (the amount),
7. without reproach (the attitude of God),
8. it will be given (the act),
9. him (the recipient).

It cannot be any more clear. It is a promise that cannot be broken, qualified, restricted, or negated. There are no prerequisites other than asking to satisfy a lack or need.

The first paradox is in the next verse James 1:6 "**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.**" It would be easy to say this verse is a prerequisite to the provision. I have found many sources that take this position. But if it were a requirement before the request then James would have placed verse 6 before verse 5. Verse 5 reveals that God promised and that is good enough and it is easy to accept. I ask, he provides. There seems to be a big "BUT" afterwards that creates the PARADOX. God will provide, but there seems to be an action a **response** to the provision. It is not something you have to do **before** the provision. It is an conscious act **after** the provision. It is in our drawer of

tools, freely given with generosity and without any reluctance on God's part. The "BUT" part is simply to reliance or faith upon that wisdom.

The requirement James was writing about was in the middle of our trials we discover our lack, we understand our own strength and intellect is not enough so we turn to God and confess our lack of wisdom, God provides this wisdom, but we have a habit of ignorance to that answer. "the Lack of Faith" is making the provision for something and having reservations as to the efficacy of that solution. The gift of God is given but we do not respond to it. "Help me Lord, but don't expect me to trust the answer or have faith in the solution." The verse pointing your faith in the provided solution not in the provider. **"If it is faithlessness in the provider you would not ask."**

Notice here James describes this person as being double-minded. It is asking for wisdom and not accepting the solution. He asks in faith that God can and will but does not act upon it. One mind reaches out for a spiritual solution and know full well that God will provide that solution, and the other simply says the solution is not adequate. God's solution does not fit my way of doing things. I have no faith in God's solution. Even though I asked for it, all I really wanted was an alternative to what I can do with my trial. He has two alternatives now, one provided by God and it is perfect, gracious, fitting perfect to the trial, and would make the asker a better, more perfect, more mature Christian, AND the one he had before he asked. And even considering the first makes him a man with out faith **"one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind"**.

The paradox is someone who would ask then ignore the provision.

Paradox of the rich and the poor

The second paradox is found in the latter part of our portion of study. James 1:9-11 **"But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because alike flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away."**

The paradox is simply, **the poor are rich and the rich are poor**. The poor have a place to glory in their high position and the rich glory in their humiliation. These statements of truth seem contradictory, yet are true. Remember a paradox is to stop you and make you think.

One of the questions one may well consider is, "Why the division, why two groups?" James in the paradox was not dividing but to reveal that both groups have reason to glory. They may see themselves in separate classes but in reality both will be subject to trial and both have a path to glory. Everyone will go through trial. They may be tested differently but they will be tested.

One will be tested in their poverty and the other in their wealth. They both need faith and wisdom to face the test that will come.

- **The poor will be challenged to endure the trials that come with having very little.**
- **The rich will be challenged with trials that wealth can not fix.**

From Proverbs 30:8-9 **“Keep deception and lies far from me, Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, So that I will not be full and deny You and say, “Who is the Lord?” And that I will not become impoverished and steal, and profane the name of my God.”**

The provision

There are SIX facts about God that should encourage us to ask for His wisdom in trials:

1. **God is a giving God.** It is the perfect will of God to provide, to gift, to bestow in response to requesting God’s solutions to trials.
2. **God gives generously.** God is not one to provide partial answers to problems. He does not withhold any small requirement to the full and sometimes overflowing answer to the Godly result of the trial. You receive all the wisdom and more. Wisdom for the current trial but more a pattern or method when a similar trial comes into your life.
3. **God gives without finding fault.** God does not give this wisdom in such a way that it humiliates us and be seen as a beggar, unworthy to have this great gift. When we ask, the quest is with head held high and with joyful attitudes, **“Consider it all Joy.”**
4. **He has no favorite recipients to His giving.** He gives to all classes, races, and types of people. There is no prejudice in the giving. All is all. No exclusions like his gift is only for the Jewish Christians, but instead for all. Absolute inclusion.
5. **It is God’s restricted promise.** You do have to ask. You ask, God provides. It is His perfect will that you ask. In trial the communication lines must stay open.
6. **It is God’s will.** This is the plan, this is the method, this is the solution for trial. A request according to His will, will receive. I John: 5:14-15, **“This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him”**

The use of Wisdom

Throughout the Bible are people who turned defeat into victory and trial into triumph instead of being victims of there circumstances. They became victors. James tells us that we can have this same experience today. No matter what the trials you may be on the outside: James 1:1-4, or the temptations on the inside James 1:13-27, through faith in the provision of wisdom will provide the support to be victorious. And the result of this victory is spiritual maturity.

James chapter one outlines four essentials for victory:

1. A joyful attitude V 2
2. An understanding of mind V3
3. A surrendered will V 4, 9-11
4. A heart that wants to belief in the God’s solution V5-8

