

ASK IN FAITH FOR GOD'S WISDOM

James 1: 5-8 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

In America today, the latest statistics sadly reveal that seven, out of ten, young people who grow up in church, walk away from God and church once they turn 18. Four to five will return in some degree when they have families of their own. Yet, two to three out of ten will never come back. One of the sad realities is, if our children pick up in any degree that we are less than committed to God and to His house, they realize that God is supplemental to life, but not foundational and fundamental to life. When they see that we are more tied to hobbies, sports, houses, toys, and living our own life our way, going to church only when convenient, and not tithing our income to God, the crash in the second generation is astronomically high. The things we do in moderation, our children tend to do in excess. That's why alcoholism is so high in the next generation of families who socially drink. The moderate use of alcohol is too often viewed as a friend to use to celebrate every occasion with, and what they see us doing with caution, they often do with abandon. This also includes the use of marijuana and other drugs.

You may wonder, "What does this have to do with our text in James?" How about almost everything?! We read, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God." Our church is full of beautiful children whose lives are more precious than gold. They are taking notes on what we do. Whether we know it or not, they know if we are sold out to Jesus. They know if we faithfully attend God's house. They know if we give the cream off the top of our income as tithes and offerings regularly to God. They are taking notes, because in the family, moms and dads, our children learn who God is by watching us. Do we represent God accurately, or do we take God casually? Be certain, our children know more from a young age, far more than we know. Many professing and church attending believers treat faithful stewardship to God as optional, sort of like whether we should put a quarter or so in the coffer of the Salvation Army bell-ringers outside Walmart at Christmas. Many believers occasionally give to a project, but never put their shoulder to the wheel to support the work of their local church.

A good question to ask as parents is, would God's church go on and keep its doors open to support their pastors and missionaries if everyone gave as we do? The Bible says it plainly in Proverbs 22: 5, "Train up a child in the way he should go. Even when he is old, he will not depart from it." As I come to our text today, we all need James' words to the scattered Jews as much as they did. Last week, as we preached about three of the four commands God gives us as we face trials. We preached on a joyful attitude, a knowing, understanding heart, and a surrendered will. Today, in James 1: 5-8, we come to the fourth command which is asking or

praying in faith. What does it mean to ask/pray in faith? This asking includes 5 components: (1) asking in faith in search of God's wisdom and generosity, (2) asking in faith with the promise of no divine reproach, (3) asking in faith with the certainty God answers prayer, (4) asking in faith with no doubting, being tossed by the wind, and (5) asking in faith with no unstableness or double-mindedness.

ASK IN FAITH WITH A SEARCH FOR GOD'S GENEROUS WISDOM.

James 1: 5a -- "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all..." The Jewish people to whom James wrote obviously had problems with their praying. James deals with that more later in his epistle, but to get a flavor, turn to James 4: 1-3. He asks his readers, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." Beloved, when we go through God-ordained or God-allowed trials and difficulties, what should we pray about? With believing hearts of faith, we should start by asking for God's wisdom. God is not out to offer us knowledge, for in most cases, He expects us to gain and obtain knowledge by being students, studying His Word, but God does offer wisdom. Whenever we face any difficulty, we need to do like the scouts. Christian Klein told me on Friday that STOP for scouts means, stop, think, observe, and plan. That's good for more of us than scouts. Wisdom may be one of the key words for James. For Peter, his keyword is hope, for Paul, it is faith, and for John, it is love. Wisdom is the God-given ability to discern right from wrong.

James tells us in James 3: 13-17, "Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere." The Greek word for wisdom that James used is **sophia**. Sophia means mental reasoning, discernment, assessments that God alone gives to us by His Word and by His Spirit. God doesn't charge us with ignorance, but He is telling us we lack wisdom and we need help when difficulties come, which He is ready and willing to generously give to us. God's generous giving starts with general mercies and blessings such as rain and sunshine and harvest. God is neither poorer when He gives nor richer when He withholds. Remember that there are few conditions attached to this apparently blank check on the bank of heavenly wisdom.

Remember that God is not stingy or chintzy. Luke 6: 38 tells us He gives “good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over into our laps.”

These Jews James wrote to were people known for their love of wisdom. Their business house of the Bible was Proverbs and that book gives evidence that for the true seeker or searcher for wisdom, it is there for the asking. Some of you remember that for 19 and 1/2 years, I taught the Book of Proverbs on Wednesday Nights. Did I learn wisdom? Oh yes, but did I plumb the depths of wisdom? No, I am still a daily student in the Nazareth International Training University, and I hope you are too. It’s been well said, “Knowledge is the ability to take things apart, while wisdom is the God-given ability to put them back together.” Anyone can have the smarts and knowledge to know how to destroy a relationship, but it takes wisdom from heaven to know how to be a yokefellow to restore a broken relationship. So why do we need wisdom as we face difficulties? Why not ask for deliverance, or grace or strength? Beloved, we need wisdom, so we don’t waste our sorrows and trials. We need wisdom to understand how to use our circumstances for our good and for God’s glory. How many of us ask for prayer in our trials that God will give us wisdom not to waste our trials and sorrows? 2ndly,

ASK IN FAITH WITH THE PROMISE OF NO DIVINE REPROACH. (II.)

James 1: 5b – “without reproach.” To double back, the Greek word ask is **aiteo**. This word means more than make a request. It means a longing for and a craving from deep within, that impels us to call out to God. The word is always the word of a humble servant or petitioner. Stay as far away as you can from those who teach that based on God’s promises, we are to command or demand from God. We do not petition God as equals with the Father. Never! We don’t request on the virtue or measure of our worth. We make no demands. In verse 5, the tense of the verb, ask is in the imperfect which means repeatedly asking. God expects persistence in prayer. We all tire too easily. We are all on the receiving end of asking. God is waiting to supply our needs. He is on the giving end—the greatest Giver of every good and perfect gift—James 1:17. James says, “Let him ask God, the great endower of wisdom as His gracious, generous gift—a gift we are to humbly and gratefully receive from His hand. When you need wisdom, where do you go? Some people run from church to church, from one Bible conference to another, from one healing or blessing service to another, others from a dream or vision they seek, or from an angel or a personal revelation from heaven.

What we need is simply the persistence to grow more intimate with God as we talk to him about our needs daily. Some folks seek wisdom by opening their Bibles at random and taking wisdom from the first verse they light on. I would never want to discredit any method God can or has ever used before, but for most of the wisdom

we need, that is not the answer for wisdom or the way to get it. No, simply go to God in prayer and ask in faith. As a child asks his father or mother for something, expect the best. Remember what Pastor Larry read this morning from Matthew 7-7-11, “Ask, and it will be given to you, seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks, finds, and to the one who knocks—notice all the repetition, it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him?”

Soon after asking, someone will tell you—don’t be asking with vain repetition. In other words, don’t bother God. He’s busy. If you prayed it once, that’s enough. Oh no, beloved. Vain repetition is when we repeat certain phrases over and over, such as 20 times saying the Lord’s Prayer. God wants you and me to seek His direction as we breathe in an atmosphere of prayer and feeding on His Word. This verse says in James 1: 5b, “without reproach, without chiding us for our much asking, without shooing us away and saying, “I’m tired of you asking for that!” A gift can be spoiled by the way it is given, or by the grudgingness of the giver, or by continual reminders of the gift after the gift has been given, or with reproaches that we don’t sufficiently appreciate it or that we haven’t been as grateful as we might have been. Never so with Jesus! Some folk give and then want the gift back or something that is its equivalent back. Or when they give, you never hear the end of the gift. That’s not Jesus. God is not like the possessive parent who is ever reminding his son or daughter how much he has sacrificed for them and how appreciative they ought to be. Not Jesus! Our God never upbraids us for our much asking. God never scolds, criticizes, finds fault, reproves, or acts offended because we have been persistent askers. No, Jesus uses the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18: 1-8 to teach us in that parable, “that we ought always to pray and not lose heart.” Jesus also told of the man who came to his friend at midnight asking for bread because company has arrived, but the time, oh, the time is long after the man and his wife and children were in bed—Luke 11: 5-8. This man keeps knocking despite being told, “Go away, we are sleeping; leave us alone! Stop knocking.” Jesus used this story to say, “Be persistent in prayer and don’t worry about me telling you I am too busy.” That day will never come for our Lord in this day of grace. Thirdly

ASK IN FAITH WITH THE CERTAINTY GOD ANSWERS PRAYER. (III.)

James 1: 5c – “and it will be given him.” You can almost miss the “I wills” in God’s Word, they are so often given. Oh, the certainty that when we ask in faith, God will give to us. We read in James 1: 5 that “God gives generously to all without reproach. Then these little words you might pass by, “and it will be given

him.” Last Thursday in my devotional, “Days of Praise,” I was moved by the words about the “I Wills” of Jesus. Mark 1: 40-42 states, “And a leper came to Jesus, imploring Him, and kneeling said to Him, “If you will, you can make me clean.” Jesus, moved with compassion and pity, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, “I will. Be clean!” And immediately, the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.” To Jesus’ disciples in Matthew 4: 19, Jesus said, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” In John 7: 37, Jesus said, Him that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out.” I love Mt. 11: 28, “Come unto Me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” John 14: 21 states, He that has My commandments and keeps them shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.” But you say, Pastor, this message is about asking. You are right. Jesus said in John 14: 13-14, “And whatever you shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.” Now think about James 1: 5—and this sentence, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” God give us this certainty of faith that God is waiting with His generous heart to pour out His wisdom to us. 4thly,

ASK IN FAITH WITH NO DOUBTING, BEING TOSSED BY THE WIND.

(IV.) James 1: 6-7 – “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord...” Now every parent knows that it often depends on how a child asks for something whether he or she will get it or not. But how are we to ask of God? “But let him ask in faith. Did you know this James, the servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was accused of not being a man of faith, uses this word faith, 16 times in the 5 short chapters of his epistle? Now I know Paul used the term faith 38 times in his Book of Romans, but that was 16 chapters. But in Ephesians, he only mentioned faith 8 times and in Philippians and Colossians, only 5 times each. Paul did use faith 22 times in the 6 chapters of Galatians. Never think James was not a man of faith. But what is this Greek word for faith. It is **pistis**. It means full reliance, constant trust, fully persuaded, assured belief, and an assured conviction.

To tell us what faith is, James tells us what it is not. We can’t be like a cork bobbing on the water—one minute up and one minute down. One more time in Haiti, I learned afresh, never turn your back on ocean waves. They will slap you down and pull you back under. This kind of praying with hesitation, with a wavering faith will not claim the blessing from God. When the Galatians started living by faith, and then started living by the law, Paul said in Galatians 5: 7, “You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth. This persuasion is not from Him who calls you.” God never calls us to vacillate. Do you ever

categorize your prayers into the maybe's and maybe not's, the possible, the probable, the improbable and the impossible? That kind of counting—is wavering in prayer. The fact remains, “Don’t pray for answers if you don’t believe.” God is not under any obligation to give us everything we ask. He will not be intimidated by any of us. But beloved, never ask with doubts and wavering faith. Sometimes we seek God’s aid when the trials hit, and He grants aid to us, but when the storm clouds are gone, and it’s clear skies and clear sailing, we immediately forget God. That is wavering faith, because unwavering faith seeks God always. The person who habitually seeks the face of God will find certain wisdom and guidance. 5thly,

ASK IN FAITH WITH NO UNSTABLENESS OR DOUBLEMINDEDNESS.

(V.) James 1: 8 – “He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” Beloved, a doubleminded person is never sure of anything. We can go from one calling to another and from one line of service to another, like a bee or a butterfly flitting from flower to flower. But this unsettled course God rebukes as doublemindedness. I know of folks who want to flit from church to church to get the best of each. Sadly, changeableness, being a Mr. or Mrs. Facing Both Ways means we have an inflated ego and an unsubdued will. We dishonor God and each other when we are double-minded. No one can count on us. Dividedness, hesitation, and divided loyalty shuts us out from the full blessings of the kingdom of God. Luke 9: 62 is so clear, “Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. Peter found the troubled sea as solid as rock when he walked on the waves to Jesus, but when he took his eyes off Jesus and looked at the waves, he instantly sank. Are we unstable in all our ways? Can we never keep a steady course? James is strong here back in v. 7. “For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.”

The world is filled with professing believers who depend on the audience for what they say. They are not sold out believers. They can speak as a conservative or a liberal, depending on their audience. God is saying, “Make up your mind.” Do you believe Me or not? Are we that way about prayer and asking? To believe God or not to believe, that is James question. Beloved, let God today move you on to maturity. Don’t play both ends against the middle with God. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4: 14, “No longer be children, tossed to and “fro” by the waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.” As we said last week, outlook determines outcome. Great days are ahead for those who ask in faith from God when difficulties face us and we in faith, stick to the Rock that is higher than I. God give us faith that is unwavering in all our prayers. My final words to us today are: “Count it all joy when you meet trials...If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God...but let him ask in faith...and it will be given him.” Amen.