

If Any of You Lack Wisdom
James 1:5

James 1:5 reads, “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.”

As we have previously noted, the opening matter about which the epistle of James provides pastoral counsel concerns the trials, troubles, and tribulations of our lives. Concerning this matter James delivers a series of four instructions under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit. The first is found in **verses 2-3** and speaks concerning our regard and attitude toward the trials of life, saying, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.” The second is found in **verse 4** and speaks concerning our response of submission in the trials of life, saying, “But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

The third of these instructions is found in **verse 5**. It flows out of the closing thought of the previous instruction. Therein we are informed that the “perfect work” of patient endurance in our lives will develop our spiritual character and maturity so that we might become spiritually “perfect and entire, wanting [or, lacking] nothing.” The instruction of **verse 5** takes up the idea of “lacking” from **verse 4** (which the word “wanting” means in this context) and challenges us with one particular area of lack in our lives. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.” Thus it speaks concerning our prayerfulness unto the Lord concerning the trials of life.

Grammatically, the instruction of James 1:5 can be divided into four parts. First, there is the individual problem of the conditional clause -- “If any of you lack wisdom.” Second, there is the encouraging precept of the main clause -- “Let him ask of God.” Third, there is the assured provision of the subordinate clause -- “That giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.” Fourth, there is the divine promise of the coordinate clause -- “And it shall be given him.”

I. *Our Problem Acknowledged.*

Brethren, as we encounter the many, various trials, troubles, and tribulations of this life, we are faced with the discovery that our wisdom for life is greatly lacking. In the context of life’s trials, **James 1:5** begins with the conditional challenge, “If any of you lack wisdom.” Life’s trials bring before us this discovery in so many different ways. We are faced with the discovery that we lack the wisdom to prevent life’s trials or to prepare ourselves adequately for life’s trials. We are faced with the discovery that we lack the wisdom to control life’s trials or even to contain life’s trials. We are faced with the discovery that we lack the wisdom to bear up under life’s trials and to bind up the wounds that we receive from life’s trials. We are faced with the discovery that we lack the wisdom to solve life’s trials and to settle the uncertainties and discouragements of life’s trials. We are faced with the discovery that we lack the wisdom to decide aright in life’s trials and to discern the lessons that we are to learn from life’s trials. We are faced with the discovery that we lack the wisdom to work out the relationship conflicts with people that are often at the center of life’s trials. We are faced with the discovery that we lack the wisdom to walk aright in godliness of attitude and action as we pass through life’s trials. We are faced with the discovery that we

lack the wisdom to see our Lord's hand of goodness and love in life's trials and to serve Him faithfully throughout life's trials.

Certainly we all lack wisdom for life, and the trials of our lives bring us face to face with this truth. Yet how quick are we in our daily living to humbly acknowledge our lack of wisdom? How willing are we to humbly acknowledge the depth to our lack of wisdom? If we are to receive the gift of wisdom from the gracious hand of our Lord, we must first humbly acknowledge our lack of and our need for this wisdom. We must cease to lean upon our own understanding (**Proverbs 3:5**). We must cease to be wise in our own eyes (**Proverbs 3:7**). In addition, each one of us as an individual must come to this humble acknowledgement of our own personal lack of wisdom. The challenge and instruction of **James 1:5** is presented in the singular. "If any [that is -- any single one] of you lack wisdom, let him [that single one] ask of God." It is a personal, individual matter. We must each individually humble ourselves to acknowledge our own lack of wisdom.

II. *Our Prayer Asked.*

So then, having come to the humble acknowledgement of our own personal lack of wisdom, what are we to do about it? What is the solution to our problem? God's Word gives answer, saying, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." This is not simply a suggestive counsel. This is an *authoritative* command from the Lord our God. If we lack wisdom for life (and we certainly do), then our Lord commands us to ask for that wisdom from Him. If we do not ask in prayer for this wisdom from our Lord, we do not only miss out on His gift of wisdom; we also disobey His command to us. Furthermore, this is an *ongoing* command from the Lord our God. This command is presented in the continuing character of the present tense. We are presently to ask for wisdom of our Lord at this "now" moment, and we are to continue asking for each new "now" moment in the future. Each day of our lives and each step of the way, we are to continue asking our Lord for the wisdom that we need. Finally, this is an *encouraging* command from the Lord our God. It encourages us that there is an answer to our need, and that the answer is in our Lord Himself. How much better an answer could there be to our need than the wisdom that our Lord Himself will give us? He is the all-wise God, and through this command He invites us to receive the gift of wisdom from His gracious hand.

Now, this wisdom is not simply informational knowledge. It is practical understanding. It is not simply comprehension of many facts. It is discernment in making decisions. Even more, this wisdom is not the worldly wisdom on how to get ahead, which breeds bitter envying, strife, confusion, and every evil work (**James 3:14-16**). Rather, it is the spiritual wisdom on how to live aright. It is the wisdom "from above" that is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (**James 3:17**). It is the wisdom that guides in the way of righteousness. It is the wisdom that guards from the way of unrighteousness. It is the wisdom that governs our thoughts and motives in righteousness. It is the wisdom that grants discernment to make right decisions. It is the wisdom that gives understanding to handle the difficulties of life unto our own growth and our Lord's glory. It is the spiritual ability to apply God's truth in our daily walk. It is to be "filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (**Colossians 1:9**). It is the true, spiritual wisdom of God.

III. *God's Provision Assured.*

When we humbly acknowledge our lack of wisdom and humbly ask our Lord for wisdom, we may have full assurance of faith that He will give us the wisdom that we need. This assurance is rooted in the very character of the Lord our God Himself. He is a God “that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.”

First, we must understand and be assured that the Lord our God gives *naturally*. He is the God “that giveth.” He is the giving God. He is the God who gives by His own gracious nature. He does not have to be compelled to give. It is simply His nature to give. Even so, in **Matthew 7:9-11** our Lord Jesus Christ stated, “Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” Certainly the true, spiritual wisdom of God for righteous living is a good thing. Our Lord Himself commands us to ask for it. How much more then shall He graciously give it to us if we ask Him for it.

Second, we must understand and be assured that the Lord our God gives *universally*. He is willing to give true, spiritual wisdom “to all,” without partiality. Any one of us is permitted to ask for this wisdom. Yea, each one of us is commanded to ask for this wisdom. As long as we will humbly and faithfully ask our Lord for this wisdom, He will assuredly give it to us. **Psalms 25:9** teaches, “The meek will he guide in judgment; and the meek will he teach his way.” If we will acknowledge His will and ask for His wisdom in all our ways, He will give us that wisdom and will guide our steps thereby.

Third, we must understand and be assured that the Lord our God gives *generously*. He is willing to give us the gift of true, spiritual wisdom freely and whole-heartedly. He is willing to give us this gift of wisdom without any grudging or hesitation. Concerning this gift of wisdom, the Lord our God is not a miser. It is His disposition to give, and to give abundantly. He is much more willing and ready to give than we are to ask. He is willing to give this gift of true, spiritual wisdom “exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (**Ephesians 3:20**). No matter how much wisdom we may need, there is an abundant supply available to us from the generous hand of our Lord.

Fourth, we must understand and be assured that the Lord our God gives *kindly*. When we humbly ask for true, spiritual wisdom from Him, He “upbraideth not.” He will not humiliate us for our lack of wisdom (although we certainly lack so very much). He will not reproach us for our past foolishness (although we certainly have been very foolish). He will not mock us with a spirit of superiority (although He certainly is far superior). He will not remind us for our unworthiness (although we certainly are completely unworthy). He will not criticize us for our spirit of ingratitude toward past help (although we certainly commit the sin of ingratitude so very often). He will not become weary or annoyed that we must ask of Him so very often. “Let us therefore come boldly” in prayer unto our Lord’s throne of grace, “that we may obtain mercy, and find grace” to give us true, spiritual wisdom in our time of need (**Hebrews 4:16**).

IV. *God's Promise Announced.*

One final assurance is given to us who will humbly and faithfully ask for wisdom from our Lord. The Lord our God gives *certainly* and *immediately*; for He delivers the promise, "And it shall be given him." This is the promise of our Lord Jesus Christ in **Matthew 7:7-8** concerning humble, righteous praying, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Again this is His promise in **John 14:13-14**, "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." Yet again in **1 John 5:14-15** the promise is given, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." Certainly to humbly ask our Lord for true, spiritual wisdom in accord with His command is according to His will. Therefore, we can know with certainty that He will hear us and that we will receive the wisdom that we ask of Him. So then, if such true, spiritual wisdom may be received in abundance for every moment of need simply by asking of our Lord, it is our own fault and foolishness if we proceed without it. We have not simply because we ask not.

"Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path" (**Proverbs 2:3-9**).