

Resources Available During Trials

James 1:3-5

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The book of James, the first chapter. Read together verses 2 through 5. James, chapter 1, verses 2 through 5.

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not, and it shall be given him.”

Now as we have seen in our previous studies together, James is telling his readers how their response to trials demonstrates the genuineness of their faith. Those who fall away in a time of trial or difficulty show that they never were true Christians. They fall into the category of those--that type of soil, the rocky soil upon which the seed is cast—that, when trials arise, it withers away.

On the other hand, those who persevere in a response of joy and of faith and of patience are those who demonstrate that they love God. And they are those who do receive the crown of life.

Now we have considered together thus far three major lines of thought. In verse 2, we considered together our *attitude* towards trials. We are to count it all joy when we fall into various trials. And then in verse 3, we considered together the *benefits* that flow out of trials. “Knowing this, that the trying of your faith works *patience*.” And then in verse 4, we considered together the *caution* regarding trials. “But, let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

We come today to verse 5, which deals with the resources available *during* trials--the resources available during trials, when it says, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.”

Now I would imagine that all of us who have heard the last three messages dealing with our attitude towards trials, the benefits that flow out of trials, and the caution regarding trials, have thought to ourselves, You know, it is very difficult to discern God’s purposes in my trials. It is hard to figure out and interpret His dealings with me in what He is doing and why He is doing it. It is hard to know how to maintain a good attitude in the midst of my trials. I struggle with that. I’m often filled with conflicting thoughts and attitudes. And I don’t know how to sort them out.

Well James anticipates these concerns. He recognizes in verses 2 through 4 the things that he is asking people to do are extremely difficult. Let us not deceive ourselves. The requirements that he lays upon us are very tough to accomplish. And we need some help in accomplishing them, and James anticipates this concern, and in verse 5 he addresses how those concerns can be met.

It takes a great deal of spiritual wisdom to deal in a proper fashion with trials. And what we have before us in verse 5 are instructions as to how we may obtain the wisdom that we need in order to properly deal with these difficulties, because there's no way we're going to get through verses 2 through 4 merely on the fuel of our own wisdom. And so James, then, in verse 5 tells us the resources that God has made available to us in order that we might be able to obey and carry out the instructions in verses 2 through 4.

So in the first place then this evening, let us consider together the problem stated--the problem stated. Now the problem is stated in the first phrase of verse 5, in which it says, "If any of you lack wisdom." Now the problem is simply this: We all lack a great *deal* of wisdom in knowing how to respond to trials, in knowing how to interpret them, and especially in knowing how to keep up a good attitude in the *midst* of them.

The "if" in this passage does not imply doubt as to whether or not we need wisdom. James is not saying, "Well, if you need wisdom, but I'm sure some of you don't--but *if* you do..." That's not what he's saying. The "if" that he uses in this passage is used in the sense of an affirmation, conveying the idea that we *do* lack wisdom, and *if* we do--or rather, we could render it, *since* we do--then here is the remedy. And so someone might say to us, "Well, I'm going to the store." And you say, "Well, *if*, you're going to the store, then get me some potatoes." And this "if" is not the "if" of "I don't know if you're going or not," it's the "if" of "*Since* you're going to the store, get me some potatoes." And so that's the sense in which James uses the word "if" here. He uses it in the sense of an affirmation that indeed we *do* lack wisdom, and this is our problem.

Now the reason why it is a problem is because we do not have sufficient resources of wisdom within ourselves. That we need supplies of wisdom from *outside* of ourselves is abundantly testified to in the Scriptures again and again. For example, in Jeremiah 10, and verse 23, Jeremiah says, "O Lord, I *know* that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." And what Jeremiah's confessing on his own behalf, and on the behalf of his people, is that we're not smart enough and wise enough, in and of ourselves, to know how we ought to order our affairs, and how especially we ought to respond to trials and difficulties.

We do not have sufficient wisdom within ourselves to know what course and path we should take in times of difficulty. And this is why Proverbs 3:5 and 6 says, Do not lean on your own understanding, but rather in all your ways acknowledge God and look to Him to direct your paths. Because our own understanding is not sufficient for us to know how to direct our paths in times of trials. So there is nowhere, and no time that we need *more* direction than in times of difficulty. If we do not draw wisdom from outside of ourselves during times of trial, then we will most assuredly fail in the midst of those trials.

Turn in your Bibles with me, if you will please, to Joshua, chapter 9. The book of Joshua, chapter 9. What we have here is an example of people who had a difficulty, and they failed to ask God for wisdom in order to figure out how to *deal* with their difficulty. And as a result, there was a major disaster that occurred in their lives. Joshua, chapter 9, verses 3 through 15. Now God had brought Israel across the Jordan River into the Promised Land, and once there, He had told them to destroy all of the nations within that land. It says in verse 3 of Joshua 9:

“And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard that Joshua had destroyed Jericho and Ai, They did work craftily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and torn, and sewed up; And old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry and mouldy. And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country: now therefore make ye a league with us.

“And the men of Israel said unto the Hivites, Peradventure ye dwell among us; and how shall we make a league with you? And they said to Joshua, We are thy servants. And Joshua said unto them, Who are you, and from whence come you? And they said to him, From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the Lord thy God: for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt, And all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites, that were beyond Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, which was at Ashtaroth.

“Wherefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, Take victuals with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say unto them, We are your servants: therefore now make ye a league with us. This our bread we took hot from our provision out of our houses on the day we came forth to go unto you; but now, behold, it is dry, and it is mouldy: And these bottles of wine, which we filled, were new; and, behold, they be rent: and these our garments and our shoes are become old by reason of the very long journey.”

Now notice, if you will, verse 14: “And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord. And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, and let them live: and the princes of the congregation swore unto them.”

Now here they were in a situation which was not a great difficulty, but nevertheless, it was a difficulty. These people come to them and they want to make a covenant with them. And the resolution of this difficulty seemed very obvious, didn't it? Why would they need to ask God for wisdom here? Wasn't the course to be followed *apparent*? I mean, after all, here is the proof--we've got the moldy bread, we've got the torn wineskins, and we've got the worn-out shoes. Why should we need to bother to consult with God and ask wisdom from *Him* with reference to the resolution of this difficulty we're facing as to whether we should enter into a covenant with this group of people or not?

And so, although the resolution of this difficulty seemed so obvious, and the course to be followed seemed apparent, in fact it was not. And it was precisely because these people in this difficulty *did not* admit a lack of wisdom and did not seek God and His counsel and direction regarding the matter, they wound up sinning against God and entering into a covenant with these people and were stuck with them for the remainder of Israel's history. They were in a league, as a perpetual reminder of their failure to ask God for wisdom with a pagan nation--a group of people that were a difficulty to them many times in the future. And so when we fail to ask God for wisdom with reference to the decisions we have to make and the difficulties that we face and the trials that come into our life, and we say, Well--this seems like the proper course of action to me, I'll just do that, and we presumptuously go forward, we wind up very oftentimes falling on our faces, in terms of dealing with our trials.

And so here is a negative example of someone who did not recognize that they could not lean on their own understanding; they did not look to God to direct their paths in this situation, and as a result they fell into a great disaster.

A positive example, however, of people who were in trial and difficulty and sought wisdom from God is contained in Ezra, chapter 8. The book of Ezra, the eighth chapter. Now here, Ezra was preparing to lead the people back to the land after their 70 years of captivity. And in Ezra, chapter 8, and verse 1, it says: "These are now the chief of their fathers, and this is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king."

So Ezra has gathered together a group of people, and he's taking them back to Israel, back to Jerusalem from Babylon. And after gathering these people and making sure that he had priests as part of the entourage, notice if you will verse 21 through 23. It says "Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way, because we had spoken to the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him. But his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. So we fasted and besought our God for this, and he was entreated of us."

Now notice if you will, verse 31 of the same chapter. It says, "Then we departed from the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem, and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way."

Now Ezra too was in a state of difficulty--it was a little different difficulty, but nevertheless, it was a difficulty, and his difficulty in this situation is that he had spoken to the king about God's care for his *people*. But he also recognized that the course that he was setting out upon, namely, going back to Jerusalem, was a course that was fraught with danger and difficulty. And he needed wisdom to know what path or what course or what route to take the people on in order that they might be able to travel safely. So what they did is, they sought God for "a right way for us and for our little ones and for all of our substance."

And though in this situation their problem was potential danger, their problem was the credibility of God's glory before the eyes of this pagan king, and so what did they do? They sought wisdom from God. And as a result of seeking wisdom from God, they were delivered safely to Jerusalem. God heard their prayer, granted them the wisdom, and they took the course that then led them safely back to the promised land.

So we recognize that from this *negative* example of Joshua and the Gibeonites, and this *positive* example of Ezra and the people of God, that those who recognize they *don't* have wisdom, and therefore turn to God and *ask* for help, are those who are enabled to go through their trials with blessing, with success, with protection. On the other hand, those who are presumptuous and think that they *don't need* God, and that they can handle this all by themselves are those who wind up getting into the deepest form of trouble because of their presumption.

Wisdom is a very wonderful thing. The Scripture describes it in the most glowing and valuable of terms. For example, turn in your Bibles to Proverbs, chapter 3. In Proverbs chapter 3, we have description of the nature of wisdom.

Now if I came up to you and I said to you, “Look--would you like to have some silver, and some gold, and some rubies? Would you like to have a long life and riches and honor? Would you like to have pleasantness, peace, and happiness?” What would you say? Would you say, “Yeah, I’d like to have that stuff”? And suppose I said further to you, “Well, you can have it if you’ll just ask for it.” Would you ask? Well I think that every one of us would do so. We would *jump* at a chance to get that kind of stuff for free, just by asking for it.

And yet what God says in this passage is that *wisdom* is more valuable than *any* of those things. And if we would jump at the chance to ask for and receive for free these lesser things, then how much more should we jump at the opportunity to ask for and receive for free something far more *valuable* than silver and gold and rubies, and a long life, and riches and honor and pleasantness and peace and happiness?

Notice if you will, Proverbs 3, verses 13 through 18. He says, “Happy is the man that finds wisdom, and the man that gets understanding.” Now what’s the implication there? The implication clearly is that they don’t already *have* it. They have to *find* it because they don’t possess it. They need to *get* it because they don’t currently have it. He says, verse 14, “For the merchandise of it is *better* than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you can desire are not to be compared with her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her, and happy is everyone that retains her.”

And so as God describes the value of wisdom, we realize that it is incredibly valuable. It is more valuable than silver, gold, rubies. It is the means of obtaining long life, riches, and honor. It provides us with pleasantness, peace, and happiness. I would say that something that is more valuable than silver and gold and rubies, and something that provides us with those blessings, is something we would want pretty bad. And God makes it possible for us to have these things merely by asking. He says, “If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God.”

So if all of this may be had for the asking, who in his right mind would ever fail to do so? People spend their *lifetime looking*, and looking *hard* and *working* hard to obtain silver and gold and rubies. And yet we can obtain wisdom just for the asking.

And so regarding trials, we have a problem and the problem is, is that we lack wisdom. Wisdom is easily *available* to us. It is highly *valuable* to us. And yet, how oftentimes we fail to ask for it. We desperately need God’s wisdom in our times of trial. We need God’s wisdom to discern God’s *purposes* in our trials. Every affliction that God sends has a message. And it requires wisdom to discern what that message is—to *learn* from that message, so that we know what use to *make* of that message.

Is this trial to increase my patience? Is it to restrain my sin? Is it to equip me to minister to others? Is it to provide me with an opportunity for evangelism? Is it for the glory of God? Is it for chastisement for sin? What is its purpose? We need *wisdom* to be able to figure that out. And we need God's wisdom to know how we should respond to it—so that we are not too dull to this trial and thus fail to obtain its benefit and lesson, or so that we are not too distraught by the trial and go to pieces under it. We need wisdom so we can have a properly balanced response.

So this, then, is the problem stated: If any man lack wisdom, and *since* we lack wisdom, then we are to ask of God. And if we do not *get* that wisdom, then we will suffer *terrible* loss, as Proverbs 3 indicates, and we will invite disaster as the story of Joshua indicates.

Having then seen together the problem stated, notice in the second place the remedy prescribed—the remedy prescribed. By now I hope we all recognize that we *need* wisdom. How, then, are we going to go about getting it? Well, our text says, “Let him ask of God.” That's the remedy that's prescribed—to ask of God.

Now it is God's method and way and characteristic to be very free and liberal with His gifts. But it is His *method* that they will only be had by asking for them. God never gives His gifts without people asking for them, because an attitude of presumption never draws out God's gifts, but prayer always does, as Ezekiel 36 and verse 37 says, after God saying, I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that, He says, “Yet for all these things will I be inquired of by the House of Israel to do it for them.” And so even though God has promised us certain things, and those things are available to us, we must ask for them. In this same book of James, in chapter 4 and verse 2, we are told that we have not because we ask not.

Why did Joshua and the elders and princes of Israel not have the wisdom to be able to see through this façade and these lies that the Gibeonites brought to them? Well they didn't bother to *ask*. They didn't have because they didn't ask. Now it's not that wisdom wasn't available to them. It's not that they *couldn't* have had discernment, but they didn't bother to ask for it, and God wasn't going to give it to them if they weren't going to ask for it.

And so James 4:2 says, “You have not because you ask not.” Because those who are too indifferent to ask would neither value the gift nor would they ever glorify the giver. And so God does not throw His gifts away on people who are indifferent and ungrateful. But Jesus says in Matthew 7 and verse 7, “Ask and it *shall* be given to you.” Those who ask are those who in humility admit their inadequacy and in faith declare both God's sufficiency, as well as His power and goodness, to provide the thing that He has promised.

And so prayer is therefore an act of worship in which we *acknowledge* God's sufficiency and His power and His goodness as we come to Him with our requests. And it is those who worship God that receive the gifts of God. So when we see our *insufficiency*, and we see God's *all* sufficiency, then the Lord undertakes for us to provide what it is that we ask for.

Now the reason why we are to ask of God is that He alone is both the possessor of wisdom and the source of wisdom. If you're going to go ask somebody for *something*, then the reason why you do so is you believe that they possess it. And so when we are told to ask of God for wisdom,

the clear presumption is that God has it to give. And indeed, the Bible tells us that He is the alone possessor of wisdom and the alone source of wisdom.

It speaks in First Timothy chapter 6 of God being the *only wise God*, meaning He alone possesses wisdom. Indeed, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him, and as Proverbs 2 and verse 6 says, “The Lord gives wisdom: out of his mouth proceeds knowledge and understanding. He lays up sound wisdom for the righteous.” And so if we’re going to have wisdom, we have to go to the source of it, and the Lord is the one who gives it. Ecclesiastes 2:26 says, “For God gives to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.”

And so it’s imperative for us to understand that God is the source of wisdom. If you want wisdom, you’re not going to find it in the university library. You’re not going to find it in the popular press. And you’re certainly not going to find it in the magazines on the racks. Wisdom is to be found only in God. And if we would have that wisdom, we must ask for it.

Now oftentimes we think, Well, doesn’t God already know what I need? Why do I need to go through this mechanical activity of prayer to ask him for stuff? He already knows what my needs are; surely he’ll supply them without me asking. Well no, He won’t. He won’t do that. And the reason why He won’t do that is because He wants us to consciously acknowledge our inadequacy and to consciously recognize His sufficiency and goodness and mercy, and thus to acknowledge that when we *do* receive these things, there’s no question as to where they came from. And so there is no question as to who gets the credit and the responsibility and the glory *for* them. And this is the reason why we need to ask.

God knows the things we have need of before we ask Him, and yet after having declared that fact, Jesus then goes on to say, “After this manner then therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name... Give us this day our daily bread.” Well doesn’t God know we need bread every day? Yes, but He will have us ask for it.

Prayerlessness is the great cause of the lack of blessing in our lives. You wonder why stuff doesn’t work out the way you had hoped? You wonder why your Christian life is stunted and slow to progress, and you have great confusion of mind and inability to go forward? Well maybe it’s because you simply fail to pray to God in asking him to remedy those situations and to supply those needs. The Bible tells us “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” And so if there’s not “*much*” going on in our life, it can probably be traced to the fact that there hasn’t been effectual fervent prayer. And so we have not because we ask not.

Now when we pray to God, how is God going to then give us this wisdom? Well, I think there are several ways He gives us wisdom. The Scripture says—the passage I read earlier, Proverbs 2:6— “The Lord gives wisdom: out of his mouth proceeds knowledge and understanding.” Well, where is the mouth of God to be listened to? Certainly in His word. God speaks there infallibly, and in His word are principles, promises, warnings—all of which are designed to give us wisdom in dealing with situations. There are examples of people who handled situations this way and that way, both positively and negatively that will help us to know how we ought to handle *our* situations. So if we want wisdom and we pray to God to give us

wisdom, then we must expect that God would give us wisdom out of His mouth, and we must go to where His mouth is in order that we may hear that wisdom.

And so it is through His word. But His word is ministered to us not only directly as we read it, but also mediately through the counsel of other people. As we hear biblical preaching, God imparts wisdom to us. As we talk to people who are mature and experienced in the faith with reference to our particular circumstances, God gives wisdom to us. As we observe the positive and negative examples around us, God gives us wisdom. God says, “Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be—wise.” God tells us, “Look at the slothful man.” Learn and see how that this person winds up in the poorhouse.

And so God provides his wisdom in a variety of ways, but always through His word and always according to His word, and always in response to prayer. And that’s why it is imperative that as we pick up the Bible to read it each day—and I trust that you *do* read your Bibles every day—that the first thing you need to do as you open to your passage is just close your eyes and say, “Oh, God, give me wisdom from your word. Open my eyes that I might understand the wisdom that you have for me.” And if you’re asking for wisdom, then as you read the word of God, God is going to *give* that wisdom to you.

So God supplies His wisdom in response to our prayers, by means of His word as it is ministered to us in the printed page and the preached word in godly counsel, and in the book of nature.

And that brings us then to our third and final point this evening. Having seen the problem stated, that we lack wisdom; having seen the remedy prescribed—let Him ask of God; notice in the third place, the encouragement given—the encouragement given. And the encouragement is that “God gives to all men liberally and upbraids not, and it *shall be given*.” That’s the encouragement.

Notice first of all, God’s liberality. Notice God’s liberality. It says, “If you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally.” Now when we pray to God and we ask Him to give something to us, God is not like people. We ask people for things, and they might give us a quarter of what we ask for, or a tenth of what we ask for. They might not give us anything at all. But when we ask God for things, and especially when we ask for wisdom, God gives *liberally*. God is not limited or cheap in his gifts. He does not operate from a condition of scarcity of resources.

If I came up to you and I asked you for \$50,000, if you’ve got an unlimited amount of money, then you would have no problem with giving me \$50,000. But if all you have is \$60,000 and I’m asking for 50, then you are going to be functioning from a condition of scarcity of resources, and that’s going to have a profound effect upon your liberality. But you see, God has no scarcity of resources, and therefore He gives liberally to all, because after He has given everything that everybody has asked, He has no less to give.

God is generous. He is open-handed. And He freely distributes his gifts, exceedingly abundantly above *all* that we can ask or think. I mean, can you imagine going up to somebody and saying, “Hey, can I have \$50,000?” and they say, “Oh here, take 60.” But that’s what God

does. We go and ask Him for wisdom with reference to this situation or that situation, and God not only gives the wisdom that we need for situation, but piles a whole bunch of blessings on *top* of it.

You see, when we go to God and we ask Him for wisdom, this is a request that is exceptionally pleasing to God—one that He reacts to with a great deal of enthusiasm, not only because He invites us to ask for wisdom, but also we know this because of the example that He has given us in His word of one who *did* ask.

Notice if you will First Kings, chapter 3, verses 5 through 13. First Kings, chapter 3, verses 5 through 13.

It says, “In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.” Ever had anybody come up to you and say that? “By the way, ask me for whatever you want.” Now most people won’t do that because, once again, they’re operating from scarcity of resources, or they don’t have the kind of affection and love for you that would cause them to want to have that degree of generosity. But God is not like us. And that’s one of the things we’ve got to learn. God is not like us.

“Ask what I shall give thee. And Solomon said, Thou hast showed unto your servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.” Notice the first thing Solomon did when God said, “Ask what I shall give thee.” He didn’t say, “Oh, well give me this and this and this.” The first thing he does is recount God’s *previous* gifts and express his thankfulness for them. This was not a greedy grabber. This was a grateful man who recognized that God had already done far more for him than he ever deserved.

Verse 7: “And now, O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king in the place of David my father: and I am but a little child and know not how to go out or come in.” Now here’s a spirit not only of thankfulness but of humility. Verse 8: “And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and evil: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?”

Now notice verse 10: “And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.” God was exceedingly pleased that Solomon would ask Him for wisdom. Notice God’s response, verse 11: “And God said unto him, Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked for thyself long life; neither has thou asked riches for thyself:”—is this starting to ring a bell? Long life, riches—did we read about that somewhere just a few minutes ago in Proverbs 3? “Nor has asked the life of thine enemies; but has asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither shall there be after thee any arise like unto thee.”

Now Solomon did not ask to be wiser than anyone else in the world. He just asked for wisdom to do his job. And God was so pleased with that request, He not only gave him what he asked for, but He gave a super-abundance of it, to the point that he was as wise as anyone else. Verse 13, “And I have also given thee that which thou hast *not* asked, both riches, and honor: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.”

And so God was very liberal with Solomon. And God will be very liberal with you as well. God is not limited or cheap in his gifts. He does not operate from a condition of scarcity of resources, and He distributes those gifts exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think.

Psalms 81 and verse 10 expresses the heart of God to his people when God says, “I am the Lord thy God that brought thee out of Egypt. Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.” Now God went to quite a bit of trouble to get Israel out of Egypt. And He could have said, “I am the Lord that brought thee out of Egypt. Now I’ve been bothered enough with you folks. Run along and fend for yourself from hereon out.” After God had given them this one mighty gift, He says, “Open your mouth wide and I’ll give you a bunch more.” This is the nature of God. God is open-handed, God is generous, God is unlimited in his desires to bless his people.

And so He does not require *payment* at our hand—He *gives* to all men liberally. He does not *ration* into our hand—He gives *liberally*. And He does not exclude *anyone* from this invitation. He gives to *all* men liberally. If *any* lack wisdom, let him ask of God. So this is the encouragement that God gives to us when it comes to seeking this business of wisdom. The encouragement that is given is that God gives to all men *liberally*.

But the second encouragement that he offers is not only that of God’s liberality, but secondly, that of God’s kindness—that of God’s *kindness*. Now he says that he gives to all men liberally, and he also says that he does not *upbraid* them. Sometimes when we have a need, and we ask someone to meet that need, they’ll go ahead and meet the need, but they’ll humiliate us in the process. They will say, “You know, this has *really* been a lot of trouble for me to do what you asked me to do, and you really used up a lot of my time and I was not able to do some of the things I really wanted to do because I had to meet your request.” Well God’s not like that.

Just as God loves a cheerful giver, God himself *is* a cheerful giver. He does not tire of giving and begin to resent the needy petitioner who comes to Him again and again with his needs. Now we can easily wear out and weary our human benefactors. They tire of our needs, they begin to make comments about the trouble we are putting them through, and the inconvenience we are causing them. Recognizing this limited capacity of people for kindness, Proverbs 25 and verse 17 says, “Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbor’s house, lest he be weary of thee and so hate thee.” That’s what *people* are like. Don’t come too often; don’t ask too much; and don’t stay too long. Well God’s not like that.

You can go to God as *often* as you want, ask as *much* as you want, and stay as *long* as you want, and God is never going to have a word of rebuke for you. We pray like God is impatient with us. You know, it’s been 35 seconds in prayer and that’s all there is. And God is saying, Boy, I was prepared for two or three hours. What are quitting now for?

God in His giving does not berate us for our past requests or for our present needs. He never tells us we have come too often or asked too much. No one has ever been turned away from the throne of grace with a word of irritation, or with a word of impatience, or with a word of reproach. You know, when our prayer time comes to an end, it's always *us* who concludes it.

Now sometimes you go to visit at someone's house, and sometimes you say, "Well, it's—I need to go now." And sometimes they say, "You know, we need to go to bed. You probably ought to be running along now." I have jokingly said to people at times, "Wife, we need to go to bed so we can let these people go home," as though we were holding them there, right? But the point is, God isn't that way. When we come to God to pray, He's there, He's listening, He's enthused. He's interacting with what we're saying, and it's always *us* that says, "Well God, I need to go now." God never says, "You know, I've got another appointment. I'm going to have to cut you off, but I'll get back to you later." He's not that way. He does not upbraid; He is not impatient.

The third encouragement that is given is not only the encouragement of God's liberality, not only the encouragement of God's kindness, but also the encouragement of God's promise. It says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not, and it *shall be given*." There's the promise: *It shall be given*.

What James is telling us is that proper asking will always prevail with God. He assures us that there will never be a time that we go to God for wisdom, assuming that we come properly, and that God will turn us away and not give us the wisdom. He assures us that we shall have the petition we ask of Him as we ask in faith. And next week, God willing, we'll talk about the warning issue. But for right now, just take the promise as it stands. If you ask God for wisdom, He *will* give it to you, not with a voice of irritation, and not with a *limited* ration. He will give it to you liberally. He will give it to you cheerfully. And He *will* give it *to* you. That's what he's saying here.

In Numbers 23 and verse 19, it tells us, "God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: has he said, and shall he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not make it good?" And you see, there's no reason to doubt these promises. You need wisdom, you ask God, you will get it. God doesn't lie. He doesn't speak and then fail to make good on His promises. God *cannot* say no to such a request, and God *will* not say no to such a request, because God has pledged Himself to give. And so He *must* grant such a request, and He certainly *will* grant such a request, not because we have a right to *demand* it out of Him, but because He has put His signature on the dotted line of the contract, and said, I will do it. And so therefore, the counsel of James is, "Ask and you shall receive."

And so the encouragement that James gives to us is that God promises that no one will ever be without wisdom when they need it, if they'll just ask for it. And it's not like this wisdom is a throwaway gift. As we said earlier, it is more valuable than gold and silver and rubies. It is that which brings us pleasantness and peace. And it is more valuable than anything else we could desire. God is willing, not just to give the leftovers or the things that are no longer of any use to Him, but he gives the very best to us.

So this, then, is the problem stated, the remedy prescribed, and the encouragement given. Next time we'll consider together the warning issued, "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." And you see, the lack of faith is really an attitude of unbelief in either the truthfulness of God, or the power of God, or the resources of God. If He lacks any of those things, He can't keep his promise. But if He possesses them all, then why are we failing to believe that we'll have what we ask for when He has specifically committed Himself to giving it?

So if you are in a time of difficulty, ask God for wisdom. And it is precisely that wisdom that will help you to be able to have a proper attitude in trials, that will help you to derive the benefits that flow out of trials, and that will help you to fully utilize all that God intended for you *in* that trial. But without that wisdom, you'll never be able to fulfill verses 2 through 4; but with it, you can.

And so may the Lord help us to be people who are frequently on our knees, who are faithfully on our knees, and who are upon our knees for extended periods of time asking for extended gifts, and knowing that whatever we ask for, God will do better than what we pray for, if we pray for those things that He has promised to give us.

Well, let us pray together. Our Father, we thank you for the promise of wisdom. And, Lord, we do need it, and tonight we do ask for it. We pray that you would give us wisdom to know how to deal with our trials. Give us wisdom, Father, that we might keep a proper perspective, that we might have a proper attitude on our trials; that we might really have joy, and that our mouths might be filled with laughter at the redemption that you are working in us, even through those trials. Father, we pray that your purposes in our trials might be *known* to us, that we might discern them, and that we might cooperate with them.

Help us, Father, not to be so dull of spirit that we miss the purpose, nor to be so self-centered and hypersensitive that we wind up being crushed by them. But help us, Father, to have a balanced and godly response to them, and *persevere* in that response until you deliver us from them.

Father, thank you for your liberality. Thank you, Father, for your kindness. Lord, we are a weak and stupid people, and we do not know how to order our affairs as we ought. Father, we pray that you would give us wisdom and guide us in the right way, in the way of life, in the way of blessing, in the way of obedience, and the way of godliness. Father, we do trust tonight that you will keep your promise to us because of your own faithfulness and truthfulness.

Father, we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.