

RTO™ School of Prayer

Praying for God's Wisdom

James 1:5-8

by Dave Mozdin

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"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 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; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

When we pray, we are prone to ask God for many different types of things, God's word even sets a pattern for this as Jesus illustrates for us in Matthew 6:9-13. We are told to ask for "our daily bread", for forgiveness as we forgive others, for protection from temptation and evil. We ask for things as we believe the Spirit leads us, for health and safety for our loved ones and ourselves, traveling mercies as we or others travel, success in our work, in our relationships, in finding a job, in finding a marriage partner, healing for those who are sick or suffering from injury, consolation for those who are grieving the loss of a loved one, justice for someone in an unjust situation. Our requests may also pertain to God's kingdom, such as salvation for the lost, especially for those closest to us, for a wayward or backslidden child or loved one to return to the Lord, for ourselves or others we know to overcome a stronghold sin (addiction) or other difficult sin pattern. We may ask for spiritual health and pastoral purity for the church, for the preaching of the gospel to bear fruit in worldwide missions, especially in persecuted nations. We may ask for God's word to run freely and souls to be saved in jails and prisons. We may also pray for our country and those in authority as God's word instructs us in 1 Timothy 2:1-2.

The items we just referenced are by no means a collectively exhaustive list, and as sinners, even redeemed sinners in a fallen world, we long for, even faithfully expect God to answer our prayers, however, also as sinners, we have a bent towards asking God for the wrong things or asking for the wrong reasons. Often, we don't think much about God, yet treat Him as a prayer vending machine, depositing our prayers in the "coin slot", and expecting God to dispense an answer almost immediately. "God, give me this, God give me that, give me, give me, give me! We don't think much about God until we encounter an emergency, and, as Manny Mill has said we look to God as our paramedic, expecting instant miraculous answers to our foxhole prayers. The Bible specifically addresses much of these wrongful prayer situations, James 4:2-3, 2"... You do not have, because you do not ask. 3You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."

In response to this, how can we be sure we are asking God for the right things for the right reasons? First, pray to and depend upon the Holy Spirit to help us. Romans 8:26-27 says, 26"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." God's word gives us much instruction, particularly in God hearing and answering prayers that are prayed according to His will (1 John 5:14-15). Second, there is one section of His word which I believe provides a good biblical foundation for effective God honoring prayer and the abundant promise of an answer and that is the featured verses, James 1:5-8, a request for wisdom from God.

The letter of James, the half-brother of Christ, is believed to be the first book written of the New Testament, circa 44 A.D. As John MacArthur notes, this book of the Bible, "... with its devotion to direct . . . statements on wise living, is reminiscent of the book of Proverbs. It has a practical emphasis, stressing not theoretical knowledge, but godly behavior."

The book begins in chapter one with the subject of dealing with trials (in the New King James version the chapter subtitle is “Profiting from Trials”), in a Christian way, and with an attitude that someone from the world would find unusual or surprising. James was writing to Jewish Christians who were suffering from persecution from the Roman governing authorities. He writes in vv. 2-3 to actually “count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds”, and that “the testing of your faith produces steadfastness”, or patience.

James then proceeds to provide help as to how to profit from the trials, starting in v.5, getting right to the point, “If any of you lacks wisdom....” We’ll stop there to begin to break this down. Which of us has ever lacked wisdom in dealing with trials? Which of us, when beset by trials, immediately sets about to devise our own plan to overcome the trial? Or perhaps throw our hands up in despair, having no knowledge of what to do? Which of us, whether hearing this or reading this ever lacks wisdom at any given point in time? This looks like a good spot for another reminder that we are all sinners in a fallen world, and the answer to all these questions is *all of us, every one of us* lacks wisdom. As noted in Barnes’ Notes on the Bible, “If any of you lack wisdom - Probably this refers particularly to the kind of wisdom which they would need in their trials, to enable them to bear them in a proper manner, for there is nothing in which Christians more feel the need of heavenly wisdom than in regard to the manner in which they should bear trials, and what they should do in the perplexities, and disappointments, and bereavements that come upon them; but the language employed is so general, that what is here said may be applied to the need of wisdom in all respects.” Amen?

Barnes’ continues, “We are in great danger of going wrong when we are afflicted; of complaining and murmuring; of evincing a spirit of rebellion, and of losing the benefits which we might have obtained if we had submitted to the trial in a proper manner. So in all things we ‘lack wisdom.’ We are short-sighted; we have hearts prone to sin; and there are great and important matters pertaining to duty and salvation on which we cannot but feel that we need heavenly guidance.” Amen again?

In the Barnes' quote just cited, we note that "Christians . . . feel the need of heavenly wisdom . . ." Here is a good place to specifically define what type of wisdom we lack. Webster's dictionary defines wisdom as "the quality of being wise (wise=having or showing good judgment) . . . Wise discourse or teaching . . . A wise plan or course of action." Vine's Bible Dictionary goes a bit deeper, defining it through two Greek words, "sophia", "the true insight into the nature of things", and "phronesis", "the ability to discern modes of action with a view to results; while *sophia* is theoretical, *phronesis* is practical". Now if all that high minded Greek language seems a bit confusing, let's more simply translate this with a practical definition from Pastor Voddie Baucham, "Wisdom is the righteous application of true knowledge. Not just the application, but the *righteous* application of true knowledge." And a John MacArthur definition: "God's wisdom is His perfect knowledge of how to act skillfully so that He will accomplish all His good to glorify Himself." Isn't that the type of wisdom any devout Christian would want?

God's Holy word, the Bible discusses wisdom at length in many of its books in terms of two types, man's wisdom, also referred to as wisdom of the world (1 Cor 1:20, 3:19), earthly (2 Cor 1:12, James 3:15), unspiritual, sensual, demonic (James 3:15), and God's wisdom, described in the Bible as the wisdom of God (Luke 11:49, 1 Cor 1:24), wisdom from God (1 Cor 1:30), wisdom from above (James 3:17). A good contrast is shown in James 3:13-17, **13**"Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. **14**But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. **15**This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. **16**For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. **17**But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. **18**And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

Two things to note here from the James 3:13-17 passage just cited. First, an attribute of the wisdom of God, v. 13, "... the meekness of wisdom". MacKnight, through the Benson Commentary, says, that "true wisdom is always accompanied with meekness, or the government of the passions." I once heard a pastor describe meekness as power under control." Barnes' Notes on the Bible says, " With meekness of wisdom - With a wise and prudent gentleness of life; not in a noisy, arrogant, and boastful manner." And "It is remarkable that the truly wise man is always characterized by a calm spirit, a mild and placid demeanor, and by a gentle, though firm, enunciation of his sentiments." Also, "the ministry of the gospel should be characterized by a calm, gentle, and thoughtful wisdom - a wisdom which shines in all the actions of the life."

The other thing to note is the group of attributes of the wisdom of God listed in v. 17. It is pure, according to the Benson Commentary, "purified from all that is earthly, sensual, and devilish." Next, it is peaceable, bringing about "a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." (v.18). The word peaceable, even by its very construction, means able to make peace, able to keep peace. Barnes Notes says, "Then peaceable - The effect of true religion - the wisdom which is from above - will be to dispose a man to live in peace with all others." Drawing from our previous School of Prayer Lesson, "A Short and Perfect Prayer for Peace", we recall how the Vine's Bible Dictionary defined true peace, as "harmonized relationships between God and man.", and from the Hebrew word *shalom*, meaning "wholeness, completeness, soundness, health, safety and prosperity, carrying with it the implication of permanence."

Then gentle, From Benson, "Soft, mild, yielding, not rigid;" After that, "open to reason", or "easy to be entreated", continuing from Benson, "Persuaded and reconciled where any matters of disgust may have arisen; not stubborn, sour, morose;" then "full of mercy", Benson, "Of pity and compassion toward persons in a state of ignorance, guilt, and depravity; ready to relieve the miseries and pardon the faults of others;" then good fruits, both in attitude and actions, then impartial or without impartiality, Benson, "...loving all without respect of persons; embracing all good things, rejecting all evil."

Lastly, sincere, that is, without hypocrisy, according to Matthew Poole, sincerity is “the perfection of all the rest before named; purity, peace, and gentleness”, et al.

While the Bible has much to say about wisdom from Genesis to Revelation, the most concentrated portions relating to God’s wisdom are found in those books known as the wisdom books. These include Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon.

While the human author of Job is not known, and the Psalms have various human authors, both known and unknown, much of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon is attributed to or influenced by King Solomon, David’s son who succeeded David on the throne. In the annals of Scripture, Solomon is considered arguably the one man who possessed the most wisdom. This is described in detail in 1 Kings 3 and 4 and is also a good lesson in praying for God’s wisdom.

Sometime after his ascension to the throne, God began to pour out His love, mercy and grace upon Solomon. In 1 Kings 3:5 we read, “At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, “Ask what I shall give you.” Solomon initially responds (v.6) by acknowledging all that God had done for his father David, and how the Lord has maintained David’s throne “and have given him (David) a son to sit on his throne this day.” He then makes the following request, after acknowledging his own inexperience and inability to rule the nation (v.7), “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?”

How does God respond? Exceedingly and abundantly! **10**”It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. **11**And God said to him, ‘Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, **12**behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. **13**I give you also what you have

not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. **14**And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.” (vv.10-13). All this besides His wisdom! This is a wonderful illustration and lesson about asking God for His wisdom as James reiterates in his letter in 1:5, “let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach....”

Solomon’s God given wisdom is tested not long afterwards. In 1 Kings 3:16-22, two prostitutes come to Solomon with a dilemma. Each of them had just borne a child at the same time, and the mother of one of the children accidentally killed the child by laying over him. (v.19). This mother then stole the other prostitute’s child and left the dead child at her side as she slept. When confronted, the offending prostitute denied this, prompting Solomon’s intervention.

We read Solomon’s response in vv.24-28, **24**”And the king said, ‘Bring me a sword.’ So a sword was brought before the king. **25**And the king said, ‘Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other.’ **26**Then the woman whose son was alive said to the king, because her heart yearned for her son, ‘Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means put him to death.’ But the other said, ‘He shall be neither mine nor yours; divide him.’ **27**Then the king answered and said, ‘Give the living child to the first woman, and by no means put him to death; she is his mother.’ **28**And all Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered, and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice.” How many of us would have been able to arrive at that absolutely correct solution so quickly to that dilemma? A sure display of *God’s* wisdom!

Yes, all of Israel heard of Solomon’s wisdom and his reputation spread both near and far. In 1 Kings 10:1-4, we read of the Queen of Sheba hearing of Solomon’s wisdom and making the long, long journey to visit him. (Scholars believe that Sheba was in what is now known as the nation of Yemen, in the southwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula.). **1**Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning

the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. 2She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones. And when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. 3And Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her. 4And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, 5the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cupbearers, and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the LORD, there was no more breath in her.” His responses and lifestyle literally left her breathless.

Later in chapter 10 we read, 23”Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. 24And the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind. 25Every one of them brought his present, articles of silver and gold, garments, myrrh, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year.” God certainly abundantly answered Solomon’s prayer for wisdom. Even our Lord Jesus Christ recognized and mentioned the wisdom of Solomon, as we will explore more in depth later in this lesson.

With all praise and thanks to God, we see that much of Solomon’s God given wisdom has been preserved and recorded in the Book of Proverbs, which begins in 1:1 with “The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:”, with the book’s purpose shown in vv.2-4, “To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, 3to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; 4to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth –” Besides praying to God for it, an important element for acquiring wisdom is disclosed in 1:7, The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” This verse also contains the first of many contrasts between the wise and the foolish as a part of wisdom’s instruction. This verse is restated in a varied way in 9:10 as “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.” By fear of the Lord, we mean a reverential respect for the One who alone is all powerful,

almighty, the One who can create, the One who can destroy, the One who gives life, the One who can take life, the One who saves, the One who condemns. In v.10 we note “the knowledge of the Holy One” and see that this is important to God Himself as He states in Hosea 6:6, “For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” That is what God wants, knowledge of Him.

Other notable sections of Proverbs include the call of wisdom, 1:20-23, making herself (wisdom is described in this book in the feminine) widely and obviously available to anyone seeking her. In vv. 24-32, we see the consequences of refusing wisdom, and many of the consequences are also in the feminine, the Adulteress, and Dame Folly in some translations. Chapter 2:1-15 discusses the value of wisdom, and similar points can be made for each chapter of Proverbs. Suffice to say that a good way to help God answer your prayer for wisdom would be a detailed prayerful individual or group study of Proverbs. There are many good commentaries, study guides and resources, hard cover or online that would be helpful.

While Solomon is biblically named the wisest man who ever was and ever will be (1 Kings 3:10), there is One who is even wiser, Jesus Christ, who Himself acknowledges this. In Matthew 12:42, in pronouncing condemnation upon the Pharisees, Christ says, “The queen of the South (a reference to the Queen of Sheba in 1 Kings 10) will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.” The Scriptures in multiple places affirms this too, 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, **23**”but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, **24**but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”, v.30 (NKJV) “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,” And Colossians 2:2-3, **2**”that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is

Christ, 3in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Note that, Christ, in whom ALL the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden.

So how do we access this wisdom of God that is in Christ? You must answer the effectual saving call of God, “who desires all people to be saved” (1Timothy 2:4). You must place your faith and trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, to be able to stand innocent before a Holy God, to be spared His wrath of judgment in eternal hell and be welcomed into His eternal heavenly Kingdom of peace and joy. Then you will receive the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:38, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” If you have not made the decision to place your faith and trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, please do so now. As the Bible tells us in Hebrews 9:27, “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,”. After the point of your death, and you do not know when that will be, it will be too late.

After your profession of faith in Christ, and you have received the Holy Spirit, you will be helped by the Holy Spirit to acquire the wisdom of God when you ask for it. 1 Corinthians 2:10-13, 10“these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. 13And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.” And v. 16, “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ. These verses from 1 Corinthians 2 tell us that having the Holy Spirit within you is the key to acquiring *God’s* wisdom, again, with the reminder to remember from our key verse in James 1:5, “.... let him ask God....”

Now to the remaining verses of our key text, beginning with the last part of v. 5, “.... God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” What a gracious sure promise of abundance! The Bible repeatedly tells us of the generosity of our great God, 2 Peter 1:3, “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness,” please note ALL things. Matthew 7:8-11, as Christ Himself has said, **8**“For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. **9**Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? **10**Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? **11**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! In a similar passage in Luke 11:13, Christ asks, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” In both passages we see Christ saying “how much more” to indicate God’s generosity. In Luke 11:13 there is an important key, relating to what we just discussed in 1 Corinthians 2 about the role of the Holy Spirit in helping us to gain God’s wisdom. We are encouraged to ask for the Holy Spirit as well as wisdom, with God promising to answer both of those requests.

One more verse that illustrates God’s generosity, Ephesians 3:20, “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think”.

Our key passage concludes with one more element necessary to obtain God’s wisdom, to ask in faith, vv.6-8, **6**“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. **7**For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; **8**he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” As Hebrews 11:6 says, “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” Gill’s Exposition says, “Not only in the faith of the divine Being that God is; but in the faith of the promises he has made; and in the faith of his power and faithfulness to perform them; and in the faith of this,

that whatever is asked, according to the will of God (1 John 5:14-15), and is for his glory, and his people's good, shall be given.”

Earlier in this lesson it was mentioned that one of the wisdom books is the book of Job. Chapter 28, spoken by Job, is devoted entirely to the subject of God’s wisdom, its inestimable value and worth, its sole possession being in God alone, its display in His creation, and His instruction as to how man can acquire it.

12“But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?

13Man does not know its worth, and it is not found in the land of the living.**14**The deep says, ‘It is not in me,’ and the sea says, ‘It is not with me.’**15**It cannot be bought for gold, and silver cannot be weighed as its price. **16**It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir, in precious onyx or sapphire. **17**Gold and glass cannot equal it, nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold. **18**No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal; the price of wisdom is above pearls. **19**The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it, nor can it be valued in pure gold.”

23“God understands the way to it, and he knows its place. **24**For he looks to the ends of the earth

and sees everything under the heavens. **25**When he gave to the wind its weight and apportioned the waters by measure, **26**when he made a decree for the rain and a way for the lightning of the thunder,

27then he saw it and declared it; he established it, and searched it out. **28**And he said to man, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.’”

One more reference to Proverbs 9:10 would be appropriate here; “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.” Seek God, know God, fear God, ask Him for the Holy Spirit’s help, ask Him for *His* wisdom. He **WILL** answer! Amen. Alleluia!

Questions or comments? Please contact dmozdin.dfp@gmail.com

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