

James - Get Wisdom!
Sign Title: Get Wisdom!

March 20, 2011

Good morning Faith Church. Last week we began a new series on the book of James. This is an intense series. Right out of the box James gave us a completely new way to look at the trials we face in the Christian life. The physical pain of physical sickness, the emotional distress of a wayward child, the relational distress of a failing marriage; why does God allow it? James tells us all the trials we go through in the Christian life are allowed by God for the purpose of bringing us to spiritual maturity.

So while we say, "God, if you loved me, why is this happening to me?" God looks at us and says, "It is because I love you that I am allowing this trial to come into your life." Trials are my chosen instrument to bring about spiritual maturity in my children.

While the pressure we go through during times of trial can become an opportunity to sin, that is never God's purpose. Trials are for maturing us in Christ. Christian maturity, according to Peter, is worth far more than anything else this world can offer.

Last week we learned the reasons why God allows trials in our life. The problem is that trials are still hard to get through. James, who has a pastor's heart, moves from telling us why God allows trials in our life, to telling us how to get through them. That is what we are going to talk about this morning.

To begin answering the "how" question, I would like to start with an Old Testament story many of us learned in Sunday School. It is the story of

Solomon's dream. If you remember, Solomon was the new king of Israel. There were challenges when he took office. There was a vast kingdom to manage and his own brothers were challenging his leadership. It was a tense time for the new king. 1 Kings 3 tells us that one night, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream and gave him a wild card. God said, "Ask for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you."

I want you to ask yourself, if God gave you a blank check, what would you ask for? Lots of things come to my mind, how about yours? Lets see how Solomon answered...

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?" It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. 1 Kings 3:9–10 (ESV)

Of all the things Solomon could ask for, he desired wisdom the most. Verse 10 tells us God was pleased with Solomon's request for wisdom that gave him more wisdom and riches than any man before or since.

Why was God pleased with Solomon's request? Because Solomon realized that apart from a relationship with God, the most pressing need we have in our life is wisdom. The importance of wisdom to make it through the trials of life is what we are talking about this morning.

James 1:5-8

How to make it through a Trial

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. James 1:5 (ESV)

Ask God for Wisdom

This is probably the most quoted verse in the Bible for Christian students during final exams. I recited these verses during final exams in college, especially when I stayed up late hanging out with friends when I should have studied. I sat in the test begging God for wisdom hoping answers to material I had not studied would magically pop into my mind. Unfortunately, that never happened. James 1:5 is not intended to be a divine crib sheet for a final exam. If that is not what it means, then what is James talking about? Let me explain it by showing you a few more things it does not mean.

Wisdom is not knowledge.

First, notice James is talking about wisdom, not about knowledge. There is an important difference. The internet has a vast amount of knowledge, but it doesn't matter how many internet pages you read, you can not download wisdom from the net. Knowledge is information, *wisdom is the right application of information*. Wisdom is much more valuable than raw information. Look what Solomon said to his sons about wisdom.

for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her. Proverbs 8:11 (ESV)

For whoever finds me (wisdom) finds life and obtains favor from the Lord. Proverbs 8:35 (ESV)

If you can't download wisdom from the internet, where does it come from so we can get some? According to the Bible, God is the source of wisdom. He is the one we go to when we need it. And the wisdom the Bible talks about is not just right application of information. It is the right application of the knowledge we

have about God to our life and our struggles. This is very important and we will develop that more later this morning. *Wisdom is applying God's truth to everyday living and the only way we get it is to go to God for it.*

God promises wisdom in trials.

Second, James is talking about the need for wisdom *in the midst of a trial*. Many of us have memorized James 1:5 out of context and we apply it out of context. Is it important to ask God for wisdom before you make a stock trade? Yes! Is it important to ask God for wisdom before you buy a new tractor? Of course. The problem is, this verse doesn't say God promises to give us wisdom to buy every stock low and sell every stock high. That isn't the point of this verse. We need to read the verse in context.

James says we are to ask God for wisdom *when we are going through a trial*. That is the time when wisdom is really important because our world is spinning out of control. The trials of life are the time we need wisdom because it is so easy to make a mistake. We have our boss angry at us, it is so easy to say the wrong thing to him. We need wisdom from God how to respond. When we lose our job, we need wisdom from God to know where to look, what to do and how to respond. When our marriage is tense and our mind naturally generates some juicy and wounding comments, we need wisdom from God on what to say and how to say it. God promises that when we turn to him and seek wisdom from him in the trials of life, he will give it to us. What a great promise.

But I think there is much more here that we need to know. Remember, keep this verse in its context. Last week, we learned the reason God allows trials

into our lives is to bring us to spiritual maturity. Even more important than the wisdom to know how to respond in a trial is the wisdom to see what God is maturing in us through the trial. After all, isn't that the whole reason God allowed the trial into our lives in the first place?

So when we are in the hospital enduring a trial of sickness, God promises to answer the prayer that says, "God, help me to understand what you are transforming in me with this trial. Or if we are in a relational trial, God promises to answer the prayer that says, "God, I need the wisdom to see what it is about me that is hurtful to others. It may not be all my problem but there are parts of my character that are fueling this relational melt down. Give me the wisdom to see what you are transforming in my life and help me to be transformed by it.

I started by saying, wouldn't it be great if God gave us a blank check for our greatest need, just like he did for Solomon? We actually do have that blank check from God. It is a blank check for wisdom, which is our greatest need apart from Christ.

There are two qualities we need to know about God and his giving of wisdom.

God gives wisdom generously.

...who gives generously to all...

Here is a wonderful promise. When we need wisdom, God promises to give it generously. He won't hold back. He isn't a cheap skate. Remember, He is our father in heaven. He is completely for us. That's why he allows trials into

our lives in the first place. Not because he hates us, but because he loves us so deeply.

Let me give you a hypothetical example. As you know, my sons are getting older. To help them mature, I have considered giving them a pile of money and telling them to budget it for the semester. They need to budget school lunches, their clothing and play money. For my sons, that would be a trial. Imagine my sons coming to me with their budgets and saying, “Dad, I put my budget together, but I don’t know if this is the best way to use my money. Since you are older, can you give me some of your wisdom?” How do you think I would react? I would love for my sons to say that! In the same way, God loves when we come to him seeking wisdom for the trials in our every day life. The Greek word generous means *freely* or *over-flowingly*. James wants us to see God as actually delighting to help us. He *wants* to give us wisdom, we just have to ask.

God gives wisdom without finding fault.

...without reproach,...

In college, since I was a computer science major, I took advanced math classes. I remember taking upper level Calculus classes. They were difficult for me. I would copy the problems from the board as the teacher solved them but I could never solve them on my own. The guy who lived across the hall from me was a math genius and almost every night he would help me with my homework. It was a very embarrassing situation. Night after night, out of good Christian love, he patiently helped me work through the Calculus problems. Every time he finished, he would say, “See, not that isn’t so hard, is it?” I would stare at him

with a deer-in-the-headlights look on my face wondering how he did it. If it wasn't for his help, I wouldn't have passed those courses. As patient as he was, I must admit, there were some nights he had a look of frustration when I knocked on his door. A look that said, "Why can't you understand this?" I wanted to say, "Because I am dumb as a box of rocks." Anybody go through a class like that?

Let's get this straight about God. He doesn't fault us when we ask him for wisdom. He is not up in heaven saying, "You are like a box of rocks. Can't you see what is going on here?" No, the Bible tells us God remembers we are but dust.

Abraham answered and said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Genesis 18:27 (ESV)

God understands our weakness. He doesn't feel anything but love when we turn to Him in a trial and say, "Father, help me, I need wisdom!" No matter how dumb we feel, no matter how insignificant the trial seems, turn to him for wisdom.

As I studied, I began wondering why God is so stoked when we turn to him and ask for his wisdom. What is it about turning to him that brings such pleasure to God's heart? *When we turn to God for wisdom, it gives him glory.* In asking God for wisdom, his glory is magnified. That is why he loves our prayers for wisdom! So friend, let's ask Him for wisdom. He promises to give it to us because it brings glory to His name.

Be confident of God's character.

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. James 1:6 (ESV)

We just said God has a passion to give us wisdom in our trials but there is a way we can muck it up. When we ask, we must believe, and not doubt.

This verse has troubled me for years. I always thought it meant that when I prayed, if I really, really, really believed God would answer the prayer. If I could just work up enough belief, God would be obligated to do what I was asking Him to do. That means the object of doubt is my faith. Is the object of doubt in this verse my lack of faith or is it something else? I think it is something different. I think the object of doubt is God's character.

Remember this verse is talking about wisdom in a trial. When we are in a trial, one of the first things we do is question God's wisdom for allowing it into our life. It is hard to believe that God is good when your spouse is sick. It is hard to believe God's purposes are good in depressing moments. It is hard to believe the purpose of our trials is to mature us when we are in the midst of them. In the midst of them we are tempted to doubt God's character, God's love for us and God's good purposes for spiritual maturity in our future.

If that doubting attitude is ours, there is no point in asking God for wisdom because if he gives it to us, we would not bring glory to Him.

Friends, hold on to this promise in the midst of the trial when we ask for wisdom. "God, I know you are good, no matter how much this hurts. I know this trial is for my spiritual good and you will use it to mature me in Christ. This trial will be a platform for me to bring glory to your name."

James gives us two consequences of doubting God's character and purposes in a trial. One is an emotional consequence we will experience, the other is a character consequence.

Don't get sea-sick.

...one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind...

James uses many illustrations from nature. He describes a person who trusts God's character and purposes in a trial one moment, then doubts God character in a trial like the waves on the sea. I spent fourteen years on the shore of Lake Michigan. I have fond memories of hanging my head over the side of a boat during fishing trips because I was so sea-sick I wanted to puke. Sea-sickness on Lake Michigan is some of the most intense nausea I have experienced because they were always bobbing and changing direction.

You want to get yourself so sick in a trial you want to puke? When you are in a trial, allow yourself to start questioning God's purposes for you in them. Allow yourself to start thinking your life is running out of control rather than completely in God's sovereign control even in the toughest moments. If you think your life is out of control, trust me, life will make you so sea-sick you will want to puke.

How do you get rid of that sea-sick feeling? Get ahold of something solid, something fixed that will not change. Anchor yourselves back to what you know to be true about God's purposes for our trials and God's never-changing love for us. That is the only way we can emotionally make it through.

Doubting God's character leads to others doubting my character.

he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. James 1:8 (ESV)

Here is James' point. *If we doubt God's character in the trials of life, we will become people with doubtful character in the trials of life.* We become like the God we worship. James told us the truth about God in our trials. He allows trials into our life not because he hates us, but because he loves us. Trials are there to mature us in Christ. Trials are times where we need a lot of wisdom and God is totally stoked to provide it. God is good. His love for us is never changing.

When we start to doubt God's character and goodness in the midst of our trials and we think God is loving to us one moment, then vindictive the next, we will become just like that under pressure. If we think God's character flip-flops from time to time, our character will flip-flop from time to time.

That is not the kind of person to which you want to be married. You don't want to be married to someone who is faithful in the good times but when under enough pressure their character changes, just like they believe God's does.

That is not the kind of person with whom you want to go into business. If you do, they will be a man or woman of integrity in the good times but when the pressure is on and business is bad, their character will change, just like they believe God's does.

How do we become people of stability in the trying moments of life?
Refuse to allow ourselves to doubt the goodness of God's character and

purposes for us, even when we can not see any good from the trial he is allowing into our life.

Seek God's wisdom for my trial

As we close this morning, it seemed only right that we cash this blank check, follow the instructions of this verse and ask for God to give us the wisdom we need for the trials we are facing today. We are going to close in a few moments of silence to give you an opportunity to ask God for wisdom today. As you talk to him, I would suggest three things to talk with him about.

First, thank God for his unwavering character. No matter how difficult the trial, he is good and the purpose of the trial is to mature us in Christ. Knowing that purpose is unchanging makes the trials of life more bearable.

Second, ask God for wisdom in the trial to understand how we should react and understand what God is trying to mature about us through that trial.

Third, since trials in life have emotional swells on them, ask God to help you stay rooted in what you know to be true. Let's face it, if you are like me, it is between 2:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m. that our emotions overwhelm us in our trials. We start doubting God's purposes and we feel like we are riding the waves of the sea. It is at those times, we need to make a real effort to anchor ourselves to what we know to be true about God from his word, not what we feel to be true about our life in the middle of the night.

Let's go to God in silent prayer.

Prayer

Father, thank you that your purposes for us are always good. We confess that many times we have doubted your purposes in our trials. We have thought we were left alone to make it through when all the time you are anxiously waiting to pour out wisdom, if we would only ask you for it. Help us to be men and women who seek your wisdom every day for our every need. Amen.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the EFCA. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics of study are ancient rhetoric and preaching. Feel free to contact him at ktruck@gmail.com or visit his web at www.christ2Rculture.com

© Dr. Kurt Trucksess. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include the web site address (<http://www.christ2Rculture.com>) on the copied resource.

