

A FAITH THAT WORKS

(A Study of the Book of James)

When We Don't Know How

TEXT: James 1:5-8

INTRODUCTION: Let me ask you again, "Do you ever say to yourself, 'I really want to do the right thing in this situation. I am just not sure what the right thing is.'?"

Or do you ever think, "I know what God wants me to do, but I just don't know how to do it."?

The next four verses of the Book of James is for you!

James 1:5–8 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Remember that James was a Jew who became a Christian.

He is writing to Jews who also have become followers of Christ.

So when James talks about wisdom, he is not talking about theoretical philosophy. Wisdom for the Jew and for the Christian was the practical understanding of living righteously.

Wisdom was knowing how to do the right thing.

Wisdom was knowing how to do what God wanted.

So the Holy Spirit says through James, if you do not know for sure what God wants you to do, or if you do not know how to do what God wants you to do, ... ask God.

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God

Why? Because

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

- **God gives to all generously.**
- **God gives wisdom without also giving a reproach.**
- **And wisdom will be given to the one who asks.**

So how does this work? We are talking practical “how to” wisdom here, so when we don’t know the right thing to do or how to do the right thing what do we do?

Now pretend with me here:

- Your boss at work has just demoted you on the job for something you did not do. You tried to explain, but he will not even hear what you have to say. What should you do?
- You told your teacher a lie about why your assignment was not completed on time. To cover that lie with your parents, you told another lie. Now you feel guilty as sin, because you know you did sin. You don’t want to hurt your parents, and you cannot afford to get a bad grade in this class. What should you do?

You go to God in prayer. You ask Him to show you the right thing to do. You ask several times in prayer. You run out of things to say about it, but you do not hear God giving an answer either in your ear or in your heart. You say amen, but there is no answer.

So you wait, but still no answer by voice or feeling.

You pray again. Again no answer comes.

You have asked. You have asked repeatedly.

In frustration and with a fear of being irreverent or even blasphemous you say to yourself,

- **“Where is all this wisdom that God gives so generously?”**
- **“Where is this practical counsel on how to do the right thing that God gives without reproach?”**

Ah, you are getting close. You are asking the right question.

Where is all this wisdom that God gives so generously?

Here is the answer to that question:

- I. **ALL THE WISDOM WE NEED FOR RIGHTEOUS LIVING IS IN THE BIBLE.**

Well, then, why doesn't James say that here?

Because when James is writing and his Jewish friends are reading, the Bible was not yet complete. In fact, as I told you, James was probably the first book of the New Testament ever written. And even if it were not the first, it most certainly was not the last.

And while the Old Testament is absolutely true, and even by itself has a lot of wisdom, it is not complete. The truth is not finished. The wisdom is not complete without what is in the New Testament.

But Jesus Himself tells us that the wisdom that we need to do what is right and to do what God wants us to do is in the Bible.

Jesus said in **John 17:17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.**

And Jesus was not bringing a new word here but reinforcing what the Holy Spirit had said in the Old Testament. We read at the start of the service how God told Joshua and Israel the same thing. Read the Book of the Law.

Psalm 119 is all about the Word of God. If we ask ...

A. How can we have our life cleansed of destructive patterns?

Psalm 119:9 How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.

B. Where can we receive trustworthy counsel that we know will be right?

Psalm 119:24 Your testimonies also are my delight And my counselors.

C. How can we grow wise in dealing with life's problems and issues?

Psalm 119:98-100 98 You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me. 99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. 100 I understand more than the ancients, Because I keep Your precepts.

And as the Holy Spirit inspired the followers of Jesus to complete the Holy Scriptures, they echoed the same truth.

D. How can we penetrate the surface and get to the heart of the problems and issues we face in life?

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

E. How can I receive complete counsel to grow to be all God wants me to be?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 16 **All Scripture** is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The answer to every question is “The Word of God.” That is because **the Bible is a sufficient supply of the wisdom we need**

- **to live righteously**
- **to do what is right**
- **to do what God wants us to do.**

Parents, that is why I practically beg you to do two things

- Regularly have your children in Kid Zone small groups where they are systematically taught the Bible.
- Put your kids in Book 66 on Sunday afternoons where in a very enjoyable way they learn to memorize the Scriptures, to hide them in their hearts.

That is why I plead with you teens to be faithful to

- Attend Lifechange groups on Sunday mornings.
- Be in worship and pay attention, even take notes – not because of me, because of God’s Word!
- Come on Wed. nights and be a part of studying the Word of God with Bro. Mark in Rush Hour.

Adults of all ages, you want answers? You want wisdom?

- Here it is! Become a diligent student of the Word.
- Be faithful in Lifechange Groups. Grow to be a teacher!
- Be faithful in Worship.
- Come on Sunday nights.
- Come on Wed. nights.
- It is all focused on learning what God’s Word says!

But let me be honest to say there is a second part, and James nails it.

James 1:6–8

6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

James says, ask for wisdom from God, but ask in faith. What does that mean?

Faith is simply believing what God says. It is not believing God will do what you want Him to do.

So we don't know what to do or how to do it.

- **We ask God.**
- **We know God's answer is in the Bible**, so we search for where He gives us the wisdom we need.
- **We find it, read it, study it, until we understand it.**

What else is there?

- **Faith means "We do what it says."**

II. WE ARE NOT MADE WISE BY JUST KNOWING WHAT IS RIGHT; THE WISE PERSON DOES WHAT IS RIGHT.

Although all the wisdom we need is in God's Word, just having a Bible, carrying a Bible, saying we believe the Bible is not enough. We must apply the truths of the Scripture to our lives.

Let me revisit the same questions and the same answers in the Scripture we just examined to see the other dimension. Notice what we must do with the wisdom of the Word of God.

A. How can we have our life cleansed of destructive patterns?

Psalm 119:9 How can a young man cleanse his way? **By taking heed** according to Your word.

In other words, we must do what God's Word tells us to do. A man cannot cleanse his way of life without the instruction of the Word of God, but just hearing the instruction is not enough. He must hear and do. He must heed the Word!

B. Where can we receive trustworthy counsel that we know will be right?

Psalm 119:24 Your testimonies also are **my delight** And **my counselors**.

C. How can we grow wise in dealing with life's problems and issues?

Psalm 119:98-100 You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For **they are ever with me**. I have more understanding than all my

teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, Because I keep Your precepts.

- D. How can we penetrate the surface and get to the heart of the problems and issues we face in life? Remember Heb. 4:12

Hebrews 4:11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The Word of God will offer the answer that goes to the heart of the problem, but we must do something with it. Go back up one verse to Hebrews 4:11.

To get to the heart of the problem we must be diligent about obeying the instruction of the Lord.

- E. How can I receive complete counsel to grow to be all God wants me to be?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Again go up to the verses preceding this one to

2 Timothy 3:14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them,

This is why James says,

James 1:6–8

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Faith in God's Word means you believe it is true to the extent that you will actually do it.

If you do not do it, it is because you doubt that it is true or that it will work for you.

So you may dabble in the learning of it,

- **trying to pick and choose what you want,**
- **but not really seeking to apply it all to your life and practice it.**
- **So you are like a wave tossed this way and that.**
- **That is what happens to the double-minded person.**
 - **Faith enough to become acquainted with some Scripture.**
 - **Not enough faith to put it to practice in their lives.**

The Holy Spirit says through James

James 1:7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

Do you want to know what is right? Do you want to know how to do what is right?

The Bible will give you God's answer, God's wisdom.

But you have to believe it enough to do it.

It will work for anyone.

It will work every time.

But you have to work it.