

James – Life after Faith

James 1:5

“I Don’t Know, but I Know Who to Ask.”

Outline:

I. SOMETHING WE CAN COMMONLY REQUIRE

A. Indispensable to us

B. Insufficient in us

II. SOMEWHERE WE CAN CONTINUALLY RESORT

A. The position James describes

B. The practice James describes

III. SOMEONE WE CAN CONFIDENTLY REQUEST

A. God’s giving is described

B. God’s giving is declared

1. In 1956, Pauline Phillips started an advice column under the pen name, Abigail Van Buren. Most people, however, know her simply as “Dear Abby.” Abby’s column is now written by Pauline’s daughter, Jeanne, who receives over 10,000 letters and emails each week.ⁱ

2. People from all over the world write in to Dear Abby seeking advice on any number of issues in life. Through the years, she has received all kinds of weird and funny letters. One of Abby’s favorites came from a woman years ago who wrote:

“Dear Abby,

My husband burns the hair out of his nose with a lighted match, and he thinks I’m crazy because I voted for Barry Goldwater.”ⁱⁱ

3. While there is nothing wrong with asking someone else for advice, the child of God has no reason to rely on the wisdom of man.

4. In James 1:5, we are reminded that even when we do not know the answer, we do know Who to ask. James tells us that when we are lacking in wisdom, we can ask God, and He will give us what we need.

5. In verse 4, James reminded us that God was working through the circumstances of our lives to make us “...*perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*”

6. While God desires to get us to the point where we are equipped with everything we need in order to be all that He has called us to be, He also knows that we are all – everyone of us - a work in progress.

7. Until we reach that point of maturity and completion, we can turn again and again to verses such as the one before us now, and we can ask God to give us what we need.

8. Looking at verse 5, I want you to notice with me some truths to which James points us. These truths remind us of the potential and privilege we have to turn to God when we don't have the answers we need.

9. Notice first of all, James reminds us of:

I. SOMETHING WE CAN COMMONLY REQUIRE

1. Verse 5 begins with the phrase, *"If any of you lack wisdom..."* When you read that phrase, it sounds as if James is suggesting that there are just a handful among us who might need the virtue of wisdom.

2. If the truth be told, there are times when all of us are lacking in wisdom. It is not so much a matter of "if" you lack wisdom, as it is "when" you lack wisdom.

3. James reminds us of something we all require at times in our lives. I want you to notice with me a couple of things about this "wisdom" that we often lack.

4. I would say first of all, this wisdom is:

A. Indispensable to us

1. It is important that we understand the meaning of this word "wisdom". We must be careful that we don't confuse it with knowledge.

2. Knowledge and wisdom are not the same things. Someone may have a head full of knowledge, and lack the wisdom to apply that knowledge to their life.

3. One old writer says that "knowledge becomes baggage" when we don't have the wisdom to apply it. He goes on to say that, "Wisdom does the right thing in the right way..."^{viii}

4. So then, this wisdom that James speaks of in verse 5, is not mere knowledge, it is the ability to know what to do and how to do it.

5. Could there be a more indispensable tool in life than the ability to know what to do and how to do it?

6. When a wrong step in life could prove to be disastrous and tragic for your future; when a simple decision could mean the difference between success and failure; can you think of anything more precious in that moment than wisdom?

7. The writer of Proverbs says of wisdom, *"She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her (Proverbs 3:15)."*

8. When James speaks of wisdom, he is describing a virtue that each of us must have to make it through this life.

9. Notice not only that this wisdom is *indispensable to us*, but notice also further that this wisdom is:

B. Insufficient in us

1. Look again at this opening phrase in verse 5. James says, “*If any of you lack wisdom...*” Mark that word, “lack”.
2. It is translated from a word that literally means “a deficit”. It speaks of a shortage of something, or a deficiency in a particular area.
3. In spite of all our advancements in education and technology, still the majority of people live with a deficit of wisdom.
4. We have more college educated people than any previous generation, and yet we seem less able to deal with life’s problems than our grandparents did.
5. We have technologies designed to simplify and streamline our lives, and yet we are busier and more stressed than ever before.
6. We are more educated, medicated, integrated, and sophisticated, but most people still don’t know what to do with their lives, and the situations that they face.
7. In spite of all of our intelligence, we are still insufficient in the wisdom that comes “from above”.
8. One day, the generators at Henry Ford’s automobile plant stopped working. His maintenance men could not figure out the problem. Ford called the man who had designed them.
9. The man came, and shortly had the generators working again. He sent Ford a bill for \$10,000. When Ford asked him why the bill was so high, the man sent him this reply: “For tinkering with the generators: \$10. For knowing where to tinker: \$9,990.” Ford paid the bill.
10. When James says, “*If any of you lack wisdom...*” he points us to something we often need – the wisdom to know what needs to be done and how to do it.
11. Notice a second truth we draw from this verse. James points us not only to *something we can commonly require*, but notice also secondly that he points us to:

II. SOMEWHERE WE CAN CONTINUALLY RESORT

1. Look again at verse 5. James writes and says, *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God...”*

2. Though it may not be immediately clear, in that phrase, *“...let him ask of God...”*, James is pointing us to a very important truth for the Christian life.

3. There is a place to which every believer can go - a resource to which every believer can turn - when they lack the wisdom they need for the world in which they live.

4. Let me show you what I mean. Notice in this phrase:

A. The position James describes

1. My old seminary professor, Dr. James Gee, used to talk about how much of our theology is tied up in the prepositions.

2. That is certainly true in this verse. Look at that phrase, *“...let him ask of God...”*, and notice specifically those two words “of God.”

3. In the original language, the word translated “of” is the Greek preposition that means “beside”. It describes something that is very close – side-by-side – with something else.

4. With that in mind, one writer translates the phrase this way: *“...let him keep on presenting his request in the presence of God...”*^{iv}

5. Think of that! The Word of God teaches us through the Lord Jesus, we have access to the very presence of God. Through Jesus, we can literally be “beside” the Father.

6. When I do not know where to go or what to do, I can resort to the relationship I have with Jesus Christ! I can call upon my Father, and speak to him from the close, intimate position of His Son!

7. James reminds us of our close relationship with God because of the fact that we have been made to, *“...sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6).”*

8. Some people pray as if they are sending an email. They compose their message, hit the send key, and then worry about when or if God will check his messages.

9. If you know Christ, you don't have to email God. You can simply speak your request directly into His ear.

10. James reminds us of the privilege we have to enter the very presence of God with our requests. As James describes this place we can continually go, notice not only the position James describes, but notice also:

B. The practice James describes

1. Look again at verse 5. James says, “...*let him ask of God...*” Notice that word “ask”.
2. In the original language, the tense of this word indicates something we are to do continually and repeatedly.
3. In other words, we don't just ask God once for the wisdom we need, we are to ask Him continually.
4. James is describing the act of persevering prayer. We are to pray for wisdom, and keep praying for it as we need it.
5. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, there are some 11 vaccines recommended for children before they reach the age of 6.^v
6. Fortunately, many of those vaccines only need to be administered one time, and the child is protected for life.
7. The “wisdom” that James speaks of in verse 5 is not a sort of vaccine that we need only once. It is something we need continually, and should request repeatedly.
8. Each new day greets us with a new set of challenges and decisions. James says “If you need wisdom, keep asking God.”
9. Notice a third truth we draw from this verse. James points us not only to *something we can commonly require*, and *somewhere we can continually resort*, but notice also finally we see:

III. SOMEONE WE CAN CONFIDENTLY REQUEST

1. Look again at verse 5. James says, “*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*”
2. Knowing that we often require wisdom from above, and pointing us to the access we have to God, James goes on to remind us of the kind of God that offers us the wisdom we need.

3. In the original language, the words are so ordered that James actually says, "Let him ask the giving God..." That is a true statement! We serve a giving God!

4. Therefore, when we come to Him and ask Him for wisdom, we can be confident that He will give us just what we need!

5. Notice a couple of things James teaches us about our giving God. First of all, notice that:

A. God's giving is described

1. When we need wisdom, James says we can continually ask God, "...*that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not...*"

2. As James describes the way in which God gives us wisdom, we find that when we come to God, *He will not short us*.

3. Notice that word "liberally". It is translated from a word that literally means "to spread out, or to stretch." The idea is that God gives generously!

4. In other words, God is not greedy! He will not ration out wisdom; he will pour it out! He will not short you when you ask Him for wisdom.

5. As James describes God's giving, we see also that *He will not shun us*. Look at the phrase, "...*and upbraideth not...*"

6. The word translated "upbraideth" literally means to rebuke. The idea is that God will not answer us saying, "Didn't I help you yesterday? Aren't you ever going to learn? You are kind of slow, aren't you?"

7. When we come into the presence of God, asking Him to give us His divine wisdom, we are not coming to a greedy, grouchy God, who will grudgingly mete out to us a little insight.

8. James says, "God gives happily!" The reason God loves a cheerful giver is because He is one Himself!

9. Notice something else about this God to whom we can confidently bring our requests. Notice not only that His giving is described, but notice also that:

B. God's giving is declared

1. Verse 5 finishes with the statement, "...*and it shall be given him.*" James says, "If any of you have a shortage of wisdom, ask God, and it shall given to you."

2. Here is a declaration from the inspired Word of God. James declares that when we ask God for wisdom, He will give it to us!

3. With this promise planted in our hearts, why would we ever waste another moment of our lives worrying about what we are going to do, and wrestling with a lack of wisdom?

4. So many of you sit outside wisdom's house, wishing you could know what is inside. All along, the door is unlocked, and God invites you to come in.

5. James says, "...let him ask...and it shall be given him." God has declared his willingness to give wisdom to those who will simply ask Him.

*God knows that you don't know,
The right thing to do; the right way to go,*

*So He has offered to those who ask,
The wisdom needed for every task,*

*There's no need to struggle with a decision,
When He has promised His wise provision.
-TDT*

1. This week I found an interesting article with some good advice for politicians. The article was entitled, "What to do when you don't know the answer."

2. The opening line of the article says, "When you don't know the answer to a question, just say you don't know – as simple as that."^{vi}

3. What is good advice for a politician is also good advice for the child of God. Even though we like to think we know what we are doing, at times we must admit that we don't know.

4. In James 1:5, however we are reminded that even when we don't know, we do know Who to ask.

5. *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."*

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