

THE SEARCH



WISDOM

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The Search For Wisdom

James 1:5(KJV) - 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.

The search for wisdom is over! If we want wisdom, let us ask God for it and He will give it to us. We don't need to bathe in any distilled water, hike to some high mountain to meet a "wise man" or smoke any special herb. All we need to do is ask for what we want and then listen as He gives us the answer.

How do I ask for wisdom? There are many ways to ask or place a demand for wisdom. The first and most obvious is making a direct petition to God. We can go directly to God and stand on James 1:5 requesting His wisdom in a particular situation. However, for us to hear and effectively carry out His instructions we need to calm down and accept His peace in the situation.

Isaiah 30:15(KJV) - For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not.

For example, in a very tense situation, I tend to get flustered initially. Consequently, I have to purposefully calm down so that I could ask the Lord for His wisdom in the situation. It is only at that time that I could effectively hear exactly what He wants me to know.

The second way to put a demand on God's wisdom is to take it out of His already written Word. Search the scriptures for answers using a simple concordance and some Godly intuition. You will be pleasantly surprised at what you can find and how easy it is to find it.

I have always been amazed at how easy it is for my father to locate a relevant scripture in the Word from his memory. However, I must acknowledge the time that he spends searching the Word and depositing the scriptures in his heart. Therefore, when he needs to make a withdrawal his account is well stocked.

I started to do that so now I have a couple deposits in my own account. I dare not compare my account balance to my father's but I do have a Bible and a concordance that I use to get all the scriptures I need. Always remember that God's wisdom is freely

given to us in His Word and he sent the Holy Spirit to show us what is freely given to us by God.

The third way to receive God's wisdom is through your heavenly language.

1 Corinthians 2:6-7 (KJV) - Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: 7But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:

1 Corinthians 14:2(KJV) - For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.

If you want the cutting edge of God's wisdom, learn to speak in the language offered to you by God. Every morning, add some time to your schedule for speaking in your heavenly language. You can then listen to God's wisdom as you release your most Holy faith to receive the manifestation of those words.

I know some people don't believe that but guess what? Some people don't believe in God also. Does that change the truth? I think not! Therefore, I choose to believe the Bible and not popular opinion.

In sum, Paul says in Romans 8:28, "*And we know that all these things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*" Let us use all three ways to capture God's wisdom and live the good life everyday.

Get Wisdom and Discernment

Wisdom is a tricky gift to manage. In the Garden of Eden, one temptation of the forbidden fruit was that it would grant wisdom like God's: "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it." [Genesis 3:6] Instead of merely asking God for wisdom, Adam and Eve tried to short-circuit the process, and got burnt by it.

Thousands of years later, King Solomon of Israel took the right steps in seeking after wisdom: he asked God for it. "At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. "Now, O

LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this." [1 Kings 3:5-10]

Like he is so often when we ask for beneficial gifts, God was pleased by this request, and honored it." So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for--both riches and honor--so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.'" [1 Kings 3:11-14]

Solomon's prayer of asking for wisdom is a good model to follow: he thanked God for his faithfulness to his father and himself, acknowledged his weaknesses in wisdom, and admitted that only God's wisdom could govern the Israelites. And God honored that, making him one of Israel's greatest Kings. Solomon certainly wasn't perfect-- he loved women, especially foreign women. Like his father David, he was not able to marry just one woman, but instead tried to emulate other nation's Kings by marrying many.

Speaking of his wives, the author of 1 Kings notes this: "They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray." [1 Kings 11:2-3] And in this, Solomon's wisdom failed him: he followed other Gods, and did evil in the eyes of the Lord by that. That broke the first commandment-- No other Gods before me [Exodus 20:3]-- and for that, Israel split between the northern Israel and the southern Judah after Solomon's reign.

Despite the failings of Solomon's wisdom, we can still learn from his example. First off, trying to emulate his having hundreds of wives is flat-out wrong: marriage is for one man, one woman. Next, as noted above, and later in the New Testament, God's people are not to be "unequally yoked"-- married to a nonbeliever by choice. [Conversion of one spouse after marriage does not invalidate that marriage: "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives." -- 1 Peter 3:1-2; I'd say that the reverse case of a believing husband is also true.]

Finally, we should stay close to God's word. The Ten Commandments given in Exodus 20 are valid for everyone, even Kings and Presidents. If you can't list those ten commandments off the top of your head, I'd suggest some time refreshing your

memory so that you do know what God certainly disapproves of. Beyond that, regular reading of the Bible helps remind you of God's words and teaching.

When I first read through the Bible, I did that cover to cover-- starting in Genesis, and plowing straight through until the end of Revelation, a few chapters per day. This isn't recommended for everyone-- some get bogged down in the raw data of Numbers, others in other places of the Bible. [I personally didn't mind Numbers at all, but had lots more trouble with the Psalms; I suppose that says a lot about me.] A "staggered" approach works to get through the trouble books-- take a few chapters each day of the trouble book, and a few chapters of something else more "interesting."

The first time you read through the Bible, I highly recommend a NIV Study Bible or the like, which explains the background of each book, people and events. This is especially useful towards the end of the Old Testament, where the prophetic books (Isaiah thru Malachi) aren't interspersed with the historical events that precipitated most of them recorded in the more historical books of Genesis through Nehemiah.

Getting back to the study of wisdom, Solomon extolled its virtues in the Proverbs, with such comments as "For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you. Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse," [Proverbs 2:10-12] and "Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding." [Proverbs 4:5-7]

A far more insightful comment on wisdom comes from Job: "The fear of the Lord--that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding." [Job 28:28] While we may be sons of God, we are not to get arrogant about that, or ignore him, as he still rules over this universe and will call all humans to account for their sins. [Revelation 20:12] God is not capricious, and won't smite you for sinning (we'd all be dead in a few nanoseconds if that was the case), but we must continually live in respect to God and stay away from the evil that he hates. This is one of the aspects of wisdom that Solomon certainly tripped up on. Like all good gifts, pure wisdom is one of God's attributes, and while we can only experience it in diluted form, we do need to acknowledge him as the source of our wisdom, and try to draw closer to him.

We are not to be based purely on world's wisdom, which can't figure out God's ways, because it's not wise to them: "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength." [1 Corinthians 1:22-25] The Greeks, the intellectuals of the day, couldn't understand why God would send his son as a sacrifice for others, instead of compelling humans to believe.

Even to this day, the message of the Gospel is almost foolishness to some: it seems too simple, not enough, to confess sins to Jesus, ask for forgiveness, and invite him into your heart. The world teaches people to strive after money, power, and control, while God teaches service, forgiveness, and submission. But, as Paul said above, God's foolishness is far more powerful than man's wisdom-- one will get you temporary gain and much pain, while the other leads to eternal life. James says this about God's wisdom: "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere." [James 3:17]

So, if wisdom is something we should have, how do we go about getting it? James reminds us to take the Solomonic route: "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." [James 1:5] Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, said this: "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God." [Philippians 1:9-11]

Wisdom is from God, and provides discernment as to what is Godly, what is merely human, and what comes from Satan. Wisdom is given to us through the Holy Spirit, as Paul says elsewhere: "To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom ..." [1 Corinthians 12:8a] We need wisdom more and more these days, as immoral behavior becomes the norm-- wisdom on how to deal with it in our lives, and wisdom as to how to oppose it.

We also need wisdom to deal with Satan's plans and schemes: "If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven--if there was anything to forgive--I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes." [2 Corinthians 2:10-11] Paul aware of Satan's schemes. With wisdom, so can you also be. Are you aware, or is Satan just some bad guy that you know that you need to resist, but don't know much beyond that? Pray for wisdom, pray for understanding, as God gives that.

Finally, Paul comments on how we can daily seek wisdom: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will." [Romans 12:1-2] By continually seeking after God, his word, and following his desires, we will be granted more and more wisdom to deal with his word, his will, and our lives.

Intro.--James opens his letter by immediately addressing the difficult problem of testing in the believer's life. (Review verses 2-4.)

God's purpose in all He does is to bring His children to maturity as spiritual adults.

Testing and trials are necessary for us to mature.

But there is a further question to be dealt with in the area of trials. I may have the knowledge of the facts that have been given in verses 2-4, but still find myself struggling with how to cope with certain pressure situations.

In verses 5-8, James instructs his readers on how to get the wisdom necessary to function under pressure in a biblical way. He deals with two essential matters:

- I. **Where to Go for Wisdom -- 1:5**
- II. **How to Go for Wisdom -- 1:6-8**

I. Where to Go for Wisdom -- 1:5

if any of you -- The way this is stated (first-class condition) assumes that they do indeed have this need. People undergoing trials need special wisdom from God to face them.

Lacks -- This connects with what James said at the end of verse 4, that it is God's intention that we be *lacking in nothing*.

Wisdom -- Wisdom is sometimes defined as "the right use of knowledge." It involves applying the truth that we know to the situations that we confront. In the present context James is talking about the ability to take the truth of verses 3 and 4 and apply it to the trials that we are facing. This is a supernatural ability to see the hand of God at work bringing us to perfection in Christ. This perception and understanding do not "just happen."

Let him ask of God (present act imperative) -- All who are undergoing trials are commanded to ask God for wisdom in facing them. I need to know how to bear up under the burden and the perception to appreciate its necessity.

All wisdom centers in God. Without a knowledge of Him, we are unable to understand the issues and circumstances of life (cf. **Prov. 9:10; 2:6-10**).

A recognition of my need and a willingness to be continually seeking (present tense) wisdom from God are crucial to receiving the needed wisdom. There is no room here for self-sufficiency or spiritual pride.

Who gives to all men generously -- A proper understanding of the character of God will be an encouragement to us in seeking wisdom from Him. He is a giving God.

Without reproach -- We need have no fear of rejection when we come to God for wisdom. He does not ridicule us because we have had to come so many times. Our past failures are not brought up to shame us.

It will be given to him--The wisdom we seek will be ours (cf. **Matt. 7:7-11**).

So a proper view of the character of God as a giving God will encourage us in coming to Him for wisdom. However, if we expect to receive the wisdom we need, we must come in faith.

II. How to Go for Wisdom -- 1:6-8

Let him ask in faith -- We must trust that God is able and willing to do as He has promised.

Without any doubting -- There can be no wavering between two opinions. I cannot be divided within myself, believing that God can and will do as He has promised and at the same time questioning whether He will.

Yet this is the very situation in which we often find ourselves when we are under great pressure. This trial seems in danger of overwhelming us and we begin to wonder whether God really loves us, whether He is doing what is best for us, whether He will see us through as He promised.

These questions must be put out of our minds as we come to Him. We must come in full reliance upon Him and His promises. We come as His children asking Him to do as He promised.

The one who doubts is said to be like a wave of the sea. That wave is at the mercy and whim of the wind.

A person whose faith is not firmly placed in God and in His character as the giving God lacks stability in his life. He is at the whim of the circumstances that blow upon him.

For a time there is confidence and joy in God. Then, as trials come and persist, there is doubt and wavering. It is a life of instability. Every trial will bring doubt and confusion into the life. **1:7** --

That man -- James disassociates himself from the doubting man.

Expect (oiestho, present mid imperative) -- This word implies thought which is based on feeling rather than fact (cf. **Phil. 1:17**). This man will not receive anything from the Lord. **1:8** --

Double-minded (lit. "two-souled.") - Here is a person with a "split personality." He is trying to live as two people; one who trusts God and one who does not. The background

for what James is saying is in the Old Testament where a person is instructed to love God with an undivided heart (cf. **Deut. 6:5; 10:29**).

In contrast, there is the hypocrite who has a double heart (cf. **Ps. 12:2**). This is a person who is trying to look to God and the world at the same time.

Unstable in all his ways -- This person's life is characterized by instability. That inner firmness which gives purpose and direction to life is lacking. Trials and pressure simply emphasize the instability and make it worse. These are strong words given after great reassurance regarding God's purpose and plan in trials.

- We can be sure beyond a doubt that God will give wisdom for trials to those who ask of Him.
- We must ask in faith, believing that He is able and willing. There is no "plan B" for us as believers.

Wisdom for the Trials of Life

One of life's most commonly asked questions is, "Why does God allow His children to go through difficult, trying, painful times in life?" We recognize that God is all-powerful and could prevent these trials if He chose to do so. Yet, He often does not. Therefore, there must be some purpose for them, some divine reason for not sparing us these hardships. Once we begin to understand God's purpose for these things, we will be able to stand strong through any storm of life.

James 1:1-12 issues a serious challenge to every believer. The first thing we should notice is James's assurance in verse 2 that all Christians will in fact face trials of many kinds. The author leaves no room for doubt; he alludes to "when you encounter various trials," which indicates the inevitability of such ordeals. Therefore, we should not ask how we can avoid trials—because we cannot—but rather we should ask God to show us how to deal with them when they appear.

The second thing we should notice in verse 2 is the seemingly ridiculous instruction to "count it all joy" whenever hardships assault our lives. This is a preposterous statement; trials and joy simply do not go together. Tears, discouragement, disillusionment, despair . . . these are the things that we associate with trials. But joy? James must have known that this would be a contradiction to our natural human reasoning; so, there must be an answer beyond what we perceive.

In James 1:5, in the midst of a discussion on trials, the author seems to change the subject mid-stream. He has just explained how trials produce spiritual endurance and maturity, and then he says, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God . . . and it

will be given to him."

Rather than switching topics, James is actually making a consistent argument regarding trials. In order for us to be able to "count it all joy" in the face of trials, we must view the matter from God's perspective. This is what wisdom does. Beyond simply understanding God's reasoning, we also must actively apply that wisdom. When we do this, we become more able to evaluate people and circumstances and are thus better prepared to make sound decisions.

A primary function of wisdom is to help us discern the source of our trials. Discovering the source is very helpful in understanding God's purpose in each hardship. Sometimes, our trials come from making wrong decisions ourselves. These occasions are tough realizations because these are times when we cannot blame the problem on anyone else.

A second source of trials is the persecution of others. As we strive to live in a godly manner, Satan will begin looking for new ways to attack us. One effective assault is through other people sent to hurt, mock, or distract us.

Another uncontrollable source is the simple fact that we live in a fallen world. There are earthquakes, floods, disease, suffering, war, and hardship in the world today that cannot be prevented.

A troublesome issue for many people is that, regardless of their specific source, God allows each and every trial that we encounter. Beyond that, He sometimes sends the trials Himself. This is why James instructs believers to ask God for wisdom in the midst of their hardship. Wisdom enables us to clearly see the source of the trial, and when we know the source, we are better prepared to evaluate, handle, and grow through the specific issue.

Once we understand the source, we need wisdom to enable us to discern the purpose for the trials. In this, wisdom helps us to question the heart of God by asking, "Lord, why have you allowed this? What would you have me learn through this?"

Some people are not comfortable with the idea of asking God "why?" I assure you, though, that you will not disturb God at all by asking Him any question you wish. The fact is we need to ask Him why certain trials happen, because we want to extract as much good from our suffering as possible.

First, God allows our trials in order to test our faith. This is made perfectly clear in James 1:3, "Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance." The word "testing" here means to be tested and found proven; that is, God is testing our faith in order to prove its strength.

Unproven, untried faith is practically worthless. How do you know what you can face in life if your faith has not been tested? 1 Peter 1:6-7 explains this valuable aspect, "In this

you greatly rejoice . . . you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith . . . may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

The testing of our faith produces spiritual maturity, which leads to endurance. This enables us to withstand any assault, no matter what form the trials take. Being tested by God strengthens us so that we can face trial after trial and still endure.

Second, God allows our trials in order to test our devotion to Jesus Christ. True devotion demands that we follow Jesus faithfully, regardless of our circumstances. Will you obey Him when you do not understand why bad things are happening? Will you obey Him when things are not going your way? These things are discovered during periods of trial and testing.

Third, God allows trials in order to purify our lives. Trials have a way of putting pressure on us in the most secret parts of our being, bringing hidden sins, bad habits, and areas of neglect to the surface. These things must be dealt with in order to become the mature Christians God wants us to be.

Fourth, our trials give God an opportunity to demonstrate His sustaining power for His children in tough times. This is an amazing testimony to unbelievers, who may witness you going through a horribly difficult situation while still maintaining the peace of the Holy Spirit.

Fifth, a major purpose for our trials is to produce Christ-like character within us. Our trials reveal to us that we cannot live the Christian life apart from Him. This means that the Christian life is not made up of different "good things" that we do, but is actually Jesus Christ living in and through each one of us. This requires our total surrender to His will, so that our reactions to stress, trial, and suffering are actually His reactions lived out through our lives.

Finally, trials equip us for service in the kingdom of God for the sake of others. Second Corinthians 1:4 makes this point clear, "[God] comforts us in our entire affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." Therefore, God is using our trials to make us more useful in helping others.

By fully understanding and identifying with someone else's pain, we will be able to reach out to them in a way in which someone else may be unprepared for. The key to this type of service is simply knowing first hand what the other person is going through. If we have been through it ourselves, we will have an intimate understanding of what the hurting individual needs.

As we have seen, wisdom's true value comes in its application. With that in mind, take a moment to review ten ways that a right understanding of God's purposes for trials might lead us to the right response.

1. We must be persuaded that God is in control of the timing and intensity of our trials.
2. We must realize that God has a specific purpose for each trial in life.
3. We must understand that each trial is designed to meet a specific need that God sees in our lives.
4. We must accept that each trial is going to result in our own good if we respond in faith.
5. We must discover how each trial can strengthen our faith by proving that we can depend on the Lord for all of our needs.
6. We must rejoice in that each trial is an opportunity for God to demonstrate His power to sustain us under tremendous pressure.
7. We must submit ourselves to the development of Christ-like character that results from our trials.
8. We must take advantage of our trials' usefulness in measuring our spiritual growth. For example, we may realize that we are capable of handling a powerful hardship that would have crippled us only a year or two ago. This is because our continuing trials have taught us that God will indeed empower us to prevail.
9. We must be convinced that God will walk us through every step of the trial (Hebrews 13:5).
10. We must have faith that by His grace and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, we will not only survive, but we will also conquer over each trial.

If you are a child of God, you have the means by which to stand firm in the face of any trial. Trust that God has a reason for your sufferings, and submit yourself to whatever He desires to teach you. The road may be rocky, but a wise response will lead you into the joy He has promised.