

Trusting the Wisdom of God

James 1:5-8

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I spoke yesterday at a men's retreat and I'm hoping that the ladies will forgive me if I speak a little more to the men here today. But ladies, don't tune me out because there is application here for you as well.

Trusting the Wisdom of God. In my heart of hearts I know that I am too often disinclined to trust the wisdom of God. Rather, I am naturally inclined to trust myself. I much prefer to go with my instincts. I am incredibly biased to my own opinion on things. It is in my DNA to trust me. Why am I this way? In the deep recesses of my heart, I want to be God. I can hear you thinking, *Who is this guy? This is the Senior Pastor? I think we visited the wrong church this morning!*

Before you make a quick escape, can I ask you to look honestly into your own heart? What do you see there? A desire to be in charge. To be right. To be in control. To be looked to as a bastion of knowledge and wisdom. To project to the world around you that all your ducks are in a row and life couldn't be better. The conversation at most men's retreats goes like this: "How you doing?"

"Great! Never been better."

"How's your wife?"

"She's totally happy, all the time. With her it's love, love, love. She is one happy woman."

"How are the kids?"

"Basically perfect. Did you see our Christmas letter? They are such darling, smiling children. That's the way it is at the house all the time. It's crazy good."

"Work?"

"They're finally realizing how lucky they are to have me."

"How are things spiritually?"

"I'm at the men's retreat, am I not? I could be home watching Big Ten football like less spiritual men, but no, I've got right priorities and a DVR."

As men, we project the best image we can hoping that someone might actually believe that we are in charge, self-sufficient, and almost divine.

When life is good and all is well, we seem to get along by our wisdom just fine. But what inevitably happens in a fallen world such as ours? Life eventually turns in painful directions. Our health fails us. Our marriage fails us. Our children disappoint us. Our employer pink slips us. Or in a moment of mental clarity, we see how quickly life is passing us by; the gut, the wrinkles, our children laughing at our wardrobe choices. The last words of Frank Sinatra on earth resonate with every thinking man today, *"I'm losing."*

It is hard for us men to acknowledge something....*We need help.* Men, let's try and say those words out loud together....That comes out hard. This is not the main point, but a foundational one:

Salvation by Faith in a Crucified Savior is Counterintuitive to Us

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles. (1 Corinthians 1:21-23, emphasis added)

The gospel is a stumbling block. The Greek word for "stumbling block" is *scandalon* defined as, *that which gives offense or causes revulsion, that which arouses opposition, an object of anger or disapproval. (A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, p.753.)* We get the word "scandalous" from it. The cross and salvation by faith in Christ are offensive to our human way of thinking and they rub the natural man the wrong way because they require a man to do the exact opposite of what men and our pride want to do – ask God for help.

Bill Maher came out with a movie a while ago entitled, *Religulous! Religion + Ridiculous = Religious*. Religion is ridiculous to Bill Maher for all the same reasons Paul explains here. It strikes our sensibilities the wrong way because it elevates God and humbles us and we don't like that. It's hard to admit we need help.

Yet we clearly do. It's not too different than those Chilean miners stuck in the mine – 33 men; 540 square feet. No showers. No deodorant. You want to talk about the ultimate men's retreat! I laughed as I read a news report on CNN.com that stated very matter-of-factly that they were refraining from sending the customary Chilean food staple of Chilean beans down to the men because "of the possibility of giving them intestinal gas."

Do those Chilean miners have any problem acknowledging that they need help? No. Why? Their situation is so obvious. They need help and without help, they will never see the light of day. They can't save themselves. They need a rescue.

That is a good picture of where we are spiritually. We are in a collapsed mine. We need help from outside. The gospel is God's rescue plan for sinners. Christ's death on the cross and resurrection from the dead is a kind of divine rescue shaft. Those Chilean men will have a decision to make once the shaft is dug and the rescue cage is sent down. *Do I get in or not?* That won't be a problem; they clearly see their desperate need. Christ is the wisdom of God extended to us to rescue us from judgment and hell and save us to life eternal for all who believe.

This is foundational to *Trusting the Wisdom of God*. The faith needed to trust God in daily life is the same faith needed to trust God for eternal life. This is good news, but it's old news. We don't need to find some magic new kind of trust. If you are a true Christian, you've got the trust already; it just needs a new application. It's the same faith that begins the journey applied daily to the challenges of the journey. If I can trust God's wisdom in Christ for what happens to me after I die, why can't I trust God's wisdom for all the things that happen before it? How?

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. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. (James 1:5-8, NIV)

In verses 2-4, James tells us to consider trials as good things because of what God develops in us through them. Trials produce perseverance which we have to have to finish our spiritual race and experience eternal life. It is especially in trials that we realize our need. We ask, *God, what are you doing? Why has this happened? What should I do? Help!* James tells us what to do.

Ask God for Wisdom (James 1:5)

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God.

If we are going to ask God for wisdom, we'd better make sure we know what it is. Wisdom is not knowing a lot about something. Wisdom is not self-confidence in the trial. Wisdom is not having all the facts straight about something.

Wisdom is the ability to live according to God's truth in the day-to-day.

This is what Solomon prized so much that he wrote to his sons:

- *Wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.* (Proverbs 8:11)
- *For whoever finds [wisdom] finds life and obtains favor from the LORD.* (Proverbs 8:35)

If you find wisdom, you find life. Why? Wisdom is the appropriating of God's truth into my mind and desires so that my life is lived out consistent with God's wisdom and will. That character trait is worth more than any amount of money. One author said, "Wisdom sees the meaning and significance of things." That's good. The opposite of the wise man in Proverbs is the fool who never is able to really understand things. Life happens to him. He lacks judgment. He spurns discipline. He's wise in his own eyes.

The wise man has the discernment to view life through the grid of God's truth and to live according to that truth in the day-to-day. Jesus spoke of this, saying that the wise man builds his house on the rock and not on the sand (Matthew 7:24ff). God's truth and wisdom, His Holy Word, and the life lived by it is a sure foundation. This is wisdom.

Let's be honest, what happens in a trial is that we feel suddenly bewildered. Life is going along fine and then some major issue arises and suddenly everything is confusing. *How could this happen? What does this mean? Does God love me? Why would God allow this? What does the future hold? Am I going to make it? Have I done something wrong? Which way should we go?* It is so easy for fear and discouragement to set in. Trials are like bombs going off in our lives and we struggle to pull the pieces together. You hear that from people, *Life doesn't make any sense anymore.* What do they mean by that? *I can't put these pieces into a framework that makes sense.*

This is why the biggest thing we need in a **medical** trial is not healing and in a **financial** trial is not more money and in a **vocational** trial is not a job and in a singleness trial is not a spouse and in a marital trial is not a new spouse. What I need more than anything else is understanding the trial for what God is doing in it and confidence that He is going to bring me through it in whatever way He deems best. That takes wisdom. It takes wisdom to ask for wisdom.

Where do we go to get it? This is great news for us. Like Solomon did, we can ask God for it and He will give it to us. There are two characteristics of His wisdom giving:

Generously/Abundantly/Freely/Overflowing

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. (Verse 5)

Here is a wonderful promise. When we need wisdom, God promises to give it to us. He doesn't hold back. He isn't cheap. He is generous to His children. Remember, He is our heavenly Father and He is completely for us.

If your Son was struggling through something and asked you for help, would you help him? You'd do all you could to give him what he needed. Imagine being God and having all the resources your children could ever need and one of them asks for your help. What would you do? *"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!"* (Matthew 7:11) God wants to give us wisdom, we just have to ask.

Without Finding Fault

Let's get this straight in our minds about our God. When we ask Him for wisdom, He's not in heaven thinking, *What are you, stupid? What's wrong with you, can't you see what's going on here? Buck up! Be a man!*

No. Scripture tells us that He remembers that we are but dust. *He is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love* (Psalm 145:8). When we turn to Him for help, He doesn't feel anything but love. He wants to help you.

Be Confident in God's Desire/Ability to Bring us Through (James 1:6)

But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt.

We just got done saying that God is overflowing in giving us wisdom. However, there is a condition. When we ask, *We must believe and not doubt.* This verse troubled me for years. I have read this verse and have applied it with a sense in my heart that when I pray, *I really, really, really do believe God will answer the prayer.* I try to generate real belief that God will do what I have asked. Here's the problem we have. We think that if we believe enough, God will do *exactly what we've asked Him to do.* So when God doesn't answer exactly as we wanted, we conclude we must not have had enough faith.

To *believe and not doubt* is a question of dependence and trust in the asking. The word there for doubt means *one who is divided in mind and who wavers between two opinions.* (Gaebelien, p. 169.) Am I trusting God to meet my needs even if He doesn't answer the way I requested or on the timeline I desire OR am I trusting me, someone else, my money, my connections, my wits, or anything else? This is not a question of what's in our prayer, but what is in our heart.

There is a great example of this tucked away in Joshua 5 that will resonate with men. The Israelites have just crossed the Jordan River and are a few miles away from Jericho, one of the greatest military bases/cities in antiquity. No doubt Jericho spies are peeking over cliffs, watching their every move. Back in Jericho, the Canaanites are sharpening their swords and making war plans. Israel is in a very precarious and dangerous situation. God says to Joshua, *Take flint knives and circumcise the army.* Can you hear Joshua? *Um. What? God, all the men would be helpless for a few days. Jericho will wipe us out.* Can you hear Joshua making the announcement to the army? *Men, I know I'm kind of new at this leader thing*

but God told me that before we go to war, we're going to circumcise all of you. I would imagine that didn't go over so well. Talk about leadership starting out badly! Actually, this was an indication of Joshua's commitment to trust the wisdom of God. It was possibly the dumbest move in military history followed closely by marching around a military fortress and blowing trumpets. After the mass circumcision, I think that one was no big deal. Joshua and Israel had settled the matter in their hearts. We will trust God's wisdom no matter what.

When we trust God, God is free to grant us wisdom and success because He is free to glorify Himself in our dependence on Him.

Consider the Instability Not Trusting God produces (Verses 7-8)

James goes on to say, *That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, **unstable in all he does.*** (Emphasis added)

"That man" is the wavering man trying to decide if he can trust God or should trust himself. Or trying to do both at the same time; trying to look both ways at the same time. Ever try to look two ways at the same time? We can't do it. It is impossible to look to God/trust God and to trust in ourselves simultaneously. Yet spiritually we do it all the time when we try to act like we're trusting in God and really our bottom line is that we are using man's wisdom and our resources to meet our need. James calls that being "double-minded." Two-faced. So guess what God does to remedy that in my life? He eventually brings trials into my life that forces me to go one way or the other. He does this to get me to surrender my self-reliance and to realize that I don't have what I need for life. I need help. God will you help me? Will you give me your wisdom? I surrender to your right to rule my life.

James goes on to make one more point on the tragedy of double-mindedness. He says there is a character flaw to double-minded faith. A double-minded heart has an instability that eventually works its way into other areas of life. It's like a flaw in the foundation of a building. You see the crack in the foundation, but it's not long until there are cracks in the walls and doors that don't close right and the roof isn't square. Instability on the foundation level produces instability throughout the whole house.

We need to consider the consequences of trying to do any area of life NOT according to the wisdom of God. We are creating weakness elsewhere. A man can't simply look at porn privately without it affecting how he assesses women elsewhere. A man can't be profane in his language and joking at work and it not distort what he takes pleasure in with his family or church. We want to compartmentalize our sin, but the leaven leavens the whole loaf of our lives.

So let's assume that our hearts are for what God wants. We've asked Him for wisdom, with a genuine desire to trust and follow His wisdom. Now what? I have thoughts. People have given me counsel. I've read the appropriate Scripture. I've prayed over it. How can I know if I have God's wisdom or not?

How Can I Know if I Have God's Wisdom or Not?

1. Is it consistent with what God's Word says on a matter?

We can pray and pray and ask God for help, but God's answer will never contradict Scripture. God's Word is God's wisdom and God's will. Are my leanings in this decision

consistent with what God's Word indicates ought to be the priorities for a man wanting to do God's will?

2. Does this proposition help further God's goals in my life?

The goal of a trial is to make us spiritually mature. Am I pursuing that goal or running from the opportunity, pain, challenge, or whatever?

3. Does it sound like "wisdom from heaven"? (James 3:17, NIV)

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.

4. Is it likely that Satan isn't pleased with it?

There are times when I haven't known what God wanted me to do, but sometimes it's easier to figure out what Satan would like me to do. Figure out what Satan would want and then do the opposite.

5. Does this lead to God being glorified in my dependence on Him?

Wisdom will always lead us to depend on God more. *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and he will make straight your paths.* (Proverbs 3:5-6) Straight paths don't mean easy paths. It simply means that by trusting in God's wisdom in the day-to-day of life, my path is marked out for me. Men famously hate to ask for directions. Real men do and when we humbly ask, our direction is set and our paths are straight guided by the wisdom of God.

Our failures in this are one more reason to worship Christ. His paths were straight, but painful. The only real man who has ever lived trusted the wisdom of His heavenly Father even in the darkest moments:

- *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.* (Matthew 26:39)
- *When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.* (1 Peter 2:23, NIV)

How we need the Lord to make it through, don't we? I just want to conclude with praise. God doesn't owe us anything, much less help in our trials. He helps us because He is a God of love and He is more for us than we even begin to understand. So let's be thankful that we have a God who loves us in our trials. *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.*

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