

A Prayer That Changes Me

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James 1:5-8

Walk the Talk is our general topic for the Book of **James**. I hope you thought about the two questions I raised last Sunday. Let me refresh your memory:

1. Do you live what you believe? 2. How do you face trials?

There is no doubt we all face trials. James too is facing them. He does not “preach” to us; he identifies with his audience, and he calls us “Brothers and sisters...” James considers his trials joy. It is not fun to be going through trials, but because we know that God is ultimately doing something great and perfect in our lives, that **assurance** gives us peace of mind and deep joy. These trials are like “teachers”, teaching us to have a strong faith in God, which in turn develops a Christ-like character in us.

Knowing that trials may confuse us and make us behave as if not knowing what to do, James has advice for us.

“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously” (v5).

Prayer is the answer. Ask God! I am not sure prayer will be first on our agenda when we are in trials, but it is very helpful, and that is my topic today.

What to pray for? What words should we say? I hear this most of the time from you and sometimes from me.

James gives three important suggestions concerning what to pray for:

1. Ask God for Wisdom.

What kind of wisdom is James asking for? We need wisdom daily in our life to make decisions: where to go, what to buy, what to eat, what kind of car to drive... and on and on.” I think James is talking about the wisdom that can help us shape our character.

In fact, chapter 3 describes this wisdom:

“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the **humility that comes from wisdom.** (3:13) ... 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.**” (3:17)

Asking for wisdom means asking for character change, asking God to make me “pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive (to the will of God), full of mercy...and sincere, without hypocrisy...” Remember, **Walk the Talk...Your Lifestyle Matters...**

God is interested in hearts **that are willing to change** and not just demanding this or that. (Sometimes our prayer is just a list of things.)

-We find in Jesus’ teachings he encourages us to have these characteristics: pure in heart, merciful, meek, peace-lovers... Jesus was interested to see change of hearts which means characters.

“Wisdom is not being merely good. It is God’s gift of rare beauty to our souls – what scriptures call ‘the beauty of holiness’- and it always looks best against the dark background of deep suffering,” said David Roper.*

Here is Young Augustine wants change , but delays. He prayed, “Make me pure, Lord, but not yet!” Do we pray like this?

In Exodus 16-18, the Israelites were grumbling against God and Moses. They wanted to get out of Egypt. They got what they wanted. But whenever they faced a difficulty, they forgot everything about God and they complained to Moses. In fact, they were thirsty and they were ready to stone their leader Moses. It is interesting how God responded to Moses. We read,

“The LORD answered Moses, “Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ I will stand there before you by the

rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” (Ex. 17:5-6)

God provided water. But that is not the main point. **God taught Moses to be a leader.** He sent him to stand in front of the crowd who was ready to stone him.

I don't know about you, but I would be frightened to stand there. Moses prayed to God, he spoke to Him. God gave him a solution. God did not change the desert. God did not change the trials; **he changed Moses' character.**

This is the wisdom that God gives. Oh, as your pastor I need this. This is not just for the pastor; God asked Moses to take with him **the elders of the community.** I pray for PACC leadership, council, deacons, trustee, CE, mission, music, youth leaders, family life center committee. I pray for the bible study leaders; I pray for each of you to learn to see your part in serving God daily. I pray that your work place becomes your ministry. . **Solomon** valued wisdom more than wealth and health. Moses eventually said, **“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”** (Psalm 90:12)

Wisdom is not what we know, but what we ought to be.

2. Ask a generous God

“You should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.” (vs 5)

My father is God, and He is generous. He knows how much I need, and He knows who I am.

“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”(Luke 11:11-13)

One more time let me remind you that we should know what we are asking. James is teaching us to ask for wisdom which will help us shape our character. Ask for wisdom, and God will give it generously.

3. Ask with faith and not doubt

Last Sunday I stressed this. Trials will strengthen our faith and not our courage. The opposite of faith is doubt. Being doubtful is being “double minded” or “two-souled.” It is like wanting holiness but not wanting it (David Roper). Doubt is a terrible situation that can alienate you from prayer, church, friends, and most importantly from God.

James is clear, when doubt dominates in our lives, we will not receive wisdom:

“But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸ Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. (1:6-8)

When we are in doubt, we will shut the doors of hearing and seeing God in our lives. This means we will not receive wisdom which helps us endure the trials that we face. We all face storms and tough situations. James describes them being like the waves of the sea, blown and tossed. Like a boat which does not have a rudder. The wind and the sea waves will take it anywhere they want.

George MacDonald put it so well. **“God will carry us in His arms until we can walk, and He will carry us when we cannot walk. But He will not carry us in His arms if we will not walk.”**

Let me talk about doubt. We all will be tempted when doubt knocks our door. Watch out that you conquer your doubt by trusting God instead of your emotions and circumstances.

When doubts knock your door, go on your knees with prayer for faith and wisdom. (James is known by having camel knees, he prayed earnestly on his knees...) James is not promising that God will take away the test. There will be circumstances when our prayer will not change the situation. But through praying

for wisdom, with faith, God will give you character **to know how to respond in these tough situations.**

Let me give you an example from my life.

I had a friend who hurt me. He did not do it intentionally, but he did hurt me. My first reaction was to retaliate. Especially, I told him not to repeat it. But then I realized that I need wisdom to learn how to handle this situation. I asked God for wisdom. He gave me love and endurance to accept him as he is and not change him. That made my faith stronger in Christ. I learned to love. You know what; God used my kindness to change him. (It does not happen always, he was receptive).

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. ²² If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.” (Matthew 21:21-22)

Let us summarize:

-We ask for wisdom. We pray for wisdom. Wisdom will shape our character to face today, and tomorrow.

-We do not understand many of the trials. But we trust that God is sovereign and He is in control.

-I will finish with a prayer that is new to me. It is called the Prayer of a Confederate Soldier:

I asked God for strength that I might achieve.

I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.

I asked for health that I might do greater things.

I was given infirmity that I might do better things.

I asked for riches that I might be happy.

I was given poverty that I might be wise.

I asked for power that I might have the praise of men.
I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life.
I was given life that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I asked for, but everything I hoped for.
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.
I am, among all men, most richly blessed.

Questions of the week:

- 1. How is my prayer life? Am I in a relationship with my Heavenly Father?**
- 2. Am I asking wisdom to have a Christ-like character?**
- 3. Am I wising up as I grow older, or am I just getting to be another old fool?**

Amen

* David Roper, Growing Slowly Wise Building a Faith that Works.