

Wisdom, Humility and Perseverance – James 1:5-12

Introduction:

James is noted to be the New Testament version of the book of Proverbs. It speaks of very practical ways to live a life of blessing as God's children. We start with the need to have wisdom, then move to a call to humility and end this study with a call to perseverance. Each of these topics connect the reader to God and his plans for his people. Without God, without faith, there would be nothing to discuss. James is not about works disconnected from a relationship with God, but is about nurturing and building up that relationship. The three themes in this study help the believer grow to maturity (perfection) and closer to God.

Wisdom – James 1:5-8

Wisdom literature, of which Proverbs is the best example, is an important genre of ancient Jewish literature. But this genre takes on even greater importance when we remember who James is writing to, Christians living in pagan communities.

“Life in a complicated pagan world, which does not acknowledge the values and laws of God, calls for extraordinary judgement.”¹

How does the Christian get the wisdom to know how to live godly lives in ungodly cities? He asks God for wisdom.

1. Who is able to ask God for wisdom according to verse 5? Who needs wisdom? Where should our quest for wisdom begin according to Proverbs 9:10?
2. Which Old Testament character is best noted for a prayer for wisdom from God? (hint: 1 Kings 3:3-9) What caused this person to lose the wisdom he once possessed (cf. 1 Kings 11)? How are wisdom and faith connected?

¹ C. Jeanne Orjala Serrao, NBBC: James (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2010). P. 53.

3. The request for wisdom is not a one time thing. Verse 5 can best be translated “let that one (who lacks wisdom) continue to ask wisdom from God.” Why should this be a continual prayer?

“Wisdom from God is needed for sound, everyday choices as much as for obviously monumental, life-changing decisions. Both are essential for achieving Christian maturity and wholeness – to become “perfect and complete” (v. 4 NASB). Wisdom is indispensable for all who cannot be content merely to believe, but must decide how to live out their beliefs.” ²

4. According to verse 5, does God want to give wisdom to his children? Who is God willing to grant wisdom to if they ask Him?
5. Will God shame the person who comes to Him for wisdom according to verse 5? James often alludes back to the Sermon on the Mount, and here Matthew 7:7 may come to mind. How certain is James that God will answer this request?
6. What requirement is there for the person who requests wisdom from God in verse 6? How does this relate to what Jesus said in Matthew 21:21?
7. What picture does James use in verse 6 that speaks of what happens when we are indecisive and unable to follow the direction (wisdom) God gives?
8. What should a person expect from God if they are filled with doubts when asking for wisdom (v. 7)? How important is our faith in seeking wisdom?
9. James coins a new word in verse 8 to describe the person who asks for help from God but does not heed it. What does he call the person tossed back and forth (v. 8)? What does this mean?
10. How much of life is affected by the unsettled mind? (v. 8)

² Ibid, p. 54.

Humility – James 1:9-11

11. What does it mean for the “lowly brother” (poor) to boast in his exaltation?

“By the first century A.D. “poor” meant more than the impoverished, it connoted those loyal to God.”³ (cf. Maccabean Revolt)

12. How would the picture of the “rich” being the humbled ones be contrary to the way the world sees things?
13. The rich sometimes have life so good that they feel they will last forever. The poor, because life is such a struggle, know that it will soon come to an end. What picture does James use to remind people that everyone will face death sooner rather than later? (v. 10)
14. Verse 11 seems to come from a proverb of James’ day. How does this describe the life of the rich (our point of reference in this context)?

“Verses 9 is one of the few times the Bible encourages boasting. It is significant because it is rare. Pride is included in the traditional list of the seven deadly sins. So Christians are aware of the need to be humble. But there needs to be a balance. Those with excessively low self-esteem need to recognize that they are gifted and valuable children of God. Humility is not pretending to be less than we are. To denigrate one’s gifts and hide them away behind false humility is as damaging to the Christian community, as pretending to be more than we are in false and foolish pride.”⁴

Perseverance – James 1:12

15. What does it mean to be “blessed” (v. 12)?

³ Ibid 57

⁴ Ibid 59

16. What brings God's blessing according to verse 12? Compare this to the person in verse 6.
17. What does this verse tell us about the possibility of tests and trials in the life of the believer?
18. What is the "crown of life" James refers to?

Conclusion:

Who will win the prize, the crown of life in God's Kingdom? The wisest, the richest, the most gifted, the most popular? Actually yes to all these and so many more because everyone can win the prize if they finish the race. No one is excluded who puts his or her faith and trust in Jesus and live faithfully for Him. But this will take great wisdom as we live in a fallen and wicked world. It will take commitment to do what is right and not vacillate back and forth. It will take humility, realizing all we are and all we can accomplish is because of God. We give Him the glory. Finally, we will stay true no matter what we have to face. Being a Christian in the Roman Empire was not always easy, but with God's help it was possible. As we hold fast to our faith we can win the prize... the crown of life.

James wants everyone to get to the finish line in victory. His advice is inspired words of hope and encouragement so that every believer will succeed in the race set before them.

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