



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Got Wisdom? (James 1:5-11)

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Lee Atwater is best known as the campaign manager in George H. W. Bush's presidential run in 1988, then heading the Republican National Committee. Diagnosed with brain cancer shortly thereafter, he died in 1991 at the age of 40. These are his words::

The '80s were about acquiring — acquiring wealth, power, prestige. I know. I acquired more wealth, power, and prestige than most. But you can acquire all you want and still feel empty. What power wouldn't I trade for a little more time with my family? What price wouldn't I pay for an evening with friends? It took a deadly illness to put me eye to eye with that truth, but it is a truth that the country, caught up in its ruthless ambitions and moral decay, can learn on my dime. I don't know who will lead us through the '90s, but they must be made to speak to this spiritual vacuum at the heart of American society, this tumor of the soul.¹

Atwater echoed the book of James. The wisdom of our society will take us in a direction of emptiness and purposelessness. What a tragedy to come to the end of one's life and regret choosing the wisdom of the world, "this tumor of the soul". Once again, James points us in a better direction:

James 1:5-11 - ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. ⁹ Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰ and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

I. PROVISION OF WISDOM (1:5)

Wisdom is the discernment and ability to live life the way the Designer meant it to be lived. The verses right before this passage talk about suffering and trials. That's an important time for the right

kind of wisdom to know how to handle the strife and come out stronger. Who suffered more than Job? He said this about wisdom:

Job 28:20, 23, 24, 27, 28 From where, then, does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? . . . God understands the way to it, and he knows its place. For he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens . . . then he saw it and declared it; he established it, and searched it out. And he said to man, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.'

So God is the initiator and source of true wisdom. We also know that his wisdom is not some elusive, hidden knowledge, either. In fact, if we will just seek in the right place, it will be found.

Proverbs 1:20, 22, 23 Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you.

TRUSTWORTHY WISDOM WILL ALWAYS COME FROM OUTSIDE US, FROM GOD HIMSELF AS HE REVEALS HIMSELF IN THE BIBLE. TRUSTING OUR THOUGHTS APART FROM HIS WILL PUT US SHAKY GROUND EVERY TIME.

We have been given the Bible. We can pray. Wisdom can be found, but there is also a prerequisite.

II. PREREQUISITE FOR WISDOM (1:6A)

James has much to teach us about prayer and this may be the biggest lesson: when we pray, it must be in complete faith with no doubting. What has God told us about himself? That he wants us to pray to him and he is fully able to do anything. In this case, he is fully able to grant wisdom and promises that he will do just that, if we pray without doubting.

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS AT 7:50AM, ROOM 153 (HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING)

Maryland

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Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

The author of Hebrews also says that this exercise of faith gives us assurance as we pray.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

III. PREVENTION OF WISDOM (1:6B-8)

If doubt-destroying faith is the prerequisite to receive wisdom, then double-minded unbelief will prevent God from granting wisdom. The picture of the doubter here is vivid. We've seen the ocean or movies like "The Perfect Storm". There's nothing less stable than a wave whose direction can't be predicted. The doubter is called a wave in a storm. No moorings. No steadiness.

This is a serious problem when you're going through the trials mentioned in verse two. How can one "consider it joy" when life's struggles only expose the lack of grounding in one's faith? Not only will there be a lack of joy, but unless our prayers are made in true faith, then we shouldn't expect God to grant our request in the first place. Prayers that doubt God's care or ability are powerless. That person, according to this passage, is double-minded.

Although he claims to be a believer, his action reveals he is an unbeliever. When he goes through a severe trial, he turns to human resources rather than singularly trusting the Lord for answers and for help... As James points out later in the letter, that person's problem is, of course, sin. "Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (4:8). There the "double-minded" are called "sinners", a term used only for unbelievers.²

Does that mean believers never doubt? No, but as a pattern of life the child of God will exhibit strength and steadiness based on a solid trust in the Lord. We grow deeper into this trust in the life-long pursuit to learn to depend less on ourselves and more on God.

IV. PEERS IN WISDOM (1:9-11)

When it comes to trials and the need for wisdom, all people are on equal footing. The rich and poor both are in need of God's wisdom and the faith that it takes to receive it.

That's why this passage calls on the lowly to boast in being lifted up by the help of God and for the rich to boast in humiliation, or being brought lower, because they will need the help of God. Trials are the great equalizer of all human beings.

Proverbs 22:2 - The rich and the poor meet together; the LORD is the maker of them all.

WISDOM IN THE CAPITOL

What does godly wisdom look like in the political arena? With the range of issues that must be studied, debated and decided, surely the wisdom of Solomon is needed. The reality is that not all lawmakers will choose to follow God and seek his wisdom. However, it is still appropriate for believers to ask God to guide them.

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.

If you are a believing governmental leader, you have the wisdom of heaven available to you. The great encouragement from these verses is that through prayer and searching the Scriptures, God's wisdom can be yours to guide you in what directions to take.

I and many Marylanders are praying regularly for you as a legislator and one of the areas we ask God for is to give wisdom to you as you serve in your office. Every day, there is a list of leaders to pray for at www.mdprays.com and we will keep it up. I encourage you to ask him for guidance as well!

¹ Lee Atwater and Todd Brewster, "Lee Atwater's Last Campaign", *Life* (February 1991), 67.

² John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: James* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody) 1998, 38.