

## IN THE MEANTIME

How many of you have heard of Actress Michelle Pfeiffer? Pfeiffer starred in such movies as:

- *What Lies Beneath, with Harrison Ford,*
- *The Prince of Egypt*
- *Batman Returns*
- *Scarface*
- *Grease 2*
- As well as the classic -- *Amazon Women on the Moon*

Michelle Pfeiffer appeared on the cover of a magazine a while back along with the caption "What Michele Pfeiffer Needs Is...Absolutely Nothing!" An alert reporter, however, found that Pfeiffer did need something. She needed, in fact, over \$1,500 worth of touch-up work on the cover photo. From the touch-up artist's bill, here is a partial list of things that were done to make Michelle Pfeiffer look beautiful:

- Clean up complexion,
- Soften eye lines,
- Soften smile line,
- Add color to lips,
- Trim chin,
- Remove neck lines,
- Soften line under earlobe,
- Add highlights to earrings,
- Add blush to cheek,
- Clean up neckline,
- Remove stray hair,
- Remove hair strands on dress,
- Adjust color and add hair on top of head,
- Add dress on side to create better line,
- Add forehead,
- Add dress on shoulder,
- Soften neck muscle a bit,
- And clean up and smooth dress folds under arm.

Total price: \$1,525.00

Well maybe in retrospect, Ms. Pfeiffer did lack something after all.

Do you lack anything? If you are like the rest of us, you probably do. In fact, the Bible speaks of one specific area of need that most if not all of us can immediately identify with. You can find it in James 1:5, **"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him."**

Let me put it simply...

- If you've ever had a day when you've wound up under it rather than on top of it, then this message is for you.
- If you understand what I mean when I say, "Sometimes you're the windshield; Sometimes you're the bug", then this message is for you.
- If the phrase, "If the chute doesn't open your next jump is free" strikes a little to close to home, then this message is for you!
- If something is seemingly lacking in times of difficulty and testing, then, friends, this message is for you.

It is my hope and prayer that this message will help correct any lack in your life, and I can assure you, it won't cost you \$1,500 either!

### **JAMES IS WRITING ABOUT HARD TIMES IN THIS CHAPTER...**

The trials, tests, temptations, the ugly things that come against the saint. The situations that tend to drag one down; that weigh heavy upon the human soul.

The church that James was addressing here knew full well what the brother was talking about:

- The people labored under exorbitant taxes,
- They were paid low prices for their crops,
- They had to endure violence, war and crime.
- They knew what it was to suffer for their faith.

Sound familiar?

James himself was the half-brother of Jesus and was the pastor of the church in Jerusalem nearly 2,000 years ago. Somewhere around thirty years after the crucifixion of Jesus, a high priest commanded James to declare that Jesus was not the Messiah. He was likewise told to discourage people from embracing this new and growing faith called Christianity. Instead James cried out that Jesus was the Son of God and Judge of the World. This enraged his enemies who then threw James to the ground and stoned him. A man with a club then ended James' sufferings by beating him to death while James prayed.

### **IT IS IN THIS CONTEXT OF PAIN AND SUFFERING THAT JAMES SAYS PRAY, AND MORE SPECIALLY, HE SAYS PRAY FOR WISDOM**

What do **YOU** pray for when you are weighed down with difficulties?

- Healing?
- Deliverance?
- Escape?
- Victory?

Hey, I relate! That's what most of us seek, isn't it? And, just to be sure, nothing is wrong with asking for those things. Later on in this book, James encourages the sick to pray and to be prayed for.

But what do you do between the time when the trial hits and the answer comes? I call this the "MEANTIME".

- Heaven appears to be brass.
- The Lord seems to have put you on indefinite hold.
- You open the Bible for guidance and you find yourself staring at a list of begets a page long.
- Job was there. Listen to Job 23:8-9, **"If I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. When he is at work in the north, I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him."**

We could be talking moments here or we could be talking about an extended period of time.

The answer is, we should continue to pray for healing, deliverance, victory, or whatever. But James adds another part to the formula. He says that we should also pray for wisdom.

When was the last time that you purposefully sought wisdom from the Lord? God obviously has a special place in His heart for this virtue.

- It is the key theme of the Book of Proverbs.
- One of the things that marks the Virtuous Woman in Proverbs 31 is, **"She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue."**
- The first gift listed in the list of the Gifts of the Spirit, in 1 Corinthians 12:8, is the Gift of the Word of Wisdom.

- According to Luke 2:40, Jesus grew as a child, **“and became strong; He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him.”**
- When the disciples looked for men to serve as deacons, they looked for men who were **“full of the Spirit and wisdom”** (Acts 6:3.).
- Is it therefore any wonder that Proverbs 19:8 notes (*King James Version*), **“He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul.”**

Why not?

- Someone has said that, "knowledge is the ability to take things apart, while wisdom is the ability to put them together."
- Someone else has noted that "Wisdom is the right use of knowledge."
- Yet again, wisdom is the exercise and practical use of knowledge.

### **THIS THEN BRINGS ME TO THE POINT, WHAT DOES ASKING FOR WISDOM HAVE TO DO WITH GOING THOUGH A TRIAL, A TEST OR TEMPTATION?**

**1. WISDOM GIVES ANSWERS. WISDOM MAJORS IN SOLUTIONS!** It gives the who, what, when, where, how, and why?

One of the great instances of wisdom found anywhere is the story of Solomon and the two women who claimed the same child. Listen to the account from 1 Kings 3:16-28 from the *New Living Translation*: **“Two prostitutes came to the king to have an argument settled. “Please, my lord,” one of them began, “this woman and I live in the same house. I gave birth to a baby while she was with me in the house. Three days later, she also had a baby. We were alone; there were only two of us in the house. But her baby died during the night when she rolled over on it. Then she got up in the night and took my son from beside me while I was asleep. She laid her dead child in my arms and took mine to sleep beside her. And in the morning when I tried to nurse my son, he was dead! But when I looked more closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn’t my son at all.”**

Then the other woman interrupted, **“It certainly was your son, and the living child is mine.”** **“No,”** the first woman said, **“the dead one is yours, and the living one is mine.”** And so they argued back and forth before the king.

Then the king said, **“Let’s get the facts straight. Both of you claim the living child is yours, and each says that the dead child belongs to the other. All right, bring me a sword.”** So a sword was brought to the king. Then he said, **“Cut the living child in two and give half to each of these women!”**

Then the woman who really was the mother of the living child, and who loved him very much, cried out, **“Oh no, my lord! Give her the child—please do not kill him!”**

But the other woman said, **“All right, he will be neither yours nor mine; divide him between us!”**

Then the king said, **“Do not kill him, but give the baby to the woman who wants him to live, for she is his mother!”**

**Word of the king’s decision spread quickly throughout all Israel, and the people were awed as they realized the great wisdom God had given him to render decisions with justice.”**

In short, Solomon was facing a life and death situation. This may well have been once of the biggest tests of his kingly reign up to this point. Nevertheless his wisdom saved the day.

Now something begs to be noted here. Earlier in this very same chapter this same Solomon did something else. What was it? He prayed for wisdom. Listen now to verses 10-12, **“The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. 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.”**

It is clear that the man's great problem solving wisdom was directly tied to his request for wisdom. God obviously honored that request!

I believe that I am safe in saying that we need wisdom in facing the issues and stresses of today nearly as such as did that wise king so many years ago.

One of the signs of the end-time is found in Luke 21:25. Here Jesus alludes to “perplexities.” The term speaks of one being...

- At his or her wit's end,
  - at a loss on how to proceed,
  - without resources, and
  - in a state of quandary.
  - Another Bible dictionary defines it as “a state wherein no way out is seen.”
- I've been there, haven't you?

Today's world is full of pain and bitterness. So many problems seem to defy solutions. A glance at the daily headlines reveals a tide of distrust, discord, and disharmony sweeping the planet. We are truly facing perplexities! We need some solutions -- we need wisdom! Tell me, please: **(SHOW OHT OF NEWS PAGE)**

- What is the answer to the crisis in Israel?
- What is the solution to the AIDS epidemic? An estimated 21 million people worldwide have died of AIDS with another 36 million presently infected with the virus.
- What can be done to restore trust and confidence in cooperate America?

On a more personal level:

- What do we do when our child confesses that he or she is gay?
- What do we do when the boss slaps a pink slip in our hand?
- What do we do when the doctor says that there is no hope?
- What do we do when someone completely misinterprets something that we say and turns it against us in anger?

While we may not know the solution, God does. While we may be at a loss, God Isn't. 2 Peter 2:9 declares, **“THE LORD KNOWS HOW to rescue the godly from temptation...”** I want you to repeat the phrase with me, **“The Lord knows how.”** Again, **“The Lord knows.”**

The Lord obviously isn't afraid of "HOW?" or "WHY? You see, He is the answer! I know. He's been my "HOW" and has answered my "WHY" many times:

- I remind you, I was raised in poverty.
- In November I will have been a pastor for 32 years.
- I have seen more sickness, suffering and death than I care to remember.
- There are days in my office when people's tear-stained questions are way beyond my understanding and wisdom!

Believe me when I say, I have had to cry "HOW" or "WHY" many times, and He has always been faithful! **JESUS NEVER FAILS! GOD GIVES THE NEEDED WISDOM.**

By the way, do you realize that in the Bible the question "HOW" is raised over 400 times? The word "why" is found an additional 502 times. The point is, ASK!

**2. WISDOM HELPS US TO BE PATIENT WITH GOD; TO UNDERSTAND THAT GOOD CAN AND WILL COME OUT OF THE TEST OR TRIAL**

I want to give you a corrective word at this point. Hear me please.

- Sometimes we need to understand that there may be a reason why the GREAT ALMIGHTY HEALING GOD doesn't immediately heal.
- There may be a reason why the GREAT ALMIGHTY PROVIDER GOD doesn't immediately provide.
- There may be a reason why the GREAT ALMIGHTY DELIVERING GOD doesn't immediately deliver.

I have known people who pray one single prayer, day in and day out. They ask for strength, or healing, or even deliverance over and over again. There is nothing wrong with that. The Bible in fact teaches us to ask and keep on asking. However, if the answer isn't coming, why not ask God for wisdom? Why not seek a reason why? God is certainly able. If He isn't doing what you think you need Him to do, then add to your request a plea for wisdom. Wisdom may well reveal to you that there is a higher/greater good at work here than you previously realized.

Let me tell you a true story. A certain godly lady, an elderly lady, was going through some very difficult trials. She had had a stroke. Her husband had gone blind and was in such declining health that he was simply awaiting death. Once when the pastor was visiting, he told the sainted woman he was praying for her. To this she replied, "What are you praying for? What are you asking God to do?"

Somewhat surprised, the pastor gave her the usual list of things one prays for in such instances: healing, strength, God's will, etc. "I do so appreciate that," she said, "but please also pray that I'll have the wisdom NOT TO WASTE ALL OF THIS."

Some of you have heard this bit of advice from me during some hour of need. "Never waste a crisis." That is good.

- God has a plan.
- Find out what it is and go with it.

I want to remind you of the story of Lazarus in John 11. The brother was deathly ill. His friends sent for Jesus to come and heal him. Nonetheless, John 11:6 declares, "**Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, HE STAYED WHERE HE WAS TWO MORE DAYS.**"

Mary and Martha, the disciples, everyone was perplexed by the actions of Jesus.

The only possible good that they could see in this situation was for Lazarus to be healed. That was it! That was the only option that was available. Jesus please come and hurry!

Yet, Jesus had inside information that the rest of the group was not privy to. He understood that healing Lazarus wasn't really the best answer for that situation.

- He knew that to resurrect a man who had been dead for four days would bring much greater glory to God the Father,
- He knew that calling his friend out of that tomb would encourage more and greater faith in his disciples, as well as His church down through the ages,
- He knew that a resurrection would do far more than a healing in proving His power over death.

Remember this about the Lord, He has the whole picture in view, we don't. He sees things, hears things, and knows things that we do not see, hear or know. He is God. I'm not; you're not!

Mary, Martha and the disciples had put a ceiling on Jesus. He could only do this and that, and that was it. Heal a sick man? Certainly. Raise a man from the dead that had been entombed for four days? Now that was a different matter.

Jesus, though, wanted them to understand that "**NOTHING WAS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD.**" Nothing! Nothing! Nothing! In this instance, waiting was very much a part of God's plan and choice. Wisdom was needed to understand that.

Psalm 119:71 declares, **“It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.”** I repeat, **“It was good for me...”**

Good to be afflicted? That's what he said. Good!

- It was good for Lazarus.
- It was good for the Psalmist.

God had revealed though them a higher good: His glory! His strength! His grace through trial!

Friends, Romans 8:28 is still true! **“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”** God is yet able to bring good out of evil!

James 1:12, *The Amplified Bible*, **“‘Blessed, happy, to be envied’ is a man who PERSEVERES (stands one’s ground, remains steadfast, remains firm) UNDER TRIAL...”** The idea here isn’t one of instantaneous victory. It again speaks of “persevering, standing, remaining steadfast, firm.”

Once again, wisdom helps us to be patient with God; to understand that good can and will come out of the test or trial. Ask.

### 3. WISDOM CAN HELP THE SAINT UNDERSTAND THE REASON FOR THE TRIAL OR TEST

I find it interesting that:

- CAIN was told WHY he was to suffer.
- NOAH was told WHY his world was to be destroyed.
- MOSES knew WHY he missed the Promised Land.
- DAVID knew WHY his baby died.
- ISRAEL knew WHY they went into captivity.
- JESUS knew WHY He had to suffer, even though His suffering was due to no fault of His own.
- PAUL knew WHY he had a thorn in the flesh.

Let’s say that the Lord has you under His discipline for a while.

Imagine with me that your six-year-old daughter does something which deserves some discipline. (With most of us, that is pretty easy to imagine.) Suppose also that you rightly administer the rod of correction to the seat of learning. What would you then do if the child were to come to you and ask “dad, what did I do to

deserve that spanking?” Can you possibly imagine any parent telling the kid, “No, I won’t tell you. It’s none of your business. You don’t need to know why. You just deserved a spanking. Leave it at that!” Hey, folks, that would never fly. The child would deserve an explanation!

The point is, God is not afraid to tell you if and why you have been disciplined too. One of the activities of the Holy Spirit today is to reveal to us our errors, our sins. John 16:8 states, **“When he (The Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment....”**

Then too, Psalm 32:8 promises, **“I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go.”**

Hebrews 12:10-11 notes, **“Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”**

God may well be using your fiery trial to work out some stuff in your life. If this is the case, He will let you know. Wait. Ask.

#### **JAMES 1:5 RAISES SOME ADDITIONAL ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE NOTED HERE:**

##### **1. THE WRITER SUGGESTS THAT WE ASK AND KEEP ON ASKING.**

The original language speaks of repeated requests. God will not grow tired of listening to your petitions. Ask. He will answer in His time.

## 2. NEXT, WE ARE TOLD, “ASK GOD.”

No one knows your situation and the reasons behind it as well as God does. Ask Him first.

As you know, I am not against counseling ministries. Nevertheless, I believe that we oftentimes seek counseling when we should be seeking God! The Lord wants us to approach **HIM FIRST**, one on one. We are to try and hear what He is saying on your own. If that doesn't work, fine, get help. But seek Him, ask Him for wisdom, before you seek after and ask man.

We are NOT to be like those who were unfaithful and unbelieving of whom it is written in Psalm 106:13, **“But they soon forgot what he had done and DID NOT WAIT for HIS counsel.”** His counsel is the counsel that really matters! Ask for it; wait for it!

## 3. JAMES 1:5 CONCLUDES WITH A PROMISE -- “GOD... GIVES GENEROUSLY... WITHOUT FINDING FAULT....”

As I have preached from this pulpit before, “God is the Great Giving God.” He gives and gives and gives again. He loves to give. It is His nature to give. The Golden Text of the Bible states, **“God so loved the world that He gave....”** That is just His nature.

Jesus commanded, **“Ask and you shall receive.”** Ask what you will, when you will for **“It is the Father’s good pleasure to give....”**

Then, too, God gives without reproof. We do not have to be afraid to approach Him. He will not put us to shame or embarrass us. **“Without finding fault”** means that the Lord gives without mixing in any evil or bitterness. He gives in a good way.

Are you facing a trial, a test, or some temptation today? I want to remind you. Jesus heals. Jesus provides. Jesus delivers. But in the meantime, between your point of need and your day of victory, go to God. Ask for wisdom. James promises, **“He will give it....”** He will be happy to make up your lack generously!