James 1:5-8 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Even though this section begins a new theme, it does not mean that it is disconnected from the previous section. There is a conjunction that connects the two sections. Therefore, we need to understand how verses 5-8 function with verses 2-4.

**Contextual Analysis:**

The conjunction indicates that this paragraph is premised on verses 2-4. What is that premise? What is James thinking that makes him immediately refer to if you lack wisdom? In other words, what is James referring to as needing wisdom?

My knee jerk response is “how to endure temptation.” We focus on the concept that seems to be more intriguing - the testing of one’s faith is always a hot topic in Christendom. By now, you have already suspected that this is not my conclusion. In order to find the main point of any passage, we break it down to its most basic form. What is the simple subject-verb-predicate sentence in verses 2-4?

This is a compound sentence. The first is “My brothers, deem it all joy when you may fall into various temptations,” and “Let perseverance have complete work.” The truth that testing faith accomplishes perseverance is something that’s known, not a command. Therefore, the two wisdoms that may be lacking are “deem it joy” and “let perseverance have.”

This is a lesson in biblical observation; we cannot isolate passages. We must ask questions and seek answers. Is the wisdom in verse 5 general or specific? Is there a specific lesson and a principle?

This is being addressed here because of the primary point of deem it joy whenever you fall into temptation. This is not a rational response; this is irrational in terms of human viewpoint. There is a wisdom from above and a wisdom which is not from above (James 3:15,17).

We have two sources of truth—God and everything else. The everything else is fashioned after man, that is after Satan. This can be rationalism, empiricism, pragmatism, or any other system you can think of. But we must be convinced that the wisdom from above is the only truth.
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What we determine as our source of truth is of the utmost importance. When we read a verse that seems to go against everything we think is true, our job is to deal with the passage, deal with that truth, until we are convinced that God’s truth is the truth.

My translation:

In dealing with the text, the translation I have is not very different than the majority of the texts. There are no textual concerns. My translation is slightly different due to the fact that Greek participles are difficult to translate into our vernacular and I have some observations that will come out as we proceed through the verses. For now, the main point that we start with is that wisdom comes from God.

But if anyone does lack wisdom, let him ask from the giving God (who gives) to all without complication and without reviling and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, while deliberating nothing; for the one who deliberates is like a wave of the sea being blown and fanned; for let not that man think that he will receive anything from the Lord; a double minded man (is) unestablished in all his ways.

*Red is the significant changes

Exegetical Analysis:

Verse 5 - This is a first-class conditional clause. To remind you, there are four primary Greek conditional clauses that are used in the New Testament. 1st Class – Assumed to be true for the sake of argument, can be translated since if situation is known. 2nd Class – Assumed to be untrue. 3rd Class – Assumed to be possible but uncertain. 4th Class – Desired but improbable circumstance.

So, should this be translated since? In the “if clause,” there is an indefinite pronoun, “tis,” which is anyone. Thus, the translation should be if anyone or if any of you. The addition of the pronoun limits the scope of the situation to a portion of the audience. This eliminates the possibility of using since.

This is important because James is not assuming that anyone does lack wisdom. The statement indicates that if the situation is true then the one who lacks is to ask.

What is in question? Wisdom. The noun here is “σοφία sophia.” We must refrain from defining this term before looking at it intently. This is a Greek term relating a Hebrew idea.

The Hebrew words for wisdom are “חכמה ḥokhmâh” (149) and “בינה bhînah” (38) and “שכלה sêkhel” (16)
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The primary word is “חָכְמָה” hkokhmâh.” This word primarily focuses on skill or understanding. To be plain, this is not knowledge but the function of a person based upon knowledge. There is a line from the comedy, “Those who can, do. Those who can’t do teach. Those who can’t teach, teach gym.” Now of course this is not at all accurate, but it is funny. The truth is that the best teachers are those who know and have skill.

Wisdom in the Hebrew Scriptures is expressed in five ways:

1. Technical skill, aptitude
2. Experience, good sense
3. Worldly wisdom
4. Godly wisdom (Psalm 90:11-12) – That which honors God
5. Specifically, God’s wisdom (Solomon) – that which is the character of God

In Job 28, Job has a lament. He begins by stating that all of the earth’s treasure can be found. But beginning in verse 12, Job remarks about wisdom (28:12-28). Proverbs is the Book of Wisdom and in Chapter 2, Solomon reflects about the wisdom that is from God (Proverbs 2:1-12).

This wisdom in James, then, is more than just an application of knowledge. Rather this is the insight from the Spirit of God. This is an understanding of God’s truth. The believer is expected to deal with the statement, seeking God’s truth through His Word and asking God for His understanding.

I used to think that this wisdom is how a person is to use the doctrines of God to overcome temptation. I think this was too simplistic. What I see now is that God desires to impart His understanding through His word, by means of the Holy Spirit, to the one who seeks for it.

Let him ask is the imperative in this passage (repeated in verse 6), “αἰτέω aiteō.” This word, in its original sense, means to request a need. Asking is predicated on the fact that the request is in the will of God. In James 4, the same word is used (James 4:1-3). God desires to give to us, His children, what we ask, but there are requisites—first, you must ask and second, you must ask in faith.

This is the time when we must distinguish between asking and grace. “Aiteō” and “charis” are never used in the same context of the grace of God. There is one passage where it is used, but it is used of the Jews asking for a favor from Festus.

“αἰτέω aiteō” is never used of unbelievers nor is it used in any “salvation” passage. This word is used of God the Father providing for His children requests.
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The first requirement is that you ask, but it not just asking—it is asking the right person. In James 1:5, we have a character of God that is often missed. In the translations it states, “ask God, who gives to all generously...” God is described here with an articular participle—literally, “the giving God.” Because it is a participle it also leads to the following information in the verse (to all...).

We must understand who we are dealing with. God is not a requisition department looking for a reason to deny requests. He is good and desires the best for us. He sees the end from the beginning and knows exactly what we need. We see two seconds ahead and we have no idea what is the best for ourselves. Approaching God with requests means that we subject ourselves to His understanding and character.

The giving God is further described by two ideas, generously and without reproach.

*Generously* is the word “ἀπλῶς haplōs.” This is the only occurrence of this word in the New Testament. This is an adverb and works with (modifies) “the giving.” The noun is used more frequently and is one of the more difficult words to wrap our minds around. The base translation for this word group is “simple,” “single,” “simplicity,” “singleness.” This indicates an attitude of the giver—to give without second thought, no regret, no pause, an undivided mind. Our God gives gifts and never regrets giving them.

The next word is *without reproach*. This is an adverbial participle (present tense) understood here as “while....” The word is “ἀνειδίζω oneidizō (ahn-ay-di’-dzoh).” The KJV translates this *upbraid*. Most of the lexicons use this word as well. Upbraid is definitely not in my vocabulary. Upbraid means “to find fault with.” This word always has a negative connotation. This is not admonishing or discipline. This is scolding, reviling, or chiding. The latter is done from a scornful attitude rather than discipline or reproach which is done from a loving attitude.

Have you ever received what you asked for but at the same time felt worse for getting it? As humans we often try to give as God does but sin enters in and makes the gift less precious, less good. Sometimes the provision is a source of pain and not a cause for happiness. But with God this is not so. He gives, and He will never hold it over your head.

The next requirement is we must ask in faith. As we have been discussing for a couple of years now, we need to correct the typical commentary on this verse. Let me expand the translation. The preposition “en” is understood in one of four ways—location, state (condition), means, time. What does the natural reading of
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this verse indicate? This is the dative of means. One could render this “but let him ask by means of faith.” Faith is a noun, it is not a verb and is not used as a participle. The word indicates “that which is believed” or “doctrines of God that are or are intended to be believed.” The focus is on the doctrine, the truth.

This indicates that a person is to ask, knowing what it is that God desires and asking God for the provision that is in alignment with His character and plan. This is why our attitude must be one of “not my will but Yours.” Sometimes we do not know what to pray, but God knows what we need before we ask. Sometimes He even provides something we want, if it is in alignment with His will.

Think about it. There are many believers who are deceived into believing that God will provide for them health and wealth. They pray earnestly, fully convinced that what the preacher man said was true. When they do not get what they want, they are told that they did not have enough faith. They did not believe hard enough or they must have had a seed of doubt. They take faith here as having full confidence.

This can be rendered “but let him ask by means of doctrinal truth” or “but let him ask in accordance with the doctrine that he believes to be true.” The rest of verse 6 through verse 8 further describes, in not so few words, the one who deliberates.

The word doubt is “διακρίνω diakrinō,” meaning to distinguish through. This indicates a person who is in the process of deciding; he is deliberating within himself. The first observation is that doubting and faith are not opposite terms. Faith is a noun, doubt is a verb (participle). The words “pistis” and “diakrinō” are used together in Romans 4:20, the word here is waver. Unbelief is the alpha negative to “pistis.”

Also, Matthew 21:21 – If you have faith and do not self-deliberate. The characteristic of someone who is self-deliberating is a person that is not fully convinced that the promise of God is true. They ask, not from a source of truth but rather wishing it were true.

God requires that you ask Him, the giving God, and that you ask by means of the promise that He has made to the believing one who asks. The question we must ask is what does God desire for our lives? What does He want? We must seek through His word to ensure that our thoughts and desires match His thoughts and desires.
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The one who deliberates is tossed like a wave. This continues to support the understanding of one who is in limbo about the nature, character, and/or the promises of God (as a believer). Being driven and tossed by the wind is a very clear picture of a person who has no established doctrine concerning the question at hand. The initial premise is about wisdom, illumination, understanding, and practical application of doctrine. The doctrine in question that is need of God’s viewpoint is that of being happy when you have fallen into a temptation.

Do we believe that this observation is a reason to be happy or do we wallow in guilt? Can we see that through God we can take this momentary failure and use His truth to overcome the current test? Do we understand that Jesus has paid for all sin and that He advocates now being seated at the right hand of the Father?

If we are deciding, then our thoughts take us back and forth, believing one thing, then another. This means that we are unstable, restless in our thoughts. There is no security in perpetual deliberation. Learn the truth, deal with the truth, be settled in the truth.

In verse 8, James states that man is double minded. “διψυχος dipsuchos,” literally “two-souled,” having two minds. We are called to have the mind of Christ. As believers we should leave behind the world’s mind, learn Jesus’ mindset, and begin to change the way we think to match Him.

The deliberator, the two-minded man, believes that he can take the two opposing views to find the truth. This is a person who has not yielded to the authority of God’s Word. His authority is found in man (himself or another). He agrees with the Word of God as long as his rational mind agrees. This is obvious in unbelievers but is common in believers as well, and this is to whom the letter is addressed.

To conclude we need to see the attribute of God; we need to understand and deal with the fact that God is a giving God and is not scornful. He is ready to give in accordance with His will and character when we ask according to His will and character.

1st John 5:14-15 – We know that we will receive what we ask for when we ask according to His will.

Ephesians 3:20 – God is able to do far beyond what we ask or think according to His power working in us.