

The Book of James, Study #2 – Asking God for Wisdom

What the Founders Said

In DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers (NY: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1980), p. 71, we read, “For the next three months [after Bill met Bob in May of 1935], I [Bill] lived with these two wonderful people,” Bill said. “I shall always believe they gave me more than I ever brought them.” Each morning, there was a devotion, he recalled. After a long silence, in which they awaited inspiration and guidance, Anne would read from the Bible. “James was our favorite,” he said. “Reading from her chair in the corner, she would softly conclude, “Faith without works is dead.” This was a favorite quotation of Anne’s, much as the Book of James was a favorite with early A.A.’s—so much so that “The James Club” was favored by some as a name for the Fellowship”.

In his last major address to AAs in 1948, Dr. Bob said, “When we started in on Bill D. [A.A. Number Three], we had no Twelve Steps. But we were convinced that the answer to our problems was in the Good Book. To some of us older ones, the parts that we found absolutely essential were the Sermon on the Mount, the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, and the Book of James”. (The Co-Founders of Alcoholics Anonymous. Biographical sketches - Their last major talks. NY: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1972, 1975, pp. 9-10, emphasis added).

In a pamphlet published by the Friday Forum Luncheon Club of the Akron A.A. Groups, the writer selected the following from a “lead” [talk] given by Dr. Bob in Youngstown, Ohio, “Members of Alcoholics Anonymous begin the day with a prayer for strength and a short period of Bible reading. They find the basic messages they need in the Sermon on the Mount, in Corinthians and the Book of James.” (Dick B., The Good Book and The Big Book: A.A.’s Roots in the Bible, 2d ed, Kihei, HI: Paradise Research Publications, Inc., 1997, p 21,).

A pamphlet published by “AA of Akron,” and written at the request of Dr. Bob states, “There is the Bible that you haven’t opened for years. Get acquainted with it. Read it with an open mind. You will find things that will amaze you. You will be convinced that certain passages were written with you in mind. Read the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew V, VI, and VII). Read St. Paul’s inspired essay on love (I Corinthians XIII). Read the Book of James. Read the Twenty-third and Ninety-first Psalms. These readings are brief but so important.”

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1. Read James 1:5-8.

You find the words “wisdom”, “knowledge” and “revelation” used though out the New Testament. Most often wisdom means having an understanding about something. Knowledge and revelation usually means knowing how to use what you know. By wisdom, James is talking not only about knowledge, but about the ability to make wise decisions in difficult circumstances. Whenever we need wisdom, we can pray to God, and he will generously supply what we need. Christians don't have to grope around in the dark, hoping to stumble upon answers. We can ask for God's wisdom to guide our choices. Additionally, wisdom carries the idea of practical discernment. It begins with respect for God, leads to right living, and results in increased ability to tell right from wrong. God is willing to give us this wisdom, but we will be unable to receive it if our goals are self-centered instead of God-centered. To learn God's will, we need to read his Word and ask him to show us how to obey it. Then we must do what he tells us.

- a) In the middle of discussing trials (v2-8), James mentions wisdom (v5). What does wisdom have to do with facing trials?
- b) Why should we pray for wisdom, not just for holding on and not giving up while going through the trial?
- c) What is God's response when we ask for wisdom? (James 1:5)
- d) Why is faith so important in prayer? (James 1:6)
- e) Read Hebrews 11:6. What does this verse tell you about faith?
- f) What effect does doubt have on a person when he or she prays? (James 1:6-8)
- g) What does it mean to be “double-minded”? (James 1:8)

Big Book, pg# 13 - I [Bill W.] was to test my thinking by the new God-consciousness within. Common sense would thus become uncommon sense. I was to sit quietly when in doubt, asking only for direction and strength to meet my problems as He would have me. Never was I to pray for myself, except as my requests bore on my usefulness to others. Then only might I expect to receive. But that would be in great measure. My friend [Ebby thacher] promised when these things were done I would enter upon a new relationship with my Creator; that I would have the elements of a way of living which answered all my problems. Belief in the power of God, plus enough willingness, honesty and humility (this

was part of a conversation between that Ebby Thacher (who would become Bill's sponsor) and Bill W. in 1934).

2. Examine James 3:13-18.

- a) According to v13, what characteristics will a wise and understanding person have?
- b) What does envy and selfish ambition do for a person? (v14)
- c) How would you define selfish ambition? What does that have to do with addictions?
- d) Where does the wisdom that leads to envy and selfish ambition come from? (15)
- e) What comes with envy and selfish ambition? (v16)
- f) How is the wisdom that comes from God described in v17?

Big Book Pg# 68 - We are now on a different basis of trusting and relying upon God. We trust infinite God rather than our finite selves. We are in the world to play the role He assigns. Just to the extent that we do as we think He would have us, and humbly rely on Him, does He enable us to match calamity with serenity. We never apologize to anyone for depending upon our Creator. We can laugh at those who think spirituality the way of weakness. paradoxically, it is the way of strength. The verdict of the ages is that faith means courage. All men of faith have courage. They trust their God. We never apologize for God. Instead we let him demonstrate, through us, what he can do. We ask him to remove our fear and direct our attention to what he would have us be. At once, we commence to outgrow fear.

3. Examine Ephesians 1:17.

- a) Why does the Spirit of God give us wisdom and revelation of God?
- b) What must we do to get to know God better?

Big Book pg# 79 - Although these reparations (act of making amends) take innumerable forms, there are some general principles which we find guiding. Reminding ourselves that we have decided to go to any lengths to find a spiritual experience, we ask that we be given strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be. We may lose our position or

reputation or face jail, but we are willing. We have to be. We must not shrink at anything.

4. Read Colossians 1:9-14

- a) What is Paul asking God to give to these Christians? (v9)
- b) What are the 4 reasons found in vs10 that Paul prays this?
- c) What does it mean to (1) live a life worthy of the Lord? (2) please him in every way? (3) bear fruit in every good work? (4) grow in the knowledge of God?
- d) What does know the will of God for you have to do with endurance, patience and gratitude? (v11-12)

Step 11 says, “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.”

Step 11 is asking for God’s guidance for our lives. When we pray for the knowledge of His will for us, we are asking for his guidance. We find this “Guidance” concept throughout the Big Book (3rd ed., pp.13, 46, 49, 62-63, 69-70, 76, 79-80, 83, 84-88, 100, 117, 120, 124, 158, 164).