

# 1

## Wise Up!

*James 1:1-8, 12*



Pain raises difficult questions. Why is this happening to me? Did I do something wrong? Is God angry with me? How long will this last? Should I pray for instant relief, or should I tough it out?



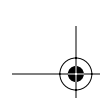
When we hurt, what we want most is deliverance; God says that what we need most is wisdom. If we let God work his purposes, he will enable us to grow and mature through the difficulties that come into our lives.

GROUP DISCUSSION. What is the difference between being smart and being wise?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Who is the wisest person you know (or have ever known)? Why do you consider that person wise?

James, Jesus' half-brother, wrote to persecuted Christians throughout the Roman Empire. He wrote before A.D. 50 when





the church was still very young. Believers barely knew what it meant to be Christians, and now they had to learn to be Christians under trial. *Read James 1:1-8, 12.*

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**1.** James writes that we should “count it pure joy” when we face “trials of many kinds” (v. 2). What is your gut-level response to that advice?

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**2.** How does James justify his seemingly outlandish words (vv. 3-4)?



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**3.** What is the connection between wisdom and perseverance?

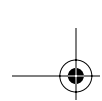
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**4.** What is one thing you have learned through difficult experiences?

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**5.** How would you describe a spiritually mature and complete person (v. 4)?





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**6.** Do you think anyone gets to such a state of maturity in this life? Why or why not?

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**7.** In what spirit should believers pray for wisdom (vv. 5-8)?

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**8.** How would you define a double-minded person (v. 8)?



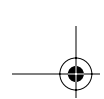
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**9.** A Christian who prays in difficult circumstances is bound to have fleeting thoughts such as, *This won't work* or *God won't answer me*. Do you believe this is the sort of doubt to which James refers in verses 6-8? Why or why not?

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**10.** What external or internal pressures tempt you to be double-minded?





12 ————— *Growing Older & Wiser*

**11.** Verse 12 promises a heavenly reward for those who persevere. What benefits does perseverance also provide in this life?

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**12.** What trials is God using right now to build your perseverance?

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**13.** How would you like to respond to those trials in a more mature way?



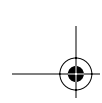
*Pray that you will trust God to work out his purposes in any trials you are now experiencing. Boldly ask for joy in the certainty that he is using your problems to make you a more mature Christian.*

**Now or Later**

Where do you especially need wisdom from the Lord? Reread James 1:6. Draw yourself on a small raft riding on wind-tossed ocean waves. Label the “waves” (and, if appropriate, the “raft”). In the spirit of James 1:5, write a prayer for wisdom. Draw yourself again, this time in a sturdy boat on a placid body of water, or if you dislike boats, draw yourself safe on land!

Study Philippians 3:7-16 and/or 2 Peter 1:3-11 with a focus on how maturity in Christ produces Christlike character.





## 2

# Wisdom Hunt

### *Colossians 2:1-10*



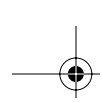
Advice columnists, talk-show hosts, commercials, infomercials. We have no shortage of people telling us how to live. With breathtaking authority, even arrogance, they proclaim to us their version of the truth.

As we drown in this flood of opinions and pseudoinformation, we ask what Job asked a long time ago: "Where can wisdom be found?" (Job 28:12). Scripture tells us that wisdom is hidden, but it is hidden where anyone who seeks can find it.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Suppose you find a map to a buried treasure not far from your home. The map does not reveal the nature of the treasure. What would you do? Who would you tell? Who would you not tell? What would you hope the treasure turned out to be?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. What is the best discovery you ever made? How did it happen? How did it change your life?





Christians in the Gentile city of Colossae had come under the influence of Gnostic teachers who claimed that Jesus Christ was insufficient for salvation. These teachers offered a secret knowledge that promised to take Christians to another level. Paul wrote to encourage the Colossian believers to trust in Christ alone for salvation. *Read Colossians 2:1-10.*

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**1.** How would you sum up Paul's intentions for the Christians in Colossae and Laodicea? Note particular words and phrases that lead you to your answer.



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**2.** When have you heard it said or implied that, in order to be saved, you needed "Jesus plus . . ." ? What was the "plus" ?



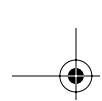
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**3.** In what sense is Christ "the mystery of God" (v. 2) ?

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**4.** Paul makes the remarkable claim that *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ (v. 3). When you consider the many branches of human knowledge—for example physics, biology, mathematics, history—in what sense do you think Paul could make this claim?





*Wisdom Hunt* \_\_\_\_\_ 15

**5.** Why was Paul pleased with reports about the Colossian church (v. 5)?

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**6.** What will ensure the Colossians' continued spiritual growth—as well as ours (vv. 6-8)?

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**7.** In contemporary society what are some hollow and deceptive ideas that compete with Christ (v. 8)?

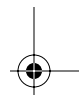
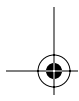


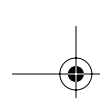
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**8.** When and how have you been taken in by a false idea, and how did you eventually see through it?

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**9.** Paul proclaims two “fullnesses” in verses 9-10. How are the two fullnesses related?





**10.** How does the fullness in verse 9 assure that our fullness in Christ is complete?

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**11.** Where do you feel inadequate to discern truth from falsehood?

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**12.** How can this passage from Colossians equip you to exercise discernment?



*Thank God that Christ has provided all we need for salvation. Pray that you will stay rooted in him and will not be deceived by “fine-sounding arguments.”*

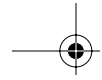
**Now or Later**

Study Colossians 2:6-7 more closely. To learn more about the importance of strong roots, find information about growing trees and shrubs. Identify things that try to uproot you from your faith. Resolve to practice thankfulness to the point of overflowing!

Study John 15:1-17, in which Jesus says we can do nothing unless we continue in him, as a branch must remain connected to the vine.

Study 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, in which Paul calls Christ “the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

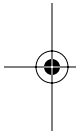




# 3

## Listening to the Young

### *Job 32*



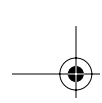
“Listen to your elders.” When we’re young, we don’t want to hear it. When we’re older, we say it ourselves, but by that time, who listens?

Once we have lived a certain number of years and accumulated a certain amount of experience, shouldn’t younger people defer to us? Haven’t we earned that right? Scripture does admonish the younger to respect the older. On the other hand, wisdom is not the automatic accompaniment of aging. Wisdom comes not from the calendar but from God the Creator.

GROUP DISCUSSION. When are you most likely to listen to guidance from a younger person? When are you least likely to listen? Give specific examples.

PERSONAL REFLECTION. How do you respond when a younger person approaches you to make a suggestion or to try to give advice? Do you think younger people find you easy or difficult to approach? Why?





In a short time Job endured a crushing series of disasters: he lost his material wealth, his children and his health. He was reduced to sitting on an ash heap. His own wife advised him to “curse God and die,” but he did not blame God. Three friends who came to see Job insisted that he must have brought all this tragedy on himself through his own sin. Then a fourth visitor spoke up. *Read Job 32.*

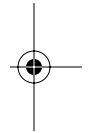
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1. Why did Elihu hesitate to speak out, and how did he overcome his reluctance (vv. 6-9)?



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2. Does Elihu strike you as an admirable person or not? Why?



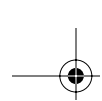
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3. Elihu sat and listened for a long time as Job and his three friends conversed. What angered Elihu about the conversation (vv. 1-5)?

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4. Why is age irrelevant to wisdom (vv. 8-9)?





*Listening to the Young* \_\_\_\_\_ 19

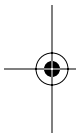
**5.** Experience shows us that, as people grow older, some get wiser and some do not. What do you think makes the difference?

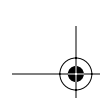
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**6.** On what basis could Elihu demand that the older men now listen to him (vv. 10-14)?

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**7.** When have you benefited from the wisdom of someone younger?

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**8.** How did Elihu feel as he waited to speak out (vv. 15-22)?

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**9.** What would safeguard him from insincerity in his speech (vv. 21-22)?





**10.** What evidence do you see that, though Job's elder friends had spoken from the knowledge of their years, they had failed to speak with the understanding that comes from God?

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**11.** Where might you be rejecting the wisdom of younger people?

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**12.** What steps will you take to listen more closely to younger believers who are wise beyond their years?

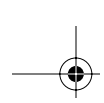
*Pray that you will be increasingly open to that wisdom which comes only from God. Pray that you will recognize God's wisdom in whatever way it comes to you.*

**Now or Later**

Look for ways to include the views of younger people—and younger people themselves—in your fellowship and ministry efforts.

Study Ecclesiastes 4:13-16. What do you learn about the relative values of wealth, wisdom, age and youth?





# 4

## When the Kids Are Grownups Too

### *Exodus 18*

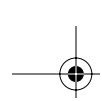


“Do American young people marry against their parents’ wishes?” a Chinese student asked us with some concern. “For us, the opinion of parents is very important. We would not marry without the consent of our parents.”

Most Americans would find themselves torn between two opinions. We believe that grown children should respect and listen to their parents, but we look down on adults who remain under the thumb of Mom or Dad. When our children become adults, how much should we expect them to continue to defer to us? And if that question isn’t complex enough, what about our daughters-in-law or sons-in-law? What about younger people in general? Long before any of us faced these questions, Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro, confronted them under great pressure in a remote desert.

GROUP DISCUSSION. When do you freely voice your opinions to younger people, and when do you hesitate? Why?





PERSONAL REFLECTION. Think of a time when you offered advice to a younger person. Was it easy or difficult? If you were hesitant to speak out, why? Are you glad you spoke up? What happened as a result of your suggestions?

Under Moses' leadership, God had miraculously brought the enslaved Israelites out of Egypt. They reached the vicinity of Mount Sinai but had not yet received the Ten Commandments. Moses' Midianite wife and two sons had not accompanied him on the journey. Now his wife, sons and father-in-law arrive at the Hebrew camp. *Read Exodus 18.*



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**1.** Where are the potential points of conflict in this story?



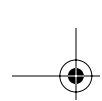
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**2.** When you see a younger person making foolish or dangerous choices, what do you do?

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**3.** What can you discern about the relationship between Moses and Jethro from verses 5-8?





*When the Kids Are Grownups Too* ————— 23

4. How did Jethro respond to Moses' account of the Lord's miracles and guidance (vv. 9-12)?

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5. What surprised Jethro the next day (vv. 13-15)?

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6. Notice how long Jethro observed the situation before he said anything (v. 13). Was this the appropriate length of time? Why or why not?

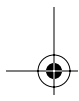


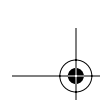
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7. Before he gave any advice, what effort did Jethro make to understand the situation—and Moses' perspective on the situation (vv. 14-15)?

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8. Jethro finally gave a rather blunt evaluation of what Moses was doing (v. 17). What misgivings might have gone through Jethro's mind before he spoke?





24 ————— *Growing Older & Wiser*

When have you felt like this with your grown children?

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**9.** How did Jethro make the case that his suggestions would be good for Moses and good for the people (vv. 18-23)?

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**10.** How did Jethro affirm Moses' abilities, even while he advised Moses to let go of some responsibilities?



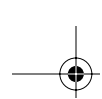
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**11.** As a result of Jethro's visit, what changes were brought about for the Hebrew people and for Moses in particular (vv. 24-27)?

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**12.** What spirit do you think prevailed between Jethro and Moses as Jethro left (v. 27)?





*When the Kids Are Grownups Too* ————— 25

**13.** The good results of verses 25-27 are a credit to both Moses and Jethro. “Moses listened” (v. 24), and Jethro gave counsel worth listening to. What wisdom would you like to pass along to your grown children or other young people?

**14.** How can you voice your ideas in a manner that expresses confidence in God and in your audience?

*Pray that you will be sensitive to people’s feelings, even when you believe they are making big mistakes. Ask God for wisdom to know when to be silent and when to speak up.*

**Now or Later**

Think of a younger person who is going the wrong way, but whom you hesitate to approach. Write a letter of advice to that person. Ask a neutral person to read what you have written and give you an honest critique of your tone. Rewrite your letter and consider mailing it or verbally delivering your opinions. Even if you choose not to share your suggestions now, note anything you learn in the process about how to approach a person engaged in self-destructive behavior.

Study 1 Samuel 2:12-36. Note that although Eli’s sons were responsible for their own actions, God rebuked Eli for the way he had indulged them. Note also God’s sovereignty at work behind the scenes. While Eli’s sons carried on their sham priesthood, God was quietly raising up Samuel as a faithful prophet for Israel.

