

My Spirit Looks to God Alone

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

My spirit looks to God alone;
My rock and refuge is his throne;
In all my fears, in all my straits,
My soul on his salvation waits.

Trust him, ye saints, in all your ways,
Pour out your hearts before his face:
When helpers fail, and foes invade,
God is our all-sufficient aid.

False are the men of high degree,
The baser sort are vanity;
Laid in the balance both appear
Light as a puff of empty air.

Make not increasing gold your trust,
Nor set your hearts on glittering dust;
Why will you grasp the fleeting smoke,
And not believe what God has spoke?

Once has his awful voice declar'd,
Once and again my ears have heard,
"All power is his eternal due;"
He must be fear'd and trusted too.

For sov'reign pow'r reigns not alone,
Grace is a partner on the throne:
Thy grace and justice, mighty Lord,
Shall well divide our last reward.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Tried with Fire: Want Wisdom?

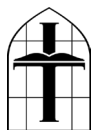
Kevin T. Bauder

On our first Thanksgiving in Denver, my wife and I wanted to drive to Iowa to see her family, then to Wisconsin for my parents' silver wedding anniversary. The problem was that a snow storm was blowing in from the Rockies. Snow swirled the whole night before we were supposed to leave, but in the morning it seemed to be letting up. Having grown up in central Iowa I'd never seen a snow storm that you couldn't drive through. You just had to go slowly and drive carefully. I assumed that Colorado snow storms would be the same, so I decided that we should head east up Interstate 76.

We were hardly outside Denver when the snow started to thicken and the wind began to howl. The further we drove the worse the storm grew. Sometime after Sterling our car began to bottom out in the drifts. There were times when the blizzard was so fierce that I couldn't see the hood in front of the windshield. We felt like we were the only thing on the road. Finally we piled into a snow bank that we could neither plow through nor dig out of. We were stuck.

We'd brought food, water, blankets, and candles. We hunkered down in the car and prepared to wait out the storm. Every couple of moments I'd try the CB radio to see whether somebody could hear me. I was about to give up when a snow plow answered. He had intended to exit somewhere behind us, but instead he drove up to us, plucked us out of our car, turned around through the median, and drove us back to the last exit. We found ourselves in a little truck stop with half-a-dozen other motorists who were waiting out the storm. We ordered supper in the coffee shop and then slept on the floor overnight. In the morning the storm had passed, but our car was buried under the snow. It took us half the day to get it pulled out and started. That afternoon we were finally able to drive east along a single lane that the plows had cleared.

By the time we resumed our drive, I had gained significant wisdom. Besides learning something about Colorado weather, I also learned something about the dangers of taking risks based upon flawed assumptions. Furthermore, I learned something about the weight of responsibility that comes with making choices that affect others.



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Wisdom increases with experience—but usually with experience of a particular kind. I would never have learned the same lessons by driving on a sunny day in June. The kind of experience that teaches wisdom is almost always difficult. We gain wisdom by enduring loss or the threat of loss.

The Bible has much to say about wisdom. One of the most profound statements is found in James 1:5. James tells his readers that if anyone lacks wisdom, “let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” God does not reproach those who desire wisdom. He gives it to them—and that is good. The part that we overlook, however, is *how* God gives wisdom to those who ask.

The promise of James 1:5 occurs in the middle of James’s discussion of trials. He has already said that trials produce endurance. In verse 5 he stipulates another fruit of trials: wisdom. The implication is that if we ask for wisdom, we can expect God to send us trials.

Of course, we can gain a kind of wisdom all on our own. We learn to make good choices by experience. We gain experience, however, by making bad choices. That’s what I did during that Thanksgiving weekend in Denver. I made a choice that could have been disastrous.

When God sends us trials, however, they are not disasters. He does not send them to break us. Every trial that God permits He keeps under His control. By guiding us through these controlled circumstances He permits us to experience just enough pain and distress to accomplish His purpose for us—in this case, wisdom.

That is why James says that when we ask for wisdom we should ask “in faith, nothing wavering.” God produces wisdom in us by guiding us through trials. We cannot have the wisdom without the trials. When we ask for wisdom, we are effectively asking God to send us whatever afflictions will be necessary to produce the wisdom. We must not say that we want wisdom, but then balk at the trial. That kind of wavering is like a wave that goes back and forth in the water. If we bring that sort of uncertainty to our quest for wisdom, we will not get what we seek. (Jas 1:6-7)

In fact, this kind of wavering is what James refers to as being “double minded.” He notes that double-minded people are unstable people, and not just in their asking for wisdom. The kind of person who desires the ends but rejects the means will be unstable in all sorts of things.

God permits His children to experience pain and suffering, trials and afflictions. Even if Scripture did not tell us so, we would learn it by experience. The question is not whether believers must endure pain. The question is why. That question has many answers, since God accomplishes many purposes through the affliction of His people. One of those purposes is that they should grow wise.

Wisdom is the ability to make good choices in the absence of a definite rule. We gain wisdom by experience—usually unpleasant experience. When we ask for wisdom we can expect unpleasant experiences. Nevertheless, we can rejoice in knowing that when God uses trials to increase our wisdom, they are always under the control of His wisdom and love.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
