

Biblical Wisdom James 3:13-18

James is a practical book. He is concerned about the application of your beliefs in the hope that it is producing authentic faith.

Moderns don't speak about wisdom much, but it is a very important theme in the Bible

1 Kings 3:9 - Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?"

Proverbs 8:11 - ...wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.

Biblical wisdom is not intelligence. Wisdom is everywhere but wisdom is lacking.

We are drowning in information, while starving for wisdom.

Edward Osborne Wilson, a secular humanist and American entomologist and biologist and two-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ¹⁵ This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

First – Let's Define Wisdom

13a - *Who is wise and understanding among you?*

James doesn't define wisdom because he's writing to Jews who had a common understanding of wisdom

In the Bible, wisdom isn't knowledge or information. It's not less than knowledge or information and it's based on information and knowledge, but it is more than just those things.

How to gain wisdom? There are four stages – David Brooks in *The New York Times*

a) *"First, there is basic factual acquisition. You have to know what a neutron or a gene is, that the Civil War came before the Progressive Era.*

b) *Second, there is pattern formation, linking facts together in meaningful ways.*

c) *Third, there is mental reformation. At some point while studying a field, the student realizes she has learned a new language and way of seeing — how to think like a mathematician or a poet or a physicist.*

d) *Finally, after living with this sort of knowledge for years, exposing it to the rigors of reality, wisdom dawns. Wisdom is a hard-earned intuitive awareness of how things will flow.*

The cathedrals of knowledge and wisdom are based on the foundations of factual acquisition and cultural literacy. You can't overleap that, which is what High Tech High is in danger of doing."

Wisdom is what you do when a strict moral rule does not apply. It's how you decide between multiple good options.

ILL – Knowledge – A tomato is a fruit

Wisdom – You don't put tomato in a fruit salad

ILL – Knowledge – Most accidents occur within ten miles of home.

Wisdom – Don't move.

ILL - Fritz Haber was a German chemist who received the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1918 for his invention of the Haber–Bosch process, a method used in industry used to synthesize ammonia from nitrogen gas and hydrogen gas. This is important because the food production for half the world's current population depends on this method for producing nitrogen fertilizers. It's also the process used to create mustard gas which during World War I, killed approximately 120,000 people. Haber said, *"In peace a chemist belongs to the world but in war, to his country."*

Wisdom is what we need to do when a strict moral rule does not apply. It's how you decide between multiple good options.

This kind of wisdom comes from God. He is standing on the OT that teaches...

Proverbs 1:7 – The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom

Fear is seeing ourselves in proper relationship to God and provides us with a God-centered approach to life.

It's important to know what wisdom is because James encourages us to seek it and live like we possess it

James says that wisdom is best viewed in how you live –

Second - What Wisdom Does (How do I know if I'm wise?) 17-18

17-18 - *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

Wisdom equips you to a) live wholly and b) to pursue peace with those around you

17-18 - *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

- a) pure – overarching attribute that informs all the others – sacred, venerable. It produces integrity and sincerity
- b) Peaceable – You don't avoid conflict, but you strive for peace and not discord. You prefer peace.
- c) Gentle – considerate, willing to yield, to be flexible
- d) Open to reason = reasonable - persuadable – you are a good listener and can be changed
- e) Full of mercy = merciful – using your resources to serve others; practical help
- f) Good fruits –

3:12 - *Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs?*

- g) Impartial = treating every image bearer the same
- h) Sincere – you say and do the same thing with consistency

Picture: Red Hen Diner sign – *“Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.”*

Each one of these attributes of wisdom is like a seed planted in our lives – a harvest of righteousness (18) that produced “peace.”

ILL - Jack Hay was not an unwealthy man but at his funeral everyone spoke to his integrity, service and humility. It will be true of you also because this is what wisdom does.

We all want this, but it is very hard to live it.

Third: The Challenge to Live Wisely 14-16

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ¹⁵ This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

The reason it is so hard is because there are 2 wisdoms in the world: “wisdom from above” versus wisdom that “is earthly, natural, demonic.”

This alternative wisdom has its tendencies in devilish practices

What makes the devil, the devil?

Worldly wisdom is self-absorbed.

14 - *But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.*

- a) You want what someone else has so badly that you despise the person who has your life
- b) At that point, you begin to demonize the people who think otherwise.

How do I know when “bitter jealousy and selfish ambition” rules my life? The conversation moves from principles to personalities.

In a me-first world community breaks down. Communication stops. If peace reigns, the entire family is benefited.

Matthew 12:34 - out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks

We are not different from what we speak

Fourth: Growing in wisdom

We grow in wisdom because there is no ‘end’ to wisdom. In different seasons of life, we need different wisdom.

- a) Pay attention to your ambitions –

There is a godly wisdom

"In the end, just as there are only two kinds of piety, the self-centered and the God-centered, so there are only two kinds of ambition: one can be ambitious for oneself or for God. There is no third alternative. Ambitions for self may be quite modest (enough to eat, to drink, and to wear, as

in the Sermon [on the Mount]) or they may be grandiose (a bigger house, a faster car, a higher salary, a wider reputation, more power). But whether modest or immodest, these are ambitions for myself — my comfort, my wealth, my status, my power. Ambitions for God, however, if they are to be worthy, can never be modest. There is something inherently inappropriate about cherishing small ambition for God. How can we ever be content that He should acquire just a little more honor in the world? No! Once we are clear that God is King, then we long to see Him crowned with glory and honor, according to His true place. We become ambitious for the spread of His kingdom and righteousness everywhere. When this is genuinely our dominant ambition, then not only will all these things...be yours as well (i.e. our material needs will be provided), but there will be no harm in having secondary ambitions, since these will be subservient to our primary ambition and not in competition with it. Indeed, it is then that secondary ambitions become healthy. Christians should be eager to develop their gifts, widen their opportunities, extend their influence and be given promotion in their work — not now to boost their own ego or build their own empire, but rather through everything they do to bring glory to God."

- Alister Chapman in *Godly Ambition: John Stott and the Evangelical Movement*

Conflict normally arises when your ambitions are self-centered.

b) Seek Peace with all People

Peacemaking is not conflict avoidance or enjoyment. And peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of fullness.

Conflict occurs when we think, want or do something differently than others.

Peacemaking comes naturally to no one. It always goes against our normal human impulses. Peacemaking is applying the gospel and God's principles for problem solving to everyday life
Peacemaker by Ken Sande

- What will glorify God?
- What have I contributed to the conflict
- How can I best say what needs to be said?
- Be reconciled as much as it depends on you

Peacemaking applies the cross to everyday relationships

Romans 5:1 & 5 - Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.....because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

c) Ask for wisdom

1:5 - If any of you lack wisdom, ask God.

d) See Christ as your wisdom

Read the Gospels and see how Jesus lived.

In Proverbs, Solomon personifies wisdom which prefigures Christ.

Wisdom is displayed in Jesus' death.

How to solve conflict? **Philippians 2:5-8** -

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,² complete my joy by

a) The goal - *being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.*

b) The means - ³*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

c) The model - ⁵*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but*

- *emptied himself,*
- *by taking the form of a servant,*
- *being born in the likeness of men.*
- ⁸*And being found in human form, he humbled himself*
- *by becoming obedient to the point of death,*
- *even death on a cross.*

d) The result - ⁹*Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Who can do this? Only God. This is why only Christianity can solve the worlds problems. When you accept Christ as your Savior, the Holy Spirit lives in you. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ who enables you to live the **Christian** life.

Conclusion: James' point is not wisdom, it's peace. The only way to peace is to live wisely. The only way to live wisely is to make Jesus your wisdom.

For Community Groups:

- 1 – What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?
- 2 – Have you ever seen an intelligent person act unwisely? How?
- 3 – Have you ever acted unwisely? How?
- 4 – According to Prov 1:7, what is the source of wisdom?
- 5 – What does it mean to ‘fear’ God?
- 6 – According to verses 17-18, what are the seeds to producing a wise life? Take time to discuss each one of them.
- 7 – How did the owner of the Red Hen diner not exercise wisdom? How do we know she did not exercise wisdom?
- 8 – What is the difference between earthly and godly wisdom? **One centers on God and the other leaves out God.**
- 9 – How is a self-centered life, not a wise life?
- 10 – Why is ambition such a pinitol element in living wisely?
- 11 – How do you determine your ambitions and keep them in ‘check’?
- 12 – Review Ken Sande’s four points to resolving conflict.
- 13 – What does it mean to apply the cross to everyday relationships?
- 14 – Discuss the pattern of peace-making outlined in Philippians 2:5-8.
- 15 – Why is important that we are Christians in order to live wisely and pursue peace?