

FAITH THAT WORKS // Wisdom from Above

As we've been working our way through the book of James, we're being challenged to put our faith into practice. To not just listen to the word but to allow it to inform and inspire change in our actions. To become practitioners of the word of God of the Bible.

James is writing to believers that had a "professing faith," but not a "practicing faith." And we want to be a church that puts our money where our mouth is. A church family whose faith that gets to work. Not only in us, but a faith that works through us for the sake of the community that we're in.

I love being a part of a church family that puts their faith to work! This is what we're talking about—not just a professing faith, but a practicing faith.

James 3:13-18, "Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

THE IMPORTANCE OF WISDOM

A working definition of wisdom for us today:

Wisdom is the ability to understand and navigate the complex realities of everyday life.

Having wisdom gives us the ability to navigate work, finances, relationships, conflict, trust, morality, marriage, sex, family, parenting... all these parts and pieces of life that are interconnected and affect one another.

When we're young, we tend to view life as fairly simple and straightforward. We tend to be far more idealistic about life. To a degree, we view life almost like a formula. If I do "A," and add it to "B," it will always equal "C".

For example:

- If I'm diligent and work hard, I'll have a good career and a good life.
- If I'm a moral person, bad things won't happen to me.
- If I obey God, life will always be up and to the right.

In other words, we think, *"If I live this way, I'll get this result..."*

But the more life we live, the more time goes by, the more experience we gain, the more hardships and trials we navigate, the more we realize that life is not nearly as clear cut as we'd like it to be.

The truth is that life is complicated. Relationships are complicated. What James tells us in this passage is that true wisdom is not just knowing that life is complicated. True wisdom understands the complicated nature of life and knows how to navigate it. Wisdom knows what to do about it. Wisdom isn't just knowledge, it's acquired knowledge applied to specific circumstances and it's unbelievably practical.

In 1 Kings 3, God comes to a young King Solomon and says, *"Ask me for whatever you want. What do you want me to give you?"* If God asked us that question, what would we ask for? Fame? Riches? Power? Influence? A beach house? No debt? A healthy marriage?

And of all the things Solomon could ask for, he asks for wisdom, and God grants his request. He gives him a wise and discerning mind. Later, two women gave birth in the same house. One of the children died, and the women whose child died, took the other surviving child from his mother, and laid the dead child at the other woman's side in the middle of the night.

1 Kings 3:22, *"But the other woman said, 'No, the living child is mine, and the dead child is yours.' The first said, 'No, the dead child is yours, and the living child is mine.' Thus they spoke before the king."*

Can you imagine? How would we know? How could we possibly issue a ruling with any level of confidence? We weren't there, so we'd have no idea!

1 Kings 3:24-28, *"And the king said, 'Bring me a sword.' So a sword was brought before the king. And the king said, 'Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other.' Then the woman whose son was alive said to the king, because her heart yearned for her son, 'Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by*

no means put him to death.' But the other said, 'He shall be neither mine nor yours; divide him.' Then the king answered and said, 'Give the living child to the first woman, and by no means put him to death; she is his mother.' And all Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered, and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice."

That's wisdom! It's practical and so specific regarding each and every circumstance.

Proverbs 3:13-15, "Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed."

Solomon knew the importance, and he tells us in Proverbs 3 that wisdom is infinitely more important than all the wealth, all the fame, all influence, and all the power in the world because wisdom alone gives us the ability to navigate the challenges of life in a way that brings about peace, justice, and human flourishing.

THE EVIDENCE OF WISDOM

In this passage, James is telling us that there are two types of wisdom. There's heavenly wisdom and worldly wisdom. There's wisdom from above and wisdom from below. A true wisdom and false wisdom.

James 3:13, "Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works..."

You can determine a wise person based on what they do and the things they say. James says that our conduct is the evidence of what type of wisdom we're operating from. So, what is the evidence of false wisdom?

James 3:14-16, "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice."

WISDOM FROM BELOW

1. Jealous

- a. This describes a harsh, contentious rivalry that's driven by the fear of losing something we already have to someone else. It's possessive, controlling, and it views everyone around us a threat and puts us constantly on guard.

2. Self-Seeking

- a. It means to exalt ourselves at other people's expense. To create rivalries and factions, division and strife for selfish ends without any concern for others.

3. Boastful

- a. Pride is not quiet. And there is nothing that reveals insecurity and the need for human approval quite like boasting. This is about self-promotion.

4. Deceitful

- a. Rivalries are born of jealousy, then selfish ambition, strife and division, which leads to boasting.

5. Confusing

- a. All of these things lead to disorder, confusion, and every vile practice. It creates an environment and culture where sin can grow and fester in the dark.

James isn't just writing this to individuals. He's writing these things to the church. A community where all these things, if left unaddressed, it will run rampant and bring horrific consequences.

But thankfully, James then gives us what true wisdom looks like.

James 3:17, "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

WISDOM FROM ABOVE

1. Pure

- a. Clean, innocent. Looking to serve and benefit others.

2. Peaceable

- a. Man's wisdom leads to rivalry, division, and strife. God's wisdom makes us peaceable. Peace doesn't happen by ignoring problems. Peace

happens when our commitment to one another is bigger than our problems and we work together for solutions.

3. Gentle

- a. We're gentle with people that we love. A lack of gentleness only reveals a lack of genuine love.

4. Open to Reason

- a. Wisdom from above isn't stubborn and hard-hearted. A reasonable person is willing to listen, to ask questions, to seek understanding, and even disagree without being demeaning or belittling.

5. Full of Mercy

- a. Wisdom is able to put itself in others' shoes and show tremendous compassion by meeting the needs of others and recognizing God's incredible mercy on us.

6. Fruitful

- a. Good conduct, works, good deeds. A wise life is filled with good fruit.

7. Impartial

- a. True wisdom is able to be objective in decision making. It isn't given over to favoritism or any form of partiality.

8. Sincere

- a. Without pretense. There's no façade. Down to earth. Genuine and without hypocrisy. No masks. No pretending. No fake religious exterior.

These are all characteristics of wisdom that are manifested in a wise person's life.

James 3:13, "By his [a wise person's] good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom"

It's a strange phrase, but here's what this is saying:

Humility always grows where wisdom present.

Pride and wisdom are incompatible. The truth is pride make us dumb. It makes us do dumb things. It gives us a grossly over-inflated view of our own importance, which leads to stupid, impulsive, destructive decisions.

Worldly wisdom says...

- In marriage, look for someone who will serve and fulfill you.

- In your career, go after the money. Assert yourself. Step on people if you have to. Get what you deserve no matter who it hurts along the way. Lie if you have to. Just do whatever it takes to build or preserve your reputation.
- In relationships, in conflict, never admit that you're wrong, or that you made a mistake. Always get the last word in. If they don't agree with you, or align with you, punish them, ignore them.

But wisdom from above is humble. It puts the interests of others ahead of itself. It seeks to serve, to bless. If you're humble, there's something pure about you. There's no pretense or façade. It's sincere.

A humble person is peaceable. They bring peace into their relationships, they're gentle (kind), open to reason (teachable), full of mercy (compassionate) and good fruits, impartial, and sincere.

What James is telling us is that the key characteristic in a wise person is that they are humble. We've talked about the importance of it, the evidence of it, so how do you get it? How do we become wiser? How do you grow in wisdom?

THE ACQUISITION OF WISDOM

James. 1:5, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."

If you need wisdom today, ask Him for it. He gives generously.

Now, just a fair warning, I've learned over the years that asking for wisdom can be like asking God to give you patience. How does God grow your patience? Sometimes, it's by allowing circumstances that will cause your patience to fail. How will you become wiser? Often, it's through failure, through mistakes, and lessons learned. Because the truth is, we learn far more about life through failure than we do from success.

It's through failure that we have the opportunity to learn how life and relationships really work, and it's through reflecting on, and processing our failures that we learn how to navigate life differently moving forward.

Proverbs 9:10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom..."

Now, if you're not familiar with the book of Proverbs you might hear that and think "why would being afraid of God make me wise?" But it's not talking about being afraid of God. It's talking about AWE, ADMIRATION and RESPECT.

The fear of the Lord: Healthy respect for God and His definition of good and evil.

See, when God created the world, he hard-wired wisdom into every aspect of it. How the world works, how relationships best function, what builds trust and what destroys it, what brings about peace, and harmony, and what brings division and destruction.

And that knowledge alone ought to give us a healthy respect not only for how God designed the world, but how we're to navigate the everyday circumstances of our lives.

Proverbs 3:5-6, "In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight."

What this means is that we're constantly deferring to God's instruction and asking for His wisdom on how to navigate life. It makes sense doesn't it!? If He designed it all, He would know how it all works right? Since He made us for relationship with one another, He knows how we're to be in relationship with one another.

Acknowledging Him in all our ways means:

- In every decision, submission.
- In every circumstance, surrender.
- In every relationship, referencing God's ways.

It means prioritizing God's ways as revealed to us through His word.

So, what now, what do we do?

1. Evaluate your life.

- a. Can I honestly say that I'm full of wisdom?

Proverbs says seek wisdom more than riches. Wisdom is a tree of life, more precious than jewels. Nothing we desire compares with her. (Prov. 3)

Today, recognize that God values wisdom and God has made wisdom available to you. He invites us to pursue it, to lay hold of it. Those who gain it are called blessed! Happy!

2. Ask God for Wisdom.

- a. Maybe you're facing some really challenging circumstances and you need God to give you wisdom.
 - i. Maybe you're in a financial hole and don't know how to climb out of it.
 - ii. Maybe you've got a job opportunity that has some serious ramifications for your family, and you're not sure what to do or how to make that decision.
 - iii. Maybe your marriage is falling apart, and you don't even know where to start or if God can redeem what's been broken?
- b. Have you genuinely, sincerely asked God for wisdom?
- c. Have you stopped leaning on your own understanding and submitted to what God says in His word?
- d. Or, maybe you're going... *"Yeah, I need wisdom for sure, but I don't even know Jesus, I don't know God..."* Maybe you need to give your heart to Jesus or come back to Him today. He brought you here for this very purpose today, and He wants to give you wisdom for whatever circumstance you're facing.