



May 17, 2026

Faith in Action - Two Kinds of Wisdom

James 3:13-18

Pastor Greg Flagg

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.



“James says, that those who are wise according to God’s will, are so kind, meek, and merciful, as yet not to cover vices nor favor them; but on the contrary in such a way as to strive to correct them, and yet in a peaceable manner...those who wish to be physicians to heal vices ought not to be executioners.”

John Calvin, Commentary on James

Questions for Personal or Small Group Use

Opening

Think of someone you’d describe as genuinely wise — not just smart or successful. What was it about them that gave you that impression?

Discussion

- James opens by asking: “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life...” Why do you think he connects wisdom not to what just you know, but to how you live and how you treat others?
- James links earthly wisdom to “bitter envy and selfish ambition.” In what everyday, respectable-looking ways do you see these show up — in your own life, at work, or even inside the church?
- James says where envy and selfish ambition exist, “there you find disorder and every evil practice.” Where have you seen a toxic undercurrent — whether at work, in a family, or in a church — quietly produce that kind of disorder over time?
- James listing “Submissive” as a value of heavenly wisdom may seem unusual to praise in our culture, where being strong and decisive is valued. What would it look like in practice to hold your opinions and decisions with humble openness?
- Based on James’s framework here, what would it look like to evaluate the advice someone gives you — not just whether it sounds smart, but whether the source and spirit of it reflect wisdom from above?
- Churches often prize confident, decisive leadership and doctrinal clarity. How do we hold onto those things without sliding into the “boasting” or “denying the truth” that James warns about?

Application

- Share the list of wisdom-from-above qualities (pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere) with someone who knows you well and ask: “Which of these do you most see in me most and which do you see lacking in me right now?” Trust that they love you, want the best for you and just listen.



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