

DG Guide: James 3:1-12

Opening Prayer

1. Opening Prayer

Father, thank you that real wisdom isn't something we have to manufacture, but a gift You give freely through Your Holy Spirit. As we open this passage together, expose anything in us that is driven by envy or self, and draw us near to You. Open our hearts more and more to receive Your grace. Amen.

2. Starter Question / Ice Breaker

Think of someone you would describe as genuinely wise (not just clever or knowledgeable). What is it about the way they live that earns that word? Share one quality you have noticed in them.

3. Key Takeaways from the Sermon

1. **Wisdom is knowing what to do and actually doing it.** John framed godly wisdom as a combination of knowledge and right living, not just head knowledge. It is a skill in living out the truth of God, shown in good conduct done with gentleness.
2. **There are two kinds of wisdom, and one is a counterfeit.** Earthly wisdom is "all about yourself" (envy and selfish ambition), and James calls it earthly, unspiritual and demonic. It produces disorder and every evil practice: not just Hollywood-villain evil, but the everyday "little things" of conflict, toxic workplaces and division even in churches.
3. **Wisdom from above carries seven marks.** It is pure, peace-loving, gentle, compliant (teachable, not gullible), full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering and without pretence. John worked through each one with a searching personal question: Do I create unnecessary tension? Do I insist on my rights? Am I approachable, or already forming my comeback?
4. **You can't love God and love the world at the same time.** James 4:1 traces our fighting back to "passions that wage war within us." John called friendship with the world spiritual adultery, an unfaithfulness to the One we belong to. It is a clear, binary choice.
5. **God gives grace to the humble.** The passage does not end in striving but in grace. Submit, resist the devil, draw near, cleanse, humble yourself, and God will lift you up. We don't climb to God; He gives grace to those who admit they cannot.

4. Scripture Reading

Read together: James 3:13-4:10 (the main passage). You may also want to read John 14:26 and Psalm 51 aloud, both of which John drew on.

5. Discussion Questions

Two Kinds of Wisdom

1. John said wisdom is "knowing what to do and actually doing it." Where in everyday life do you find the gap between knowing the right thing and actually doing it is widest for you?
2. James describes earthly wisdom as "all about yourself," rooted in envy and selfish ambition. John pointed out that the evil it produces is usually not dramatic but small and ordinary. Where do you see these "little things" showing up in workplaces, friendships, or even church life?
3. John used Steve Jobs' line to John Scully: "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water, or come with me and change the world?" How is that a picture of the choice James is putting to us between a "spiritually meaningless" life and God's wisdom?

The Marks of Wisdom from Above

4. Read James 3:17-18. Of the seven marks (pure, peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy, unwavering, without pretence), which one most surprised you as a description of wisdom, and why?
5. John explained that "peace-loving" doesn't mean avoiding conflict at all costs; true wisdom "heals and settles situations." Where might genuine peacemaking actually require you to step toward a hard conversation rather than away from it?
6. On being "compliant," John was honest that he often comes back with a "but," already forming his response to shut down criticism. Share a time when being genuinely teachable changed how a situation turned out.

Follow God or Follow the World

7. James 4:1 says our fighting comes from "passions that wage war within us." John said we often fight until we get our own way, and even our prayers get distorted by self. How does this reframe the conflicts you find yourself in?
8. John told the story of a friend whose family left church over a music dispute and never came back, "what a tragedy." Why do you think believers can end up "acting just like society around us," and how does this passage diagnose the real cause?
9. James calls friendship with the world "adultery" and "enmity with God." That is strong language. Why do you think God speaks so seriously about a divided heart, and what does it tell us about how He sees us?

Grace for the Humble

10. John drew the line clearly: "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble." He defined humility as "recognising your true position before God," not weakness or low self-esteem. How is that different from how the world usually pictures humility?

11. Read James 4:7-10. John said these aren't a sequential ladder of steps but "independent yet connected" points. Which one (submit, resist, draw near, cleanse, humble) does God seem to be putting His finger on for you right now?
12. John reminded us the whole passage is in the plural: "God never expects us to live the Christian life all by ourselves." How can this group be a place where people can actually name a sin they can't shake and find support rather than judgement?

6. Personal Reflection

- Where is envy or selfish ambition quietly driving something in your life right now, perhaps dressed up as ambition, "getting ahead," or "I'll sort myself out first, then I'll be generous"?
- John asked, "Am I approachable, or am I already forming my response?" Where are you closed off to someone, and what would it look like to listen instead?
- "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." What is one concrete way (prayer, Scripture, confession) you will draw near to God this week?

7. Group Commitments / Practical Applications

Choose 1-2 of these to commit to as a group:

1. Try John's weekly prayer rhythm together: leaders on Sunday, ourselves Monday, family Tuesday, friends Wednesday, those hurting Thursday, missionaries Friday, those who need Jesus on Saturday. Report back next week.
2. Each person identifies one relationship marked by tension and takes a single step toward peace this week (a message, an apology, a conversation).
3. Pair up for confidential accountability around one sin you "can't seem to shake," with a check-in mid-week.
4. Commit as a group to a set time, place and method for being in God's word daily, and share what is working.
5. Pick one "right" you tend to insist on (your seat, your turn, your way) and deliberately lay it down this week as a practice of gentleness.

8. Closing Exercise

Read the chorus of "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus" aloud together, the hymn John shared from Helen Lemmel's story: "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace." Then sit quietly for a moment and let each person silently name one "thing of earth" they are asking God to make dim as they look to Him.

9. Closing Prayer

Pray together, focusing on:

- Worship: praise God that He is the pure source of all true wisdom, and that He shares it freely through His Spirit.
- Confession: name (silently or aloud) the envy, selfish ambition or pride this passage has surfaced.
- Thanksgiving: thank God that He gives grace to the humble, that He loved, forgave and restored us while we were still sinners.
- Drawing near: ask God to help each person take their one concrete step toward Him this week.

- One another: pray for the relationships in the group and the wider church, that we would be marked by peace rather than the world's fighting.

10. For Next Week

- Follow through on the group commitment you chose, and come ready to share how it went.
- Memory verse: "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without pretence." (James 3:17)
- John hinted that the next passage builds on this one: as the Spirit changes us, we begin to relate to fellow Christians in a whole new way. Come having read on into James 4:11 onwards.

11. Leader Notes

- This passage can easily slide into moralism ("try harder to be wise and humble"). Keep steering the group back to grace: wisdom is a gift received through the Spirit, and humility is the doorway to grace, not a payment for it. The marks of wisdom describe the fruit of God's work in us, not a checklist we achieve.
- The language of "adultery" and "enmity with God" is deliberately confronting. Hold it with warmth: the point is how seriously God takes our hearts because He loves us, not condemnation. Let it lead to repentance and relief, not shame.
- Question 12 and the accountability commitment invite real vulnerability. Set the tone yourself by sharing first, and protect confidentiality. Some may name struggles that need gentle follow-up beyond the group.
- Watch for the person who hears "be miserable, mourn and weep" (v.9) and slips toward despair. John's point was treating sin seriously, which leads through to the joy of Psalm 51, not staying in gloom. Make sure the group lands on grace and the joy of restoration.
- You don't need to cover all twelve questions. Choose the ones that fit your group and leave room for the Spirit to direct the conversation.

Or, if you just want a bunch of discussion prompts:

1. What is the difference between being clever and being wise? Where does the Bible say real wisdom comes from?
2. Why do you think envy and selfish ambition are so often the hidden engine behind conflict, even among Christians?
3. Which of the seven marks of wisdom from above do you most want to grow in this year, and why?
4. "Peace-loving" wisdom heals rather than avoids. When have you seen real peacemaking cost something?
5. Where are you most tempted to "insist on your rights," and what would gentleness look like there instead?
6. Are you genuinely approachable, or do you tend to defend and deflect? What shapes that in you?
7. James says our fighting comes from "passions that wage war within us." How does looking inward (rather than blaming others) change the way you handle conflict?
8. What does it mean that friendship with the world is spiritual adultery? Where do you feel the pull of a divided heart?
9. How would you explain "God gives grace to the humble" to someone who thinks Christianity is mostly about being good enough?
10. Of "submit, resist, draw near, cleanse, humble," which is hardest for you right now, and what is one step you could take this week?