

Bible Fellowship Teaching Plan for James 3:13-18 (October 25, 2026)
The Wisdom from Above

Central Truth: Genuine, godly wisdom is demonstrated by the character and conduct of our lives. Earthly wisdom is driven by jealousy, pride, and selfish ambition and results in conflict and disorder, while the wisdom from above produces purity, peace, gentleness, mercy, impartiality, and sincerity, leading to a harvest of righteousness.

Key Passage (13): “Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.”

Opening Question: Think of someone you think is wise. What is it about that person's life--not just what they know--that makes you think of them as wise?

Background: Our text builds on the discussion of speech in the preceding verses as James addresses the attitudes and motivations behind our words and actions. In asking, “Who is wise and understanding among you?” he challenges his readers to demonstrate their wisdom through good conduct and the meekness that comes from genuine wisdom.

James speaks of two opposite kinds of wisdom. The wisdom that’s not from God is characterized by bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. It is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic in its source and influence, producing disorder and destructive behavior. The wisdom from above comes from God and is reflected in purity, peace, gentleness, reasonableness, mercy, good fruit, impartiality, and sincerity.

James concludes by explaining that those who make peace sow the seeds of righteousness and contribute to a harvest that honors God. The passage calls believers not simply to acquire more information, but to examine what kind of wisdom is actually directing their lives.

Lesson Objectives:

- 1) Explain how godly wisdom differs from knowledge or information.
- 2) Identify good conduct and meekness as evidence of genuine wisdom.
- 3) Define meekness as strength under control rather than weakness.
- 4) Recognize bitter jealousy and selfish ambition as attitudes that oppose heavenly wisdom.
- 5) Describe the characteristics and consequences of earthly, unspiritual, demonic wisdom.
- 6) Identify the eight fruits of wisdom from verse 17.
- 7) Explain how peacemaking contributes to a harvest of righteousness.
- 8) Identify practical ways you can demonstrate heavenly wisdom in relationships, church life, and everyday decisions.

I. Genuine Wisdom Is Revealed in Good Conduct and Meekness (13). James begins with a question: “Who is wise and understanding among you?” and immediately points to the evidence: good conduct and “the meekness of wisdom.”

- A. True wisdom doesn’t come from how much Scripture we know, how persuasively we speak, or how confidently we defend our opinions. It’s revealed in the way we live and the attitudes we display.
- B. James especially emphasizes meekness. It’s not weakness, but strength under control, willingly submitted to God’s will and directed toward the good of others.
- C. Disagreements provide a practical test. Do we listen carefully and remain open to correction, or do we become angry because our pride has been challenged?

Discussion Questions

- 1) How does James say a person should demonstrate wisdom?
- 2) What is the difference between possessing knowledge and living wisely?
- 3) Why is meekness an essential characteristic of godly wisdom?

- 4) How can we stand firmly for biblical truth without becoming harsh or arrogant?
- 5) What do our reactions during disagreements reveal about our spiritual maturity?
- 6) How does being “quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger” help us demonstrate wisdom?

Questions for Personal Reflection

- 1) Do people see godly wisdom in the things I say and the way I live, or do they mainly hear my boasts about what I know?
- 2) How do I respond when someone challenges my understanding or disagrees with me?
- 3) Am I more concerned about discovering the truth or proving that I am right?
- 4) Where do I need to exercise greater meekness and self-control?

II. Earthly Wisdom Produces Jealousy, Selfish Ambition, and Disorder (14-16). James contrasts heavenly wisdom with two destructive attitudes: bitter jealousy and selfish ambition.

- A. Bitter jealousy can disguise itself as righteous concern or zeal for truth. However, beneath it may lie resentment, rivalry, pride, or hostility toward those who disagree with us.
- B. Selfish ambition seeks personal recognition or influence, even when the pursuit damages relationships or the unity of the church.
- C. James warns against boasting about such attitudes or claiming to represent the truth while acting from selfish motives.
- D. He describes this counterfeit wisdom as “earthly, unspiritual, demonic.”
 1. Earthly because it reflects fallen human priorities rather than God's character.
 2. Unspiritual because it's not governed by the Spirit of God

3. Demonic because it reflects the deception, division, and disorder seen in demonic forces.

E. The result of this wisdom is predictable: “disorder and every vile practice.” When pride and self-interest are our motivations, even worthy causes can be corrupted by the methods we use to advance them.

Discussion Questions

- 1) What is the difference between a sincere desire to defend truth and bitter jealousy?
- 2) How can selfish ambition disguise itself as concern for God's work?
- 3) Why does James connect jealousy and selfish ambition with disorder?
- 4) What happens when people value winning an argument more than loving others?
- 5) How can pride and contention damage unity and weaken a church's witness?
- 6) Why must we examine not only what we believe but the motives behind our actions and attitudes as well?

Questions for Personal Reflection

- 1) Do I sometimes disguise pride, envy, or a desire for control as a defense of truth?
- 2) Am I genuinely concerned for others, or do I primarily want people to accept my own views?
- 3) Have my words or actions contributed to conflict that could have been avoided?

III. The Wisdom from Above (17)

A. This wisdom has God for its author, it's communicated to authentic followers of Christ by the Holy Spirit, and it provides us with insight into the things of God.

B. This wisdom is pure--completely free from anything that's "earthly, unspiritual, or demonic." It's not corrupted by sin, hidden agendas, pride, envy, or the desire to manipulate others. Godly wisdom seeks what is true and right before seeking what is convenient or personally advantageous. Our appropriate response to this pure wisdom is heartfelt awe and wonder since it reflects the holiness of God Himself.

1. This wisdom is peaceable. It leads us to live in peace with others. See Romans 12:16-18.
2. This wisdom enables us to be "gentle" or "considerate." "It assumes God's sovereign justice and therefore refuses to force personal rights."
3. This wisdom is "open to reason," "willing to yield to others," or "not self-willed." It's the opposite of being proud, arrogant, obstinate, or overbearing. It's eager to forgive and seek reconciliation. See First Corinthians 9:19-22
4. This wisdom is seen in those who are "full of mercy." The Parable of the Good Samaritan ends with the Lord's command, "Go and do likewise," showing that we must imitate God's mercy in active compassion towards others.
5. This wisdom is "full of good fruits"--all those evidences that bear witness of the authentic, Christian faith that James says should be clearly heard and observed by those who truly follow Jesus.
6. This wisdom is shown in impartiality (see James 2:1-13). The wisdom leads us to an impartial treatment of others, treating others as God Himself would treat them.
7. This wisdom is "sincere" or "without hypocrisy." What this wise person appears to be on the outside is the same through and through. You can judge this book by its cover.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Why does James place purity first in his description of heavenly wisdom?
- 2) How can we pursue peace without compromising biblical truth?

- 3) What hidden motives might contaminate an otherwise good action?
- 4) Which of these seven qualities is most difficult to practice when emotions are running high?
- 5) What's the difference between showing mercy and excusing wrongdoing?
- 6) How does impartiality show that we're seeing people through God's eyes?
- 7) How can we tell whether our actions are producing good fruit and not merely creating the appearance of godliness?

Questions for Personal Reflection

- 1) Are my motives pure, or am I seeking recognition, control, or personal advantage?
- 2) Do I sometimes create conflict unnecessarily because I insist on having my own way?
- 3) When I find it necessary to address a difficult issue, do I seek a godly resolution or simply a victory?
- 4) Am I gentle when dealing with people who frustrate me?
- 5) Can I admit that I'm wrong and change my position when truth requires it?
- 6) Do I show mercy to others as quickly as I expect mercy for myself?
- 7) Do I treat people impartially, regardless of their status, influence, or usefulness to me?
- 8) Is my outward behavior consistent with my inward motives?
- 9) Which quality of heavenly wisdom should I ask God to develop more fully in me?

IV. Peacemakers Reap a Harvest of Righteousness (18). James concludes with the outcome of living according to heavenly wisdom.

A. This harvest of God-glorifying righteousness that reflects His own holiness is sown in peace.

1. It's scattered across the globe in a peaceful manner.

2. It's not accomplished through contention, conflict, and strife or crushing your opponent using worldly ways.
- B. This sowing is accomplished by people of peace, in peaceful scenes, and with a peaceful spirit; through a pure and holy life.
- C. The entire process begins, progresses, and ends with genuine, authentic peace.
- D. Peacemakers cultivate an environment in which righteousness can flourish and others can see the transforming power of the gospel.

Discussion Questions

- 1) What does James mean by a "harvest of righteousness?"
- 2) What kinds of seeds do we sow through our everyday conversations and activities?
- 3) How can the methods we use to accomplish a good goal undermine that goal?
- 4) What is the difference between being a peacemaker and merely keeping the peace?
- 5) How might a church's witness improve if its members consistently demonstrated the qualities of heavenly wisdom?
- 6) What practical actions can help sow peace and righteousness in our homes, church, workplaces, and communities?

Questions for Personal Reflection

- 1) What kind of fruit is my life producing in the lives of those around me?
- 2) Do my words and actions tend to nurture peace or create conflict?
- 3) Is there a relationship that I need to seek forgiveness and reconciliation?
- 4) What seed of kindness, mercy, or encouragement can I plant this week?
- 5) If I keep on acting the way I do now, what kind of harvest am I likely to produce?

Summary: James 3:13–18 teaches that wisdom is not measured merely by knowledge, experience, or the ability to argue persuasively. True wisdom is recognized by the godly character it produces and the influence it has on others to bring them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and help them grow in their faith.

The passage presents two contrasting ways of living:

<u>Earthly wisdom</u>	<u>Wisdom from above</u>
Bitter jealousy	Purity
Selfish ambition	Peaceableness
Pride and self-interest	Gentleness
Stubbornness and rivalry	Openness to reason
Hostility and division	Mercy and good fruit
Partiality and hidden motives	Impartiality and sincerity
Disorder/destructive behavior	A harvest of righteousness and peace

Principal truths are:

- 1) Wisdom must be seen. Good conduct and meekness reveal whether our knowledge is being applied in a godly way.
- 2) Motives matter. Jealousy and selfish ambition can corrupt even activities that appear godly or well-intentioned.
- 3) Godly wisdom transforms our character. It produces purity, peace, gentleness, reasonableness, mercy, good fruit, impartiality, and sincerity.
- 4) The means matter. Righteous outcomes cannot be reliably cultivated through hostility, manipulation, and selfish ambition.
- 5) Peacemakers sow seeds of righteousness. The wisdom we practice today influences the spiritual fruit that grows in our relationships and communities.

Closing Challenge: “Who is wise and understanding among you?” Rather than answering only by considering what you know or how well you can explain your beliefs, examine the fruit of your life: “Am I growing in purity and humility?” “Do I pursue peace rather than victory in every disagreement?” “Am I willing to listen, show mercy, and treat people impartially?” “Does my influence leave others experiencing more of Christ's grace and truth?”

Choose one quality of wisdom from those James lists to practice intentionally this week. Ask God to expose any jealousy, pride, or selfish ambition that hinders it, and seek His help in responding appropriately.

The ultimate goal is not to appear wise, but to live in a way that reflects Jesus Christ--the wisdom of God, and produces a harvest of righteousness and peace.

Sunday School Lesson for October 25, 2026
James 3:13-18

Welcome to Sunday School on the go from the First Baptist Church in Tallassee. I'm Jim Glass, one of the teachers in the Pairs and Spares Class, and, on this last Sunday in October, we're at the midpoint of our study of the challenging letter of James. Throughout our study of the gospel of John, we heard the Lord Jesus call His disciples to follow Him. In this brief letter, James shows us just how authentic believers truly follow Jesus.

During our study of James, you may have been confronted with something that's challenged the way you see your life / as the mirror of God's Word has shown you where you're not living up to the standard of righteousness that should characterize the lives of those who truly follow the Lord Jesus. As I've said before, I hope this hasn't discouraged you, because James doesn't expose sin in our lives so that we would turn away from the Lord either in our defense or in defiance, but so that we would recognize that He is diligently at work in us, transforming us, so that that we would be "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

In the last couple of weeks, James has challenged us to take the pulse of our faith, most recently by considering our speech. Through some rather extreme illustrations and pointed challenges, he's warned us that, if our speech fails to honor the Lord and edify those made in His image and likeness, our religion is worthless.

By way of transition from what James has said about our words to addressing the motivation behind our words and our actions, he writes in verse thirteen, "Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct"--which includes the words we speak--"let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom." In today's lesson from verses thirteen through eighteen of chapter three, James continues to call us to bear the fruits of an authentic faith as he

leads us through a comparison of those whose lives are transformed by the wisdom God offers and those who choose to reject that wisdom.

James begins by asking the question, “Who is wise and understanding among you?” Bringing together all the characteristics that he’s talked about so far in his letter, the truly wise and understanding person is the one who asks for God’s wisdom in faith, does not treat others with partiality, practically demonstrates the vitality of his or her faith, and speaks only what will honor God and edify others. These are four classes of attitudes and actions that James has told us are active and visible in the lives of those who are truly following Jesus. Those who talk a good talk but don’t walk a godly walk are only deceiving themselves--their faith cannot save them because it’s not a saving faith.

In our verses for today, James explains that the truly wise person is an individual whose virtuous behavior is evident and unambiguous--a person who models the highest and purest principles of the law of liberty and the royal law and is known for his or her meekness or gentle deeds. To introduce this development of what he’s been telling us, he asks a question, much as Job himself asked in chapter 28, verse twelve: “Where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?”

James asks, “Who is wise and understanding among you?” “Who among you claims to have a superior insight into truth? How are others able to confirm that you, indeed, have this superior insight. A person can claim to have wisdom, to be wise, but what’s the evidence? Where’s the beef?--to apply an old hamburger commercial. It’s deeds, not words, that authenticate and substantiate the real existence of true wisdom.

He answers his question by saying, “By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.” Let anyone who claims to have a leg up over everyone else prove his wisdom by his good life. Once again, James is calling for acts and attitudes--not words. He’s inspecting conduct, not claims,

professions, or contentions, and he declares this in an especially strong way. He might have just said, “Let him by his conduct show his wisdom,” just as he said in chapter two, “I will show you my works by my faith.” Instead, he says, “Let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.”

He doubles down on the necessity for practice and conduct, as distinct from mere knowledge, and, in addition to the particular character of the conduct, he includes the attitude by which this practice and conduct is to be demonstrated: “in the meekness of wisdom.” There are the two characteristics James sets forth as unmistakable signs of heavenly wisdom. Heavenly wisdom bears the fruit of good actions and attitudes and inspires those who possess it through meekness.

This test is actually very practical, and we can apply it to ourselves as well as to others. For example, how do we conduct ourselves in a disagreement? Are we calm and compassionate in sharing our experience with God’s grace in our lives, fully confident that truth will become clearer? Are we focused on understanding and allowing the truth to shape our lives, even if that means we’re found to be in the wrong? Are we meek and gentle towards those who disagree with us, or are we liable to lose our tempers and become angry with those with whom we disagree?

Certainly, if you lose your temper, it’s pretty obvious that you’re not to be counted among those who are wise and understanding. Anyone who loses his temper in an argument has begun to care more about himself, and less about the truth as emotions displace wisdom. Such a person has become slow to hear, and swift to speak; unwilling to listen and learn, failing to hear not only the other person’s words, but his or her heart as well.

True wisdom, James says, is exhibited “in the meekness of wisdom.” He’s already told us in verse 21 of the first chapter to “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls;” and illustrated that meekness by calling us to be “quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.”

Meekness is not weakness, but strength under control. One word study explains that, “Far from timidity, [meekness] is the poised disposition that gladly submits to God’s will and channels power for another’s good. It therefore belongs to the cluster of virtues labeled ‘the fruit of the Spirit’ [that we find in Galatians 5:23], standing in needed contrast to human anger, rivalry, and self-assertion.”

Now, if James’ readers were typical of most Jews of that day, they held a long-standing contempt for all those who were not the children of Abraham, in spite of what we read in such places as Psalm 37, verse eleven: “The meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.”

And, of course, Jesus Himself said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, chapter five, verse five, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth,” and then demonstrated that meekness in His crucifixion. Although He was fully able to call down a legion of angels to rescue Him, // in meekness, He “humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Such is the character of the wise person, the person of understanding, who validates that wisdom through his or her good conduct in the meekness of wisdom.

If we find in verse thirteen the positive encouragement to the effects of wisdom displayed in meekness, we find its exact opposite in verse fourteen in a warning against jealousy, pride, and their effects: “But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.” Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition all stand in direct opposition to the meekness he’s just said characterizes the one who is wise.

It seems that James is actually addressing a real-life situation among his Jewish readers, knowing that they regarded all those who did not strictly adhere to the Law of Moses / as outcasts who would never experience the grace of God. One commentator even notes that this nationalistic pride “was an evil from which the Jews greatly suffered; and a few years later it hastened,

if it did not cause, the overthrow of Jerusalem. This ‘jealousy’ or zeal itself became a party name in the fanatical sect of the Zealots. It was an evil from which the primitive Church greatly suffered, as passages in the New Testament and [as early Christian] writers prove; and can we say that it has ever become extinct?”

Jealousy or zeal may be a good or a bad thing, according to the motive behind it. In the opening words of the Ten Commandments, God declares Himself to be “a jealous God.” More often, though, the word has a bad connotation. Paul speaks of “a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge” by those who “did not submit to God's righteousness” in Romans, chapter ten, verse two; in Galatians, chapter five, verse twenty, zeal--there translated as “jealousy”--“zeal” appears alongside “enmity, strife, ... fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, and divisions.” In order to make it plain that he’s speaking of it in a bad sense here, James adds the word, “bitter,” perhaps recalling what he has just said about a mouth that utters both curses and blessings being as out of place as a fountain that produces water that’s both bitter and sweet.

What James seems to be speaking of here is bitter, religious animosity--a personal hostility towards those who hold an opposing idea or belief that reveals itself, not in loving attempts to win over those who may be at fault, but in harsh thoughts, words, and actions--even pitting one group against another within the church--something that Paul would later address in no less than five of his letters to the churches.

And where does it come from? Selfish ambition. Not the pursuit of truth or the desire to honor God and edify those who might be in the wrong, but from unworthy and divisive means and methods in order to promote one’s own views or interests. Here again, James uses a word that implies self-seeking divisiveness, for the word we have translated as “selfish ambition”--as one word study puts it--refers to “Self-seeking rivalry ... a moral disease that corrodes relationships, disrupts church unity, and hides the glory of Christ

behind personal agendas. ... a striving for prominence that disregards the good of others and the will of God.”

So, James says, if you harbor attitudes and selfish desires in your heart that disrupt the unity of the body and destroy the credibility of the gospel, don't brag about it, and don't make a mockery of the truth. The boasting that James was writing about most likely referred to those Jewish Christians who thought that some aspects of the Law of Moses--most obviously circumcision--were still required in order to truly be saved. James, as the leader in the church in Jerusalem, faced this challenge early on, as we find in Acts, chapter fifteen. Now, it seems, the problems were still persisting among the congregations to which James is writing.

In boasting that they were the true defenders of the Law of Moses, the members of the so-called party of the circumcision--as Paul refers to them in Galatians, chapter two verse twelve, and Titus, chapter one, verse ten--James says they were distorting the truth, most likely in the fact that these Jews who still thought circumcision was necessary for salvation were also claiming that God was the God of the Jews only / which Paul soundly refutes towards the end of Romans, chapter three. In their fanatical zeal for what they considered to be the truth they were really lying against the truth of the revelation of God in Christ and seriously harming the cause they claimed to serve.

James' words against this bitter jealousy and selfish ambition are, of course, not limited to his day or the issue of circumcision. Throughout the history of the church--even today--, innumerable controversies of one kind or another have been driven by self-interest disguised in any number of ways, resulting in a great loss to the credibility and integrity of our witness to a lost and dying world. So, James' words are as relevant today as they were when he first wrote them.

James recognized that a simple warning to help us recognize those whose actions and attitudes damage our witness wasn't sufficient. He knew that the

potential damage to God's Kingdom work in the world then and today was so great that he found it necessary to reveal the real source of the counterfeit wisdom that motivates these individuals. In verses fifteen and sixteen, he writes, "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."

Once again, James is by no means overstating the reality of the forces aligned against the church's witness. Just as we heard him say in the verses from our previous lesson that the tongue that is not tamed is set on fire by hell itself, he wants us never to forget the true source of conflict against and even within the church: it's earthly, unspiritual, and even demonic.

This fake, counterfeit wisdom--if it can really be called wisdom at all--this fake, counterfeit wisdom is, first of all, earthly. It doesn't come from heaven; instead, it comes from man's earthly, fallen, sinful nature. If every good and perfect gift comes from above, as James told us in the fifth verse of the first chapter, what kind of gift do you think comes from below? The worldly wisdom that produces strife and conflict and produces arrogant pride and self-importance leads people to defend their deceptive and deceitful opinions with fanatical zeal, in often subtle, direct opposition to the truth.

This false wisdom, James says, is earthly in origin and character, and it's also unspiritual. It's a worldview governed by an animalistic nature, for the word means "that which pertains to the natural life that men and animals share in common," completely devoid of the Holy Spirit. This wisdom never operates impartially or objectively, but only and always from an anti-Christian agenda that is often subtly disguised.

Using this very word that we have translated as "unspiritual" here and "natural" in First Corinthians, chapter two, verse fourteen, Paul tells us that "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are

spiritually discerned.” Temporal, worldly wisdom can’t explain eternal, heavenly reality, and eternal realities make no sense to those who seek worldly wisdom alone.

Worldly wisdom is earthly, it’s unspiritual, and it’s demonic. Don’t miss James’ unquestionable, undeniable, irrefutable declaration here. He’s not exaggerating and he’s not overstating the threat. The spread of false wisdom that produces bitter jealousy and selfish ambition is a prime tactic of the demons of hell. Perhaps as James thought about the demons that the Lord Jesus cast out of so many during His ministry, he remembered how their victims were reduced to a level of madness as, for example, the boy whom the demon threw into the fire--Mark, chapter nine--or the man who broke every shackle used to bind him and was driven into the desert--Luke, chapter eight--until the Lord healed them of their possession. Or even the words of Satan himself in the Garden of Eden when he asked Eve, “Did God really say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” Like Satan, the demons are liars and deceivers, and we shouldn’t expect the ideas, the judgments, or the principles that come from them to be any different.

What does Paul have to say about this demonic wisdom? Writing in his first letter to Timothy in the fourth chapter, beginning in the first verse, he warns Timothy, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared.” Looking back on history, we can see so many instances of conflicts between civilizations, nations, political parties, church groups, families, and even individuals where the evidence of this earthly, unspiritual, demonic wisdom has emerged as the driving force behind these battles for the souls of mankind.

Paul was absolutely right when he wrote to the followers of Christ in Ephesus in the sixth chapter of his letter beginning in verse 12: “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities,

against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

This kind of wisdom makes itself known in our own day in such things as critical race theory, gender confusion, abortion, gambling, reparations, assisted suicide, climate change, individual rights, and a host of other issues that we hear about almost every day. Verse sixteen: “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.” Such words were never more truly spoken.

“This is not,” James says in verse fifteen, “the wisdom that comes down from above;” instead--verse seventeen, “The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.” In every way, it’s the exact opposite of the wisdom that is “earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.”

The question that James opened this part of his letter with, “Who is wise and understanding among you?” was intended to start the reader thinking about how to identify godly wisdom and distinguish it from wisdom that’s not from God. It’s an extremely important question that we today should take to heart and answer decisively.

Other than some classified information, there is no piece of information that, if we really wanted to find it, is beyond our reach. All we need to do is say, “Hey, Siri,” and ask your question--whether you want to know the most current weather forecast or the projected economic forecast, about the latest medical treatment for a disease, the latest rage-baiting podcast, or the video replays of the missed calls from last week’s football game. Now that our Internet searches are powered by AI, we have what one writer calls “god-like access to virtually anything we want to know.” According to one tech website, ChatGPT alone receives around 2.5 billion prompts *per day*, with roughly 330 million coming from the U.S.”

He goes on to add, “The risk we run, as individuals and as a society, is to confuse all of the information we can access with wisdom. Certainly, of all that our technologies have made possible, we are not somehow less susceptible to wars, or rage, or debt, or bloodshed. Radical ideology still captures young people, false religions still confuse and deceive many, abortion continues, and both poverty and crime beleaguer nations.”

So, what are we really getting from all this information, what are we doing with it, and how does wisdom fit in? There’s a world of difference between information and wisdom. Nearly a hundred years ago, T.S. Eliot foresaw this confusion and wrote about it in his poem entitled, “Choruses from ‘The Rock.’” This is what he said: “All our knowledge brings us nearer to death. But nearness to death // no nearer to God. Where is the Life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information? “

In today’s world, information is offered as a counterfeit to wisdom, and that’s especially dangerous when the information offered is fabricated and false. According to critical theory, wisdom isn’t a matter of who’s right or wrong and whose facts are grounded in the truth, but who has felt more oppressed, and the one who is oppressed claims the moral high ground as if it were an unalienable right.

As a result, it’s not wisdom that’s being cultivated and developed in our schools and colleges. But the Bible says in Proverbs, chapter four, verse five, “Get wisdom,” and “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”--chapter nine, verse ten. Chapter three, verse thirteen: “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.”

We’ve already seen in the first chapter of James that God promises wisdom to those who earnestly seek it with an undivided heart. Wisdom doesn’t just give us insight into the shadowy and obscure realities of our world,

it gives us the ability to live in the light of what is true and good. As a result, there's no true wisdom apart from the knowledge of God. Writing in his first letter to the followers of Christ in Corinth--chapter one, verse 24, Paul connected this idea of wisdom to the Lord Jesus Himself when he called Jesus "the power of God and the wisdom of God."

That's why we look to Jesus "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"--as Paul writes in Colossians, chapter two, verse three, warning them--and us--in verse four: "I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments." As we look to Jesus, we find in Him the wisdom that overcomes the world, the kind of wisdom that's a sure foundation and that provides access to the mind of Christ.

In verse seventeen, James tells us that "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere." He calls it, "the wisdom from above" meaning that it has God for its author, it's communicated to authentic followers of Christ by the Holy Spirit, and it provides us with insight into the things of God--things that"--Peter says in First Peter, chapter one, verse twelve, "things into which angels long to look."

In Solomon's instructions in Proverbs, chapter two, beginning in verse six, he wrote, "The LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul."

Because this true wisdom originates in God, it's first of all pure--pure in itself, completely free from anything that's "earthly, unspiritual, or demonic."

The word translated "pure" is the word from which we get the word "holy" or "hallowed," and our appropriate response to this pure wisdom is

heartfelt awe and wonder. It's not an easy word to define because most of attempts to do so only tell us what it's not--it's not tainted by sin, it doesn't contradict itself, there's nothing untrue or imperfect about it, and nothing about it hides a hidden agenda.

The purpose of this wisdom isn't to make us more enlightened, creative, or smarter. The purpose of this wisdom is to purify our hearts so that what comes out of our hearts is also pure. Jesus told His followers in Luke, chapter six, verse 45, "The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good." In His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, chapter five, verse eight, the Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Pursuing and immersing ourselves in this wisdom that is pure allow us to be pure--free of lust, uncleanness, pride, envy, wrath, and all those things that dominate those who pursue worldly wisdom.

So, "Who is wise and understanding among you?" Who are the people you interact with who have something special--something you may not be able to describe--but someone who makes you feel at ease, comforted, encouraged, appreciated, inspired, or loved? That strange, unforgettable effect doesn't come out of nowhere. It often comes from what was said and what was underneath what was said. James is showing us that wisdom works in a very similar way. It doesn't stay hidden inside a person. Wisdom shows up in what our lives consistently produce and in what others experience when they're around us. Wisdom leaves an afterglow in its wake.

Now, please don't misunderstand me. This isn't about whether everyone leaves a conversation feeling happy. Godly wisdom sometimes needs to speak difficult truths. Not all hurt feelings come from someone else's lack of wisdom. Sometimes they come from a lack of wisdom on our part. James is calling us to consider the fruit that our lives produce. Wisdom is revealed by the character it produces. James is telling us that genuine wisdom isn't measured by knowledge, experience, or persuasive speech. It's recognized by the fruit it consistently produces in someone's life.

Having made us pure, this wisdom works within us to reveal itself in several ways. James offers seven. First, in that it's peaceable. It leads us to live in peace with others. As a result, we won't dishonor the Lord by pursuing selfish ambition that James has told us only produces strife. So, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews encourages us in chapter twelve, verse fourteen, "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord;" and Paul writes in Romans, chapter twelve, beginning in verse sixteen, "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

Those who are truly wise seek peace because they have no self-interest--it's not about them, it's about Christ and honoring Him to the point that we have the same attitude as that of Paul when he wrote to the Philippians in verse 21 of his opening chapter, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Second, this wisdom enables us to be "gentle" or "considerate." One word study describes it as "strength restrained for the good of others. It assumes God's sovereign justice and therefore refuses to force personal rights." "It is neither weakness nor compromise but the steady posture of those who trust God to vindicate righteousness while they extend grace to others." As a result, we can "Bless those who persecute us; bless and do not curse them"--Romans, chapter twelve, verse fourteen.

Peaceable, gentle, and, third, "open to reason," "willing to yield to others," or "not self-willed." The opposite of being proud, arrogant, obstinate, or overbearing. Refusing to become argumentative. Being willing to sacrifice our own convenience for the good of others. Eager to forgive and seek reconciliation. This was Paul's attitude when he wrote in First Corinthians, chapter nine, beginning in verse nineteen: "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them." Then, after several examples, he concludes: "I have become all things to all people, that by

all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.” “Open to reason,” “willing to yield to others,” “not self-willed.”

Next, the wisdom from above is seen in those who are “full of mercy.” At least twice, Jesus reminded His followers of the word of the Lord found in Hosea, chapter six, verse six: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice,” and the Parable of the Good Samaritan ends with the Lord’s command, “Go and do likewise,” showing that we must imitate God’s mercy in active compassion towards others.

Full of mercy and “full of good fruits”--for example, the fruit of righteousness--Philippians, chapter one, verse eleven; the fruit of the Spirit--Galatians, chapter five, verse 22: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control;” and the kinds of fruit that prove that we are indeed genuine disciples of the Lord Jesus--John, chapter fifteen, verse eight. All those fruits that bear witness of the authentic, Christian faith that James says should be clearly heard and observed by those who truly follow Jesus.

Another result of the outworking of the wisdom that’s from above is impartiality. With this word, James takes us back to his opening illustration in chapter two about the rich man and the poor man who showed up at church one day, and how they were treated differently. The wisdom that’s from above makes us impartial in our treatment of others so that we’re not influenced by those kinds of things that the world uses to classify and label and divide people; instead, the person whose life is built on this wisdom recognizes that everyone is in need of Christ and someone for whom Christ died, that the ground is level at the foot of the cross, and, as a result, they treat others as God Himself would treat them.

This pure wisdom that flows from the heart of God is peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and--last--“sincere” or

“without hypocrisy.” You can judge this book by its cover--what this person appears to be on the outside is the same through and through--no mask, no pretense, no hidden agenda, no variation, no ebbing and flowing with the tide of culture; but firmly established, built on the solid rock of Christ Himself. After all, the source of that wisdom never changes, never sways, never departs from truth, so why would someone whose life is hidden in that truth ever let go of that certain security?

Finally in our text today, what is produced as this wisdom is spread abroad throughout the world? James tells us in verse eighteen that “a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” As those who have fully embraced the wisdom that flows from the heart of God, whose lives have been completely transformed by this wisdom, and who are now totally free of any form or trace of bitter jealousy or selfish ambition--as they engage with the world, their peaceful witness sows strong, healthy seeds of righteousness that results in a rich, abundant harvest of transformed hearts and lives and a world where peace flourishes and continues to spread.

This harvest of God-glorifying righteousness that reflects His own holiness is sown in peace. It's scattered across the globe in a peaceful manner. It's not accomplished through contention, conflict, and strife or crushing your opponent using worldly ways. This farmer sows his fields in peace. The fields are not sown through mob action, riotous conflict, or calculated manipulation. The farmer quietly, carefully, gently, peacefully scatters the seeds of the Kingdom of God as the Landowner directs / through the wisdom and discernment He has entrusted to the farmer.

This sowing is accomplished by people of peace, in peaceful scenes, and with a peaceful spirit; through a pure and holy life; by noiseless and unremarkable laborers; and the result is seen in an abundant harvest in producing righteousness within the individual heart and peace within the world. The entire process begins, progresses, and ends with genuine, authentic peace--the highest form of blessedness we could ever experience.

Those who sow using the ways of the world reap what they sow. The means never justify the ends, because the ends are always corrupted by the evil means used to accomplish them. How many noble pursuits have been compromised and destroyed through the kind of wisdom that is “earthly, unspiritual, demonic?”

James’ words have such a broad, compelling application to so many aspects of our lives today--from a national scale to an individual perspective. We must devoutly avoid any part of the world’s wisdom that is “earthly, unspiritual, demonic,” and diligently pursue only that true wisdom that is “pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.” As we do that, a harvest of righteousness will be sown in peace by those who make peace.

Cindi Murphy writes, “James teaches that wisdom is revealed by the fruit it produces. So why does he spend so much time contrasting earthly wisdom with wisdom from above? Because we naturally mistake knowledge for wisdom. We assume that if we know God's Word, can explain biblical truth, or have years of experience, we must be living wisely. But James directs our attention somewhere else. He tells us to examine the fruit our lives are producing.”

“That can be uncomfortable because earthly wisdom rarely presents itself as obviously sinful. It often sounds reasonable. It can look like ‘just wanting what's best,’ ‘telling the truth,’ or ‘getting things done the right way.’ Yet beneath those actions can be selfish ambition, pride, envy, or a desire for control.”

“James reminds us that the fruit always reveals the source. The wisdom shaping our hearts will eventually become visible in the way we treat people, respond to conflict, and influence those around us.”

“That truth is both humbling and hopeful. James isn't calling us to appear wiser or simply learn more. He's inviting us to examine whether the wisdom directing [every aspect of] our lives is truly from above.”

“When the people closest to you experience your influence over time, does it consistently leave behind the fruit of heavenly wisdom—or something else?”

“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.”

Next week, James challenges us to apply the truth of our text for today through various examples from everyday life, offering several practical solutions to our failure to live by the wisdom that's from above in chapter four.

As always, as it's still a good thing to do, keep calm, trust in the Lord, and wash your hands! God bless you!

The resources for this lesson include James: Christianity in Real Shoe Leather by Joel Gregory; Planting Roots unpublished manuscript, James: Rooted in Christ, by Cindi Murphy; The Epistle of St. James: The Greek Text with Introduction and Comments, by Joseph B. Mayor; Notes on the Bible by Albert Barnes (1834), text courtesy of Internet Sacred Texts Archive; The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; The Expositor's Bible, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; The Expositor's Greek Testament - Nicoll, Text Courtesy of BibleSupport.com; Exposition of the Entire Bible by John Gill (1746-63), text courtesy of Internet Sacred Texts Archive; ICC New Testament commentary on selected books, Text Courtesy of BibleSupport.com; Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical (John Peter Lange) text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; Expositions Of Holy Scripture, Alexander MacLaren, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; and The Pulpit Commentary, Electronic Database, copyright © 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2010 by BibleSoft, inc.