

James Series Bible Study Guide

Season 3- Episode 2 (Week 10)

Wisdom from Above

James 3:13-18

Main Passage

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.”

Big Idea

True wisdom is not proven by what we know, claim, or say. True wisdom is revealed by a life that is shaped by God, purified in motive, humble in posture, peaceable in relationships, merciful in action, and fruitful in righteousness.

James is calling believers to examine what kind of wisdom is actually ruling their hearts.

There is a wisdom from below that may sound right, religious, intelligent, or impressive, but is actually driven by bitter jealousy and selfish ambition.

And there is a wisdom from above that is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere.

The question is not simply:

Do I know wise things?

The question is:

Does my life reveal the wisdom of God?

Opening Discussion

Before reading the passage, discuss:

What is the difference between knowing the right thing and living with true wisdom?

Why is it possible for someone to sound wise but not actually be walking in the wisdom of God?

Where do you most often see false wisdom disguised as confidence, leadership, advice, or even spirituality?

Context of the Passage

James has been showing us throughout the entire letter that genuine faith becomes visible.

In James 1, he says we must be **doers of the word**, not hearers only.

In James 2, he says faith without works is dead.

In James 3:1-12, he shows that the tongue reveals the condition of the heart.

Now in James 3:13-18, he turns to wisdom.

But James does not define wisdom the way the world often does. The world often measures wisdom by intelligence, insight, strategy, success, influence, education, or the ability to speak with confidence.

James says true wisdom is shown by **good conduct, works, and the meekness of wisdom**.

That means wisdom is not merely what we know. Wisdom is what the truth of God produces in us.

This section is a heart examination.

James is asking:

What kind of wisdom is ruling your life?

Is it wisdom from below, driven by jealousy and selfish ambition?

Or is it wisdom from above, marked by purity, peace, gentleness, mercy, sincerity, and righteousness?

Section 1: The Question of True Wisdom

James 3:13

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

James begins with a question:

“Who is wise and understanding among you?”

This question frames the entire passage.

James is not asking who can speak the best, argue the strongest, lead the most confidently, or explain the deepest theological truths.

He is asking:

Who is truly living under the wisdom of God?

Then James immediately tells us how true wisdom is revealed.

He says:

“By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.”

That means true wisdom is not proven by verbal claims. It is proven by visible conduct.

James does not say:

Let him talk about his wisdom.

Let him defend his wisdom.

Let him boast in his wisdom.

Let him explain how wise he is.

He says:

Let him show it.

True wisdom shows up in real life.

It shows up in how we speak.

It shows up in how we respond.

It shows up in how we handle conflict.

It shows up in how we treat people.

It shows up in what we desire.

It shows up in whether our life is marked by humility, obedience, mercy, peace, and righteousness.

James is saying wisdom is not simply knowing what is true.

Wisdom is living in surrender to what is true.

Key Truth

True wisdom is visible. It is not proven by what we claim, but by what our lives consistently produce.

Practical Application

Ask yourself:

What does my conduct reveal about the wisdom ruling my heart?

Do my words reveal heavenly wisdom or earthly wisdom?

Do my relationships reveal humility or selfish ambition?

Do my reactions reveal peace or disorder?

Do my motives reveal purity or hidden self-promotion?

Do I merely know truth, or am I being transformed by truth?

Word Study: Wise

Greek Word: σοφός — sophos

The word translated **wise** means skillful, learned, discerning, or able to rightly apply truth.

In the biblical sense, wisdom is not merely intelligence. Wisdom is the ability to live rightly before God according to what is true.

A person can be intelligent and still not be wise.

A person can know Scripture and still not walk in wisdom.

A person can have strong opinions and still be driven by pride.

In James, wisdom is not merely the possession of information. Wisdom is the life that is shaped by the truth of God.

Practical Definition

Wisdom is knowing what is true from God and building your life around it in surrender, humility, and obedience.

Word Study: Understanding

Greek Word: ἐπιστήμων — epistēmōn

This word carries the idea of being knowledgeable, skilled, or understanding.

James pairs **wise** and **understanding** together to describe someone who claims to have spiritual insight and practical discernment.

But James immediately moves from claim to conduct.

In other words, he is saying:

If you truly have wisdom and understanding, your life will show it.

Practical Definition

Understanding is the ability to discern what is true, but James says true understanding must become visible through a transformed life.

Word Study: Good Conduct

Greek Phrase: καλῆς ἀναστροφῆς — kalēs anastrophēs

The phrase means good behavior, honorable conduct, beautiful way of life, or noble manner of living.

James is saying wisdom is revealed by a life that is visibly good before God.

This is not religious performance. This is the outward evidence of inward transformation.

Practical Definition

Good conduct is a life pattern that visibly reflects the character, humility, and righteousness of Jesus.

Word Study: Works

Greek Word: ἔργον — ergon

This is the same general word James uses when discussing works in James 2.

It means deeds, actions, labor, or visible activity.

James is not saying works save us. He is saying true faith and true wisdom become visible through works.

In James 2, genuine faith produces works.

In James 3, genuine wisdom produces wise works.

Practical Definition

Works are the visible actions that reveal what is truly alive in the heart.

Word Study: Meekness

Greek Word: πραΰτης – prautēs

This word means meekness, gentleness, humility, or strength under control.

Meekness is not weakness.

Jesus was meek, but He was not weak.

Meekness is power surrendered to God. It is strength governed by humility. It is truth carried with tenderness. It is conviction without arrogance.

James says true wisdom operates in meekness.

That means heavenly wisdom is not harsh, proud, combative, self-promoting, or domineering.

Practical Definition

Meekness is surrendered strength that carries truth with humility, gentleness, and trust in God.

Section 2: The Heart Behind False Wisdom

James 3:14

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

James now exposes the heart behind false wisdom.

He says a person may claim wisdom, but if their heart is full of bitter jealousy and selfish ambition, they are lying against the truth.

This is serious.

James is saying it is possible to use the language of wisdom while being driven by the spirit of the world.

A person can sound spiritual while being motivated by jealousy.

A person can claim discernment while being driven by ambition.

A person can say true things while carrying an impure heart.

A person can be right in content but wrong in spirit.

That is why James says:

“Do not boast and be false to the truth.”

In other words:

Do not call it wisdom if the root is jealousy.

Do not call it conviction if the motive is ambition.

Do not call it leadership if the goal is self-promotion.

Do not call it truth if the spirit behind it is pride, rivalry, resentment, or control.

Key Truth

False wisdom can sound spiritual, but James tells us to examine the motives underneath it.

Word Study: Bitter Jealousy

Greek Words: πικρὸν ζῆλον — pikron zēlon

The word **pikron** means bitter, harsh, sharp, resentful, or sour.

The word **zēlon** can mean zeal, jealousy, envy, or intense desire.

Together, **bitter jealousy** describes a resentful, sour, inward jealousy that becomes poisonous in the heart.

It is not just wanting something.

It is resenting someone because they have what you want.

It is being disturbed by another person’s blessing, success, attention, gifts, opportunity, influence, or approval.

Practical Definition

Bitter jealousy is when you resent someone because they have something you want or because their blessing feels like a threat to you.

Bitter jealousy says:

Why them and not me?

It cannot celebrate what God is doing in someone else because their blessing feels like your loss.

Biblical Example: Cain and Abel

Cain is one of the clearest biblical pictures of bitter jealousy.

God accepted Abel and his offering, but He did not accept Cain and his offering. Cain became angry and his face fell.

Abel had not sinned against Cain. Abel had not stolen from Cain. Abel had not attacked Cain.

Abel was simply accepted by God.

But Abel's acceptance exposed something in Cain's heart.

Instead of repenting, Cain resented.

Instead of bringing his heart before God, Cain turned against his brother.

Instead of ruling over sin, Cain allowed sin to rule over him.

Bitter jealousy grew into anger, hatred, and murder.

Cain shows us that bitter jealousy does not merely want what someone else has. It begins to resent the person who has it.

Word Study: Selfish Ambition

Greek Word: ἐριθεία — eritheia

This word means selfish ambition, rivalry, factionalism, self-seeking advancement, or a competitive desire to promote oneself.

It was connected to a spirit of political maneuvering, rivalry, and party-building.

James is not condemning all ambition. There is such a thing as holy ambition.

Paul says:

“We make it our aim to please him.”

2 Corinthians 5:9

The issue is not desire, diligence, excellence, leadership, or passion.

The issue is ambition with self at the center.

Practical Definition

Selfish ambition is the self-centered drive to promote myself, prove myself, protect myself, or get what I want, even if it damages others or dishonors God.

Selfish ambition says:

How do I get ahead for me?

It uses people, opportunities, truth, influence, leadership, or even ministry to build self instead of serving God and others.

Bitter Jealousy vs. Selfish Ambition

Bitter jealousy says:

Why them and not me?

Selfish ambition says:

How do I get ahead for me?

Bitter jealousy resents another person's blessing.

Selfish ambition pursues my own advancement.

Bitter jealousy is inward resentment.

Selfish ambition is outward striving.

Together, they produce disorder.

Section 3: The Source and Fruit of False Wisdom

James 3:15-16

“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.”

James now identifies the source of this false wisdom.

He says it is not from above.

Instead, it is:

Earthly.

Unspiritual.

Demonic.

That is a sobering progression.

False wisdom may appear practical, strategic, intelligent, or even religious, but if it is driven by bitter jealousy and selfish ambition, James says it is not from God.

It is earthly because it is shaped by the values of the world.

It is unspiritual because it is driven by natural desires rather than the Spirit of God.

It is demonic because it reflects the spirit of Satan, who refused to let God be the center and sought his own glory.

James says this kind of wisdom always produces a harvest.

Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

This means false wisdom does not stay private.

It eventually affects relationships, families, churches, teams, leadership, conversations, and communities.

When self is on the throne, disorder follows.

Key Truth

The wisdom ruling your heart will eventually shape the world around you.

Word Study: Earthly

Greek Word: ἐπίγειος — epigeios

This word means earthly, belonging to the earth, limited to the world below.

Earthly wisdom is wisdom shaped by the values, priorities, and methods of the world rather than the kingdom of God.

It asks:

How do I win?

How do I get ahead?

How do I protect myself?

How do I build my image?

How do I get what I want?

Practical Definition

Earthly wisdom is wisdom that operates from the values of this world instead of the heart of God.

Word Study: Unspiritual

Greek Word: ψυχικός — psychikos

This word can mean natural, soulish, or unspiritual.

It describes life governed by natural human desires rather than the Spirit of God.

Unspiritual wisdom may sound reasonable, but it is not submitted to the Holy Spirit.

It is driven by instinct, appetite, emotion, pride, fear, insecurity, and self-preservation.

Practical Definition

Unspiritual wisdom is wisdom driven by natural human desires instead of the Spirit of God.

Word Study: Demonic

Greek Word: δαιμονιώδης — daimoniōdēs

This word means demonic or demon-like.

James is not being casual. He is saying that jealousy and selfish ambition reflect the spirit of the enemy because Satan's fall was rooted in self-exaltation, pride, and rebellion against God.

Demonic wisdom does not have to look obviously evil at first. It can disguise itself in religious language, leadership language, or truth language.

But its fruit reveals its source.

Practical Definition

Demonic wisdom is wisdom that reflects the enemy's spirit of pride, self-exaltation, division, and rebellion against God.

Word Study: Disorder

Greek Word: ἀκαταστασία – akatastasia

This word means disorder, instability, confusion, unrest, disturbance, or chaos.

James has used a related idea earlier when describing the double-minded person who is unstable in all his ways.

Where selfish ambition and jealousy rule, stability disappears.

There is confusion.

There is conflict.

There is relational chaos.

There is division.

There is unrest.

Practical Definition

Disorder is the instability and chaos produced when hearts are ruled by jealousy, selfish ambition, and earthly wisdom.

Word Study: Every Vile Practice

Greek Phrase: πᾶν φαῦλον πρᾶγμα – pan phaulon pragma

This phrase means every evil, worthless, wicked, or corrupt practice.

James is showing that jealousy and selfish ambition do not produce isolated problems. They create an environment where all kinds of sin can grow.

When selfish ambition is present, gossip can grow.

Manipulation can grow.

Pride can grow.

Division can grow.

Harshness can grow.

Deception can grow.

Bitterness can grow.

Hypocrisy can grow.

Practical Definition

Every vile practice refers to the sinful behaviors that grow in the environment created by earthly wisdom.

Section 4: The Character of Heavenly Wisdom

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.”

Now James describes wisdom from above.

This is the wisdom that comes from God.

It is not merely information from God. It is the character of God’s truth shaping a person’s heart, conduct, relationships, and decisions.

James says heavenly wisdom is:

Pure.

Peaceable.

Gentle.

Open to reason.

Full of mercy.

Full of good fruits.

Impartial.

Sincere.

These are not random virtues. They are the visible characteristics of wisdom from above.

This means all true heavenly wisdom will carry these qualities.

Especially the first one: **pure**.

James says wisdom from above is **first pure**.

That means heavenly wisdom begins with purity of motive before God.

If the motive is polluted, the wisdom is not from above.

If the heart is driven by jealousy, ambition, pride, bitterness, manipulation, lust, greed, control, or self-promotion, it cannot be called heavenly wisdom.

Key Truth

Heavenly wisdom begins with a pure heart because God's wisdom never flows from sinful motives.

Word Study: From Above

Greek Phrase: ἄνωθεν — anōthen

This word means from above, from heaven, or from a higher place.

James used this idea earlier when he said every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.

Wisdom from above is wisdom that comes from God and reflects God's character.

It is not earthly wisdom improved by religious language.

It is heavenly wisdom given by God and formed by God.

Practical Definition

Wisdom from above is God's wisdom shaping our hearts, motives, conduct, and relationships according to His character and truth.

Word Study: Pure

Greek Word: ἁγνός — hagnos

This word means pure, clean, holy, undefiled, morally sincere, or unmixed.

James says heavenly wisdom is **first pure**.

This is the foundation.

Purity means the motive is clean before God.

It is not mixed with jealousy.

It is not mixed with selfish ambition.

It is not mixed with hidden agendas.

It is not mixed with pride.

It is not mixed with manipulation.

It is not mixed with self-promotion.

Practical Definition

Pure wisdom is wisdom that comes from a heart sincerely surrendered to God and not mixed with sinful motives.

Purity asks:

Is this pleasing to God?

Is my heart clean in this?

Is my motive surrendered?

Is this for God's glory or my own?

Is this truly from the Spirit, or is it polluted by self?

Word Study: Peaceable

Greek Word: εἰρηνικός — eirēnikos

This word means peaceable, peace-loving, peace-producing, or disposed toward peace.

Biblical peace is not pretending everything is fine. It is not avoiding hard conversations. It is not compromising truth.

James says heavenly wisdom is first pure, then peaceable.

That order matters.

Peace without purity becomes compromise.

Purity without peace can become harshness.

Heavenly wisdom holds both together.

Practical Definition

Peaceable wisdom seeks reconciliation, unity, and right relationships without compromising truth.

Peaceable wisdom asks:

Am I trying to restore or just trying to win?

Am I creating peace or unnecessary conflict?

Am I speaking truth in a way that reflects Christ?

Word Study: Gentle

Greek Word: ἐπιεικής — epieikēs

This word means gentle, considerate, reasonable, gracious, forbearing, or not harshly demanding.

It describes someone who does not insist on every right in a harsh, rigid, or combative way.

Gentleness is not weakness. It is strength under control.

It is truth carried with grace.

It is conviction governed by love.

Practical Definition

Gentle wisdom is wisdom that speaks and acts with Christlike strength, humility, patience, and restraint.

Gentle wisdom asks:

Am I being unnecessarily harsh?

Am I using truth to heal or to hurt?

Am I responding with the posture of Jesus?

Word Study: Open to Reason

Greek Word: εὐπειθής — eupieithēs

This word means easily persuaded in the right sense, compliant, willing to yield, teachable, or open to reason.

This does not mean gullible.

It does not mean easily manipulated.

It means not stubborn, defensive, arrogant, or unteachable.

Heavenly wisdom is humble enough to listen.

It can receive correction.

It can consider another perspective.

It can be led by truth instead of pride.

Practical Definition

Open-to-reason wisdom is wisdom that is humble enough to listen, receive correction, and be led by truth rather than pride.

Open-to-reason wisdom asks:

Could I be wrong?

Have I truly listened?

Am I being led by conviction or stubbornness?

Is there something I need to receive, repent of, or reconsider?

Word Study: Full of Mercy

Greek Phrase: μεστή ἐλέους — mestē eleous

The phrase means full of mercy, abounding in compassion, filled with a merciful disposition.

Mercy is compassion toward weakness, failure, suffering, and need that moves into action.

Mercy is not merely feeling bad.

Mercy forgives.

Mercy helps.

Mercy moves toward the hurting.

Mercy treats others through the lens of the mercy God has shown us.

This connects deeply with James 2:13:

“Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

Practical Definition

Merciful wisdom treats others through the lens of God's mercy and moves with compassion toward their need.

Merciful wisdom asks:

How has God shown mercy to me?

Am I treating this person with the mercy I have received?

Am I more eager to condemn or restore?

How can I act with compassion and truth?

Word Study: Good Fruits

Greek Phrase: καρπῶν ἀγαθῶν — karpōn agathōn

This phrase means good fruits, good outcomes, good works, or visible righteous results.

Fruit is the visible evidence of what is alive at the root.

James says heavenly wisdom is full of good fruits.

That means true wisdom does not remain hidden in the mind. It produces visible Christlike action.

Good fruits include humility, obedience, mercy, service, repentance, forgiveness, generosity, gentleness, patience, peace, righteousness, and love.

Practical Definition

Good fruits are the visible works of righteousness that grow from a life surrendered to the wisdom of God.

Or simply:

Good fruits are the visible proof that God's wisdom is shaping your life.

Good fruit asks:

What is my life producing?

Are people being blessed by the wisdom I claim to have?

Is this producing righteousness, peace, mercy, and obedience?

Does my conduct look like Jesus?

Word Study: Impartial

Greek Word: ἀδιάκριτος — adiakritos

This word can mean impartial, unwavering, without uncertainty, or without divisive judgment.

In context, it carries the idea of not being divided, biased, hypocritically selective, or partial.

This connects with James 2, where James rebukes favoritism.

Heavenly wisdom does not judge people based on money, status, appearance, usefulness, influence, popularity, or personal advantage.

Practical Definition

Impartial wisdom treats people with righteousness and mercy without favoritism, prejudice, double standards, or selfish bias.

Impartial wisdom asks:

Am I treating people differently because of what they can do for me?

Am I judging by appearance, status, money, or influence?

Am I applying truth consistently?

Am I showing the heart of God toward every person?

Word Study: Sincere

Greek Word: ἀνυπόκριτος — anypokritos

This word means without hypocrisy, genuine, sincere, undisguised, or not pretending.

Heavenly wisdom is not fake.

It is not religious performance.

It is not saying one thing while hiding another.

It is not pretending to be pure while being driven by selfish ambition underneath.

Sincere wisdom means the outside and inside are aligned before God.

Practical Definition

Sincere wisdom is wisdom that is honest, whole, and without hypocrisy before God and others.

Sincere wisdom asks:

Am I being honest before God?

Is there hypocrisy in me?

Am I pretending to be something I am not?

Are my words, motives, and actions aligned?

Section 5: The Harvest of Righteousness

James 3:18

“And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

James ends the section with a picture of a harvest.

A harvest is the visible result of what has been planted over time.

This means righteousness does not grow accidentally.

A righteous life, righteous relationships, righteous families, righteous churches, and righteous communities are cultivated by what is sown.

If we sow jealousy, selfish ambition, harshness, pride, comparison, manipulation, gossip, and conflict, we should not be surprised when disorder grows.

But if we sow purity, gentleness, mercy, humility, sincerity, truth, and peace, God grows a harvest of righteousness.

James says this harvest is **sown in peace by those who make peace**.

That means the way we sow matters.

Truth can be sown in pride.

Correction can be sown in harshness.

Leadership can be sown in selfish ambition.

Conviction can be sown in anger.

Doctrine can be sown in arrogance.

But heavenly wisdom sows righteousness in peace.

This does not mean peace at the expense of truth.

Heavenly wisdom is first pure.

Biblical peace is not compromise. It is not avoidance. It is not pretending everything is fine. It is not people-pleasing.

Biblical peace is God's truth, God's mercy, and God's order brought into real life with the spirit of Christ.

Key Truth

Heavenly wisdom produces peacemakers, and peacemakers create the kind of environment where righteousness can grow.

Word Study: Harvest

Greek Word: καρπός — karpos

This word means fruit, produce, crop, result, or harvest.

James uses agricultural language to describe spiritual reality.

What is planted eventually grows.

The wisdom ruling the heart eventually produces a harvest in the life.

Earthly wisdom produces disorder.

Heavenly wisdom produces righteousness.

Practical Definition

A harvest is the visible result of what has been planted, cultivated, and allowed to grow over time.

Word Study: Righteousness

Greek Word: δικαιοσύνη — dikaiosynē

This word means righteousness, justice, uprightness, or what is right before God.

In this context, a harvest of righteousness means the visible fruit of God's right ways being produced in a life, relationship, family, church, or community.

It is the opposite of disorder and every vile practice.

Practical Definition

A harvest of righteousness is the visible fruit of God's right ways growing in real life.

Word Study: Sown

Greek Word: σπείρω — speirō

This word means to sow, scatter seed, plant, or cultivate.

James is saying righteousness grows from what is sown.

Our words sow.

Our motives sow.

Our tone sows.

Our reactions sow.

Our leadership sows.

Our forgiveness sows.

Our harshness sows.

Our mercy sows.

Our wisdom sows.

Every day, we are planting something.

Practical Definition

To sow means to plant something through our words, actions, motives, and responses that will eventually produce a harvest.

Word Study: Peace

Greek Word: εἰρήνη — eirēnē

This word means peace, wholeness, harmony, reconciliation, and right order.

Biblical peace is not the absence of difficulty. It is the presence of God's order, mercy, truth, and reconciliation.

James says righteousness is sown in peace.

That means God's righteousness is not cultivated through the spirit of jealousy, ambition, harshness, pride, and disorder.

Practical Definition

Peace is God's truth, mercy, and order bringing wholeness and reconciliation into real life.

Word Study: Make Peace

Greek Word: εἰρηνοποιός – eirēnopoios

This word means peacemaker or one who actively makes peace.

James does not say the harvest of righteousness is sown by those who merely love peace, prefer peace, or talk about peace.

He says it is sown by those who make peace.

Peacemaking is active.

Peacemakers move toward reconciliation.

Peacemakers tell the truth in love.

Peacemakers correct with gentleness.

Peacemakers forgive as they have been forgiven.

Peacemakers refuse gossip.

Peacemakers resist retaliation.

Peacemakers pursue unity without compromising holiness.

Peacemakers bring the wisdom of heaven into places of disorder.

Practical Definition

A peacemaker is someone who actively brings God's truth, mercy, humility, and reconciliation into places of disorder.

The Flow of the Passage

James 3:13-18 has a clear movement:

1. James asks the question of true wisdom.

“Who is wise and understanding among you?”

He wants believers to evaluate whether their lives truly reveal the wisdom of God.

2. James gives the evidence of true wisdom.

“By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.”

True wisdom is visible in conduct, works, and humility.

3. James exposes false wisdom.

“But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts...”

False wisdom may sound spiritual, but it is driven by polluted motives.

4. James identifies the source of false wisdom.

“Earthly, unspiritual, demonic.”

Wisdom driven by jealousy and ambition does not come from God.

5. James reveals the fruit of false wisdom.

“There will be disorder and every vile practice.”

Earthly wisdom always produces destructive fruit.

6. James describes heavenly wisdom.

“First pure, then peaceable...”

Wisdom from above carries the character of God.

7. James shows the harvest of heavenly wisdom.

“A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

Heavenly wisdom produces peacemakers, and peacemakers create the conditions where righteousness grows.

Primary Truths

1. True wisdom is not proven by what we claim but by what our lives produce.

James does not allow us to define wisdom by words alone.

A wise person shows wisdom through good conduct, wise works, and meekness.

2. Wisdom is not only about what we do, but why and how we do it.

James exposes bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in the heart.

That means motives matter.

A person can do the right thing with the wrong spirit.

A person can speak truth with an impure motive.

A person can serve while secretly seeking recognition.

A person can lead while driven by control.

Heavenly wisdom examines the heart.

3. Bitter jealousy turns another person's blessing into a personal threat.

Bitter jealousy says:

Why them and not me?

It cannot rejoice when others rejoice because someone else's blessing feels like loss.

Cain shows us that if bitter jealousy is not brought before God, it can grow into anger, hatred, division, and destruction.

4. Selfish ambition puts self at the center of the story.

Selfish ambition says:

How do I get ahead for me?

It makes life about my name, my kingdom, my will, my recognition, my control, and my success.

The Lord's Prayer reorders the heart:

Your name. Your kingdom. Your will.

5. False wisdom always produces disorder.

James says where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

That means the wisdom ruling the heart eventually shapes the environment around the person.

Earthly wisdom produces chaos.

Heavenly wisdom produces righteousness.

6. Heavenly wisdom is first pure.

Purity is the foundation of wisdom from above.

If the motive is impure, the wisdom is not from above.

God's wisdom is never driven by pride, jealousy, manipulation, deceit, lust, greed, bitterness, or self-promotion.

7. Heavenly wisdom is visible in Christlike character.

Wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere.

This means heavenly wisdom makes us look more like Jesus.

8. Peacemakers create the environment where righteousness grows.

James ends by showing that righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Peace does not mean avoiding truth.

Peace means bringing God's truth, mercy, and order into real life with the spirit of Christ.

Personal Heart Examination

Use these questions slowly and prayerfully.

Wisdom

Do I merely know truth, or am I living in surrender to truth?

Does my conduct show the wisdom of God?

Where am I tempted to appear wise instead of walking wisely?

Bitter Jealousy

Whose blessing is hard for me to celebrate?

Where has someone else's success felt like my loss?

What does my jealousy reveal about what I am trying to get from people instead of receiving from God?

Selfish Ambition

Where am I trying to promote, prove, protect, or advance myself?

Where am I using good things for self-centered purposes?

Am I seeking God's kingdom or building my own?

Purity

Is my heart clean in this?

Are my motives surrendered to God?

Am I doing the right thing in the wrong spirit?

Peace

Am I trying to restore or merely trying to win?

Am I sowing peace or creating disorder?

Am I making peace without compromising truth?

Fruit

What is my life producing?

Are my words producing righteousness or disorder?

What kind of harvest is growing from the wisdom I am living by?

Group Discussion Questions

Question 1

James begins by asking, **“Who is wise and understanding among you?”** Why do you think James starts with a question instead of a command?

Question 2

What is the difference between knowing biblical truth and living with biblical wisdom?

Question 3

James says true wisdom is shown by good conduct and works in meekness. Why is meekness essential to true wisdom?

Question 4

How can bitter jealousy hide under spiritual language or even concern for what is right?

Question 5

What are some subtle ways selfish ambition can show up in ministry, leadership, work, family, or relationships?

Question 6

James says false wisdom is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. Why does James use such strong language?

Question 7

What does it mean that heavenly wisdom is **first pure**?

Question 8

Why does the order matter: **first pure, then peaceable**?

Question 9

Which characteristic of heavenly wisdom do you most need God to grow in you right now: purity, peace, gentleness, teachability, mercy, good fruits, impartiality, or sincerity?

Question 10

What does it practically look like to sow peace in a relationship without compromising truth?

Practical Application

This week, ask God to reveal what kind of wisdom is ruling your heart.

Do not only examine your words.

Examine your motives.

Examine your tone.

Examine your reactions.

Examine your relationships.

Examine what your life is producing.

Then take one concrete step in each of these areas:

1. Confess

Confess any bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, pride, or impure motive God reveals.

2. Surrender

Pray the Lord's Prayer slowly and surrender your name, your kingdom, and your will to God.

3. Purify

Before making a decision or having a hard conversation, ask:

Is my heart pure in this?

Will this glorify God?

Does this reflect the Spirit of Christ?

4. Sow Peace

Choose one relationship or situation where you can actively sow peace.

You may need to apologize, forgive, encourage, stop gossiping, speak gently, seek reconciliation, or respond with mercy.

5. Look for Fruit

At the end of the week, ask:

What did my words plant?

What did my actions plant?

What did my motives plant?

What kind of harvest is beginning to grow?

Closing Summary

James 3:13-18 teaches us that wisdom is not merely something we know. Wisdom is something our lives reveal.

Earthly wisdom is driven by bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. It may sound impressive, strategic, or even religious, but it produces disorder and every vile practice.

Heavenly wisdom is from above. It is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere.

And when heavenly wisdom rules a person's heart, that person becomes a peacemaker.

The simplest truth of the passage is this:

Heavenly wisdom produces peacemakers, and peacemakers create the kind of environment where righteousness can grow.

Closing Prayer

Father, we ask You to search our hearts. Reveal every place where we have been ruled by earthly wisdom, bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, pride, or impure motives. Forgive us for calling something wisdom when it was really self-protection, self-promotion, resentment, or control.

Give us wisdom from above.

Make us pure in heart, peaceable in relationships, gentle in our words, open to correction, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial in how we treat people, and sincere before You.

Teach us to sow peace without compromising truth.

Make us peacemakers who create the kind of environment where righteousness can grow.

In Jesus' name, amen.