



THE BOOK OF JAMES

SECTION THEME

In this section, James is going to address wisdom. Wisdom is not about education...wisdom is about action. It's about character. James says if you have wisdom from above... then [you're] going to be pure. There's going to be a holiness about your life.

GO DEEPER

Learn more about wisdom in the following Bible passages. Psalm 90:12; Proverbs 9:10-12; Ecclesiastes 1:17-18; Jeremiah 9:23-24; 1 Corinthians 1:18- 31.

What do these verses teach us about what wisdom is and isn't?

Do they confirm what James is saying, or provide a different perspective?

How does "numbering our days" (Psalm 90) bring wisdom?

How does wisdom bring sorrow (Ecclesiastes)?

In these passages, what is the relationship between wisdom and boasting?

JAMES 3:13-18

13Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.

14But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.

15This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.

16For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

17But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

18And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS

The Bible has a great amount of teaching about wisdom. The passages in the side column are just a few we could consult. One regular theme is that true wisdom doesn't boast about itself. The wise person recognizes his or her own limitations and does not boast. Wisdom is a **sober** thing, with understanding of the sorrows of life as well as the joys. The wise person knows how short life is and has a healthy fear of the Lord.

DIGGING IN

- Verse 13 starts off with a question, so let's answer it. Who is the wisest person you know, or have known?
- Why do you say that? How did they show their wisdom?
- What do verses 13–15 tell us about what wisdom is and isn't?
- Verse 13 talks about a “good conduct”? How would you define that? What kind of “good conduct” does a wise person exhibit?
- Why is meekness part of true wisdom?
- Have you known people who thought they were wise but really weren't? Were they meek? Did they show humility?
- Read Matthew 7:15–20.
- That's what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount.
- How does it compare to what James says here in James 3?
- In James 3:16–17 we see descriptions of the “fruits” of true wisdom and false wisdom. What's the difference
- How can we tell them apart?
- What does it mean for wisdom to be “pure”? How can wisdom be “open to reason”?
- What do you think verse 18 means?
- It might help, once again, to think about the people James is writing to, and those he is writing about. It seems that false teachers were causing division, saying hurtful things, claiming to be wise, but consumed by envy and ambition. Were they doing these things in the name of righteousness? That is, were they trying to promote some standard of righteousness by attacking everyone who didn't play by their rules?
- What can you do to promote peace that yields “a harvest of righteousness”?

5 MARKS FOCUS: TIME WITH BELIEVERS

It's hard to escape the idea that James has written to religious people. They considered themselves wise, and they boasted about that. They liked to be well-respected, and when they saw others who got more respect, they envied them, criticized them, and tried to get ahead of them. They must have had their ideas about how everyone else should live. And maybe this started with a genuine desire for righteousness, but this desire was soon clouded by impure motives, by personal ambition.

Share about a time when you have witnessed that kind of posture in others or maybe a time when you yourself struggled with impure motives.

USE THE 2 OF THE FOLLOWING APPLICATIONS IN YOUR WALK THIS WEEK:

Prayer: James 1:5 invites us to ask God for wisdom. Pray for wisdom you need to navigate through this life in a way that honors God.

Memorization: Learn the Beatitudes from Matthew 5:3–10. Or at least create some mnemonic way to remember the eight qualities that Jesus describes there.

Honor: Do something to honor a person whose wisdom you have been blessed by. If the person is still living, thank them by telling them what they have taught you. If they have passed, then thank God for them, and find some way to commemorate their effect on your life.

Evaluation: Do this with a kind, humble heart. Name the 5 to 8 opinion leaders in your life—people in church, school, work, the media, etc.,—whose ideas you regularly pay attention to. Based on the teaching in James 3:13–18, do you feel these people are speaking God's wisdom into your life? This is not an invitation to pride, criticism, or a divisive spirit on your part—just a way to check your regular input with the descriptions of heavenly wisdom we learned today.

A PEEK AT THE GREEK

The word the ESV translates as “open to reason” is from the Greek, *eupēithēs*. This word occurs only once in the New Testament. The literal translation means “easily persuaded,” but we shouldn't read this as being a push-over or gullible. Instead, *eupēithēs* describes a person who is willing to listen to others and willing to defer to the wishes or desires of others. It is a disposition opposite of the “selfish ambition” (*eritheia*) in verse 16.