

James: Faith That Works – Part 7
The Worlds of Wisdom – James 3:13-18
Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – February 22, 2026

Introduction

- Our friend James—our pastor, elder, and brother, who was raised in the same household as Jesus, who knew Him, heard Him, saw Him, and believed that Jesus was indeed who He said He was, the Son of God, the Messiah, the Lord of heaven and earth, the bread from heaven, the living water, the gate, the good shepherd, the King of all Kings. Jesus—who has all authority in heaven and earth, the one in whom we live and move and have our being, the one in whom all our hope is in.
- Those who know this Jesus, follow this Jesus, love and treasure this Jesus, will give their lives to Him, and their lives will be changed by the power of His Spirit working in those who believe. In this letter to the churches, James, through the illumination and inspiration of the Spirit, directs, develops, and disciples us toward greater Christlikeness by aligning our thinking with the truth of God’s word, so that our living is shaped and reflects the truth and the power and the grace and the goodness of God.
- Over the last two weeks, James has helped us understand that those who have saving faith will show it by our *works* and our *words*. This week, James shows us that there are two competing “worlds of wisdom,” and the one we live in is revealed by what our lives produce. James wants us to know that wisdom doesn’t just *inform* us, it *forms* us.
- So it is imperative, of utmost importance, that we understand where our “wisdom” is coming from. Are we thinking and living by the wisdom of heaven, or are we thinking and living from the wisdom of earth? In our passage for today, James helps us to understand the difference between these two “worlds of wisdom,” what they are and what they produce, so that we will follow the good path that leads to peace and a harvest of righteousness.
- Let’s open our Bibles to James chapter three, and we will start this section with verse thirteen. The passage is found on page 1044 in the Pew Bible. James starts out by asking us a question:

James 3:13 NIV

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

True Wisdom Is Shown

- I hope and pray that you desire to be truly wise and understanding, that you will seek these things above all else. Proverbs tell us:

Proverbs 3:13-18 NIV

Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, 14 for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. 15 She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her.

16 Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. 17 Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. 18 She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed.

- I hope you take this advice and make it an aim of your life, for there is a blessing in it. James tells us that if you are wise and understanding, then show it; true wisdom is shown. James does not say, “Let them explain it.” He does not say, “Let them defend it.” He says, “Let them show it.” Wisdom in Scripture is never merely intellectual. It is ethical. It is relational. It is visible.
- Proverbs 9:10 tells us, **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”** Wisdom begins when we see God clearly and ourselves clearly. When we see God clearly, humility follows. Proverbs 11:2 says, **“When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.”** Pride and wisdom cannot coexist.
- James says that true wisdom is shown by a good life. That means consistent conduct. Not flashes of brilliance. Not moments of eloquence. A good life. Deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. That phrase is critical. Humility is not something you tack on to wisdom; it flows from wisdom. *When you truly understand who God is, you stop promoting yourself.*
- Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8:1, **“Knowledge puffs up while love builds up.”** You can accumulate knowledge and still be arrogant. You can use knowledge as a battering ram to tear others down or as a building block to build others up. You can use it as a weapon to defend yourself and destroy others, or as a wellspring that brings life and help to others.
- Knowledge and education can be harmful or helpful, depending upon who and what has your heart, what “wisdom” you are following, and where the seed of truth comes from that has been planted in the soil of our soul. When wisdom from above takes root, humility follows. It shows up in how you respond to correction. It shows up in whether or not you must win every argument. It shows up in whether or not peace follows you. True wisdom is shown because it is grown from the seed of heaven.
- James tells us there are only two “worlds of wisdom” or places our wisdom can come from. Either from earth or from heaven. He goes on to explain the difference between the two by comparing and contrasting one with the other so that we can discern their presence in our lives, and rip out the weeds of wisdom from earth so that the wisdom of heaven can thrive and grow in us and through us.
- After telling us our wisdom must be shown in our living, James moves on to examine the two sources of wisdom, the first being the “wisdom” from earth.

The Wisdom from Earth

James 3:14-16 NIV

But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

- James begins by telling us to examine the motives of our hearts, to see if we are motivated and driven by envy or selfish ambition. Don’t own it in such a way that makes it a boast . . . or don’t try to cover it up. Bitter envy is a resentful comparison that desires what the other has. It says, “Why them and not me?” “I want that; I deserve that,” etc. Selfish ambition is self-promotion. It is consumed by its own interest. It says, “How do I advance?”
- Earthly “wisdom” embraces and harnesses these two desires and says use them to get what you want, what you desire, what you deserve. It drives people to do all kinds of evil.

- James says that this wisdom is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. Earthly means shaped by this fallen world's values, unspiritual means not guided by the Spirit of God. Demonic means aligned with prideful rebellion against God. This motivation carries the echo of a snake tongue.
- In the garden, the serpent, in his attempt to lure Adam and Eve to sin against God, told Eve that God told them that if they ate of the tree, they would die. The snake responded, "You will not certainly die," and then drove the hook in by saying, "**For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil**" (Gen 3:5). Pride has always been the root of destruction. Proverbs 16:18 warns, "**Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.**"
- Notice what this earthly wisdom produces. *Disorder and every evil practice*. Disorder means instability, turbulence, confusion. Paul uses the same word in **1 Corinthians 14:33 when he says, "God is not a God of disorder but of peace."** Where envy and selfish ambition rule, stability disappears. Trust erodes. Relationships become competitive.
- James then adds, "every evil practice." That is not an exaggeration. Envy and selfish ambition are generative sins. They multiply. When advancement becomes ultimate, compromise becomes acceptable. Envy leads to slander. Ambition leads to manipulation. Comparison leads to resentment. Resentment leads to division, and all types of evil are justified in the name of our own glory, our own rights, and our time in the spotlight.
- Wisdom from earth produces disorder. Once humility is removed, every evil practice finds room to grow. The origin is not of heaven, but of earth; it is of the flesh and for the flesh; it is unspiritual, not of the Spirit of God; and it is demonic in origin because it is of the same motivation that drove the devil to rebel against God, to his downfall.
- These things can happen in our hearts, in our homes, and in our church. Do you remember in Galatians where Paul instructed us, saying, "**Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other**" (Gal 5:24-26)?
- Friends, we must stop and examine our hearts, check our motivation, as God and also brothers and sisters who love us, show us the truth. We must become ruthless at rooting it out, wherever we find that type of wisdom growing.
- Intentionally don't take credit. Do good without anyone knowing. Stop trying to be the first up the ladder of success, and help others do so. Admit that you may be wrong, and check yourself before you wreck yourself.
- Now James draws a comparison to the other source of wisdom, wisdom that comes down from heaven.

The Wisdom from Heaven

James 3:17-18 NIV

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

- This wisdom has a different origin. It is from heaven. Its origin is from outside this world and outside of us. It must be asked for and received. Do you remember what James told us at the beginning of this letter? "**If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives**

generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you” (James 1:5).

This is a promise. We have to recognize that we don’t naturally come by God’s wisdom; it is something that we must ask for, and when we do, God will give it to us generously.

- This is another prayer that God will always answer. Ask for God’s wisdom, and He will give it to you, and then follow it. Here are the characteristics of the “wisdom from heaven” (James 3:17).

Characteristic	What It Means	Supporting Scripture
Pure	Undivided loyalty to God. No hidden agenda. No double motive.	Psalms 86:11 “Give me an undivided heart.”
Peace-loving	Moves toward conflict with humility and courage. Seeks reconciliation.	Matthew 5:9 “Blessed are the peacemakers.”
Considerate (Gentle)	Strength under control. Kind rather than quarrelsome.	2 Timothy 2:24 “The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome...”
Open to Reason (Submissive)	Teachable. Willing to listen and learn.	Proverbs 12:15 “The wise listen to advice.”
Full of Mercy	Extends grace because it has received grace.	Micah 6:8 “Love mercy... walk humbly.”
Good Fruit	Visible righteousness. Tangible spiritual outcomes.	Galatians 5:22 “The fruit of the Spirit is ...”
Impartial	No favoritism. No bias driven by self-interest.	James 2:1 “Believers... must not show favoritism.”
Sincere	No masks. Integrity in private and public.	Psalms 15:2 — “Speaks the truth from their heart.”

- We know what the “wisdom of the earth” produces—disorder and every evil practice. And what does this “wisdom from heaven” produce? *A harvest of righteousness.*
- James says, “Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.” Wisdom is a seed. Life is a harvest. Earthly wisdom multiplies sin. Heavenly wisdom multiplies righteousness. Hebrews 12:11 speaks of a “harvest of righteousness and peace.” Righteousness and peace belong together. Wisdom from heaven stabilizes the community. It creates safety. It builds trust. It produces righteousness that endures.
- And at the center of this wisdom stands Christ. He is “the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24). The cross looked foolish to earthly wisdom. Earthly wisdom says protect yourself. Jesus laid Himself down. Earthly wisdom says climb upward. Jesus humbled Himself. Philippians 2 calls us to have the same mindset as Christ.
- When Christ takes root in a heart, the source changes. When the source changes, the fruit changes.

Conclusion

- There are two worlds of wisdom. One fueled by envy and selfish ambition. One shaped by purity and peace. One produces disorder and every evil practice. One produces a harvest of righteousness.
- So here is the question James leaves us with: what kind of fruit follows you? What harvest are you reaping? Does peace grow where you sow? Or does tension multiply? James is not asking whether you sound wise. He is asking whether righteousness is growing where you are sowing. What do you show with your life?
- If you see envy in your heart, confess it. If you see selfish ambition driving you, repent of it. If disorder grows around you, do not defend it, uproot it. Ask your Father for wisdom from above. Ask Him to give you the wisdom from heaven. He will gladly and generously give it to you. *This world desperately needs people whose lives prove they belong to another World.*

Our prayer team is available to pray with you after the service, near the “prayer” sign at the front of the sanctuary, and in the prayer room next to the offices. Also, you can send your prayer request to prayer@crosspointrockford.com

Questions for Growth Groups

1. Read James 3:13. James says wisdom must be “shown.” Why do you think he emphasizes visible evidence instead of verbal claims? Where have you seen the difference between claimed wisdom and demonstrated wisdom?
2. James connects wisdom and humility. Read Proverbs 11:2 alongside James 3:13. How does humility reveal true wisdom? In what situations are you most tempted toward pride instead?
3. According to James 3:14–16, earthly wisdom is marked by bitter envy and selfish ambition. How do these attitudes show up in everyday life—at work, in families, in church, or in your own heart?
4. James says earthly wisdom produces “disorder and every evil practice.” Why do envy and selfish ambition tend to multiply into broader conflict and instability? Have you seen this pattern play out in real life?
5. Look at the characteristics of wisdom from heaven in James 3:17. Which one most encourages you? Which one most challenges you? Why?
6. James 3:18 says peacemakers sow in peace and reap a harvest of righteousness. What would it look like for you to intentionally “sow peace” this week in a specific relationship?
7. The sermon asked, “What kind of atmosphere follows you?” If someone described the spiritual climate around your life, what words might they use? What is one step you can take this week to reflect wisdom from above more clearly?

Bonus: You may want to close your time by reading James 1:5 together and praying specifically for wisdom from above.