

THE WISDOM TEST

Today's Epistle reading is from the book of James. James is my kind of writer. He is very practical in his writing. He gives us his thoughts and explains to us the application of the subject to everyday life along with the consequences, good or bad, that result from it. Now the pew Bible heading of these verses is titled "*two kinds of wisdom*" and in my Bible the title pertaining to these verses is "true wisdom". In the Message Bible the title used is "*love well, live wisely*". **Who does not want to live wisely? However, as usual it's the "how to" that seems to slow us up.**

To begin we have to be at the same place to define the meaning of wisdom. **Wisdom is not knowledge. Wisdom is much more. It is the knowledge of what is true or right coupled with just judgment, action, discernment, or insight.** So there is much more to wisdom than just knowledge. Then as James does in Chapter 3, he draws a comparison for us to earthly wisdom and wisdom from above.

I have discovered in these verses a useful tool in discerning where people are coming from and what type of wisdom foundation they are building on. Let's look at these verses and see what very practical advice James tells us about the types of wisdom and their results. These verses show us again there is nothing really new "under the sun" when it comes to people and their behavior. The Bible shows us the whole wide range of human behavior – our weaknesses and our strengths.

In the verses before today's reading the entire subject is the tongue and its unruly nature. That is certainly no news flash!!! More trouble has been brought about by the tongue and its outpouring of words since time began. Just as James writes in verses 10-12 "*and so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring*" No truer words were ever spoken!

Words of blessing can bring healing and peace while words of cursing bring hurt, division, and more undesirable results. We have knowledge of these unhappy consequences, but do we possess the wisdom of knowing what is right and put that into our action, based on discernment, or insight?

James explains how we do that, how we can discern it, and gain insight into a situation with the people involved. He begins with a challenge that if we believe we are wise and understanding than those traits are shown by good behavior and deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.

In the Message translation the verse puts it this way “it is the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts”. We must as disciples reflect what we have read and heard from the teachings and examples of our teacher – Jesus Christ.

James uses wisdom as a character goal which comes about by the lack of bitterness, envy and selfishness—all outgrowths of anger. From the beginning of Chapter 3, James points to the main method we use to convey anger and that is our tongue! As I stated earlier, words are truly powerful and unlimited in the damage they can do, especially when spoken out of bitterness, envy or selfishness. However, James explains if we are indeed wise and have wisdom the results will be obvious for people to see.

Wisdom must be another one of those traits of character that God desires for us all to have and use. Proverbs contain many verses on the subject of *wisdom* and where to seek it and how to use it. James being the practical man he was, lays it out pretty clear for us with no theories of... or numbered lists to success.

James has told us that wisdom shows itself in our lifestyle. Now there is definitely a comparison in our reading of two kinds of wisdom – earthly and true wisdom.

What does a lifestyle based on “earthly” wisdom look like? James paints a very clear picture here. **Earthly wisdom is a “me first”, “do unto others before they do it to you”.** **Another ingredient is to “win at all costs” and “i have the last word”.** Such a person views life as nothing but a struggle, and to look out for “number one”. They live with a fear that “they” are out to get me! Earthly wisdom can deceive one into a life when played out with these “foundations” seeks power, control, wealth and fame. Much the same things Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness.

There is no room for serving others, when earthly wisdom is the foundation that individual deals almost constantly with four attitudes. James names them. One is **bitter jealousy** and shows in the fact that the person believes they are always right and never admit to being wrong. (teacher/letters). There is **selfish ambition** with a me first” and how can the situation benefit me! “what’s in it for me?”, “my way or no way”, we have all likely dealt with

such a person. With such an attitude they tend to think they are better than others. Paul warns us in Romans 12:3 *“do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment”*.

We can see the destructive results when one bases their wisdom on earthly things. Numerous movies and books have been written about people, who thought it wise to live in such a way only later to discover the terrible price that it had cost them. In the Message 2 Timothy 3:16-17 *“every part of scripture is god-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live god’s way.”*

Now James, inspired by God, gives us the answer to the question “what is wisdom?” - or as the title in my Bible says “true wisdom”. Again as **James stated in the first verse it is not only knowing and being wise, it is living it.**

We live in an information age I am told. We probably have more information available at our fingertips, literally, than at any time in history, but have we learned anything? Are we wise? We have heard the saying: “wise beyond their years”.

Why do we assume we cannot gain wisdom until we are too old to use it? Young people, there is a vast reservoir of wisdom in this room this morning. By interacting with people we many times exchange wisdom without thinking about it. One of the real joys of holding a group study is picking up the morsels of wisdom that are exchanged during discussion.

The first element James lists is purity. Now its meaning here is truthful, authentic, and uncorrupted. Remember Jesus said in the *Beatitudes* *“blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God”*. Our Wednesday night class has been studying Integrity with examples of Job and Hosea. Job despite his lot never cursed God from his lips.

Proverbs 10:9 says it all *“he who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out”*. Mom told me not to lie because you had to remember that lie precisely every time you told it, but the truth remained the same with each telling. How many people have been caught in their own lies? And now with everyone it seems having a smart phone can record it too.

Next is the person with true wisdom has **peace loving followed by gentleness**. When one is argumentative and always picks fights or likes to debate every issue, this is not what God desires of us. Proverbs 15:1 *“a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger”*

Another trait of true wisdom is **willingness to yield**. Now in Greek it means open to ideas, willing to listen, or try new things. When we have true wisdom, suggestions made are not looked at as criticism of us, but an opportunity to explore something new or a different way!

A new Pastor comes to town and preaches at the church for the first time. After the sermon a man comes up to him and says, "Pastor, that sermon stunk." The Pastor trying to be open about it asked, "what didn't you like about it?" The man replied, "well in the first place – you read it. In the second place – you read it poorly. And in the third place – it wasn't worth reading in first place." Another man comes up to the Pastor and say, "Pastor, don't you mind him – he just repeats what he hears everybody else saying."

One of the last two elements of true wisdom are being **full of mercy and good fruits**. A person possessing those traits is wise because they don't jump on another because of their mistakes or remember mistakes forever and ever. It is placing our self in their situation.

Remember Jesus was interested in the person where there were when he met them and what they did from that day forward! Jesus is a great example for us with others and especially with our children.

If we seek the Holy Spirit and the fruits of the spirit then we truly will have true wisdom. People will be drawn to you. Why, because we do not see in our world today an overwhelming display of it. It is for us, his disciples, to be that light on a hill for others to see. Easy? No way. But standing as that light in the darkness we know joy in our hearts.

Lastly, true wisdom is **unwavering and without hypocrisy**. In true wisdom there is truth and sincerity. Despite the storms of life, and turmoil, there is a steadiness. That can only come from God and having the wisdom only He can give.

In closing carry this thought-- Knowledge can be memorized. Wisdom must think things through, using knowledge rightly. Wisdom thinks for itself and resist pressures from others or groups.

May we all seek after true wisdom, "*for wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will fill you with joy. Wise choices will watch over you. Understanding will keep you safe.*"

Amen.