

DAY 1 - (week beginning Mon 17 Sep 2018)**Read - James 3:13-18**

“Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.” v 15

We continue our Journey Through James as he turns his attention towards the subject of wisdom.

There are two key points that we need to make as we begin to look at what James is saying. Firstly, we need to differentiate between wisdom and intelligence.

We are each one of us blessed with a different level and type of intelligence and this is inherent to who we are and there is not always much we can do about that. But wisdom is something that we can all have, or not have, regardless of our level of intelligence. I am sure we all know very clever people (intelligent) who are not very wise, as well as some less clever people who are very wise.

So James is not talking about how clever we are, but about the quality of the decisions we make.

Secondly, James makes it very clear that there are different sources of ‘wisdom’. He talks of ‘earthly wisdom’ and ‘heavenly wisdom’. The dictionary uses words like ‘experience’, ‘good judgement’, ‘sensible’ and ‘knowledge’ in defining wisdom. But even with these words there are different ways of thinking about what is sensible or good judgement, depending on the foundation that is used in making that assessment.

James is urging us to use God’s way as a basis for our wisdom, rather than being ‘worldly wise’.

Prayer: Father, please teach me to have Your wisdom to guide me in life.

DAY 2**Read - Proverbs 2:1-11**

“Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.” v 9-11

The book of Proverbs is packed with wisdom and gives us an insight into the source of that wisdom in today’s reading – it comes from a search for what is ‘right and just and fair’.

William Barclay explains the difference between heavenly and earthly wisdom as follows: *“The most notable thing about it [earthly wisdom] is that it brings disorder. That is to say, instead of bringing people together, it drives them apart. Instead of producing peace, it produces strife. Instead of producing fellowship, it produces a disruption in personal relationships ... there is a kind of person who is undoubtedly clever; but his effect in any committee, in any Church, in any group, is to cause trouble, to drive people apart, to foment strife...”*

This kind of wisdom is the opposite of what the writer of Proverbs is talking about, and it is the wisdom that has caused the strife in the world we live in today. There is a worldly wisdom that says you must look after yourself; that other people’s problems are their own fault – this drives people apart.

But heavenly wisdom says that we must love one another, including our enemies. We must be careful what source of wisdom we embrace.

Prayer: Father, please show me Your way.

DAY 3**Read - John 16:12-15**

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.” v 12-13

‘Heavenly wisdom’ is a gift from God, and we see in our reading today that Jesus says that we will get that wisdom from the Spirit that dwells in us. The Bible does not have direct answers to many of our modern issues, but the Spirit does – and so do many of our friends! But we need to be able to see what is ‘heavenly’ and what is ‘earthly’.

James gives us some words to describe heavenly wisdom. He says that it is “first of all pure and peace-loving”.

These two words are good first measures of whether the wisdom we are hearing is heavenly or earthly. Is the underlying sentiment of the wisdom coming from a good, pure intention and motive? Does it foster peace, or create disorder? Does it build relationships or break them down?

Much of the advice (‘wisdom’) we get from worldly sources (TV, news, social media etc.) will fail these three questions immediately. Much of what is happening in the US and our politics will too!

We need to seek the wisdom that comes from a pure motive, is directed at good and leads to improved relationships with each other and God. True wisdom is comfortable in God’s presence because it mirrors our God who is pure and peace-loving.

Consider: What sources of ‘wisdom’ are the foundation for your thinking? How do they measure up in purity and peace-loving?

DAY 4**Read - 1 Kings 3:5-15**

“So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?” v 9

The story of Solomon's quest for wisdom, rather than fame and fortune, is a well-known one. In a way it showed that he already had heavenly wisdom, because earthly wisdom would have asked for wealth and prestige. He got those too in the end, but the key thing is that was not what was driving his thinking – his motives were pure and peace-loving.

James could have been thinking of Solomon when he used the words “considerate, submissive ... impartial” in his list in James 3:17. Solomon's whole focus was on the need for him to be a good leader for the sake of God's people. He was thinking of them and not himself. He wanted what was best for them and how he could serve them best.

As mentioned previously, worldly wisdom is based on looking after yourself “because no-one else will”. This is the complete opposite of what God teaches on fellowship: if we all focus on what is best for others, then everyone is being looked after. However, if everyone focuses just on themselves then no-one is being looked after.

Is the wisdom we follow focused on the good of others? Is it elevating me above others, or putting us on the same plane? Does it submit to others or insist on being heard?

Prayer: Father, give me heavenly wisdom. The wisdom that reflects who You are.

DAY 5**Read - Matthew 11:25-30**

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” v 28-29

The final words that James uses to describe heavenly wisdom are “full of mercy and good fruit” and “sincere”.

Jesus made the point in our reading that He is gentle and humble in heart (like heavenly wisdom) but also that we need to take His yoke upon us, a yoke that is easy and brings rest.

A good part of Jesus' yoke is the need for us to be caring for the needs of others. This means showing mercy to those who are in trouble, even if they have brought that trouble upon themselves and then doing something to help.

Is the wisdom we hear drawing us in the direction of compassion for the needy and a move into action? The world says: “don't make your troubles my troubles” but Jesus says “do!” Heavenly wisdom draws us to the needy and not away from them; it brings compassion to our hearts; and moves us away from judgement of the situation.

In listening to that wisdom and going out and making a difference to someone in need it brings rest to our souls. Go and ask anyone involved in a ministry to the needy!

The world says this will drain you, God says it will bring rest.

Prayer: Help me to be full of mercy and good fruit.

DAY 6**Read - James 3:13-18**

“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.” v 17

We come back to where we started in James. This is the essence of heavenly wisdom. These words are our measuring rod for discerning what is God's wisdom and what is not.

In essence, wisdom is a summary of the whole book of James.

James makes the point that our wisdom should be evident “by [our] good life, by deeds done in humility” [v13]. We spent a week looking at faith and works and that our faith needs to be evident in our daily lives.

We looked at favouritism – not putting some people (especially ourselves) above others. Heavenly wisdom is impartial and submissive.

We have looked at taming the tongue; ensuring that what we say is peace-loving, considerate and sincere.

We have also looked at persevering through trials. This too is heavenly wisdom as too often the world says we should just give up.

The whole book of James is a handbook for discovering the heavenly wisdom that can transform our life into one of meaning, purpose, peace, right relationships, mercy and good fruit.

Prayer: Father, please help me to take all I have learned in James and put it into practice so that I can find true wisdom, purpose and peace.