

Harvest

Evangelical Free Church

SERIES: Life: Redefined • Lesson 7

For Adult Bible Fellowships and Small Groups Meeting Nov. 15-21, 2009

Join us in being on mission with God!

OUR VISION

To continually mature and grow as a united body of Jesus-imitators who live out God's greatest commandment to "Love" by exalting God and serving one another, and His greatest commission to "Go" by reaching into and shaping our local, regional, and global communities.

"Two Kinds of Wisdom"

James 3:13-18

Getting Started

After an introductory time, discuss the following questions in your group or class.

Our culture has varied pictures of a truly wise man. Cartoons like *Hagar the Horrible* picture a wise person as someone who sits on the top of a mountain waiting for someone to scale the peak and seek their counsel. An Intel commercial shows an actor playing Ajay Bhatt, co-inventor of the USB port on a computer, enjoying a rock-star like following. For some, the wise person is a scientist or scholar who has led the way in his or her field or discipline. For others it's perhaps a judge who has a long and distinguished record in the field of law. You can probably associate wisdom with someone you know personally.

Q: Identify several people by name that you would classify as wise. They may be wise in different ways or display their wisdom differently. Add a few words about what in your mind makes them wise.

- _____

- _____

- _____

Thinking about Wisdom

We all know people or know of people who remember a lot of information. They may have lived long lives rich in experience. Or perhaps they have a lot of formal and informal education to draw from. They have lots of knowledge. But they may not have lots of wisdom.

Q. From your perspective, what is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?

God speaks about wisdom

In James 3:13, James asks a question to his readers. The question is build around the assumption that some of the people in his audience did claim to possess some kind of wisdom. Perhaps they were quick to take the role of teacher. James' words suggest that these people wanted authority and recognition.

1. What kind of answers do you think the original readers would have given to the question about who among them is wise or understanding?



James 3:13-18

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ 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, of the devil. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. ¹⁷ 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 raise a harvest of righteousness.

2. If you were asked this same question about the people you know at Harvest EFC, who, if anyone, would come to your mind?

3. If our culture were to list some things a person should show as evidence that they were wise, what do you think would appear on that list?

The second half of verse 13 challenges anyone who considers themselves to be wise to prove it by meeting a certain standard that is important in God's eyes. You will note that God's standard is not what our culture generally expects.

4. According to verse 13, what evidence does God look for as signs of wisdom in a person?

5. James insists that wisdom is not measured by producing good deeds alone. He qualifies this action by adding something else. What does verse 13 describe as accompanying these good deeds?

6. The Bible maintains that humility comes from wisdom. How does Jesus describe this kind of wisdom in action in Luke 14:8-11?

7. Why do you think we tend to associate humility with weakness, fear, and intimidation rather than wisdom?

8. Verse 14 describes someone who may be doing good deeds. But in their hearts do not reflect humility. Instead, there are two other attitudes—bitter envy and selfish ambition. Describe how you think each of these attitudes diminish the quality of someone who may be doing good deeds on behalf of Christ.

Bitter envy _____

Selfish ambition _____

9. What positive things does the Bible say about ambition in Romans 5:20 and 1 Thessalonians 4:11?

Wisdom: The Missing Ingredient

10. How is the *selfish ambition* spoken of here different from the attitude we see in the verses just mentioned? What would be the warning signs that good ambition might be turning into something unhealthy?

11. Verse 16 asserts that these two characteristics create other problems in our lives. What kinds of things do selfish ambition and bitter envy lead to?

12. From your personal experience or observation, describe some of the kinds of disorder that follow when people are motivated by selfish ambition or envy.

James insist that there are two kinds of wisdom. One kind is common to this world and modern culture. The other is not from this world, but from God. James hinted at this distinction back in James 1:4.

Verse 17 describes three characteristics of the kind of wisdom the world has to offer. It shapes the way we naturally make decisions. It fuels the assumptions of teachers, government officials, business executives and parents. Sometimes it overly influences the choices we make even as followers of Christ.

13. The word for *earthly* describes that which is physical, or natural. It's tied to this earth and limited to the ways people think when they don't consider eternity or God or consequences that exist outside of the moment. Below are a few statements of this kind of wisdom. Add a few phrases of your own.

“What goes around comes around.”

“If it works, it is the right thing to do.”

“He who dies with the most toys wins.”

14. The word for *unspiritual* highlights the fact that this kind of wisdom does not factor in spiritual realities. It may come to useful conclusions so far as it goes, but it is naturally blind to that which is spiritual. When you are tempted to build life around this kind of wisdom, what spiritual resources will you tend to ignore or minimize? In what way is that dangerous?

15. The NIV translates the third characteristic as “of the devil.” The devil is not mentioned literally here. The phrase is actually “demonic.” The roots of this wisdom is not only natural, it is linked to the realm of lies, half-truths, and corrupt ideas.



Reaching Up and Reaching Out

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Remember that Satan masquerades as an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14) So most of these ideas look good, but are deadly when carried to their logical conclusion. Identify some of the common ideas that sound good, but lead to things that are not. (I've started the list for you.) Then tell what's dangerous about the view.

"No religion has a corner on the truth." _____

"It's important to accept everyone and what they believe." _____

"We should respect and adopt the majority view on any issue." _____

16. Verse 17 lists seven qualities of the wisdom that come from heaven. Literally, it is from above. Why do you think James speaks of God's wisdom as that which is from above rather than simply a kind of wisdom that belongs to God?

17. Of the seven qualities listed here, which one might you not have expected to be included in the list?

18. In your opinion, which qualities of this godly wisdom are most absent in the wisdom of the culture around us today?

19. We might have expected James to tell us in verse 18 that peacemakers so a harvest of success, good-will, restored relationships, or other fruits. Instead, James reminds us that they produce a harvest of righteousness. Why do you think the Bible depicts righteousness as one of the key results of godly wisdom?

20. How does that change the way you assess the outcome of a conflict? What becomes more important in the process of approaching situations with God's wisdom? What is of lesser importance?

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