

## James 3:13-18 ~ Two Kinds of Wisdom ~ Leader's Guide

1. How has James described wisdom previously? (James 1:5-8)

As we learned earlier, James speaks of wisdom as the ability to make wise decisions in difficult circumstances, about practical discernment.

2. What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?

There are three steps to wisdom: 1) Memorization. You learn the words, the facts, and the concepts. 2) Knowledge is knowing what the words mean and learning to use the facts and concepts you've memorized to solve problems. Some of these problems can be trivial and some can be quite vast. 3) Wisdom is making judgements as to which problems should be solved, why they should be solved, and what the benefit is from solving them.

So memorization is the "what," knowledge is the "how," and wisdom is the "why."

Example: If you memorize the ten commandments, you can then recite them.

Knowledge lets you understand what they mean ("Thou shalt not kill" means more than just not murdering someone; it means not hating them either). Wisdom is knowing why God gave us the commandments, why he wants us to obey them, and how they demonstrate his love for us.

4. What does James say is the evidence of wisdom in Verse 3:13?

Wisdom is demonstrated by one's 'good life' and by deeds done in humility.

5. How does James characterize 'earthly wisdom' (Verses 3:14-16)?

From time to time all of us experience jealousy and selfishness. When that happens, James says, don't brag about it. It's all too easy to get together with some of the guys and start talking around the themes of "ain't it awful -- he's so lucky -- boy, I'd like to go tooling around in a Corvette." With talk like that, you're actually boasting about your envy and selfishness, which James says is earthly, unspiritual, and of the devil.

6. What kind of well-meaning advice might lead you to feeling jealous and envious?

Well-meaning advice often stems from the pressures of society. Advice such as "assert yourself, go for it, set high goals, press on regardless" can lead you into greed and destructive competitiveness. There is nothing wrong with these goals per se as long as we seek God's wisdom and help from being so competitive that we then feel envious of someone else who succeeds.

The book *Miracle Cure* by Harlan Coben is about the heads of the Cancer Center and the new AIDS center at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in NYC. They were essentially competing for the same funds from NIH—very big bucks. They both started as very talented, knowledgeable and wise doctors, the very top of their profession. But to get the money led them in different but equally unwise directions.

The cancer center doctor formed an alliance with a well-known televangelist and several politicians on the far right to speak out against homosexuality. They portrayed AIDS as a disease brought about by one's own immoral actions and therefore it should not be supported with government funds.

On his part, the AIDS center director started admitting only the least infected patients so that he could demonstrate positive results. He then went even further by accepting patients that had hepatitis, claiming they actually had AIDS, and then showing that they were cured.

7. What is the result of 'earthly wisdom?' Where does it lead? Give an example.

In Verse 16, James says that envy and selfish ambition leads people to cause trouble and do cruel things. Does this sound like James is exaggerating? He's not. A guy I know, Steve, scours garage sales every weekend buying up junk and selling it on eBay. Well, he bought a sword for \$5 and then sold it for \$280. That became the talk of some guys in our club and boy, were they envious. Some of them quit giving Steve leads to good garage sales and then one guy, Big Ed, sent him off on a wild goose chase to another state. Big Ed bragged about it and got a good laugh. No one criticized his boasting yet I think we all felt a bit uncomfortable. Looking back on it now, I see it as a cruel prank, clearly 'of the devil.'

8. How does James describe 'heavenly wisdom?' (Verse 3:17)

Wisdom of heaven is pure, friendly, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, kind, helpful, genuine, and sincere. Can you see that heavenly wisdom is everything that the example above is not?

9. What does heavenly wisdom produce? (Verse 3:18)

James says that peacemakers who plant seeds of peace will harvest justice or righteousness.

10. Do you see the similarity between James' 'heavenly wisdom' and Paul's 'fruit of the spirit?' (James 3:17, Galatians 5:22-23)

Galatians 5:22-23 – <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

James 3:17 – 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.

'Fruit of the Spirit' and 'heavenly wisdom' have almost exactly the same characteristics and, in fact, they are the same thing. After all, where do we get heavenly wisdom if not from the Holy Spirit that lives in each one of us?