

Who Is Wise?

James 3:13-18



Preparation: Pray before people arrive. Ask for the leading of the Holy Spirit in your conversation. Read the scripture for today, and study Stulac pg. 130-138. Circle or highlight the discussion prompts from this study guide that seem to fit your group best.

Beginning the group study: Pray for wisdom

Read aloud from James 3:13-18

- What things stand out to you in the text from James?

From Stulac (pg. 132, 135-137), printed here:

“When James invites people who are (supposedly *wise and understanding*) to step forward and identify themselves, he is returning more explicitly to the topic of ‘teachers’ addressed in 3:1. James wants his readers to know what true wisdom means, especially for those who think they are wise enough to teach others. James gives more of a description of wisdom rather than a definition. In fact, he’s been describing it all along, with his talk of believing God, relying on God’s goodness, doing what God’s word says, and living the righteous life that God desires. Now he will label this as wisdom and describe it further as a humble submissiveness to God – resulting in a life of goodness, purity, and peace toward other people. To explain this, James analyzes three aspects of wisdom: *The Nature of Wisdom*, *The Source of Wisdom*, and *The Expression of Wisdom*.

The *Nature of Wisdom* is not something I merely possess in my head; if I am wise at all, it is something I will demonstrate in my conduct. The personality of wisdom should be taken to heart: the wise deed will be done in *humility*. Humility is the character trait underlying the Christian behavior described in the entire letter.

The *Source of Wisdom* that James wants his readers to seek is said to come *from heaven*. Since true wisdom comes from outside ourselves and from God himself, we have to examine where our reliance is placed. It makes sense of what James has already prescribed for a life of faith. It requires of us an active prayer life – to ask for wisdom as 1:5 commands. It requires a conscious dependence on God – in the humility prescribed in 3:13. True wisdom can be had only by people who live in active reliance on God.

And the *Expression of Wisdom* is the deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. What will genuine wisdom look like in a person’s life? James describes both the false wisdom and the true, and in each case he lists identifying attitudes and actions. False wisdom is the opposite of the humility entailed in admitting one’s need and relying on God (envy, self ambition; they expose the sinful desire for personal glory). True wisdom belongs to people who can yield status, and who can submit and learn from others (peace-loving, impartial; in contrast to the bitterness and envy of false spirituality).¹

¹ Stulac, George M. 2010. *James*. IVP Academic.

Getting started:

- Who in your life who has modeled wisdom for you? Talk about why you admire that person.

When a student asked a speech-writer, “What are the three most important rules of eloquence,” the speech-writer replied, “Delivery, delivery, and delivery.” Likewise, Augustine suggests the three most important precepts of the Christian religion are “Humility, humility, and humility” (adapted from Calvin’s *Institutes* 2. 2. 11).

- Humility can sometimes be confused with weakness or meekness. James is describing humility as teachable-ness, asking us to be students of God’s word, and open to new ideas and direction as the Spirit leads us through the word.
- What does humility look like on a practical level?

Genuine faith will manifest itself in deeds, and the same principle holds true in the contrasting demonic realm. The false wisdom that is of the devil will manifest itself in practices of disorder and evil.

- Why do you think James brought up bitter envy and selfish ambitions as examples of false wisdom and not something else?
- Where have you seen envious or selfish behavior hurt people, either in your own life or in the lives of others? When has selfishness gotten the best of you?

In Philippians 2:3-5, the Apostle Paul calls us to imitate the humility of Jesus in our relationships with each other. This humility points to the power and love of God. Jesus wasn’t weak in his humility, and in your humility you can point to the power and love of God too.

Consider the ways in which we can grow in wisdom that is from heaven within the Christian community (and right here in this group!). Discuss good examples of the wisdom that is from heaven (pure, peaceable, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, impartial, and sincere).

- Talk about how when you plant with this kind of wisdom and an attitude of peace, you harvest in righteousness. (Righteousness really can’t grow in any other conditions)
- And pray for wisdom to your daily prayers this week. See how God answers and come back with any stories of answered prayers for wisdom.