



LEADER'S NOTES

For use with the discussion guides drawing on the Sunday messages.

April 17, 2005
James 3:13-18

OVERVIEW

We tend to think of someone who is wise as a person who “knows a lot.” But, Biblically, the concept of wisdom has more to do with how someone lives rather than what someone knows. You could know a lot or a little, but if you are living in line with how God sees life, you are living wisely. That means, the criteria for evaluating wisdom might be a bit different for those in the kingdom than for those in the world.

DISCUSSION

If you start your discussion with a “definition” of wisdom, you’re not likely to generate an enthusiastic conversation. So, let’s start simpler . . . and a bit more intriguing. Take the six names and have your people rank them based on their perceived “wisdom.” (Maybe you use index cards with the names on them and have people rearrange them in front of the group. Have others come and “make adjustments” explaining why. Be creative!) Once you have begun the exercise, move into the discussion of how wisdom is evaluated. Listen for the differing criteria . . . but don’t dismiss anyone’s yet!

As you turn to the passage, remind the group about James’ approach. In his epistle, he is not talking about “getting saved.” James’ concern is about how we are living. He wants us to understand that our faith and our relationship with the living God should impact the way we live—day to day. This section is no different; he wants us to see that truly Godly wisdom makes a difference in how we live.

Most of the words James uses to describe wisdom (and its opposite) will be clear. Read from a couple of translations, and you will probably not miss much at all. There are two words that might warrant a little clarification.

Gentleness (3:13): Some render this “meekness.” The idea is not soft-spined or wimpy!

This is a word used to characterize someone who may have power and strength but they have it under control. They don’t run roughshod over anyone.

Selfish ambition: These words carry the idea of the strife that is stirred when I try to get things my way on my terms. (They might even be good things, it’s just that the focus is on me having my way!)

Look at the description of what Godly wisdom is like found in 3:17. Living like that is what it means to live “wisely.” And the person who can live like that, in the midst of the trials and challenges of every day life, is making it known by the way that they live that they are walking with God! The tendency is to think that a wise person is the one who can make their life “work;” who knows how to get things done and live comfortably. James says otherwise. It’s not that living that way is necessarily sinful, it’s just that wisdom is more about looking like Jesus than living like a competent and successful somebody!

BIG IDEA

The kind of life you live betrays the kind of wisdom you live by.

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

A small group resource for the church drawing on the Sunday messages.

April 17, 2005
James 3:13-18

A weekly discussion guide designed to aid you to hear the Word, understand what you hear, and take it to heart.

Rank the following famous people with regard to “wisdom.” Which do you think is the wisest? Why?

Brittney Spears
Albert Einstein
Christopher Columbus
Harrison Ford
George W. Bush
Mother Teresa

How did you evaluate “wisdom”? What were your criteria?

James has been talking with us about “real life”—real life faith, real life joy, real life trials. And he has been helping us learn how to live out our faith in the midst of this life . . . with all its challenges. He turns his attention to “wisdom” and has something to tell us about Godly, real life wisdom. Read James 3:13-18.

From James’ point of view, what kinds of things indicate someone is truly wise?

What kinds of characteristics would James say indicates that someone isn’t really wise in a Godly sense?

Why would selfish ambition and jealousy be things that interfere with living wisely? Why are they not characteristics of Godly wisdom?

Look back at the last few days. Think about how you lived; how you related to others. Would James say you lived as a wise person? Why or why not?

Prepared for you by

SOUTHSIDE
fellowship

Woodruff Road &
Highway 14
Greenville, SC
864/234-7033
southsidefellowship.org