

Getting Clarity in an Unclear World: “Living the Good Life” James 3:13-18

Connect:

The Titanic sank on April 14, 1912. A common idiom for wasting time with fruitless activity is “rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.” After all, the ship is about to sink – what’s the point?! A more helpful effort would have been to turn on the sonar or radar screen on the bridge of the ill-fated ocean liner. Unfortunately, sonar was not devised until 1918 and radar was not invented until 1935! James emphasizes in this week’s passage that we should be doing things which make a real difference.

Prepare:

Last week we talked about the double-edged sword of words (James 3:9 says it all).

We prayed that God would help us think before we speak and then only words which encourage others.

How did you do in the speech department this week? Say anything you wish you could take back?

Study and Discuss:

Do you know which of the books of the Bible are considered wisdom literature?
Read Psalm 1:1-4. What do these verses have to do with wisdom?

God’s wisdom is meant to do something to us, to transform us into something we are not on our own.

Read Hebrews 1:1-3. In what way does Jesus reflect God the Father? How do you think He wants to influence us?

Read James 3:13-18. James characterizes two kinds of wisdom here. What are they?

He goes on to give examples of the results of each of these as well as their sources. See if you can match the qualities of the two types of wisdom:

Community Group Discussion Questions

Earthly wisdom (connect each word to its description on the right)

Bitter jealousy (ζηλον πικρον, zelon pikron)

Focused on worldly values

Selfish ambition (εριθειαν, eritheian)

Almost an animalistic pursuit of pleasure

Earthly (επιγειοσ, epigeios)

Harsh passion that causes damage to others

Unspiritual (ψυχικοσ, psychikos)

Opposed to the work of God

Demonic (δαιμονιωδες, dailmoniodes)

Causing dissension by wanting power

Godly Wisdom (connect each word to its description on the right)

Meekness (πραυτητι, prauteti)

Someone who promotes peace

Pure (αγνη agne)

Not looking for their pound of flesh

Peaceable (ειρηνικη, eirenike)

Humble, not self-seeking

Gentle (επιεικησ, epiekes)

Full of integrity, no hidden motives

Open to reason (ευπειθησ, eupeithes)

Without hypocrisy, "no acting"

Full of mercy (μεστη ελεουσ, meste eleous)

On the side of truth, not factious

Sincere (ανυποκριτοσ, anupokritos)

Quick to listen, slow to speak

Community Group Discussion Questions

Pastor Jay shared a quote from David Nystrom of Western Seminary describing this section of James 3:

“(1) Where there is divisiveness , there is no wisdom; (2) wisdom is peaceable; (3) therefore, the peacemakers are the ones who possess wisdom; and (4) the ones who create tumult and discord do not possess wisdom, however much they protest to the opposite.”

Read Matthew 7:15-20. What comes from a healthy tree?

Pastor Jay shared what happened to his well-groomed yard after the recent storms. There were palm fronds, trash, leaves, all sorts of debris in the yard and in the pool. In short, all sorts of things you don't usually see when the weather is good and the yardwork has been done.

Similarly the storms of every day life often reveal stuff in our characters that we usually keep hidden away or piled up out of sight.

If we trusted Jesus for our salvation, shouldn't we come to him to help with our spiritual yardwork?

Read Proverbs 16:16. We need to prize wisdom like winning the lottery! It is like finding a treasure chest buried in the backyard!

Response:

Read again James 1:2-4. James is telling us that the trials, the storms, the difficult circumstances of our lives bring the unpleasant junk and trash to the surface of our hearts so that Jesus can deal with it.

As believers we need to see the ugliness in our hearts that need to be transformed and made to look like Jesus. Pastor Jay gave us some strategies for doing this during the current week:

1. Listen. Wisdom starts with listening to God. The still small voice wants to speak to us. Will we listen?
2. Ask for wisdom. God is waiting to give it to us. He is more interested in transforming us than we are interested in being transformed to be more like Jesus.
3. Live and learn. See the fruit of wisdom. Most of us probably feel we are living wisely but in the end the test of true wisdom is the fruit of our words and actions.

Community Group Discussion Questions

Pray:

Lord, help us to understand your word more clearly so that we may listen to you, ask for wisdom when we need it (which is most of the time) and begin to see the results of allowing you to change us to be more like your Son.

Remember what Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens) said about scripture:

“It is not the things which I do not understand in the Bible which trouble me, but the things which I do understand.”