

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

COFFEEHOUSE FIVE CHURCH

JAMES

HOW TO LIVE THE GOOD LIFE

JAMES 3:13-18

06/04/2017



MAIN POINT

To live the good life, we must grow in godly wisdom.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is the best advice you have been given? How has this advice helped you?

If you were looking for wisdom or advice, where would you look?

Studies show that human knowledge is expanding at an unprecedented rate. By some estimates, we double what we know about the world every 13 months. Smart phones have put all of this knowledge at our fingertips. Need to know of a good restaurant? Ask your friends on Facebook. Having weird medical symptoms? Check WebMD. Are you lost? Pull out Google Maps. With all this information readily available to us, it is easy to believe we have it all figured out. Some have dubbed this “infobesity.” The problem is that information alone isn’t enough—we need the wisdom to apply it. True wisdom can only be found when we search for it from above.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 3:13.

What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge? What is an example of each? How do we confuse these two?

Are all sources of wisdom equally valid? Why or why not? How do you determine what wisdom to follow?

Knowledge is the accumulation of facts, but wisdom is the God-given ability to apply those facts to our everyday lives. In an information age, it is easy to get these two confused, but wisdom is much harder to come by than knowledge. Likewise, all wisdom is not created equally. All wisdom falls into one of two categories: earthly or heavenly. James wrote that we need to develop the spiritual discernment to recognize the source of the wisdom we have found.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 3:14-16.

What examples of worldly wisdom can you think of off the top of your head? How often have you consulted these sources over the last month?

Read Ephesians 2:1-4 and compare the state of our hearts in our sin to the way James described worldly wisdom. What parallels do you see? What does this teach you about the nature of worldly wisdom?

Worldly wisdom is fixated on the here and now, and it is the most readily available source of wisdom. It can be found by watching the news, checking social media, or by asking any person you meet on the street. The problem with this wisdom is that it is tainted by sin, which is the default condition of the world. Ephesians 2:1-4 lays out in stark terms the natural disposition of every human heart. So when we are getting wisdom from darkened hearts, we are getting worldly wisdom. Yet even followers of Jesus seek this wisdom regularly. All are susceptible to its pull. What Ephesians 2 goes on to teach is that we need to be made new, and that includes our wisdom.

Most people search for wisdom in one of the following places: Senses-What I feel; Self-What I think; Society-What others think; or Scripture-What God thinks. Which of these sources do you depend on the most? If you said something other than Scripture, then how is it worldly in the way that James describes?

Earthly wisdom is sensual and demonic. Have you ever thought about it this way? What do these words mean? How does this help us recognize worldly wisdom?

The problem with worldly wisdom is that it comes from inside of us, which means it proceeds from sin. All the places we search for wisdom outside of God are ultimately flawed. James gave several helpful parameters for recognizing worldly wisdom. First it is sensual, which means that it arouses the gratification of our senses. Such wisdom is found in 1 Corinthians 6, where the Corinthians believed that sexuality was simply an appetite like hunger that needed to be satisfied. Sensual wisdom is what feels good or seems good to us. The problem with this is that according to Romans 1:18 and following, our senses can lie to us. They are affected by sin, so they are not a pure source of wisdom.

Earthly wisdom is also demonic, which means that it comes from evil. Much of this seems harmless to us at first, but when we see things that seem wise to us or even people who seem wise, we need to probe below the surface to see what informs this wisdom. Much of earthly wisdom comes from a place that seems genuine, but leads away from Jesus and to our own gratification and pleasure.

What is an example of sensual or demonic wisdom that you have encountered recently?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 3:17-18.

What differentiates the traits of heavenly wisdom from earthly wisdom?

In these verses, James lists eight traits of heavenly wisdom. Identify and define them together as a group.

Let's look briefly at each of James's eight traits of godly wisdom. The first trait encompasses all of the other seven. "Purity" is the first. People with true wisdom are pure in that they have put aside the vices of a self-seeking nature and factionalism. This trait provides the secure foundation for all that follows.

The following five traits show the attitude of true wisdom toward other people: "Peace-loving" means it demonstrates a desire to promote peace between struggling factions. "Considerate" refers to being reasonable in the demands it makes on others. "Submissive" indicates a willingness to learn from others by being open to reason. "Full of mercy" is revealed by offering compassion to those in distress. "Full of good fruit" is shown by kind actions and helpful deeds to others.

The final two traits describe the essential nature of true wisdom in itself: "Impartial" means without prejudice and unwavering in its commitments. "Sincere" means genuine and open in its approaches to others.

How could you use these traits to test wisdom that you receive from others? Why should we meditate upon or

memorize a list like this?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Where are you looking for wisdom in a place that you ultimately cannot find it? Explain.

What can you do to acquire godly wisdom? Read Psalm 1:1-6. Will you commit to reading the Word for a little bit each day this week?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. Why is the cross of Christ the apex of wisdom? When people seek you out for wisdom, how could you point them back to the cross?

PRAY

Thank God for being the source and object of our wisdom. Praise Him for the wisdom in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Ask Him for wisdom where it is needed, and pray that you would always search for wisdom where it can be found—in God’s Word.

COMMENTARY

JAMES 3:13-18

3:13. James 3:2-12 presents shortcomings of the tongue to which teachers and all individuals are vulnerable. 3:13-18 reminds us of our need to demonstrate genuine wisdom. The words particularly apply to aspiring teachers, but they have relevance to all believers.

The opening rhetorical question asks how we can show that we have wisdom. Wise refers to someone with moral insight and skill in deciding practical issues of conduct. Understanding pictures someone with the knowledge of an expert. We are to show the presence of wisdom by good deeds practiced with humility. Only obedient deeds, not mere talk, prove the presence of wisdom.

Humility refers to a submissive spirit opposed to arrogance and self-seeking. The person with humility is not a doormat for the desires of others, but controls and overpowers the natural human tendency to be arrogant and self-assertive. Non-Christian Greeks felt that this type of humility was a vice. Christianity made meekness into a virtue. “Meek” in Matthew 5:5 is the adjectival form of the noun translated here as humility. Jesus promised the “meek” they would inherit the earth. Jesus meant a believer who relates to God with dependence and contentment will reap God’s abundant blessings.

Even when you are involved in a disagreement, you must demonstrate a gentleness and kindness of attitude. You must banish all contentiousness and mutual accusation. The Bible calls on all Christians to show the presence of spiritual wisdom in their lives by deeds of humility and goodness.

False wisdom destroys unity and develops rivalry. This section discusses the demonstration of false wisdom (v. 14), the source of false wisdom (v. 15), and the results of false wisdom (v. 16).

3:14. Bitter envy and selfish ambition prove that a person is following the route of false wisdom. Envy describes a determined desire to promote one’s opinion to the exclusion of the opinions of others. Selfish ambition pictures a person who tries to promote a cause in an unethical manner. This person becomes willing to use divisive means to promote a personal viewpoint. Bitter rivalries develop out of these practices.

James warned that people who had envy and selfish ambition could boast about it or deny the truth. Boasting describes the malicious triumphant attitude gained by one party over its opponents. Those who choose to deny the truth can end up rejecting the truth of the gospel. Envy of Jesus led the religious leaders to deny his person and power and to plot his death (John 11:47-53).

3:15. This verse uses three adjectives to describe the distinctive traits and source of false wisdom. First, negatively, false wisdom does not come from heaven or from God. Its source is earthly. It belongs to the way of life of this world. Second, false wisdom is unspiritual, belonging to the natural world and not to the supernatural world. It comes from the mental and emotional ideas of fallen human beings. Unfortunately, we Christians are too often guilty of using this twisted wisdom. Finally, this false wisdom is of the devil. Satan uses it to corrupt relationships.

3:16. The results of envy and selfish ambition are disorder and every evil practice. Disorder describes an experience of anarchy and disturbance. Such disarray affects private relationships between Christians and public meetings of believers. Every evil practice pictures an evil from which no good can come. People who cater to selfish ambition need never expect to develop any fruit which is godly, righteous, or helpful to others.

False wisdom promotes self-assertion and independence. It destroys a spirit of mutual concern. Where Christians “do their own thing” instead of caring for one another, a community of support and mercy can disintegrate (see 1 Cor. 1:10-17). Paul outlined a solution for this epidemic of selfish living, telling us to look out for “the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4).

3:17. True wisdom is free from self-interest and strife. This verse lists eight traits or characteristics of true wisdom. The first is purity. People with true wisdom are pure in that they have put aside the vices of a self-seeking nature and factionalism. This trait provides the secure foundation for all that follows.

The following five traits show the attitude of true wisdom toward other people. Peace-loving means it demonstrates a desire to promote peace between struggling factions. Considerate refers to being reasonable in the demands it makes on others. Submissive indicates a willingness to learn from others by being open to reason. Full of mercy is revealed by offering compassion to those in distress. Full of good fruit is shown by kind actions and helpful deeds to others.

The final two traits describe the essential nature of true wisdom in itself. It is impartial, without prejudice and unwavering in its commitments. True wisdom is sincere, genuine and open in its approaches to others. Jesus particularly showed his genuineness in his dialogues with Pilate (John 18:33-37).

3:18. Verse 18 concludes this section with a description of the effects of true wisdom. True wisdom results in a harvest of righteousness, that is, a conformity to God’s will. True wisdom also lets one experience peace, the enjoyment of harmonious relationships between human beings.

Over the years Christians in various churches have developed wide differences in their social practices. American Christians from the South sometimes oppose mixed swimming, but they may offend a Christian from the North by their cultivation and use of tobacco. Christians differ in their preferences for English versions of the Bible. Some regard the use of certain modern translations as sure signs of compromise and moral apostasy. European Christians live in a culture which more readily accepts the use of alcohol by believers. Many American Christians find it hard to tolerate this acceptance. American women almost never feel compelled to wear a covering for their heads to worship services. Among many eastern European Christian groups it is expected that women will wear a covering, even if it is only a scarf. Each of these circumstances demands a response of peace and consideration to prevent strife, factionalism, and petty quarreling.