

The Difference Wisdom Makes

Sara Carlisle

James 3:13-18

SLIDE: what's the use of wisdom?: _____.

We have been doing this series in James called 'What Difference Does God Make'...and the reason we chose James to explore this series is because James recognizes that faith in God should make a difference in one's life...that your life should look radically different because you know God, because you have a relationship with him. Last week Jonathan preached and talked about the tongue, and the power it has. He talked about how our words actually do stuff...they have power to bring life or death to the hearers. And James has left us in a desperate place. Who can control his tongue? How can we do it? James answer is, it's going to take more than our own power, it's going to take God's wisdom.

So what is wisdom really. Who do you think of when you think of wise people? Who do you think you'd go to to figure out life?

SLIDE: picture slides

Wisdom is mastering life's complexities...it's skill in living and it produces the good life. Wisdom is success in life...not just in one area of life, but in all areas. Wisdom brings a life that God wants for you. Wisdom brings the life in God that you dream about having. Wisdom brings a life that can be put on display, where people look at it and say 'surely only God could do that. Only God could produce such a life!!!' What kind of life in God do you want to have? What kind of mark do you want to leave on this world. You only have one life--What do you want to be remembered for?

Erik Eriksson came up with 8 stages of psychosocial developments...the stages are divided up between different life stages. Success in each stage determines how you will do in the following stages. If issues aren't dealt with early on, they will come up in later stages. The last stage is called 'Ego integrity vs Despair' and it is the stage where one looks back over their life to determine its success. Now I know that we don't think much about this stage in our lives, but there is something that Eriksson recognizes...He observes that the way people live their lives, the decisions they make when they are young determine the types of people they are turning into.

Have you ever thought about it like that? What do you want to be known for? How are the decisions that you are making now helping you get there. How are they helping you become that person? How are they adding to your life? Wisdom would tells us to think about these things. Wisdom would say that God's

purposes are the most important and his ways are best. Wisdom says, God knows how to get me there. So, what kind of life do you want to have? What do you want to be known for?

I had the chance to spend some time thinking about this. And I would encourage you to do the same. Spend some time thinking through what you would want your eulogy to say. Here are some things that I came up with

Eulogy:

Sara was loved. She knew she was loved by the living God, revealed in Jesus and it changed everything for her. Sara was passionate about the Kingdom of God and believed passionately that God was restoring all of creation and was calling his church to partner with him. She made people, everywhere she went, see that they belonged in Heaven...that Jesus can and will heal anything—She believed he was at work to bring Justice to the poor, the broken, the addicted, the forgotten, the voiceless, the least...and these people really were her friends. She was a leader. She was a pastor and she felt that as part of her calling to raise up women in any and every capacity that God called them. She taught them to lead not as men, but as women, believing that there was a difference and the world needed both. She enhanced people and could see them at their potential in Jesus and she helped loved them into who they were becoming...and she would never let them settle (as much as it was up to her). But despite her leadership, Sara was first a follower. She was a follower of Jesus and because of this single-minded devotion to him, she could follow just as easy as she could lead. Her life was never about her, but was an offering poured out to Jesus for the sake of his name. And because of this, she loved her family well. She was loyal. And in all her work, it was never at the sacrifice of her family. Her husband was doubled by their relationship and Sara was truly doubled because of his love and care for her. Her children would often say they wanted to be like them when they grow up. She enjoyed life. She enjoyed the Beauty of God in creation. She could often be found taking walks or playing outside. She loved music and writing and it was a source of life for her. She was always laughing and smiling. She had deep peace and joy. She chose joy, when there were thousands of things for her to be heavy about. In the midst of suffering she knew God's comfort and lived to extend it to others who were suffering—victims of sex trafficking, the hiv/aids pandemic...She chose God. Over every person, every emotion and every circumstance.

The truth is, I know that there is much work that needs to be done in me, and through me before I am this type of person. I know that there are a number of decisions that I will need to make...and these will all require God's wisdom. I can't possibly get there without his help...only He could produce such a life. I need God's wisdom. Wisdom produces the good life. Wisdom goes beyond what's ethical or moral or legal...I might know the rules...the rules will tell me about needing to have sexual purity in a dating relationship. And if you are a Christian, the rules will tell you that you need to date within the Christian faith. But the rules won't tell you among all of those who you could date, who you

should date. And the rules won't tell you among all those that you could marry, who you should marry. The rules may warn us about the wrongness of stealing. But the rules won't tell a bank how much risk to take when investing, or whether to load up on subprime mortgages.

We know we need wisdom. That's why every bookstore is lined with rows of self-help literature. We know we need wisdom. We know we need someone to guide us through the complex questions of life—areas that the rules don't cover. That's why we flock to counselors and that's why we have shows like Dr Phil...It's because we crave advice from people who seem to know how to successfully navigate the complexities of life and the complexities of relationships.

That's what's so amazing about Jesus. When I came to Jesus, I realized I didn't have to figure it all out on my own. Jesus was in charge of my life now...and He's not a God who stands far off, but one who has come close—and he continues to offer His wisdom to those who belong to him.

Let's face it guys, we are making decisions right now in our lives, that will forever effect us. We are figuring out what kind of careers we're going to invest in, who we're going to spend our life with, how to be good parents, what kind of relationships we want to have, how we're going to spend our time, how to spend our money or affections, our emotions. We are only given one life. And we can spend it on a thousand things. Wisdom shows us how to spend it on God and his interests. We need wisdom to live the life that only God can give us. We need God's wisdom to figure out life.

SLIDE: What's the use of wisdom: figuring out 'the good life'

Right at the beginning of our text for tonight, James says 13 "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life..." The word he uses for good here is 'kalos', which expresses the attractiveness of the good life...it's wholesomeness and helpfulness that is displayed in those who belong to God.

How are we going to find insight to navigate these questions? How are we supposed to figure all of this stuff out? Well, we're not left to ourselves. We need God's wisdom to figure out the questions of life, in order to live the lives in God we've always wanted...because the way we respond to these individual questions form our lives and the people we're becoming.

READ JAMES 3:13-18

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice

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. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

SLIDE: How do you know if you're wise?:

So right away James starts describing these 2 kinds of wisdom and he doesn't waste anytime getting at the heart of the matter. James isn't afraid to get in your face. He says, do you want to know if you're wise, well then...look at at your heart. How do you know if you're wise? figuring out what's going on in your heart He says, there is the kind of wisdom that has a motivation of humility and goodness...and another kind of "wisdom"...he's calling it wisdom, but he's really mocking it that has a motivation that is bitter and selfish. He says wisdom always displays action—good or bad, what's going on in your heart will produce the actions that you can visibly see in one's life.

Think about the good life for a minute. Think about your heroes. They are probably people that have made a significant mark on the world. Who have changed the world in some radical way. And it came at great cost to themselves...they had to be intentional with their energies. Their good deeds are obvious.

SLIDE: Good deeds and humility produce: a full life

When I think about the lives of people that I want to be like when I grow up, I think of people like my mom, Rich Nathan, or Craig Heselton (here's a guy who had an amazing job as a manager of a chemical plant here in Columbus and he answered God's call to use his gifts and training to serve the church. And I've seen up close the way he loves his family and his wife), Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King Jr., Bishop Desmond Tutu, Bono...people who use their position to serve people. They don't use their power to dominate or oppress, but to liberate, to love. Position doesn't mean one is wise, position that is used to serve people is wise. EX of the mayor...

And true humility that produces the wise life, the good life is humble. It's teachable. Again James throws us a curve ball. We always think about people who are wise as those that know all of the answers, but James says they are people who are willing to get low...willing to ask questions...willing to be the student. EX realizing I fail to ask questions...

And Solomon, who in Scripture is known as the wisest guy who ever lived insists throughout his writings that, instead of looking to ourselves for the answers we need, we should pursue the counsel of others. In fact, Solomon, the wisest one, had more to say about the importance of seeking wise counsel than all the other biblical writers combined!!!

Here are a couple of them:

Proverbs 1:5 let the wise listen and add to their learning,
and let the discerning get guidance—

Proverbs 19:20 Listen to advice and accept discipline,
and at the end you will be counted among the wise.

How about that?! So to be wise, I don't have to have all of the answers. To be a good small group leader, I don't have to know everything about the Bible. Wise People ask questions?! Wow?! You might be wiser than you thought.

So this covers the first kind of wisdom, true wisdom...that is humble and teachable. But what about this other "wisdom" that James is talking about.

14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

James was sick of the false teachers that were messing with the early church. Their wisdom was destructive, it brought division. It was mean-spirited and arrogant. Nothing about these false teachers lives reflected humility or goodness. But their kind of wisdom, as they called it, still produced action. But it was just nothing to write home about. It came from a heart of bitterness and selfishness.

And instead of asking if we have this true wisdom, that leads to the blessed, full life OR the "wisdom" that leads to the foolish life...we really ought to examine ourselves to see that there are no traces of this junk: this bitterness...this selfishness. He says, your bitterness your selfishness will produce evil no matter how smart you think you are!!!

SLIDE: Bitterness and selfishness produce: A Foolish Life

There is a really interesting book called "The Intellectuals" by an American Historian named Paul Johnson

What Johnson said interestingly was that he didn't explore the philosophies of the great intellectuals in history—people like Rousseau, the 18th c. French Philosopher, Karl Marx, or Tolstoy or Norman Mailer. He didn't explore these people's philosophies. Instead, he explored their private lives. And what you discover when you read his book is that all these folks who we study in college and who are quoted and held up as paragons of humanity—whose philosophies tell the rest of us how we are to live—these folks are, in fact, some of the most awful, despicable, mean, violent, promiscuous people you could imagine.

They were horrible to their wives. They had a very, very low view of women. Many of them were drunks.

Johnson, being a careful historian, wrote about people that we would normally consider to have had lived successful lives...Jean-Paul Sartre.

Sartre

Sartre's writings were especially popular in the 60's and 70's. he was the father of a philosophy called existentialism, which according to his definition defines a person according to his actions. In other words, he says that the only things that makes a person successful is acting, making a commitment. That's what gives your life meaning. Just doing something, it doesn't matter what you do, just do it. There is no absolute truth, Sartre said, we just have to pick our truth and then pursue it with all our might. Sartre used to talk endlessly about women's liberation and the equality of the sexes and the need for sexual freedom. But despite all of this talk He treated his live in lover, Simone de Beauvoir, horribly. He used to slap her around. He was notoriously promiscuous in her presence. He slept with his friends wives and his philosophy had disastrous consequences for millions of people.

In the late 1950's, 8 Cambodians who were studying in Paris took classes from him. He taught them that life had no ultimate meaning or value. He taught them that if you needed to commit violence in pursuit of your idea, your vision of justice, then go ahead. Because what was important was your commitment to the idea, to the cause. These 8 cambodians listened to Sartre and they believed him. They went back to Cambodia and formed the Khmer Rouge Regime and killed a third of their countrymen.

James would say that Sartre's wisdom, is false wisdom. What he believed didn't lead to a good life, a full life. It didn't produce A life of humility and good deeds and peace.

What you believe really does make a difference. It makes a difference what you commit yourself to. What you believe comes out in your life.

I could go on, but the point is that many of the folks that we consider to be successes, when you get up close to them are miserable failures in their personal lives. That's true of very successful politicians, presidents, and athletes. They need God's wisdom. Their kind of "wisdom" doesn't quite work in producing good deeds.

So where are you seeing bitterness in your life?. A tell-tale sign of bitterness, is cynicism and anger. You might be bitter about something that happened to you when you were younger, maybe you were sexually abused by someone you trusted and you haven't been able to deal with it. Maybe you were hurt by someone in the church, and you know you're bitter at the church. You haven't dealt with it...sometimes you show up, but you keep your distance from people for the most part. Maybe you're angry at God, you say things to him like

'You don't even care about me do you?' We judge God, we judge other people. We get bitter and angry and cynical. We feel our hearts hardening and we know we hate it, but we don't know how to turn it around.

Well James is saying, you need to deal with it. This will do nothing, but lead to a life further and further away from the life you want. It will divide you. It will separate you from God and from people. The way to deal with this bitterness is by confronting it and confessing it as sin. There may be someone that you need to forgive. Let me explain to you what forgiveness is. Forgiveness is not pretending that something didn't happen. And it's not pretending that it was okay. Forgiveness names sin as sin, wrongdoing as wrongdoing and says, 'now go to Jesus to be dealt with'. It loosens you from being bound to it. So the person that hurt you can no longer hurt you...and it frees you from having to make them pay, because God who is just and in charge will bring Justice. And if you have directed your anger at God...then you need to ask him to forgive you and clean up your heart again. There are times when we struggle in this way, but it is not ever okay to be angry at God...essentially it's judging him. So many of you have bitter hearts because you have been angry at God...forgetting that he is the one who Suffered for you. He is the one who suffers with you. He is the one that is setting things right.

So James tells us to deal with our bitterness and he tells us to deal with our selfishness. James understands sin. Luther defined sin as 'a life turned inward.' And in our individualistic western culture, we are more selfish in our ambitions that we realize. We are so good at spending our energy on ourselves. We don't think about future generations...about the natural resources that we are hoarding in the US, we don't think about caring for the environment bc our children and grandchildren are going to have to deal with the mess we've created. We spend our energy on ourselves. Doing what feels right, following our hearts, giving into our bodily urges...

We all know what that leads to. We have all had experiences, things we've done that we wish we hadn't...'how could I have gotten myself into this.' We've all seen this in others lives...and it's because if we do ask ourselves questions, we ask the wrong questions. Part of our selfish ambition is evident in how self-deceiving we are. Let me explain...Self deception comes quite natural to me. I can make a bad decision look and sound like a great decision without blinking. Some of us have made poor financial decisions sound like investment opportunities...or poor relationships sound like ministry opportunities. I've missed tons of time at the gym under the excuse of, "I just need to rest my body". I've rationalized hundreds of dollars at starbucks...tons of time on movies that I need to catch up on, but for what reason?? Every addiction begins this way:

"I know what I'm doing"

"I'm not addicted. I just enjoy this"

"I'll be careful"

“I can handle it”

“I could quit if I wanted to.”...well then quit. It’s certainly not good for you.

Sound familiar...think of the last week and the bad decisions you’ve talked yourself into. The fact that we have to give ourselves excuses or reasons ought to clue us in.

You don’t have to go through creative mental schemes to convince yourself that it’s a good idea to eat more vegetables or save money or avoid bad company. You just know. You don’t look around for reasons to do the right things; it’s the bad decisions that require creative reasoning.

If we’re going to figure out true wisdom, we need to know the right questions to ask...and we need to ask the questions of other people. Sometimes we need to recognize the subtle ways that we separate ourselves from God’s wisdom.

SLIDE: Who is wisdom?: figuring out true wisdom

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. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

Wisdom that comes from heaven, wisdom from God...God wants what’s best for us. He wants to show us how to find true wisdom. He wants to help us figure life out. He wants to give us a life that only he can give.

- The wrong questions: **may skip these slides if low on time. **
 - Is there anything wrong with it?...The common assumption is if there is nothing wrong with what we’re doing, it must be okay. (if it’s not illegal, unethical, or immoral, then it qualifies as a live option, right? If there isn’t a ‘thou shalt not’, then it’s safe to assume it’s okay. This sets us up for another question (that we rarely verbalize or allow to surface to the level of conscious thought)...it goes something like
 - How close can I get to the line between right and wrong without actually doing something wrong? The Christian version: How close can I get to sin without actually sinning? How far is too far; How many drinks is too many drinks? How much is too much to spend? How far can I go? How close to the line can I get...
 - There was this pastor that used to come to my high school soon after I decided on my own to be a follower of Jesus. And kids were always asking that question. ‘How far is too far.’ And I loved the answer he gave us...he would always say, ‘how much Jesus do you want’. And to this day, the guy is still doing great. He has an amazing wife and family...he leads a ministry for teens that are getting out of jail..to help them get their lives straightened up...what

- a wise man. What a man of purpose...a man who has been intentional with his resources: of time, emotional energy, money etc
- So after we ask 'how far is too far?' After we come this far, we start asking 'How far over the line between right and wrong can I go without experiencing consequences?' In other words, how unethical, immoral, or insensitive can I be without suffering any unmanageable outcomes? How long can I neglect my family, these relationships, my finances, or professional responsibility without feeling the effects? How far can I indulge in addictive behaviour without becoming addicted? It is a slippery slope. And it leads to...
 - How did I get myself into this mess?
 - Visiting my hs reunion: ex of Kari, of

The moral of these stories...Just because there isn't a 'thou shalt not' doesn't mean it is a 'thou shalt'.

Taking that job, though it pays well..., dating that person, though they say they love God...may not be the wise thing to do. Buying the house, though you can afford it, may not be the wise thing to do. Maybe your future goals in ministry or with a family...will be put off because you are stuck in bills that are over your head.

You don't need another pair of jeans. The phone you have works just fine. Quit entertaining thoughts about quitting your job. Start recognizing the difference between your wants and needs...start recognizing your selfish ambition.

Our only alternative is to turn to the Wise One, the source of Wisdom. the opening verses of James, he explain to us that God has immense wisdom to give us, if we would only ask.

- 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

We simply need to ask. We can ask ourselves a lot of questions to justify ourselves. But We need to ask the question 'is this the wise thing to do?'...we need to ask ourselves...we need to ask God...we need to ask the people that he has put around us. Not how far is too far...not is this hurting anyone, but 'Is this the wise thing to do?' To find true wisdom, ask it of every invitation, every opportunity, every relationship. Start utilizing this question to engage with God.

Recommend "The Best Questions Ever "

SLIDE: Becoming pure ones

And as we read the closing verses of this chunk of scripture. Every trait in v 17-18 describes this true wisdom, this wisdom from heaven has a corporate, community aspect to it. We get so used to figuring out life on our own..and here is Joshua House, we believe in 'Encountering God and Discovering

Community'...we believe that we can even encounter God through community. And that is what James is saying here. From the beginning, God has been setting apart a people for himself. That's what this word 'pure' means. Holy...means set apart. He wants us to go against the grain. To be people who aren't just busy, but bear fruit. He sets us apart to be people who take the pathway of peace and forgiveness, instead of drama and fighting and gossip. He wants us to be willing to get low, to treat people equally...to be genuine from the inside out. These traits:

pure; peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere...all come from a life of true wisdom, with God as the source. Only God can make us into these kind of people.

And we need to be willing to pure and set apart as much as he wants us to. Charge to Joshua House: there's a point where Jesus just isn't cool. There's a point where wisdom isn't the cool thing to do. There's a point where being peaceful isn't the cool thing to do. DO IT ANYWAYS!!! There are parts of Jesus that are horribly offensive to people. There's a reason why they wanted to kill him...some people hate the truth. Some people hate grace—giving people what they don't deserve. Some people hate peace.

And I'll close with this. Last verse:

18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

SLIDE: Becoming peaceful ones

The wisdom of God leads to a life of peace and wholeness. This is where this whole passage is leading...to this notion of peace. He says, life with God leads to peace. And this idea of peace is not just a 'release of tension'. Biblical Peace Salom or Shalom means "to be whole, to be healthy, to be complete..in all areas of life." It is a life where God is King and the Kingdom of Heaven reigns. It is riddled with God's Justice and Righteousness and Goodness. We have God now!!! This is one of the most wonderful things about having Jesus, is we no longer just have to figure out life on our own. Our life is not ultimately controlled by the events and people around us. God is in control. He transcends space and time...He is in control. He is the wise One. He holds our lives together and directs us. But you have to go to him...again and again. V 18 gives us this imagery of sowing and reaping—this was an image that was familiar to the hearers everyday lives. They knew that it took investment of their time and energy and emotion. But as we go to God and enter into his Presence we are changed...we are made more complete and he gives us the tools to offer this same wholeness to the people around us.

So that is our call as followers of Jesus...as Jesus continues to heal us and complete us and make us whole, we are to turn and sow that, to invest that in the world around us. Our call is to be peacemakers who by serving others can partner with God to transform their lives.

For some of you that were at JH on Campus this past week, and man did we have a great time...God did some pretty cool things. But Chris Meekins, our campus pastoral coordinator brought up the book 'unchristian'. It's a really good read, but what is so striking about it is that it says that christians have become most known for being:

Judgmental, anti-homosexual, and hypocritical.

How did those that are supposed to represent Christ's love and justice and peace...the kind of peace that changes people, that makes them complete...become known to be hateful and critical and 2-faced. True wisdom is expressed in our lives as peace... people who remind people that they belong in heaven, the good life, the life ruled and controlled by the Kingdom of Heaven.

We need to be followers of Jesus that re-claim his true name, his true wisdom and who become known as people of peace. We need to take back his message of peace.

Words: bitterness/anger/cynicism/unforgiveness

Call to be peacemakers...forgiveness...

Being holy: willing to be set apart, not blending in

Need God's wisdom: big decisions to make...some of you have recognized cycles...

OUTLINE:

The Difference Wisdom Makes: James 3:13-18

What's the use of wisdom? _____ (v. 13)

How do you know if you're wise? _____ (v. 13-16)

Good deeds and humility produce: A Full Life

Bitterness and selfishness produce: A Foolish Life

Who is Wisdom? _____ (v. 17-18)

Becoming pure ones

Becoming peaceful ones