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James / James 3:13–18

James enjoys rhetorical questions, as we see with how he begins this section. Why? Because it is a way to focus the message he has more directly on the recipient. Those he is talking to are to ask themselves, am I part of this category? It forces them to consider what he is saying instead of them just saying, oh he's speaking to someone else.

Think to part of the story of King Solomon. God appeared to him in a dream and invited him to ask for whatever he desired. Rather than asking for wealth, long life, or victory over his enemies, Solomon humbly acknowledged his own limitations and asked God for an understanding and discerning heart to govern His people and distinguish right from wrong. God was pleased with his request and granted him exceptional wisdom, along with riches and honour. Solomon's God-given wisdom was demonstrated when two women claimed to be the mother of the same living child. Solomon proposed dividing the child in two, knowing that the true mother would rather surrender her child than see him killed. When one woman pleaded for the child's life, Solomon recognized her compassion and identified her as the mother.

I wondered when I read the story of King Solomon when I was younger that if I was in King Solomon's shoes at that time, not having his story to draw from, would I have asked for the same thing? You see, James is asking something similar to those he is writing in his letter. "Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom." As James continues, "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace." James is reminding us to never underestimate the power of a seed.

As we hear from James and saw from King Solomon, true wisdom, not of this world, is a gift from God. And that if we seek the wisdom from God, James tells us what our lives will look like, "pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy." But if we embrace the wisdom of the world, James also states what our lives will look like, "Bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth... For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind."

Now, we have probably never been in the situation of King Solomon, where he had to make the decisions as

to whose child was whose, but we've all been in the middle of a conflict and have used wisdom (or not) to respond. In the middle of a heated argument we have a choice to raise our voices, to speak without thinking, or wait patiently until all the verbal heat is spent before we respond, to use a soothing tone of voice. Think of a time that someone brought peace to a volatile situation, how did they accomplish it?

There is a difference between knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Knowledge is about knowing facts, understanding is about grasping their meaning, and wisdom is about knowing how to use them well. For instance, knowledge says: "There is a difference between right and wrong." Understanding says: "I see why something is right or wrong, and what consequences it may have." Wisdom says: "I will choose what is right, even when it is difficult or inconvenient." I loved what one definition said for wisdom, "Wisdom often requires recognizing the limits of your own knowledge, being willing to change your mind, and considering how your decisions affect others."

Wisdom requires recognizing the limits of your own knowledge, and do we do this? And not only recognizing the limits of our own knowledge, but recognizing the limitless knowledge of God's? As we heard through the story of King Solomon godly wisdom involves more than knowledge or

intelligence. It requires humility to recognize our need for God, discernment to make sound judgments, and compassion to act in ways that uphold what is right. Solomon's wisdom came from God, and it became evident through his actions.

When was the last time you waited on an answer from God, instead of saying yes (or no) to something right away? And I'm not just talking big questions, but sometimes the everyday things that we say yes or no to, but that may not be the will of God in our life. Or when was the last time we asked for wisdom from God before we spoke? As James mentions traits of wisdom, he would say to ask yourself, is what I'm about to propose pure, peaceable, gentle, submissive, merciful, fruitful, impartial, and sincere? And if not, maybe we need to rethink what we're going to say, or do. James is reminding us to not simply follow the majority, or to go along with the culture, but to evaluate our lives and check every decision we make to see if they align with out beliefs and align with God.

For instance, if you're offered a promotion at work and you want to take it, ask yourself why? Ask yourself if God wants you to do it, don't just do it because everyone else does.

Recently, I was asked if I wanted to take on a role within an organization, but they needed to know within a few days. And I will admit, it felt kinda good at first to

be asked. There's something affirming about being considered for a role, about knowing that someone sees something in you that makes them think you might be the right person. You feel valued, recognized, perhaps even a little flattered. I almost said yes. But after that initial feeling wore off, I found myself thinking more seriously about what was actually being asked of me. Was this something that God wanted me to do in my life right now? I told them I would think about it, pray about it, and let them know. The deadline came and I hadn't heard anything from God at which point I told them, I couldn't give them an official answer. They said that was okay, I could have more time. As time went on, I felt like God was saying, now is not the time, and so that is what I told them. I appreciated the thought and gesture, but not now. As humans, there is nothing wrong with feeling good about being asked, that's natural. The important thing is to make sure that, that feeling is not what makes your decisions, but to seek God's wisdom in our decisions.

I remember shortly after I had given my notice at work that I was taking a leave of absence to pursue full-time studies, a fellow Christian asked me why I didn't apply for long-term disability through my workplace because of my concussions. That way, I could be off work, pursue other things, and still receive my full-time pay. I understood the reasoning behind the suggestion. My life certainly wasn't back to normal. A full day

of teaching could leave me so mentally exhausted that by the time I got home, I had very little left to give. My concussion was still affecting me, and there were legitimate challenges I was dealing with, and it would help support the family. From a practical, earthly perspective, the suggestion probably made sense. But something about it didn't sit right with me. Not because there was anything inherently wrong with exploring disability benefits when someone genuinely needed them, but because that wasn't why I was leaving.

I wasn't leaving my career simply because I was tired, because my circumstances had become difficult, or because I needed a way out. I believed God was asking me to step away from my career as a teacher to pursue ministry and studies. This was about obedience to what I believed He was calling me to do. And I think this is where the difference between earthly wisdom and God's wisdom becomes so important. Earthly wisdom often looks at a situation through the lens of security, practicality, financial stability, and what makes the most sense based on what we can see in front of us. And there can be value in being wise and responsible in those areas, if we seek God in it. But God's wisdom calls us to look beyond what appears to be the most logical or comfortable option. It asks us to search for what God may be asking of us.

Sometimes, the wisest decision in God's eyes may not look like the wisest decision on paper. It may involve stepping away from something secure before knowing exactly what lies ahead. It may mean surrender, releasing the need to have every detail figured out, and trusting God enough to take the next step even when others might see a more practical alternative. As we are reminded in Proverbs 3:5–6 trust in the Lord with all our hearts and not lean entirely on our own understanding, acknowledging Him in all our ways and trusting Him to direct our paths.

I realize that I didn't have the whole picture when I handed in my notice. I knew the direction I believed God was leading me, but I didn't yet know what the next chapter would look like or where it would ultimately take me. I had to take the step of faith before I could see more clearly where that step was leading. And that has stayed with me.

Sometimes we want God to show us the entire road before we take the first step. We want confirmation, certainty, and a clear explanation of how everything will work out. But sometimes, He gives us enough light for the next step and asks us to trust Him with the rest. That is seeking and following God's wisdom. The world might ask, "What makes the most sense financially? What offers the greatest security? What is the safest and most practical option?" Those can be reasonable

questions, but as Christians, we need to ask, “Lord, what are You asking of me? Am I making this decision out of fear, comfort, or a desire for security, or am I willing to follow where You are leading me?”

God’s wisdom doesn’t mean we disregard practical considerations or act irresponsibly. Rather, it means that we allow our faith, our relationship with Him, and our desire to be obedient to shape how we evaluate our options. And sometimes, that obedience will make little sense to anyone else. They may see what we are giving up without understanding what we believe God is calling us toward. I think that is the difference. Earthly wisdom can help us determine what is practical within the circumstances we see. God’s wisdom invites us to consider our circumstances in light of His purposes, trusting that He sees what we cannot. Faith means being willing to follow Him and seek His wisdom, even when we cannot yet see the whole picture. As I told them in my licensing interview, if I didn’t make that leap of faith, what was that saying or showing my kids?

That question has stayed with me because I believe there is something important about the responsibility we have to model our faith for others. We can talk about trusting God, encourage people to pray, teach them Scripture, and tell them that God is faithful. But at some point, they need to see what that faith looks like when it costs us something, when it requires a difficult

decision, or when following God means stepping outside of what feels safe and familiar.

Faith is more than words. As we remember back to James 2:17, he reminded us that faith without works is dead. In other words, what we profess to believe should have an impact on how we live. Our actions don't earn us God's favour, but they can demonstrate that our trust in Him is real. I wanted my kids to understand that trusting God isn't just something we talk about on Sundays or when life is going well. It's something we live out in the everyday decisions we make. It's choosing obedience when there are easier alternatives. It's seeking God's direction rather than simply taking the most comfortable path. And it's being willing to surrender something good, even something secure, when we genuinely believe He is calling us toward something else.

That doesn't mean we always get it right, because I certainly do not. Or that every risk we take is an act of faith. I still can jump too quickly to make a decision without seeking what the Lord wants. Discernment matters. We need to seek God's wisdom and be willing to examine our own motives. Sometimes what we call faith can actually be our own desires dressed up in spiritual language. That's why our relationship with God, our understanding of His Word, and our willingness to listen and learn, and seek His wisdom are

so important.

So, when making a decision this week and beyond, ask yourself, “Am I being led by selfish ambition or spiritual peace?” Pray, “Lord, help me to walk in Your wisdom, not my opinion.” Pray for discernment before making decisions. James tells us of two paths we can take: earthly wisdom rooted in envy, selfish ambition, and disorder. Or heavenly wisdom, which is pure, peace-loving and full of mercy. What we choose to follow will shape our relationships, decisions, and character. True wisdom is not to be found in arrogance or personal gain but through humility and submission to God. When we seek God’s wisdom, it produces peace, righteousness, and godly fruit in our lives. We often see wisdom in the world that promotes self-centeredness, but God calls us to wisdom that seeks His will. God's wisdom isn't about choosing the option that looks best to us in the moment. It's about trusting the One who sees beyond the moment and being willing to follow Him where He leads. Seeking first His kingdom through prayer, His Word, and a humble heart, shaping every part of our life.

This also isn’t an individual thing. As the church, the body of Christ, we need to ensure we are seeking God’s wisdom when making decisions collectively. As a church we don’t just want to make decisions because they are easy, or the way things have always been

done. We don’t want to make decisions simply because they are the most comfortable, the most popular, or the ones that require the least amount of change. We don’t want our personal preferences, our fears, our traditions, or even our best intentions to become more important than what God may be calling us to do as a church.

Instead, we need to ask ourselves: Are we seeking God’s direction, or are we simply asking Him to bless a decision we have already made? Are we willing to listen when someone sees things differently than we do? Are we willing to set aside our own preferences for the sake of the greater good and the mission God has given us? And perhaps most importantly, are we willing to follow where God leads, even if it means stepping into something unfamiliar?

We need to be a church that prays before we plan, seeks God before we settle on an answer, and listens for His direction rather than simply relying on what we think is best. We need to be willing to examine our motives, search the Scriptures, listen to one another with humility, and discern together what will best honour God and serve the people He has entrusted to our care.

And seeking God's wisdom together doesn't mean we will always agree immediately. We are different people, with different experiences, perspectives, and ideas. But unity doesn't mean everyone has to think the

same way. It means we are committed to seeking the Lord, listening to His Word, and allowing His purposes to take priority over our individual preferences. Sometimes God's wisdom may affirm the direction we are already going. Other times, it may challenge us to change course, let go of something familiar, or take a step of faith that we wouldn't have chosen on our own. The question is whether we are humble enough to recognize that our way isn't necessarily God's way, and whether we are willing to trust Him enough to follow His leading.

When Solomon asked God for wisdom, he recognized that he couldn't lead God's people in his own strength or understanding. He needed God to give him discernment to know what was right. Our goal isn't simply to make good decisions. It's to be a people who seek God's wisdom so that the decisions we make reflect His character, advance His purposes, and help us faithfully live out the mission He has given us. Because ultimately, the question isn't just, “What do we think we should do?” It's, “Lord, what would You have us do?”