

## Sermon Discussion Information

Sermon Series: "Work Life"

Sermon Title: "Seeking Wisdom"

Sermon Text: James 3:13-18)

Listener's Journey: I want my listener to see wisdom as the leaven of the intellect and the greater good of formal education.

Unique Quotes from Sermon:

Today's teaching is titled "Seeking Wisdom" because history and experience tell us that in our work life, growing the intellect is important but wisdom is the greater end goal. For example, formal education gives us information and a head start in the information age that tends to favor people with degrees, but wisdom translates that information into usable forms and ultimately is the most transformational in our work *regardless* of whether or not someone has acquired an advanced degree.

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The key negative concept is "envy." To James, envy is most unlike wisdom. That is so fascinating because if asked what we think is opposite to wisdom we would be more inclined to say such things as "foolishness" because the opposite of a wise person is a foolish person, right? But, if you think about it, "foolishness" is a very ambiguous term and foolish people could be so for dozens of reasons including simple unknowing and lack of experience.

Envy, though, is a powerful and clear concept. And, in the entirety of James's letter we can tell he was very explicit to imply that when all people, educated or non-educated, informed or uninformed, wealthy or living in poverty, act out of envy--disorder and evil practices are right around the corner. Wisdom brings peace and resonance between people, envy invites chaos.

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In the opening chapter of her book [*Becoming Wise*, Krista] Tippett offers some perspective on today's teaching:

The Internet in its infancy is upending the nature of making and leading and learning and belonging. It's sending us into a new Reformation, but this time of all of our institutions at once—political, educational, economic, and religious. The interesting and challenging thing about this moment is that we know the old forms aren't working. But we can't yet see what the new forms will be...

...We have riches of knowledge and insight, of tools both tangible and spiritual, to rise to this calling. We watch our technologies becoming more intelligent, and speculate imaginatively about their potential to become conscious. All the while, we have it in us to become wise. Wisdom leavens intelligence, and ennobles consciousness, and advances evolution itself.<sup>1</sup>

Wisdom "leavens" intelligence like yeast added to bread to make it ferment, rise and be transformed into something larger than itself to become as James taught—an intrinsic good to humanity.

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<sup>1</sup> Tippett, Krista. *Becoming Wise Deluxe: An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living* (pp. 2-3). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

James started with what wisdom is not and moved to what wisdom *is*:<sup>17</sup> 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.

James 3:17. NIV

This is so interesting because like choosing the word “envy,” James chose several words here that one would not immediately associate with being a wise Christian in our time. Modern Christian religion tends to point believers toward words such as “defend,” “correct,” and “conquer” not “loving,” “considerate,” “full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”

Now, as in all of life, there are times to defend and correct, for sure, but according to James, the core ethic of leading a wise life informed by the wisdom of our Creator is to lead peace-loving lives in which we are promised that if we sow in peace, we will reap it as well.

How does this translate into practical application in day to day work life? James gave us several points of application, but three words that stand out today as pre-eminently relevant are *“impartial and sincere.”* It is challenging to be sincere in a world that rewards duplicity, but it is nearly impossible to be impartial because of our cultural worldviews and biases. Yet, if you think about it, sincerity and impartiality are two of the most prominent ethical traits of truly wise people.

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#### Three Discussion Questions:

1. Who are some people in your life, or who you admire and learn from because you feel they are “wise”? (Personal sharing)
2. What are some connections between being wise and doing good and why would James make this a central part of his argument? (Exploring the text)
3. What is your journey with formal education and its dialogue with the wisdom tradition? (Direct application)