

# Who is wise?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Okay, let's keep those verses open in front of us and just as we begin, the question that James! really is asking is who is wise amongst us? Who is wise here this morning? Don't put your hands up yet.

but this is James's question. Do you see verse 13? Who is wise and understanding among you? I don't know what you think wisdom or being wise makes you think of. Maybe someone who does very well in their tests at school. So here on the screen is Ali Mowin Nawazish and he lived in Raul Pindi in India and he took 22 A levels which are big exams. He may or may not be wise, he is very clever to be able to do that but that's not what James is talking about. Or maybe you think of an old wise person with lots of life experience which they might share. It's an old film but here's Yoda in Star Wars or Mr Miyagi in Karate Kid, the old version. They've got lots of life experience and they're willing to share it with you. In the Bible, did you know this, being wise is not so much about being clever or having lots of life experience. Wisdom is about knowing God deeply. Not just knowing about him but really knowing him deeply. You know what God thinks, you know what God loves and you know how to live to please him in your life right now. That is what it is to be wise. I don't know what the big thing is you think you might wish for in your life if you had just one wish. Like I'd like to be healthy, I'd like to be loved, I'd like to be happy, I'd like to win. All those are the kind of things you might like but actually to be wise as a human being, to know God, it's got to be the most precious thing.

Like what a waste of a life to be a fool, stumbling about in God's world and making life up as you go along. Question, who is wise and understanding among you? Now James kind of wants us to step forward and put our hands up and say, me, I think, I think I know God, I think I've got wisdom. Except you might be a bit nervous about doing that because James in his letter, he's a bit like a surgeon with a knife and his special thing. He's cutting into church people like lots of us and showing us up for who we sometimes are.

A bit double-minded, a bit half-hearted and not all that we say we are. Who is wise and understanding among you? Well if you think you are, says James, James, then show it. Look at this, verse 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. You see, says James, the proof that we know God deeply is not have you learnt Bible verses or can you say what's true about God? Or do you know how to live to please him? The proof you're wise and you know God is seen in how you live. Who is wise and understanding among you? Show it by a good life and humble deeds. Actually that's what all of James is about. Don't just listen to the Bible, do it. Don't just claim to have faith, act and obey. Do you say you know God and you sing to him on a Sunday in church? Okay then, sit next to people who aren't like you on a Sunday. Feed and clothe the poor, control your tongue, stop fighting with your brothers and sisters at home. You see, knowing God's real wisdom will work itself out in the good fruit of a changed life. And if it doesn't, the kind of wisdom you have is diseased and not true.

See, knowing God and having wisdom is a bit like a tree. It's a bit like a tree. So, to help us this morning, I brought a tree. There we go.

[ 4 : 39 ] Notice it's a tree, it's a little olive tree. Thank you everyone. Almost turned to you there Kate. So, a tree, this tree has roots and branches and it's a wisdom tree, pretend. And the tree produces fruit. Not yet, these are the leaves I think. The olives haven't come.

If you want to know if it's a good tree, you want to know if you really know God, then look at the fruit you produce. If the fruit is healthy, healthy good deeds in your life, then that's great.

But if the fruit of the tree is shriveled and bad, you know that the tree, saying that you know God, is diseased. And in our verses this morning, James kind of outlines two different trees, if you like, two

kinds of wisdom. There is, well, wisdom from above, kind of wisdom from heaven, that brings a good life. But there's a second kind of wisdom which is diseased and from below and from hell. And so the question is, we who gather together and come to church, saying we want to know God or we do know God, what kind of wisdom do we have? Okay, here we go. In verses 14 to 16, James paints a picture of the kind of church, the kind of people whose wisdom and knowledge of God is not just diseased, but from the devil. Call it wisdom from below.

So let me read verses 14 to 16. Will you, adults and children, listen out for the bad attitudes and the bad fruit, and then put your hand up and tell me what you hear? You ready? Listening out for the bad things. If you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, don't boast about it or deny the truth.

Such wisdom does not come down from heaven, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. Who heard one or two bad things in there, bad ways of acting? Calvin, you can say, yeah. Nice and loud. Get your mum to help you if you want.

[7:07] You thinking about it? Envy. Well done. Bitter envy. Now, do you want to just come hang this on the tree? You can come do that if you want. We won't do it with all of them, but here's a bitter envy fruit.

There we go. You hang that fruit on the tree off here. Thank you. So bitter envy, and next to that was selfish ambition. Now, envy is kind of when you want something that's not yours and you really want to grab it. Example, he's playing on the PlayStation, he's playing with his Lego, and I want to go, and I'm going to take it. Kids can be like that, can't you?

Grown-ups can too. I don't like it when they get the attention, when other people say that they are so wise and good. I want that. Selfish ambition is like, I want the focus to be on me. I want people to look up at me. I want people to agree that I'm the wise one, and I know all the answers. You listen to me. Which is so arrogant and proud. Like when talking to someone else about God, and I'm more interested in showing what I know or winning an argument than listening. Maybe I'll be very rigid in my opinions, never prepared to admit I'm wrong about anything. That happens in families, doesn't it? And it can happen in churches and youth groups and small group Bible studies, where you aim to help each other know God better, but things get very tense, because you're not really listening to each other, because I've got to get my point across and people listen to me. Steamrolling over other people's opinions and quarrels. And James says, if that's your kind of wisdom, such wisdom does not come down from heaven, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. It's not from God that your wisdom is from hell.

4 verse 16, where you have envy and selfish ambition. Did you notice these others? There you find disorder and evil practice. Look at those fruits going on there. Disorder and evil practice. Let's get the fruit the right way round. Oh dear, the fruit's fallen off.

Evil practice. Kind of like the sea in a storm churning around, where Christians are supposed to be kind, but are damaging each other with evil and judging words. Here's the last bit. In chapter 4 verses 1 to 3, James points the finger at his readers and says, what causes fights and quarrels among you?

[10:12] Let me put up this bad fruit of fighting. On it goes. And quarrels. Don't they come from the desires that battle inside you? You desire but don't have, so you kill, you covet, you can't get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You don't have because you don't ask God. And when you ask, you don't receive because you ask with wrong motives. Do you hear what they're doing here? They are fighting and quarreling and trying to get what they want in their own way. Do you know what that's like? Say you're a child at home. He's playing his game.

I want to go. I want it. He says no. So I hit him and we get into a fight. Envy. Ambition, disorder, fighting, that kind of thing.

As a grown-up, I know God. I'm wise. It would really help if other people knew that about me. You're wrong. I'm right. You listen to me. No, you listen to me.

Do you see the tree and the bad fruit? Maybe you've been part of a church, adults, where people fall out and fight and quarrel, all trying to be the centre of attention, all convinced that they are wise and right. It's awful.

That kind of proud wisdom doesn't fit with knowing God. It's demonic. In a church. In a family too.

[11:53] Some of us, by the way, in our personal lives, will have suffered from wise Christians who really weren't. They were so proud and self-centred and domineering and bashing. Just awful.

But what this is, is wisdom from below. And James is saying here to us that it is actually possible to talk the talk and know all about God, chapter and verse, and be part of a Christian family and be in a church community and feel safe, and yet be so riddled through with pride, refusing to listen, boasting, trampling, quarrelling, that the truth is you might not actually know God as well as you think.

Could it be that someone has wisdom that's earthly and unspiritual and demonic? James says yes. Unlike the real thing.

The beautiful wisdom that comes from God. So let me undress the tree and take the fruit off here, because that's wisdom from below. That's what we want to run a mile from.

And now secondly this morning, check out wisdom from above. Let me read verses 17 to 18. Listen out now for the good attitudes and the good fruit that knowing God produces.

[13:26] Put up a hand if you hear one of these words. They're big words actually in here. The wisdom that comes from heaven, verse 17, is first of all pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, and impartial and sincere, and peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

What did you hear, William? Considerate. Yeah, considerate. Let's put the considerate fruit on.

What else did other people hear? Some of those words of really good fruit.

Can you strip your hand up? No, you're just waving your arms. David? Pure. Thank you. Let's put pure on here. I'll take some more of the fruit.

Anybody notice any other fruit in there? Bill? Peacemaker. Yeah, thank you. I actually have peace-loving. A peace-loving peacemaker. Brilliant. Others that you noticed?

Submissive. I like to keep putting them up. Submissive. There we go. Good fruit. That's just good fruit.

[14:38] And someone who is full of mercy. See, what James wants to say is that when God really reaches down from heaven and presses the gospel of grace into us and plants his word in us so that we really know, I guess, our failings, his kindness, his glory, this is what will start to come out from us.

Wisdom that is pure. Where I'm no longer secretly serving myself when I say I'm serving God. You're peace-loving and considerate and submissive.

I'll stop trying to grab other people's attention and their stuff and I'm the centre of the world, I'm right and everyone else is wrong. And instead I'll sit and yield to other people and listen and put them first.

Full of mercy and good fruit and impartial and sincere. And I think all of these fruits really are summed up in one word in verse 13. Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

See, a person who shows all these good fruits, they are humble. They're humble. When you, in your life, instead of being big and tall and proud, you make yourself low before God and before others.

[16:12] Because that's the real fruit of true wisdom. Like when you know God truly and deeply, you realise you're so foolish and flawed and yet he loves you so fully and freely.

And without him you're nothing. But you've been born again from above. And when you really know that and know him, I can't be envious and selfish and a fighter anymore.

I'll be peace loving and considerate. You keep playing with your game, your Lego. It's yours. I'm not here to fight you.

Submissive. For sure I know what's true about God, but all of that is his gift to me and I've got so much to learn. And so in a Bible study and in conversation, let me listen to other people humbly, full of mercy and good fruit as God has been to me.

Let me do good to others and put them first. Impartial and sincere. I don't need to manipulate other people anymore. I can be straight and transparent, humble.

[17:23] I will make myself low and put others first. We just asked at the start, who is wise among us?

Do you know, here's a question, you put your hand up and answer. Maybe you'll get it quickly. Do you know there is just one person who is just perfectly wise? Do you know who that is, Charlotte? Who is it? It's Jesus, exactly. And verse 17 here describes Jesus, the beautiful embodiment of someone who knows God.

His every waking moment marked by humility. There's a point in Jesus' life, we saw it in our first verse when we began, where Jesus says, Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Charlotte, you knew the answer was Jesus. You know, Jesus' life shows us what ultimate wisdom does in you. He was never puffed up, never proud, didn't quarrel and fight.

[ 18 : 32 ] He spoke strong words, but he wasn't a quarreller. He knows his father perfectly and intimately. He's so gentle and humble, Jesus. Speaks the truth, he's straight and clear, and makes himself low and serves.

He's trustworthy, merciful, transparent. You imagine our, well, where we live in our flat or in our family and our church and our world, more and more reflecting his character.

You think, oh, I want that. Verse 18, this was the word Bill noticed. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

Imagine that. A wiser church and wiser households where there are fewer quarrels and less tension and more considerateness and greater gentleness.

And because of that, there's righteousness and lives pleasing to God. So it's James' question at the start of our passage. Who is wise among us?

[ 19 : 41 ] Show it by a good life and humble deeds. Okay, here's the last question. Don't put your hand up. What should we do then? What should we do? What should we do as a group of people, you as an individual, us in our families, if we want wisdom from above?

Because we should do, shouldn't we? We want to know God and ourselves truly, without deception. And we want to live humbly and have this kind of fruit in ours.

If we want that. And what should we do if we know how tempting and easy it is to say we know God, and yet we're proud and envious and ambitious and we quarrel and fight, and we want to get away from that.

What should we do? Here's what we're meant to do, James says. We're meant to ask God. Just back a page in chapter 1, verse 5, James says, 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.

You know, our God doesn't look down on us this morning, sort of with spite in his eyes. He is generous. Ask him for wisdom in your life. He won't criticise you or grumble at you.

[ 21 : 01 ] He won't dwell on your faults. It is his great delight and plan to make us into a community of little Christs, with our characters reflecting the wisdom and humility of his Son.

Ask him. And as we ask him, know that every good and perfect gift is from above. Wisdom from above. Coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.

We're meant to just pray, I think. Lord God, help us. We're sorry for when we grab what's not ours. We're sorry for our selfish arguing and our fighting.

Please forgive us our foolish pride. Please give us wisdom from above. To know you deeply. Press your grace into us, Lord.

Capture our hearts for Jesus. And make us people who act humbly. That's the to-do, the take-home, what are we going to do from these words.

[ 22 : 05 ] Pray. Would we pray that? For yourself and for your family and for St John's. And then as we pray those kind of things, we'll see if he won't answer.

Because he will. And that our God might increasingly make us and our homes and our families and our church places that produce this kind of fruit and reflect the humility of Jesus.

So that fights and quarrels fade away and there is peace and righteousness and the good life because we know our God truly and deeply. That often suggests this.

We go home this week and in the next seven days, pray to God and ask him for the wisdom from above that will grow in us the kind of humility that reflects the Lord Jesus Christ.

We're going to pray. Let me lead us in a prayer and then we're going to sing together. Who is wise and understanding among you?

[ 23 : 15 ] Let them show it by their good life. Our Lord God, so many of us are so aware how easily we try and grab things that aren't ours.

How easily we want the attention on us. Some of us so tempted to fight and to quarrel. Our Lord, thank you for how pure and peace loving and submissive he was.

We do long, our Father, in our own hearts and lives and in our families and our church to be peacemakers who sow in peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.

So we pray that you would grant us wisdom from above. Please plant your word deep in our hearts. Please would we so know the grace of Jesus in our lives that you might grow in us this kind of purity and love of peace and considerateness.

That would be so good for us. But more than that, it would be so pleasing to you. Please change us, we pray. In Jesus' name.

[ 24 : 42 ] Amen. Amen.