

**Wisdom Beyond Our Years**  
**James 3:17-18 (AFBC 1/6/19)**

A belated Happy New Year to everyone. Welcome to the year of our Lord, 2019—Lord willing, the year I retire and the year Josh Hunt takes over as your new Pastor!

Given this transition we're facing, I felt it appropriate to talk about "Wisdom Beyond Our Years." Some of you have heard me tell the story of our Search Team's first interview with Josh—back when he was a candidate for our church's position of Associate Pastor.

Josh and I had already talked, so I stayed quiet as the other team members asked the questions. I was so impressed with the way Josh responded to their questions, however, that before the interview ended, I said something to him that I'd never said to anyone else under similar circumstances.

I said, "Josh, I must tell you that your answers this evening reflect a wisdom that's *beyond your years*." To which Josh replied, "Well, I've always been kind of an *old soul*." And I understood that. I appreciated it and still do.

He'll need this wisdom—and you will need to recognize this in him and appreciate this about him—as Josh seeks to serve and lead this church as Pastor. It has certainly served us and him well in his role as Associate.

Of course, everything will go much better around here if this church not only has a wise pastor, but this new pastor is also privileged to serve a wise church.

Now I won't pretend to know what "wise beyond your years" means for a church that's already 197 years old—but I'm sure it means something good—something that's worth praying for and pursuing together! So, with that, let's take a look at our text for today:

**James 3:17-18: "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 raise a harvest of righteousness." (James 3:17-18)**

Just for fun, let's start with a bit of poetry:

My dad gave me a one dollar bill,  
 'Cause I'm his smartest son!  
 And I swapped it for two shiny quarters,  
 'Cause two is more than one!

And then I took the quarters,  
 And traded them to Lou,  
 For three dimes (I guess she didn't know),  
 That three is more than two.

Just then along came old blind Bates,  
 And just 'cause he can't see,  
 He gave me four nickels for my three dimes,  
 And four is more than three.

And I took the nickels to Mr. Coombs,  
 Down at the feed-and-seed store,  
 And the fool gave me five pennies for them,  
 And five is more than four.

And then I went and showed my dad,  
 And he got all red in the cheek,  
 And closed his eyes and shook his head,  
 Too proud of me to speak!

Well... sometimes we're not so smart, are we? And wisdom can be even harder to find--but how valuable it is when we do.

When God told King Solomon he could wish for anything and it would be granted, Solomon asked for wisdom. I suppose we all need more wisdom—and in our kind of world, we often need a wisdom that's "beyond our years!" Let's pray that it would be so.

In the Bible, wisdom is demonstrated primarily by the way we live our lives and conduct our relationships. It has more to do with our actions than our words. Wisdom is something we do.

James 3:16 says that a lack of wisdom, rooted in envy and ambition, leads to "disorder." James is talking primarily about relationships—people problems. When we're unwise with our spouse, it causes problems in the relationship. When we're unwise with our children—more problems.

Acting unwisely at work, or school, or church, creates additional problems. They begin to add up!

Each day of our lives, like it or not, we encounter people. And people are notorious for being hard to get along with. That's why we must learn how to relate wisely to others.

James 3:18 reads, "**Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.**" James is making the point that what you sow in your relationships is what you will reap!

In all our relationships, we are either sowing seeds of disorder and anger, seeds of mistrust and conflict—or... seeds of peace that will result in a harvest of righteousness.

But how do we plant these seeds of peace? How do we demonstrate wisdom in our homes or schools or workplaces? Can we even recognize wisdom when we see it?

James tries to help us by listing six distinguishing characteristics of people who are wise. Let's take a look.

### **I. The Wise Person Is Pure (3:17) Verse 17 says: "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure."**

The word "pure" literally means "without pollution, or... freedom from defilement." This is a person of solid integrity.

If you're wise, you don't compromise your integrity. That means no lying, cheating, stealing, taking advantage of others, or deliberately misleading them. There's purity in this.

All relationships are built on trust. When we lie to people, we eventually lose their trust. It's hard to regain a person's trust. Rebuilding damaged relationships takes a long time.

Dr. Leonard Keeler invented the lie detector. After using it to interview over 25,000 people, he made a startling observation about the human race: People lie--often! What a big surprise!

If we're wise, we maintain our integrity by always speaking the truth—even when it hurts or proves unpopular to do so.

**Proverbs 10:9** says, "**He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out.**"

People of integrity are not afraid of being found out. We need to get back there, friends! It will be a tough trip for some, but how desperately we need this. And there's no better place to cultivate the seeds of integrity than in the home.

The Christian home sets our compass for life. It's where values are demonstrated and appreciation for the truth is learned. The wise person is pure and seeks to instill these values in others.

## **II. The Wise Person Is Peace-loving (James 3:17-18)**

Our text says, **"But the wisdom that comes from heaven is... peace-loving."**

This is more than just not fighting back when wronged. This carries with it the idea of actively pursuing peace—as Jesus said, being a "peacemaker." This is the person who, when he sees conflict and division, works to overcome them.

Of all the qualities of wisdom he mentions, James focuses on this one the most. He comes back to it in verse 18: **"Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness."**

When Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers," he told us this one pursuit—peacemaking--sets us apart as children of God. Friends, peacemaking is the way of wisdom.

## **III. The Wise Person Is Considerate (3:17)**

Consideration of others is not really "in" today. Many are attracted to an "in your face" approach to life. There's a better way, because **"...the wisdom that comes from heaven is... considerate."**

Paul used this same word in II Corinthians 10:1, along with the word "meekness," to refer to the personality of Jesus Christ. Paul writes, **"By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you."**

Jesus was considerate of others; and He's the model, the Master Teacher, that we're to follow and learn from. This word translated "considerate" is rich in meaning. It conveys the idea of being tolerant of others and gentle toward them.

This person will more quickly stand up for the rights of others than their own. They know how and when to compromise and seek the common good of all.

An inconsiderate person recognizes only his own rights and wishes, but the considerate person knows that although he may be within his legal rights to do something, that doesn't make it Christian to do it—and he knows that honoring Christ matters more. The wise person is guided by the higher law of love.

**IV. The Wise Person Is Submissive (3:17)** James says, **“But the wisdom that comes from heaven is... submissive.”**

Properly understood, this is not a male/female thing, but relates equally to every follower of Jesus Christ. To be “submissive” does not imply weakness.

Instead, think of it as an open-mindedness that respects others and is willing to listen to their ideas, suggestions, and points of view. It's being less hard-headed and more reasonable.

The submissive person allows honest discussion to happen. Wise people are open to learning from anyone—especially those who have life experiences that are different from their own. It doesn't mean we always reach agreement, just that we truly hear the other person and take seriously what they are saying.

I know this isn't always easy, and it takes courage to do it. But listen to this truth from Proverbs 12:15: **“A fool thinks that he needs no advice; but a wise person listens to others.”**

**V. The wise person is merciful.** Back to James: **“But the wisdom that comes from heaven is... full of mercy and good fruit.”**

This doesn't mean that we just sit around feeling sorry for others. Instead, this is an attitude of compassion toward the poor and the sick, the hurting and the abused, that finds expression in some kind of tangible action on their behalf. This is “mercy” coupled with... “good fruit.”

In the New Testament, “mercy” describes an attitude of compassion that gives people what they need rather than what we, with our limited perspectives, may think they deserve. It's doing unto others what we would hope they would do in return for us, but it's also more. It's trying to reflect in our dealings with others the merciful ways in which God responds to us.

Sharing a New Year's meal and some warm blankets with needy persons in our community is a good recent example of mercy at work! In fact, missions of all kinds should reflect God's mercy.

Thank God that He does not choose to give to us what we earn or deserve. Instead, God gives us what we need—everything we need and more.

And God says, "I want you to do this for other--to treat them with compassion and mercy." Wise people reflect God's nature by being "full of mercy and good fruit."

**VI. The Wise Person Is Impartial and Sincere (3:17)** Listen again to James 3:17: "**But the wisdom that comes from heaven is. . . impartial and sincere.**"

To be "impartial and sincere" is to be unwavering. It's being consistent--not taking one position here and another one there.

This is a person with solid principles. They avoid violating those principles, regardless of the situation. They do not follow the principle of our day, "When in Rome..."—but act the same way wherever they are, without hypocrisy.

By the way, that word "hypocrisy" has an interesting source. It was used to describe a Greek actor who played two parts in the same play.

An actor in the Greek theater might appear on stage with a happy mask, hold it in front of his face and say his happy lines. Later, he would return to the stage holding a sad mask while delivering his sad lines.

In Greek, the actor was called a "hupocrites." That's one who wears a mask, pretending to be something or someone they are not. There's a lot of phoniness in our world today--in our lives and relationships, and often in our leaders.

Why do we think life is better when we hide our true selves from others. We put on masks that say, "I'm tough and in control," or "I am better or holier than you," or "I really deserve everything I have—unlike you, I've earned it."

All this does is create distance between ourselves and others, including those we love, and whose love and acceptance we crave in return. Maybe we need to come out of hiding, to put down our masks and risk relating to others more openly and honestly. It just might lead to more meaningful relationships.

It doesn't matter how old we are, we can have wisdom beyond our years. I'm not so sure years, by themselves, add much to our wisdom anyway. But resolving to grow in wisdom—at whatever age, making wisdom our goal—this could help.

So, how can we grow in wisdom this year? Here are a couple of guidelines that come straight from God's word.

1) First—and this should come as no surprise--we need to **pray**. We can ask God to give us wisdom. **James 1:5** says: **"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it shall be given to him."**

2) Second—and this shouldn't be news for us either--we **turn to Holy Scripture, the Bible**. **Psalm 119:98-100** reminds us, **"Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts."**

**"I have more understanding than the elders..."**—how about that? Doesn't that sound for the world like "wisdom beyond our years!"

3) And when pursuing wisdom, don't just turn to the written word. **Focus on** the Living Word, **Jesus Christ**.

In I Cor. 1:24, Paul tells us that Jesus is "the wisdom of God." Col. 2:3 says that "in Jesus Christ lies hidden all God's treasures of wisdom and knowledge." We find true wisdom in Him.

So focus on Christ—His life, His teachings. He is our source of true wisdom. Let's spend time studying His teachings and praying for guidance and strength to follow Him faithfully, and, I promise you, we will grow in wisdom.

Let it be so: Please, Dear Lord, make us wise! Amen.