

The Wisdom From Heaven

by Alistair Begg

True wisdom comes from God and is characterized by purity, peaceableness, consideration, submissiveness, and fullness of mercy.

Duration: 42:54

Scripture: Matthew 22:37-39, Luke 10:25-37, James 3:13-18

Topics: "Wisdom"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of the Christian life as a journey of growth and learning. He compares it to a marriage, acknowledging that challenges and difficulties may arise. The preacher encourages listeners to show humility in their actions and to live a life that reflects the qualities of a humble heart. He also highlights the all-embracing mercy of God and warns against being selective in showing mercy to others. The sermon references biblical passages, such as James 4:4, to emphasize the need for clarity and adherence to theological and moral principles.

Transcript

The following message by Alistair Begg is made available by Truth For Life. For more information, visit us online at truthforlife.org. Our reading this morning is from James chapter 3, and we're going to read from verse 13 to verse 18, because it's here that we find ourselves in our ongoing series of expositions in the book of James. Now, James chapter 3 and verse 13.

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from heaven, but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.

For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. 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. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

Father, we ask for your help in studying the Bible so that our thinking and our speaking and our hearing and our obeying may be prompted by your Spirit, and that you will free us from every distracting influence and help us so that we might be drawn afresh to your Son, the Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Well, if you're using an NIV, then you will be helped by the little heading before verse 13, whereby we're told that James is about to introduce his readers to two different kinds of wisdom.

The wisdom that he says is false, which is earthly and unspiritual, it's just godless. And that wisdom is marked by envy and by selfish ambition, and it in turn goes on to produce disorder and all kinds of evil. We have not yet come to a consideration of such wisdom.

Instead, beginning with the wisdom which is true wisdom, the wisdom that comes down from heaven. And last time, if you were present, you will remember that we set out to establish the source of this wisdom or to discover it, and we found that it is, in verse 17a, the wisdom that comes from heaven or from God. We saw that James had already introduced the subject back in chapter 1, and anyone who was lacking wisdom should simply ask God.

It's the only place to go because he is the source of all true wisdom. We then said we would look at the nature of this wisdom, and then finally at the evidence for the wisdom. During the week, as I studied some more, I decided that we would hang our thoughts this morning not on nature and evidence, but simply gather them around these two headings, which I think are perhaps more straightforward.

We will consider true wisdom defined, and then true wisdom displayed. We will discover it as it is described and given definition, and then we will end by looking at the way in which this wisdom finds itself on display. So, if you have a Bible in front of you, you have the text before you, and you can see what we're doing.

The definition of true wisdom is provided for us, not in exhaustive terms here, but selectively so. And we have to remind ourselves in doing this that, as we've said before, James is a very Old Testament book. It's a kind of proverbial book, and James, thinking in Old Testament frameworks, is describing wisdom, not in terms of intelligence or in terms of logic, but rather in practical or moral or ethical terms.

And all of that morality and practice and spiritual truth is based, as we saw last time, on a knowledge of God himself. If we get that wrong and we begin to think simply in theoretical terms or in abstract terms, then we will immediately go wrong in our study. And there is, of course, a great importance to intelligence and to logic.

The Bible does not gainsay that at all. And when you read concerning these things, you come across all kinds of interesting illustrations of the same. And one I thought I'd share with you, because I just can't resist having discovered it this week.

As I was considering the nature of the distinction between wisdom and logic and intelligence and so on, and I came across this missive or directive from the British Admiralty at the time of the Second World War. And they posted this for those who were under their command in relationship to the storage of warheads. And this is what was posted for the soldiers.

It is necessary for technical reasons that these warheads should be stored with the top at the bottom and the bottom at the top. In order that there may be no doubt as to which is the top and which is the bottom for storage purposes, it will be seen that the bottom of each warhead has been labeled with the word top. I've never been in the military, but they tell me that is fairly representative of military logic.

Well, that's not what we're dealing with here. There's something far more significant than that. Nor is it, incidentally, an approach to wisdom which is a desire for the Buddhists' attempt at personal equilibrium.

No, it is none of the above, but it is that endowment of heart and mind which comes from God, given to his children in Jesus, all that is necessary for the conducting of our lives in a way that is true and right and obviously so. James, along with Solomon in Proverbs, seems pretty keen to make sure that we, his readers, understand that this wisdom is dressed, if you like, in working clothes. That it is a wisdom which is not in the academy, it's not in the library, in some stuffy section with large tomes, but it is a wisdom which is worked out in individual relationships and in the ebb and flow of everyday life.

And we do well to keep in mind the well-known verse in Proverbs 10.10, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. We won't go back over territory from last time. Let's move directly to look at verse 17 and to the way in which James defines this for us.

The wisdom that comes down from heaven is, first of all, pure. In other words, right at the head of the list, says James, is this question of wisdom's purity. Phillips actually paraphrases it, it is utterly pure.

It is without any kind of flaw at all. And, of course, why would we be surprised that this comes, first of all, since we've already considered its source. For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

So the notion of purity here would be understood by the metallurgist, or the chemist, or anybody actually having a drink of water. There is all the difference between having a glass of water that is absolutely clear and clean to all intents and purposes, and one that one might pick up that has all kinds of residue floating in it. And we would be tempted to say, no, I would rather have the one that's just the straightforward, clean, unpolluted, uncontaminated water.

I don't want the one with the residue. That's the word that is being used here for wisdom. This wisdom that comes from heaven is uncontaminated by the elements he's already mentioned in verses 14, 15, and 16.

You will not find wisdom cozying up to envy and to selfish ambition. You will not find wisdom finding its expression in all kinds of disorder and evil practice. Why? Because this wisdom is utterly pure.

He then goes on, in some senses, to employ adjectives which unpack the nature of pure wisdom. You could say, almost, that all of these following adjectives explain what he means by the wisdom that is, first of all, pure. And so we'll look at them in turn, and hopefully in a way that isn't tedious, but I want just to walk down the list along with you, noting them in turn.

First of all, then, it is peace-loving, peace-loving, or peaceable, depending on your translation. The wisdom that comes down from heaven is, first of all, pure, then peaceable. In other words, it is the opposite of contentious.

A contentious spirit sits quite happily on the bus next to envy and selfish ambition. But wisdom is not going to sit on the bus with these characters, because wisdom is peaceable. The peaceable nature that is described here is not some kind of acquiescent approach to life, which simply says, anything for a happy life, but it is rather the wisdom that comes from God, whereby those who are embodying this wisdom become the promoters of peace.

When you spend time with them, they are not seeking to be disruptive and argumentative, but they're looking for ways to make things cohere, to make people come together, to enjoy the company of one another as it is possible under God. Because after all, God is introduced to us in the Bible as the God of

peace on numerous occasions. Therefore, it stands to reason that God's children would themselves be peace-loving people.

Thirdly, that we are to be marked, or wisdom is marked, by consideration, considerate. And once again you see that it is only in relationships that we can test this, whether it is true of our lives. It's quite possible to be considerate as long as you're not spending time with anyone.

I suppose you could be inconsiderate in relationship to yourself, but that would be over the top, or it would be hard to be inconsiderate in a telephone kiosk if such things exist anymore. But it is once you're out in the mainstream of life and dealing with people, not least of all in a local church, that you find out just how considerate you are. And wisdom is considerate.

In other words, it is the description of somebody who is fair and who is generous in their dealings. The kind of individual who doesn't insist always on the fulfillment of the letter of the law, but rather recognizes that the spirit of the law is comprehensive and gives people the benefit of the doubt. It is, in essence, the absence or the opposite of quarrelsome.

Wisdom is not quarrelsome. Wisdom is considerate. Fourthly, wisdom is also submissive.

Adamson, one of the commentators, translates this word from Greek, yielding to persuasion. Wisdom yields to persuasion. That doesn't mean that wisdom folds over every time there is an opinion expressed and agrees with everything.

No, the picture is much more that of the yielding of a wise son to the instruction of his father, or the yielding of a private to his sergeant or to her sergeant. Within the framework of military command, within the order of family life, the wise individual is submissive. In other words, is willing to listen and willing to be persuaded by what is good and what is best.

It is a wonderful characteristic, isn't it? When I was an assistant in Edinburgh all these years ago now, in the mid-seventies, and I would be picked up to go to various meetings at the church by the one who was my boss and my mentor, Derek Prime, I would seize every opportunity on the drive there and on the drive home to ply him with questions and to find out as much as I could, not simply about what was happening, but why he approached things in certain ways. And I remember on one occasion, as we were going to a meeting that was going to be marked by a fairly significant discussion, where there were divergent views, he said to me, It is very, very important, Alistair, that you understand the distinction between going to a meeting knowing your own mind and going into a meeting with your mind made up. And if you think about that, that is good.

Because if our mind is made up, then when others express a view different to our own, we will refuse to be persuaded by it. We have already made up our minds. But if we know our minds, but have not made them up, and someone expresses wisdom and clarity and outlines an approach to things, which may be parallel or even largely different to the way in which we've conceived of something, then if we are of a submissive perspective, we will be prepared to yield to them.

To yield to them. I think it's in Congress that they use that phraseology. I yield to the Honorable Member from Ohio.

Usually there's nobody there to yield to. I've seen it on C-SPAN. They're just talking to themselves.

But nevertheless, at least the posture is right. I'm not going to hold the floor, and I'm not going to hang on to everything. I'm going to yield.

Of course, don't get carried away with the principle and apply it inaccurately, because a truth that is pressed in the wrong direction very quickly becomes error. Clearly, James would not be approaching every issue with such a deferential dimension. He is very, very clear when he needs to be clear.

For example, if you just allow your eyes to look at verse 4 of chapter 4, you can see that when it comes to matters that are foundational of theological and moral principle, that he would not be considering submissive as yielding on these things. So he's not Johnny Milquetoast. He's very clear.

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God? You need to know that anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. That doesn't sound very submissive. What about people who don't believe that? James says, I don't care whether they believe it or not.

That is what is. That's very important. Also, and fifthly, wisdom is full of mercy.

Full of mercy. Mercy, of course, is one of God's essential qualities. If grace, put simply, is that aspect of God's character whereby he gives to us what we don't deserve, mercy is that dimension of God whereby he does not give to us what we do deserve.

So, for example, classically in Lamentations 3, it is because of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed. They are new every morning. He remains a faithful God.

And therefore, it also follows that when we have been made by new birth, James 1.18, have been brought to faith in Jesus through the word of truth, that in becoming a kind of firstfruits, that we would be marked by this mercy also. The mercy of God is an all-embracing mercy. It is a mercy without respect of persons.

Indeed, it is then a mercy which cuts across the barriers and boundaries that people are frequently desirous of erecting. You remember this in Jesus dealing with the experts and teachers of the law, with the Pharisees. How, in the minds of many of these people, they wanted to know who their neighbors were so that they could be merciful to the ones that were described in those terms, and then that they wouldn't need to be merciful to all of the other ones.

You say to yourself, well, that is a strange approach to things. Well, not as strange as you might think if you think for a moment or two. We may be the kind of people who are tempted to show mercy just to the people that fit our bill or fit the framework of what we regard as acceptable behavior.

But the mercy of God is an all-embracing mercy, and it breaks down the barriers that man erects. It is classically reported for us in the parable that Jesus told after one of the teachers of the law came to him and said, You are a wise man. What must I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said, Well, you know what's written in the law.

How do you read it? And he said, Well, I know that in the law it says you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. And Jesus said, That's entirely correct. You've answered rightly.

Then just go ahead and do this and you will live. The man should have split at that point, but he didn't. And Luke tells us that the man seeking to justify himself asked Jesus to define neighbor.

Who is my neighbor? He said. What was he doing? Trying to draw a circle around his responsibilities. Tell me who my neighbors are, and then once I know who they are, then I can be a certain way towards them, and everyone who does not fit within the circle, then, of course, I don't have to bother about them at all.

And then Jesus says, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, who fell among thieves that stripped him of his raiment and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance, a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

And likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place, came and looked and passed by on the other side. So it's not going very well for the priestly class, is it? It's not going particularly well for this man's colleagues and friends. I want to know who my neighbor is.

Well, let me tell you a story, he says. There was this fellow, and he came down the road, and he buzzed off, and another one came down, and he did too. The lawyer must by this point be saying to himself, I wonder where Jesus is going with this.

But he wasn't ready for this one. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion for him.

So he went to him and bandaged his wounds and poured in oil and wine and set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And on the next day when he departed, he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, Take care of him, and if you spend any more than this, when I come back, I will repay you. So which of these three do you think was the neighbor to him who fell among thieves? See what Jesus does? Turns the tables on this chap.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and your neighbor is yourself. Yeah. Who's my neighbor? Don't worry about who your neighbor is.

Answer this question. Who was the neighbor to the man who was in the predicament? And the lawyer is forced to answer. He who showed mercy to him.

And then Jesus said to him, Go and do likewise. Incidentally, and in passing, I'm so thankful for my elementary school education in Glasgow, Scotland, in a secular school with a teacher who made us memorize the Bible before we began the lessons of our day. And the reason that I was quoting this from the King James Version is because I remember it from the age of 10.

In elementary school in Scotland, a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves who stripped him of his raiment and departed, leaving him half dead. Who will show mercy to the half dead of 21st century Cleveland culture? Who will show mercy to the battered and the beaten? The merciful. My unwillingness to display mercy to those outside my circle of reference is unavoidably a representation of my own stony heart's inability to grasp the vastness of God's mercy towards me.

It is when I am reminded constantly of what I deserve before God and what he has chosen to do in Jesus that I then realize what a wonderful thing mercy is. Mercy there, says the songwriter, was great and grace was free and pardon there was multiplied to me. Or in the words of the old hymn by Margaret Cousins who wrote a poem from the memoirs of Samuel Rutherford and we made it into a hymn, somebody made it into

a hymn, that begins, The sands of time are sinking, the dawn of heaven breaks.

She writes a verse in there that goes, With mercy and with judgment my web of time he wove. And in Victoriana language, and I are always the dues of sorrow were lustered by his love. This tremendous picture of the compassion and grace and mercy of God, that kindness which leads men and women to repentance.

Who's my neighbor? How many people do I have to be nice to? You've got the question wrong. Who was neighbor to this man? The one who showed him mercy. Correct.

Do you think Parkside is a merciful community? Do people come to us in our daily routine at the office when their life is in a shambles and in ruins and they come into our office and they close the door and say, I know I can speak to you. I know I can talk to you. Because I know that you understand mercy.

Are we the kind of people that they come into our office and they close the door and they say, you know, I can talk to you. I'm really envious of that promotion. Can't stand that character.

Can you? I'm so ambitious. It's hard to wiggle out of this. I find it really, really hard.

Mercy is a characteristic of wisdom. Mercy enters into the difficulties, identifies with the needs and the feelings and enables us to point men and women to a God who is rich in mercy. Mercy and judgment are met in the cross.

It is not mercy at the expense of judgment, but it is mercy in judgment. He does not count our sins against us because he counts them against Jesus. That is mercy.

Sixthly, we must move on. Good fruit. Good fruit.

We're back in verse 18 of chapter one. And we're down in verse 18 of chapter three. Because faith for James is a faith that is seen.

We have a creed that we recite. It should be seen in our conduct. If we are men and women of truth, then the truth will transform.

Indeed, it's by means, verse 18 of chapter three, of the spiritual harvest that we prove that God is at work in us. In other words, it is because we are peacemakers and not troublemakers. It is because we're not marked by envy and selfish ambition, that we're not raising a harvest, a weed-infested crop of disorder and evil deeds.

No, but wisdom produces peace, and that peace produces a harvest, and that harvest is the harvest of a right standing before God and right deeds before men and women. That's how we'll know where we are. You see, it is not the fruit that determines what the tree is.

It is the fruit that gives evidence of what the tree is. I was driving in Indiana this past week when I was speaking at Taylor University. Corn on the one side, and a crop that went forever on the other side.

And eventually I had to stop and find out what it was. And it was soybeans. And the reason I know is because of what was growing there.

The beans. The beans did not determine what the plant was. The plant was what it was.

The beans displayed what the plant was. Our fruit does not make us. Our fruit reveals us.

Some people think that's Christianity. That it's plastic fruit like your Aunt Mabel's from Minneapolis. Or porcelain fruit if it's a little upmarket.

All those beautiful fruit, you say, Man, I never saw them in such pristine condition before. Don't ever try and have a bite of one of them. You'll break your teeth off.

Because they're not real. They're manufactured. They're fake.

The Christian life is not Christmas tree ornaments being hung on from the outside. That is moralism. That is ethics.

Try your best. Embrace a few values. Hang them on your life.

And see how you do. That's a litany of despair. Because we make such a hash of it.

The Christian life is, Jesus says, I am the vine, and you are the branches. I come and live in you. I will produce fruit through you.

And you will bear the fruit of wisdom. Because I am all of righteousness. And I am all of wisdom.

And so that it is as God invades our lives. That we become increasingly wise. Increasingly peaceable.

We're not the finished article. We won't be this side of eternity. But nevertheless, we are growing in grace.

And in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. And finally, this wisdom is defined in terms of being impartial and sincere. Undivided in mind.

It's the wisdom that is without wavering. It's not hesitant. You wouldn't expect it to be.

You would think that God would know his mind, wouldn't you? When he says yes, he means yes. When he says no, he means no. And this wisdom is impartial.

The clarity of God's word determines our coming and our going. Undivided in mind and untainted by hypocrisy. Impartial and sincere.

The word in Greek is anapokritos. Anapokritos. If you say it five times quickly, it will begin to sound like unhyprocritical.

And that's exactly right. Because it is virtually a literal translation from the Greek into English. Anapokritos.

Unhyprocritical. In other words, God's wisdom isn't two-faced. God's wisdom doesn't play one thing on a Sunday and another thing in a business trip.

It's not one way on a Friday night and another way on a Sunday night. The wisdom that comes down from heaven is untainted by hypocrisy. That all by way of definition.

Now, we have seven minutes to deal with wisdom displayed. And in a sense, seven is plenty. Because what is the display, save these characteristics, by God's Spirit, worked in and through a life? Remember back in 13, who is wise and understanding among you.

Don't grab for your SAT scores. Don't go for your diplomas. Don't give me a speech.

I don't need to know how articulate you are. Show me. Show me.

This, of course, allows me to quote from my favorite musical always. Anytime I can quote Eliza Doolittle, I like to do so. And in that classic song that she sings to Freddie, remember, Sing me no song, read me no rhyme, don't waste my time, show me.

Don't talk of June, don't talk of fall, don't talk at all, show me. It's not so much tell me, it's show me. Show me what? Show me the quality of your life that expresses itself on the basis of the humility of your heart.

A humble heart is the key to a quality life. God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. Humility of heart.

Notice the phrase, that ensured by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. A wise man isn't arrogant. A wise man knows how much he doesn't know.

A bright, wise girl knows that what she knows is only a tiny portion of the vastness of knowledge that is available. So you will find that particularly intelligent people who marry their intelligence with wisdom will be marked not by the ostentatious ugliness of their displays of verbosity or intellectual capacity, but by the humility of their very lives. Where does this humility come from? It comes from a high view of God.

From a high view of God. In the beginning, God. Not in the beginning, you.

Or in the beginning, me. In the beginning, God. In the end, God.

He is the Alpha and the Omega. And in the middle, God. The humility of heart has a high view of God, has a sober view of oneself.

Romans 12. I beseech you not to think of yourselves more highly than you ought, but to think of yourselves with sober judgment according to the measure of grace or faith that God has given you. So you have a sane estimate of yourself, a high view of God, a sane estimate of yourself, and a generous view of other people.

That's how you'll know if you're dealing with humility. That's how we will know if wisdom is producing humility within us. We begin our day thankful that God has awakened us, recognizing that the synovial fluid that works in all of our joints we are totally unable to control or to produce.

That the double circulatory system of our hearts is not doing anything really in response to ourselves no matter how much Lipitor we're jamming in. And so on. In other words, we are entirely dependent upon God.

Oh God, you woke me up today. I want to thank you for that. God, you've made yourself known in the world today.

I honor you and adore you for that. You've given me life and breath. You've given me parents, whatever it might be.

And here I am. The tiny thing in the vastness of your universe. A high view of God, a sane view of myself, and a generous view of other people.

How will I know if I have a generous view of other people? I will know if I have a generous view of other people if I am routinely cutting them down or building them up. It's not a generous view of other people that is constantly carping, tearing down, diminishing, second-guessing. Here's a quote from Van Dyke.

That's Henry Van Dyke, not Dick Van Dyke. This is how it goes. Never believe anything bad about anybody unless you positively know it to be true.

Never believe anything bad about anybody unless you positively know it to be true. Never tell even that unless you feel it is absolutely necessary and that God is listening while you tell it. Quite a standard.

It's a standard of humility. Wisdom displayed in the humility of heart and finally in the quality of life. Who is wise and understanding among you, let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

Good deeds. I was struck this week in reading Acts chapter 10. Peter at Cornelius' house, where he has that big dramatic lesson because Peter had the same problem as the man in Luke chapter 10 that needed the parable of the Good Samaritan told to him.

And you remember Peter wanted to draw circles around the providence and grace and goodness of God and God had to obliterate that for him and show him that God's mercy and grace extended beyond the Jewish nation and out into the peoples of the world. And when he got that, he made a speech at Cornelius' house and it's a wonderful talk that he gives and as he goes through it, he tells the people, you know that this was true and you know that was true. And right in the middle of it, he came on this phrase.

He says, and you know about Jesus of Nazareth, he went around doing good. That's what it says. He went around doing good.

It seems almost anticlimactic, doesn't it? Except think how goodness oils a family. Think how goodness sets forward an agenda in a company. Think how goodness ties hearts together.

Think how goodness displays the character of God. Show me, he says, show me by the deeds that are done in the humility that comes from wisdom. Wisdom, humility, deeds, quality life.

It's like Paul to Titus. You read Titus 3 for your homework and you'll find he's constantly saying, make sure the people that you're the pastor of are doing good. I want you to stress these things so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.

To doing what is good. Now remember, and with this I finish, James is not issuing a call to his readers to accumulate virtues. This is not a call to accumulate virtue.

Anybody can read this list and say, well, I can try to be more peaceable. I can try to be more humble. I can try and be more submissive or considerate, whatever else it is.

I guess that's the message. I'm supposed to go out and just try and stick as many of these characteristics on my horrible life as I can. No, all you need to do is put your name at the head of this list.

Try putting your name at the top of the list. Alistair is pure, peace loving, considerate. You don't want to go much further.

Because you're saying, oh, you know, I'm not. I wish I were. How may I be? And it is the very absence of these things that shows us our need of someone who is the embodiment of these things.

Namely, Jesus. You see, if I showed you a painting up here on the screen, done by Turner or by Picasso, and then I said this afternoon, I want you to take that image away and I want you to paint paintings like that and bring them back this evening and I'm going to put them up on the screen and show how well we've all done. Some of us would come back and we think we've done pretty well.

But we'll put Turner over here in his landscape and then we'll put yours over here and then we'll try and put handkerchiefs in our mouth to stop from laughing at the disparity between the two situations. Some people will be nice and considerate and they won't do that. But me, I'll be like, oh man, that is so far from it that I can't believe you even were prepared to put that up there.

How are you going to do it? Let's throw a life, let's throw the life of Jesus up here that is pure and peaceable and gentle and open to reason and full of good fruit and the harvest of righteousness that comes through peace. Let's throw that life up there and then let's say, well, let's all go out and try our best this afternoon until we'll give us a week. We'll come back next Sunday and see how we are.

The disparity between the two is so vast that it will be pathetic to behold. But if somehow or other, by some miraculous procedure, the genius of Turner could come and live in our lives, then we could paint Turner's paintings. And if the power of Jesus would come and live in our lives, then we can live a life like Jesus.

And the very purpose of God from all eternity is to produce his children looking more and more like Jesus. So the Christian life is, if you like, a point of entry whereby we say, Gracious God, thank you for sending Jesus to be a saviour. And I so desperately need a saviour and I want him to be my saviour.

Okay, now we're married. Now the fun starts. Just like in a marriage.

Oh, I didn't know it was going to be like this. Oh, I didn't know you were going to be like that. Oh, I didn't know how hard this might prove to be.

But through it all, growing, learning, loving. I wonder where you are in relationship to this. When we come back tonight, we'll think more about it.

How Jesus, the gentle teacher and the humble servant, is the Lord of glory and our friend and king. I commend him to you. Let's pause and pray together, shall we? Father, teach us not to sin with such abandon.

We do it all too easily. Pretend and lie and envy and lust and criticize and brood and ignore people's needs and deny them. We consume things for ourselves.

We hoard money. We defame others. We distort.

And we make excuses. And then we come and expect an easy forgiveness just because we paused at the end of the service. We ask you, gracious God, to forgive us for the neglect of your holy character.

Help us not to misinterpret your patience with our sin as though it were permission. Loving Father, astonish us with a wholesome godly fear which will not drive us to despair but cause us to number our days and to produce in us hearts of wisdom. Lord, your love and goodness to us is an undivided love.

It is impartial and sincere. Grant that we might have undivided hearts as we go out into this week. For your Son's sake.

Amen. You've been listening to Alistair Begg. You're welcome to pass this message along to others, but please do not charge for this message or alter it without written permission from Alistair Begg or Truth For Life.

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