

The Marks of Heavenly Wisdom

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of pursuing wisdom over mere knowledge, highlighting James chapter 1 and verse 5 where God generously gives wisdom to those who ask. It discusses the characteristics of wisdom, such as purity, peaceableness, gentleness, reasonableness, mercy, good fruits, impartiality, and sincerity, while warning against jealousy, selfish ambition, and hypocrisy. The sermon encourages seeking wisdom through trials, asking God in faith, and maintaining a heart free from partiality and hypocrisy.

Scripture: James 1:5, James 3:17, Matthew 23:27, Proverbs 8:12, Matthew 5:9, Colossians 3:12, Proverbs 11:2, Ephesians 4:32, James 3:16, James 1:17

Topics: "Pursuing Wisdom", "Characteristics of True Wisdom"

Description

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Transcript

One of the things I want to share is found in James chapter 3. You turn with me to James chapter 3. If you look at the letter of James, he speaks a lot about wisdom and wisdom is characterized in Proverbs chapter 8 as a person, that God created the earth by wisdom, et cetera. And there's a lot of emphasis, particularly in the book of Proverbs, about acquiring wisdom. And James emphasizes that in particular.

It says here in James chapter 1 and verse 5, if any of you lack wisdom, and I believe that applies to all of us, let him ask God who gives to all generously and without reproach and it will be given to him. I personally believe that wisdom is the greatest requirement for our personal life, for our family life, for our working life in the office, and also for church life. It's different from knowledge.

A lot of people who have a lot of knowledge don't have much wisdom. And people with a lot of wisdom sometimes may not be great Bible scholars because wisdom is a matter of life, whereas Bible knowledge is a matter of the intellect, how good a memory you have and how sharp your intellect is, et cetera. So we need to pursue wisdom more than knowledge.

I fear that sometimes many believers pursue knowledge, read the Bible. In fact, a lot of when we attend meetings and listen to God's word, we are really acquiring a lot of knowledge, but that's not the greatest thing. The Bible speaks of the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

So in James, it speaks here about wisdom and he connects it with the trials we go through in life. You know, it says here in verse 2, James 1, verse 2, consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the trial is a testing of your faith and that will produce endurance. That means you stick it out through the, endurance means you stick it out through difficult times.

And if you allow endurance to do a complete job over a period of time, through many trials, it's an amazing promise here in verse 4, you will become perfect. You'll be complete. That means your personality will be completely what God wants it to be.

And you will be lacking in nothing. Can you imagine a life where we're lacking in absolutely nothing? That should be our goal. I want to come to a spiritual life where I'm lacking in nothing.

Any situation I face, I have an answer for it. Any problem I face at home, in my personal life, in my work spot, in the church, there will always be an answer. And it does not come through study and knowledge.

What a great need that is for parents to have wisdom. And if we, before we become parents, if you have allowed God to take you through many trials, you're well-prepared for marriage. It's not by reading books on bringing up children that you bring up children properly.

What we need is wisdom. And that wisdom, it says here, comes through trials. And so if I recognize that I lack wisdom, that's one of the first important requirements is first of all, to recognize I lack it.

There are a lot of people, as I said, who have a lot of knowledge who don't have wisdom. So if I acknowledge that I lack wisdom, I must ask God, I say, Lord, I lack wisdom. I need wisdom in so many situations in life.

And here is an amazing promise again. God will give it, verse five, generously. That means he will not be miserly in giving you wisdom.

Every one of you who listen to me can have any amount of wisdom because God gives it generously. He doesn't give money generously. He doesn't give intelligence to people generously.

You know that all of us don't have the same measure of intelligence. You know that human beings all don't have the same intelligence. Some are very intelligent.

Some are very low in intelligence. But when it comes to wisdom, everyone can have as much as he wants, as much as he's willing to have, if he's willing to face up to all the trials he faces in life and say, Lord, I want to acquire wisdom in these trials. And God designs exactly what trial he has for each of us.

The purpose is to make us wisdom lacking, it says in verse four, lacking in nothing. It's amazing, just like you want your children to go through a school and get a complete education, the education God wants to give us is in the area of wisdom. And so it says here, not only God will give it generously, it says he won't reprove you for not having it.

You know, sometimes we can tell those who work under us or our children, why can't you understand that? It's a common question. You should have known that by now. God never, never speaks like that.

I want to encourage you to know this. Without reproach means God will never tell any of you. Why don't you know that by now? You've been a Christian for so long.

Why don't you know it? Human beings can speak to us like that. You may speak to your children like that. But God, a loving father, never, never speaks like that to anyone.

Without reproach, he does not question, why don't you understand it after having been a Christian so many years? It's a great verse that God does not reproach. He's an example for us to follow as fathers and mothers, and even as brothers and in places of responsibility, even in our work spot. If you want to be like God, you should not be reproaching people saying, why haven't you understood so far? Without reproach, and it says it'll be given him, but verse six, there's only one condition.

He must ask, believing that God will give it to him. You know, when we are in tough situations, many tough situations, the answer is always to get some wisdom from God in that situation. And isn't it a wonderful promise that God will give that wisdom without ever rebuking you and without asking any question and give you as much as you need generously, provided you ask in faith.

So if any of you are facing a particular situation right now, or you may face some in the near future, here's a wonderful promise to keep before you always for the rest of your life. Lord, you will always give me wisdom generously without rebuking me. I thank God that I can come to God without any fear, even if I'm being stupid and I've done stupid things one hundred and one times.

He will not rebuke me. I love that. I can come to him and say, Lord, yeah, I bungled up there.

I messed up. You won't say, why did you do it like that? I think of the story of the prodigal son when he came to the father. Father didn't say, didn't I tell you what would happen if you go away? He never said that.

Why did you take so long to come back? Then just listen to the way the father deals with the prodigal son and you understand the meaning of that word without reproach. I mean, if there was anybody who deserved a rebuke, it was that prodigal son who had taken half the property and gone off. And I'm sure the father had warned him numerous times not to try such things.

But the father never reminded him of all those things. You know, we have the habit of reminding people. I told you this and I told you that.

God never does that. I thank God for that. Without reproach is a great phrase there in James chapter one, verse five, which you can always keep in mind.

Remember, my dear brothers and sisters, your heavenly father will never reprove you saying, why didn't you do it? If you're seeking for wisdom, he'll correct you when you do something wrong. But he won't question you. Why have you not learned this even after so many years, such questions that we ask without reproach? The only condition which Jesus emphasized throughout his life.

Believe, trust God, what does it mean to have faith in God? That means basically I understand from the teaching of Jesus, faith is to believe just the simple thing. Let me put it in one sentence. If you being evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more will your heavenly father give good things to those who ask him? That is faith.

It's not a very complicated thing. That's all it means to ask him faith. I believe we should teach our children that from a very young age.

They can have faith. If you can tell your children, do you think your dad is going to daddy will ever not give you something which is good for you? I mean, he may not give you everything you ask for. In fact, it's a very foolish father who gives everything that a child asks for.

Many things the father and mother will say, no, son, I can't give that to you. No, my girl, I can't give that to you. It's not good for you or you're not yet ready to receive it.

Like I've often said about the three traffic lights, red, orange and green, God always answers. Sometimes the answer is no. Sometimes the answer is wait.

Sometimes the answer is yes. But he always answers. But he won't reprove us, reproach.

He won't. It is without reproach. It's a great word.

And it will be given him, but we must ask him faith and faith. Let me repeat this. How much more do you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children? How much more will your heavenly father give good things to those who ask him? I would remind you of two verses, both related to both relate to parenthood.

In God's relationships with us, God is a father and a mother, and it's what we need to teach our children. The attitude of God towards us is like a father and a mother. If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly father give good things to those who ask him? And as a mother, can a mother, Isaiah 49, 15, forget her second child, her nursing baby, that she should not have compassion on the child of her womb? Yea, they may forget, but I will not forget you.

These are two great verses to produce faith that God is a father better than any earthly father. And God is like better, more, more considerate and remembering us than a mother will her own newborn baby. So it's easy to have faith, really.

Faith doesn't mean I get whatever I want. I feel sad that the Pentecostal movement and the charismatic movement have emphasized faith as if you have faith, you get whatever you want. No, I thank God that God doesn't give me everything I want.

I mess up my life. You give me a child, everything he wants, he mess up his life. As a good father, he knows what to give me and what not to give me.

So faith doesn't mean I get whatever I want, but I do believe that everything I need for wisdom in my life, he will give me. He'll give me wisdom in any and every situation I ever face. And that is the purpose of the trials with which God takes us through.

So keeping that in mind, you know, if you can turn to James chapter three, he goes on that subject and speaks here about verse 17. He describes this wisdom. First of all, he describes what it is not the wisdom.

He talks in verse 13 onwards. A wise person. How do you know you have acquired wisdom? Here it is, James chapter three and verse 13.

A wise person behaves in a good way and manifests it in deeds, in the gentleness of wisdom. There's a gentleness in wisdom. Wisdom is not harsh and there's a natural harshness in his flesh.

The children of Adam, all of us are naturally harsh, but there's a gentleness of wisdom. Even when someone has done something wrong. Correction will always be gentle.

That's how God does it. And it says, then it says some of the characteristics which are which indicate that you don't have wisdom. Think of this.

He first says, if you have these qualities, that's not you don't have wisdom and it's got nothing to do with Bible knowledge. Verse 14, if you have jealousy or selfish ambition, don't be arrogant, this type of wisdom, which makes you jealous of others and which makes you want to show off in the church that you are somebody, that you can sing better than others, or you can preach better than others, or you know more of the Bible than others. This type of showing off is not wisdom.

It is a proof that such a man does not have such wisdom, not only is not it's not wisdom. This is a type of wisdom that is demonic. It's very interesting if you link up with 14 and 15.

It says there, whenever a man appears to have a lot of Bible knowledge and is able to give solutions to different situations, but he's got jealousy. He's jealous of others who are better than him. See, jealousy is always linked to somebody being better than you in some area.

And if that makes you jealous and one critical of him, then very often we criticize people who are better than us because we are jealous. If you were not jealous, you'd appreciate it. And a person like that can never have wisdom.

You can rule out immediately. I will never go to that man for wisdom. The guy is jealous.

Or if he's arrogant, a proud person will never, never, never have wisdom. If you want Godly advice, never go to a proud person. He'll give you demonic wisdom.

It says here that wisdom is demonic and earthly. And wherever there is such jealousy and selfish ambition, we're seeing all types of disorders and evil things exist. So here are warnings against two particular things that is very close to all of us and can come up so easily.

Jealousy. Somebody is appreciated more than you. Somebody can do something better than you.

And maybe you were the one who was doing it best till now, but somebody has taken over that and is able to do that better than you. Then comes jealousy and selfish ambition. I've seen that in so many churches where people want to prove that they can preach better than someone or sing better than someone.

It's selfish ambition. And it's terrible when that happens in a church. It's much worse when it happens in a new covenant church.

You can say such a person hasn't understood the ABC of wisdom. No. Selfish ambition.

That always creates disorder and every evil thing. And I want to say, when you think of the history of what you face in RLCF four years ago, there it is. That's the root cause of it.

Jealousy and selfish ambition will produce disorder and every evil thing till God had to root out that problem, remove the cancer so that he could build a healthy body. I praise God for that. Sometimes God has to do that.

I've seen that happen in different situations where God sees a cancer growing and growing and growing and God does a radical surgery and removes it. And says, OK, I've got to build a body, we can't let this cancer keep growing. But that's where that is always caused by the cancer, usually caused by jealousy and selfish ambition.

I've seen that happen in families. Jealousy and selfish ambition between members in a family or between one family and another one, trying to show it better than the other. Beware of these two things, dear brothers and sisters.

Let it never, never be found in your church. Let it never, never be found in your heart or in your home. Jealousy can even be there among siblings in a family where one is doing better than the other.

We must teach our children to rejoice. If one child is doing better than you. Yeah, that's your brother, that's your sister.

You should be happy. OK, if God has given him some ability or her some ability that you don't have, praise the Lord for it. Right from childhood, because there's a lot of competition sometimes among children that can lead to jealousy.

You have to remember that whenever there's jealousy and selfish ambition, verse 16, which can easily come up when you have children, the result will be, verse 16, disorder and every evil thing you can imagine now that you can think of. That's God's word. Beware of it.

So the opposite of that is to pursue wisdom. And that wisdom we have described in verse 17 like this. You know, the Bible speaks in Proverbs about the seven pillars of wisdom.

Wisdom is built with seven pillars, we read in Proverbs. And here are those seven pillars. And it's good for us to evaluate and see whether the wisdom we have is mere Bible knowledge or it has produced in us these characteristics.

That way we know that it is from above. I told you that it comes through trials. It comes through our asking God in faith, believing that God will not withhold it from me.

And the wisdom that comes from above is, first of all, pure. I just want to quickly go through this. These seven things, I don't want to take too much time, you can meditate on it later.

But the number one characteristic of wisdom is purity. There cannot be any type of sin that we tolerate in the case we don't have wisdom. If you can do a small unrighteous thing in your office or in any situation, it's one of the clearest indications you don't have wisdom, whatever other qualities you may have.

Wisdom is pure. It does not, it battles impurity in one's thought life, a wise person realizes the tremendous tendency to impurity in our thoughts. It could be sexual thoughts, it could be thoughts of bitterness against someone or.

The memory of evil that other people have done makes us impure. That's why you've often heard me emphasize the importance of forgiving. It speaks about that later, full of mercy, ready to forgive that we

don't keep a memory of the things that people have done against us.

Dear brothers and sisters, keep your mind pure. If you want to grow in wisdom, say, Lord, I'm going to fight the battle to keep my mind pure from anything that brings impurity in. And it is peaceable.

That means it's something that strives in every situation for the way of peace. It will not allow strife in anything. Whenever an argument comes up, we must avoid it.

I try to follow that example always, even when people begin to argue about biblical matters, I say, listen, I don't want to argue. Let's talk about something else. If you want to understand some scripture, I don't mind explaining it to you, I say.

But if you're going to argue because you're convinced you're right and you're convinced I'm wrong, OK, you can believe that I'm wrong. Go ahead. I'm not going to try and convince you that I'm right.

I don't want to waste my time. I know what I believe. I know it's changed my life.

So I'm not trying to convince you because, you know, some of the doctrines we preach and stand for, many Christians don't appreciate. OK, I'm not going to argue with them. If they're really hungry after God, they'll see it as the truth.

But it is not by argument. We must be peaceable. We must be known as people.

You must be known as a brother or a sister with whom nobody can have a quarrel or a fight. You have a reputation like that. It's great if we can teach our children.

You must or it won't come immediately. Children naturally fight and quarrel over little silly things because they're immature. But we should encourage them as they grow up, particularly going to the late teenage years when you're 17, 18 years old.

You should know by now you should have a reputation in the family. That your sibling can't fight with you anymore. You're peaceable.

It's a mark of spiritual growth and wisdom. But you're the type of person who say, OK, you want to take that, take it. I'm not going to fight over it.

I'm not going to argue about this matter. Let's leave it. And you see the beginnings of an argument starting, you stop it there.

That is a wise husband or a wise wife. It's very easy for some type of little thing to start between a husband and wife. But the wise person will detect it immediately.

Hey, this is going in a dangerous direction. We're going to fall over the cliff pretty soon. So apply the brakes and no, I have nothing more to say.

Let the other person think they have won the argument. Fine. No problem.

It's a mark of a wise person who pursues peace. May that be true in all of our homes. And wonderfully, if we can teach our children that from a young age, the wisdom from above is pure and peaceable and it's gentle.

It's one of the things that Jesus taught us to learn is gentleness. That's another thing which is not doesn't come naturally to us. We are by nature harsh and rough.

And many people think gentleness is a feminine, womanly thing. No. Not at all.

The most manly person that ever walked on this earth was the Lord Jesus Christ. There was nothing effeminate about him. He was 100 percent a man.

I believe he was a very muscular man, having worked in the carpenter shop for so many years. But you know what he said in Matthew 11, 29, he said, learn to be gentle from me. He was gentle.

And you see that in situations like. When the woman caught in adultery was brought to him. He said, I don't condemn you, woman, even though there was an Old Testament law which says the woman caught in adultery must be stoned to death.

Jesus had the authority to bypass it, being Almighty God himself. It's OK. I don't condemn you.

Don't go and sin. Don't sin again. There was a gentleness about him.

Do you think that woman would ever have forgotten that for the rest of her life? Just that one incident. You know, sometimes one act of gentleness on your part can have such an influence on the other person that they never forget it for the rest of their life, and it blesses them and leads them towards the Lord. I'm absolutely sure that that adulterous woman got converted.

Not by being stoned, but Jesus' gentle act of I don't condemn you, don't go and sin anymore. There's a gentleness and wisdom. Yeah.

And also I think of the other divorced woman who came to Jesus. You know, that's a beautiful passage we read in John, Chapter four. When you get time, you read it.

How Jesus dealt with this woman who was divorced five times and is now sleeping with somebody who was not married to. And when he brought up that subject about her previous divorces and their marriage, you notice there in John, Chapter four, I don't have time to turn there now. She quickly changed the subject.

You know, whenever a person is in an embarrassing spot, they try to change the subject. And that's exactly what the woman of Samaria did. She said, you know, forget about my husband, Lord.

Let's talk about worship. Can you just change the subject a little bit? You know, you people say about you must worship in Jerusalem. We talk about worship in Samaria.

And I see a gentleness of Jesus there. He didn't say, hey, hang on, hang on, we're talking about your husband, let's deal with that first. No, forget it.

I won't mention it anymore. It's it touched a sore spot in her life and I will not talk about it anymore. This is wisdom.

This is to be sensitive where you find that something you said is opened up a sore spot in somebody's life and quickly change the subject and go on to something else because you don't want to embarrass me. That's wisdom. Seek for that quality, brother, sister, wonderful, peaceful, gentle, reasonable.

That's another thing it says here in verse 17, the wisdom from others is reasonable. That means it's willing to listen to reason. The opposite of reasonable is stubborn.

There are some people who are stubborn, they are not willing to listen to reason, they're not willing to accept that if somebody presents an argument, which is convincing, they're so stuck in the way in that position that we call them unreasonable. A wise person is not someone who says, I'm always right. A wise person is willing to admit I could be wrong.

I'm not right in every area. I'm reasonable enough to be willing to change, I don't want to spend too much time on all that. Full of mercy and good truths, this is something I've been emphasizing a lot these days.

And that is the importance of forgiving for many, many months now, I've been emphasizing the fact that we must be clear in our mind that there's not a single human being whom I have not forgiven. Every single person that I know who has hurt me, I must forgive them. If you can spend a little time, it won't take more, it won't take more than five minutes to just check up.

Think of all the people who have hurt you, spend five minutes. I encourage you, if you've never done it before, spend five minutes today to think of all the people in your life who ever hurt you. Some of them may be dead and gone, but even if they're dead and gone, you ask yourself, have you forgiven that person completely? If not, in the presence of God, say, Lord, name that person and say, Lord, I forgive that person.

That's all you got to do. You will not be able to remove the memory from your mind. It will remain in your mind forever.

I remember the evil things people have done against me 50 years ago. But I don't get condemned over it because I've forgiven everyone. Memory is something we have no control over.

So remember this, this is very, very important, full of mercy and it's good fruits, which is forgiving others completely. So important between husband and wife. Whenever I meet, whenever I met a marriage, one of the first things I teach them is be quick.

Both of you husband and wife, to ask forgiveness and be quick to forgive. And when I meet married couples, sometimes I ask them, I say, are you quick to ask forgiveness? Are you quick to forgive? You need it for 50 years. You need it.

So many of you who are married, I want to ask you a straight question. Answer it to yourself. Do you have a reputation that your marriage partner can say, testify to, that your marriage partner can testify to, that you're very quick to ask forgiveness when you said or done something wrong? And also when the other person did something wrong, that you're quick to forgive and will never bring that matter up again in conversation.

That's a wise husband. That's a wise wife. If you don't have that quality, pursue it, you'll become a godly person, you'll become a wise person.

And this word unwavering is also translated in some places as without partiality. See, partiality is one of the sins which is very often unrecognized. I'll tell you, I've seen it in CFC people.

I've seen it in CFC elders. One of the most unrecognized sins I've seen, even among CFC elders, is partiality. They don't realize it, that they have a bent towards someone, maybe towards one of their own family members.

OK, that means they don't look at the matter absolutely impartially, you know. Supposing there's a little conflict between two people and you're an elder, these are the type of situations where an elder brother has to be completely unbiased. It's a battle.

I tell you, I've seen this in others and I said, Lord, I want to be absolutely sure that I don't take the side of the most influential person or my favorite or my favorite brother could be wrong. Then I have to say, brother, I'm sorry, you're wrong there. I have to take the side of this other person who's not so spiritual because he's right in this situation.

That is being impartial. But if you're partial, you say, oh, this is my fellow elder, I've got to support him. No, I don't have to.

If my fellow elder is wrong, he's wrong. I followed that principle with even my closest co-workers. See, brother, I don't agree with you there.

That person who's 10 times less mature than you are, is right. And you're 10 times more mature, but you're wrong. It's not, I may not say it like that, but it's important that we are completely impartial.

You must have no favorite children among your children. If one of your children is a favorite, you're not wise. You're partial.

And that can be seen sometimes unconsciously in some of your actions and decisions. It could be in a church. This is a battle.

You have to say, Lord, I want to fight the battle. Totally impartial. But that is wisdom.

Give it to me. Give me wisdom from above. Yeah, I won't go much longer than that, but I want you to think about that.

And finally, of course, without hypocrisy, if murder was an idolatry, were the greatest sins of the Ten Commandments. I've often thought if there was a list of Ten Commandments in the new covenant, which would be number one? Hypocrisy. And unbelief, not murder and idolatry, hypocrisy.

Because it's the hypocrites that Jesus said in Matthew 23, how would you escape the damnation of hell? There were people, people whose outside of the cup was absolutely clean. He told people whose outside of the cup was absolutely clean, you hypocrites. How do you escape the damnation of wisdom means a complete freedom from hypocrisy.

That's another area, just like without partiality, we want to battle against partiality in our life. We need to equally battle against hypocrisy. It comes in so subtly.

So, dear brothers and sisters, pursue after wisdom. Make it the number one pursuit in your life. Because the result will be that you can be a tremendous blessing to other people as you grow in wisdom, you'll be able to help people and they come to you for counseling, for advice.

You don't have to be an elder. You can be just a brother in the church and be a blessing to many people. If you pursue wisdom, you gradually, you know, you will get a reputation for wisdom.

But what I mean, I don't mean becoming famous. I don't mean that way that people will know. But I know when I've gone to that brother or that sister, they've always given me some advice that's always been helpful.

That's it. You may not be an elder. You may be just a sister in the church.

When somebody came to you for advice and you said something to them, which really blessed them and helped them. Gradually, people begin to get confidence in you. Don't you want to be such a brother or sister in the church? I wish the church, there'd be many people in the church like this.

It'd be tremendous if you have a church full of people who are earnestly seeking after wisdom. More than for knowledge. I've emphasized Bible study and knowledge.

The far greater need is for wisdom. So may God bless you all and I pray that all of us will grow in this area. And be a tremendous strength in the church.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we see our need. There's so many situations.

I find myself in so many situations, Lord, where I have a lot of knowledge, Bible knowledge, but wisdom is a great need. I need it more and more. To help people, to guide people.

We all need it to guide our children. Give us wisdom, wisdom, really seek it, Lord. Take us through any number of trials you want to take us through.

That's the way for us to get wisdom. And we want to trust you that you will, when we ask you for it, you will give it to us generously and you will not reproach us in some situation when we say, Lord, I don't have wisdom. You'll give it to us in abundance.

But we will ask you in faith for ourselves, give us more faith in the days to come. That you will give us this wisdom that we ask you for. Keep us free from partiality, Lord.

Give us a heart of forgiveness to every single person and help us to walk in humility before you. The humility that comes with genuine wisdom. Please give us that, Lord, walking in loneliness before you, bowing our head before you all the time.

We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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