

The Nature of Genuine Wisdom Part 3

Epistle of James

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Then the title of our last three messages, including this morning is "The Nature of Genuine Wisdom." The nature of genuine wisdom. We'll see in a moment when we read the text that James begins by asking the question, "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it." Who is wise and understanding among you? He's actually confronting the fact that it's just intrinsic, a part of human nature, that we all tend to think ourselves more wise than we are. We tend to overestimate our abilities. It's a part of the sin nature and pride itself. We have a lower view of God than we ought to have and we have a higher view of self than we ought to have. It's just part of the wiring that's been messed up through the fall.

So James understands as he writes to these Christian believers and he's got folks who profess to love Christ, he is writing to instruct them in things they need to understand to help them live out their faith. That's the main theme of his entire epistle. He wants to deal with the issue that some who think they are wise need to understand that they are not so that they would humble themselves and really pursue true wisdom. And he wants to confront as he often does, he's very direct of all the epistle writers of the New Testament, he's one of the most direct. Now of course, he's inspired by the same Holy Spirit that inspired every word of God, every word of Scripture, and yet we see the personality of the author in it as well.

So he says that we need to examine ourselves to see if we are truly wise, and we also need to understand that this applies to us in giving guidance as to how we should look at potential leaders for the church. We're going to be voting later, not voting but we will be reporting on candidates for you to consider and prayerfully for elder and deacon during the business meeting today, an important part of that meeting, and one of the ways that Scripture encourages us to evaluate leaders is, are they making progress in these areas? This is part of the function of this passage. Who should you look up to and to seek to follow after? You know, as Christians we are to say to one another, we are all to make disciples, "Follow me as I follow Christ." Well, how can you tell if someone who says, "Follow me as I follow Christ," is following Christ? It should be someone that you really look to as a mentor, a spiritual teacher and guide.

That's the kind of application that this passage has but most directly he's asking us to look at ourselves. You think that you have knowledge of spiritual things, you think you have knowledge of truth and you are confident in that, well, how can you know if the wisdom that you have is truly genuine because there are two types of wisdom, we're going to see: there is genuine wisdom, that is the wisdom from above; and James contrasts that with false wisdom, that is the wisdom from below. So how can you tell the difference? Even though as he exposes it, it becomes clear they are very different. They are absolutely different in character and source and kind. He understands that it's possible, it's easy for us to mistake one for the other in ourselves and in others. We can think that we have true wisdom when we don't, and he gives us the test to show how to examine ourselves and we can think that others have wisdom, true wisdom, and they don't.

So we are going to look today really at a kind of character sketch of what wisdom looks like this morning. You know, how sometimes you'll see in the old days it was more this way, now with computer technology everything has changed, but remember the old days when someone would commit a crime and they would do an artist rendering, a sketch, talk to the person about, "Can you describe them? How tall were they? What was their facial structure? What color eyes did they have?" And an artist would render it and you would see a picture, "If you see this man, he's wanted. Watch out." Well, this is like today we are looking at not a negative artist's rendering, we're looking at God's rendering of what a truly wise man or wise woman or wise child, young boy who loves Christ or girl who loves Christ, what does wisdom look like? How do you recognize it? Here's the artist's rendering, its external appearance.

So we're looking at, again, the nature of genuine wisdom and we are asking how to recognize it. That's the point of the message. Let's read verses 13 to 18, James 3.

13 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. 18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we ask that you who give wisdom and who have promised even in this letter in an earlier passage that if we lack wisdom, we can ask of God who gives liberally, generously to all men. We ask you to give us wisdom and we ask you to understand how to evaluate our own hearts, where we are spiritually with you. Are we growing in true wisdom? Help us, Lord, search us and know our hearts. Try us and know our thoughts. See if there be any wicked way in us and lead us in the way everlasting. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

So we are looking at the nature of genuine wisdom and today we're looking at this character sketch really more from the outside. Last Sunday we talked about the inward essence of genuine wisdom, remember? Two messages ago, we talked about that James basically says, "Look, genuine wisdom and false wisdom can look very similar at first glance and they can be, we are prone to mistake one for the other." That's why he writes these six verses. He knows it's a problem that we have. We mistake it in ourselves and in others and we need to know how to recognize one. So he says the first thing we looked at is he shows us in this passage what genuine wisdom is not. You know you don't have genuine wisdom when you see, "Did you hear that bitter jealousy and selfish ambition?" Those are the character qualities that are not characteristic of genuine wisdom. Disorder and every evil thing. Relational chaos and brokenness. When people are going around mistreating people. Even though they may seem to have a grasp of theology, they may have a clearly defined understanding of the Gospel, be able to expound it clearly and even argue persuasively, if the way they treat people is this way and they are selfishly ambitious, they are jealous, they are harsh, that's not true wisdom.

So he says that's what it does not look like. Then last week we began looking at what it does look like positively. How do you recognize genuine wisdom? What are its positive characteristics? And we saw the last time the inward essence is meekness. That's what he says in verse 16. But today we're going to look at two points. We're looking now at the external appearance; that though you can confuse them, if you know what to look for, it's clear. Like Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits." You can tell if true wisdom is in your life by looking at your fruits. You can tell if true wisdom is in someone else's life by looking at their fruits. So that's what we're going to look at this morning.

We have two points this morning. The first is the outward evidence of genuine wisdom. That's our first point this morning. The outward evidence of genuine wisdom. He turns to the positive side of the outside picture in verses 17 to 18 when he says, "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

Now, the first thing that we see about that that really kind of jumps out at us, is that the word "peace" occurs three times in those two verses. You first have it in verse 17, peaceable. First pure, then peaceable. Then look at verse 18, it closes out with two occurrences of that word again, the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. One of the ways that you see and recognize genuine wisdom is that the people who really have true wisdom from God, remember wisdom biblically is not knowledge for the sake of knowledge. It's knowledge applied to life. It's two things really. It's knowledge and that makes it very different than the wisdom of the world. Greek wisdom, and they were big into wisdom, I mean philosophy was so big in Athens. So the Greek world, the people that James is writing to, he's writing in the Greek language because they speak Greek. They have been Hellenized. They have been basically very heavily influenced by Greek culture, Roman culture, and those cultures valued wisdom, but they valued earthly wisdom, human wisdom. Human wisdom is more

about the knowledge and theoretical insights and speculation. God's wisdom is intensely practical. Read the book of Proverbs and you see that over and over and over again, all the books of wisdom in the Old Testament. It's intensely practical. God isn't just concerned that you can theorize, he's concerned with how you live. Does your knowledge come into your life?

And the second thing, or really the most important thing that is even before that that differentiates God's wisdom from human wisdom, is God's wisdom begins with the fear of God. True wisdom, biblical wisdom, begins with the fear of God. That is, a reverence for the Lord and a realization that all of my life must be oriented around the most important reality in the universe which is God. How can he be the most important reality in the universe and me not orient my life around him? So true wisdom then, you see, you can't put things into perspective in your life if you haven't got the main things aren't the main things. So you start with the main thing of where God is in your life and then you can start applying wisdom in all the other areas. That's the idea.

So James now says, "What's the outward evidence of that kind of wisdom, true, genuine wisdom?" And he says the outward evidence in a word is peace. It's peace. He said three times the word peace: peaceable; sown in peace by those who make peace. The NIV translates that last phrase, last verse, "peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness." The ESV says, "a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." I think that the NASB, the one I'm reading, misses this here. Literally the Greek says, "the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." The way it reads here in the text is the seed whose fruit is righteousness. The word "seed" doesn't occur there. It's the fruit of righteousness that is sown in peace by those who make peace. The idea is essentially the fruit of righteousness, the harvest of righteousness, how do you harvest righteousness? How do you have a life where you do what God wants you to do? Well, you sow the seeds of peace and you make peace and you make that about what your life is about and you harvest righteousness so that peace is the key. It's the outward evidence and you're going to look at someone whose life is a peacemaker, who is someone who relates in a godly way. You know, you can have a kind of peace that's not real peace. You can always be friendly, avoid confrontation, no confrontation at any cost, and you can think that's peace but that's not peace. I don't know who coined this: there is a difference between being a peacemaker and being a peace-faker. A peace-faker acts like there is peace when there is no peace. And biblically we start with an understanding of who God is and peacemaking is genuinely dealing with conflict in a godly way. Sometimes you can't escape conflict and conflict is a part of life, but the outward evidence of a person with wisdom is they are characterized by peace. Wherever they go, they are making peace. They are not pretending conflict doesn't exist. That's not a way to make peace. They are not pretending that offenses and sin aren't there. That's not the way to make peace. The way to make peace biblically is to bring the Gospel to bear in every situation, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But he's saying that the outward evidence, you want to know if you're wise, look around you at your relationships. Look around you. What are the state of your relationships? Think, are you embittered against family members? Is unforgiveness a part of your life?

Have you offended people and you just don't care to make it right and, "If they are going to be that way, let them go." Do you leave behind you a trail of broken relationships? Or relationships that are breaking? If that's the case, you are not walking in genuine wisdom. It doesn't mean that you are necessarily not a believer but it's certainly an opportunity to step back and say, "Am I a believer? Am I really trusting in Christ?" And then if I am a believer, I'm not applying my heart to wisdom because if I were, I would not see a train of broken relationships around me and no desire to make peace in those relationships. This kind of absence of peace is an evidence of earthly wisdom, natural wisdom as he calls it, even demonic.

So peace is the outward evidence of true wisdom. You think about this, true wisdom is knowing who God is and rightly relating to God at the beginning, right? The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, Proverbs 9:6. You start there, fearing God, reverencing God, honoring God, respecting and worshiping him. Well, what is God like? You know, the Bible calls God the God of peace five times in the New Testament. Five times he refers to himself as the God of peace: Romans 15:33, Romans 16:20, Philippians 4:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 13:20. The God of peace.

Now think about the Christian faith. We see the Bible makes clear to us that the God, the one God, the one true and living God is a God who has manifested himself to us through the Scriptures and he shows what he's really like and the wonder of this God is he is three persons in one substance. The Trinity, the doctrine of the Trinity, that God the Father is God; that God the Son is God; that God the Spirit is God; and they live in a perfect communion of oneness and joy and love from eternity past. No deficiency in God, only fullness. So when you understand that, that that's who God is and that the Father says he's the God of peace, and Jesus we are told, the Messiah, Isaiah 9:6 will be called the Prince of Peace, we see that the Spirit when he comes, what does he produce? He produces fruit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace. We are told over and over again if we love God, we should pursue peace, Hebrews 12:14. Ephesians 4:3, that we should preserve, be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

So peace is of primary importance to God. He wants us, if we really love God, we're going to love peace with other brothers and sisters. It is of urgent importance to the Lord for you and me if we are at peace with him, rightly related to him, to be rightly related to others, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ. One of the most powerful illustrations of this, I was sharing a little bit of this on Wednesday night because we were talking about a related subject, talking about marriage and the need to pursue peace in marriage and I mentioned this verse. Turn with me to Matthew 5:23-24. You know, if you say you love God. So a person who claims to be wise and have understanding is a person who is claiming to love God, right? So we say we love God, then we should love our brother.

In Matthew 5:21 and 22, Jesus teaches us that the sin of murder, the outward sin of murder is committed in the heart when we call someone a fool or an idiot; when we devalue another human being, that we have murdered them in our hearts. Look what he says, "You have heard that the ancients were told," Matthew 5:21, "'You shall not commit murder ' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that

everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell." So he is talking about relational sins when you hate your brother and you are murdering them in your heart. And look what he says next. He goes right next to, I think this shows us how important this is to God. Verse 23, "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."

Now, what hit me recently is reflecting on this a little more is how I've read that verse for years and thought it really shows the importance. You know, God wants you when you go to worship him, and you are trying to honor him, and you realize you haven't dealt with a relationship, he says, "Go and deal with that first and then come back and let's talk about our relationship. If you love me, go and love your brother." But when you put that in context when Jesus said that, it is really striking how important this is to God. When Jesus gave this instruction, at that point in history the way it was for faithful Jews to worship God, there was one place they could make an offering. There was only one place. It's like in a sense, not quite, they went into synagogues all over the place and they were instructed but when they had to make an offering, like go into real church, there was only one church in all of Israel, in that sense, the temple. So to make an offering, they had to go to Jerusalem to the temple.

Now Jesus grew up in Nazareth which is about 85 miles from Jerusalem, and he and his family went to the temple regularly to make the offerings they were supposed to make as Jews, faithful followers of God under the old covenant. So he had made that journey many times and just like Jews all over Israel made the journey from wherever they lived, Beersheba, Dan, they made it all the way to Jerusalem to make their offering. Now, they didn't have cars back then so to go 85 miles meant it was basically a five-day journey. Maybe 20 miles a day, maybe 21 miles a day. At 21 and a quarter miles a day you make it in four. It was also a journey that was not flat. Sometimes it was downhill, but it was uphill as much as it was downhill. You know, what goes up must come down. Up and down. Up and down. That's what the terrain is like going from Nazareth to Jerusalem so imagine, just imagine, I want to make an offering to be right with God because I have sinned in some way and I know I need to be right with God, so I take my offering and I make a four day journey up and down, up and down, up and down. I get to Jerusalem and I'm about to make my offering so that I can be rightly restored to God, and I'm convicted that my brother has something against me; that I have sinned against my brother. Jesus says, "Stop. Leave your offering there. Ask the priest, 'I need to leave this here. I'll be back in a little over a week.' Make your four-day journey back to Nazareth, up and down, up and down, up and down. Find your brother. Confess your sin. Make things right with him. Now make the four-day journey back." That's how important it is to God.

God says, "You say you love me and you don't love your brother?" Or as John said in 1 John 4 says, "How can you say you love God whom you have not seen when you don't love your brother whom you have seen? You're lying. You're deceiving yourself."

According to James, you certainly don't have true wisdom. That the person who is truly wise pursues peace. As he says at the end of verse 18, they are people who make peace. In fact, the verbs there in verse 18, actually in the whole passage, almost every one of them are present tense verbs which we've talked about. The Greek present tense is not so much about the time of action, past time, present time, future time, it's more about the kind of action. It means continuous ongoing action. These are people who are constantly sowing peace and who are making peace. They go about life sowing seeds of peace. That is what true wisdom looks like.

Now, let me make an important clarification. I said this a little bit earlier, but I want to make it a little clearer. He's not talking about people who pursue peace at any cost. He's not saying that we should be Neville Chamberlain kind of Christians. If you've seen that movie, "The Darkest Hour," you see the contrast between Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill. Neville Chamberlain wanted to have peace at any cost and he gave Hitler whatever he wanted, and he said peace for our time, peace with honor. It wasn't peace for our time and it wasn't peace with honor, it was just a little more, just a breathing point before Hitler started devouring Europe. You can't make peace with the devil. He is our enemy. He will always be our enemy. You can't make peace with sin.

So that's why actually when we saw this last time, that verse 17, "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable." Remember we talked about this last time, that you have to start with what it means to be pure before you can pursue the rest of the list. Pure means fearing God; that you want to be right with God; that you want to walk with God; that you want to be pleasing to him; you want to make room for him in your life; you want to fellowship with him. That's what's most important, "Lord, how can I please you?" And when you have that heart attitude, you won't yield and ignore things that need to be done.

It's not loving to not tell someone the truth. I mean, for instance, if someone is pursuing an ungodly lifestyle and they say they're a Christian and they are pursuing an ungodly lifestyle, a man wants to leave his wife and marry another woman, "I know God wants me to be happy. I've prayed about it." I've had that said to me on numerous occasions as I've tried to convince someone to turn from sin and to come back to what God wants them to do, return to their wife and to rebuild their marriage and they said, "I've prayed about this and I know God wants me to be happy." I say, "Well, you may have prayed about this, but you are wrong about what God wants. You're determining that by your own desires rather than the Bible is really clear. The Bible is clear that marriage is for life; that you can't just determine that you want to be happy and pursue it another way. In fact, that is ungodly and it's not going to result in happiness." And there have been a couple of those occasions where later someone acknowledged to me, "Thank you for telling me. Even though I didn't listen to you, you were right. I wasn't really happy. I wish I could go back." It's too late. They had already married the other person. The damage was done. They didn't just commit the affair, they went ahead and just burned all the bridges in between.

But when you make happiness your goal and you ignore; God's word is all for a good. His commandments are not burdensome. He's the one who made us. He knows how we

operate. It's like trying to buy a weed eater or a lawnmower and do it according to your own plan. A weed eater is better now, you know, the gas/oil mix that you use in a weed eater or some other, I want to say tools. What am I talking about? Garden implements. Help me out. Okay, so whatever the name for it is, some machine. Wow, it's amazing. Okay, back to the weed eater. I have a weed eater and you have to use a gas/oil mix and there is a recipe for how much, a certain kind of oil that you mix together in a can of gasoline and that makes it run properly. Now, if you want to buy that weed eater, the same weed eater, and ignore the instructions and just pour gas into it, it will probably work for a little while. I don't know how long. Not very long. Why is that? Because you're wanting to operate the machinery in a way that the manufacturer did not intend. God is the manufacturer of every single one of us. He knows how he wants us to operate and ignoring his instructions, you do so at your own peril. So it's not loving to pretend that it's okay just to leave your wife. It's not loving to pretend that it's okay to pursue homosexual relationships. It's not okay to pretend that it's okay to do anything against God's word.

I mean, we can't stop people. Of course not. We don't have the power to do that and we are not to not love sinners. We love them. We are to love them the way God tells us to love them and the way that he offers his love to sinners. We are all sinners, right? If we all pursued what we want all the time, it would just be disaster. But God knows how he made us. His word is clear. And so loving someone means you speak the truth. You say, "Listen, I know you feel these desires so intensely, I know that you've allowed this connection to happen to you and this other woman, and you think she makes you happy, and I'm not arguing with your experience, but I am telling you that you cannot ignore God's word without experiencing his discipline. If you are his, he will discipline you. And if you're not his, and the fact that you are not listening to the clear reproof of Scripture makes me very concerned that you may not genuinely be a follower of Jesus Christ."

So I had to say those things, those were loving things. Now, when I did that, I was pursuing peace. It resulted in a conflict but I was pursuing peace. It would not have been peace to say, "Go ahead. Hey, go with God's blessing. Keep coming to church. Bring your new wife to church." That happens in a lot of places. That would have been doing what Jeremiah, God through Jeremiah said about the false prophets in Jeremiah's day, "Woe to them who say peace, peace when there is no peace." God is a God of peace, but his peace comes with his truth and his blessing and his grace, and the wonderful thing is when you talk to someone like that, you say, "Listen, we all have desires but we through Christ and the cross, we can crucify those. He will give you the power to do what he wants you to do. I'm going to help you walk in truth. Let's take the steps together. God hasn't called you to do something he won't enable you to do." It's the wonder of the God we serve, just like Ted was saying, he doesn't just say like the normal employer, "I want to cast my burdens on you." No, he says, "Cast your burdens on me." When he says, "I want you to live like this," he will enable you to live like that through the power of the cross, the resurrection and the Gospel.

But peace is not peace at any cost but if you love God, you're going to love your neighbor. If you truly love God, you're going to love your neighbor. That's what those two commandments, Jesus says, "What is the greatest commandment?" he's asked. He says, "The greatest commandment is love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength." And then he adds a bonus in. The guy didn't ask him about the top two commandments. He said, "What is the greatest commandment?" Jesus said that and he said, "The second is like unto it." The second, in essence, flows right from it, right behind it. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength," and the second which flows right after it is, "love your neighbor as yourself." If you get those two things right, you get the whole law right. That's all that you have to do: love God with everything you are and love your neighbor as yourself.

So how can you say you love God with everything you are and not love your neighbor as yourself? That's what the Scripture is saying, and James is saying there is no way to possess true wisdom and not have a growing sense, now we are all in process. We are all learning. We are all dealing with our sin nature every day, but there should be progress being made where we are becoming more and more peacemakers and we are willing to clean up the relational issues that we have. We are willing to confess our sins when we sin against our brother and our sister. We are willing to forgive because of what we have been forgiven.

So that's the outward evidence. Are you a peacemaker? Look at your relationships, are you a peacemaker? Not a peace-faker. And are you sowing peace? That's the outward evidence of wisdom. The second point is the clear progression of wisdom. The clear progression of wisdom. He uses eight terms, eight subpoints on this one. We're going to go through them each quickly. He says, "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy, and then righteousness is your harvest." So there is this progression that he lays out.

Wisdom, the picture is wisdom is like a plant growing. In fact, I think that's part of, you know, he's using words that are connoting that mental picture. He uses the word "fruit" twice. Verse 17, full of mercy and good fruits; verse 18, and the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace. So fruits there twice. Sowing, that's actually sowing seeds, and you are reaping a harvest of righteousness. You see, so it's a progress. He's like showing that you sow and you are reaping and it also is there in that, I mentioned this a couple of weeks ago or last week, the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable. The idea is you first start with this and then this comes and so the idea is he's like picturing you watching a plant grow.

How do you recognize true wisdom? It's like looking at a plant. You know how you have something growing in your yard, have you ever had the things, "I don't know if that's a weed or if that is something we planted." You're really cleaning up after a mess for a while and, "I'm not sure." Maybe you haven't had that problem. I have had that experience. So is this something that's supposed to be there or not? Well, you kind of

look at it and you examine, or even differently than that, have you ever had like a sapling growing in your yard and maybe it's right near a dogwood and you think, "Maybe it's a dogwood tree." If it's a pine tree or a poplar tree or, you know if it's a pine tree. If it's an oak tree or a poplar tree, I don't want it. But if it's a dogwood tree, I want it. Well, how do you know? Well, you watch it grow and then when you finally get a leaf, then you've got almost certainty at this point because an oak leaf looks one way, and a dogwood leaf looks another, and a poplar tree looks another. So he's saying basically, "Watch this grow up. This is how wisdom grows up into this beautiful peacemaking character."

You start with being pure. You are seeking to be right with God. When you know something, you take knowledge and it's not just about God, it's of God. You want to know the living God. You want to love the living God. So that's pure, then peaceable. You are disposed to peace. In fact, that's the idea of this word. It means to be, some translations say peace-loving, but it could be peaceful. But it has the idea of being ready for peace. First pure, then you become ready for peace. Because you are loving God, you're just ready for peace. I want to be at peace with my brothers because I'm at peace with God and God is the God of peace. I don't want to be in unnecessary conflict because I want the kind of harmony that God is, and that God has.

Next, this is what wisdom looks like: you are gentle. This word is different than the word translated "gentle" in verse 13, gentleness. Back in verse 13, I said we really use that word, it would be better translated meekness. That's a certain Greek word, *praytes*, and that word means meekness, but this is a different word for gentle. They are both translated in the NASB with the word "gentle or gentleness," but they are two different Greek words. This Greek word, peaceable, gentle, in verse 17, really means to be kind; to be tolerant; to be considerate; to be thoughtful; to be lenient and yielding. So as you are walking with God, you are learning truth about God, you are really applying it to true wisdom, what happens is you become disposed to peace and you become more gentle and thoughtful and considerate and lenient. You listen. You don't quickly react. You don't quickly take offense. There is a different character being formed because wisdom, truly understanding who God is, truly understanding what he wants from us, what he has done for us, changes the way we live.

And the progression continues. The next word in the NASB is "reasonable." The ESV translates it "open to reason." If you have the NIV it says "submissive." This Greek word literally comes from two words joined together. The first word means "good or well," and the second word means "to persuade." So it means like "rightly persuadable." You know, you could be persuadable in a wrong way. You can be persuaded to do evil. This is good, sort of a goodly persuadability. You know, well persuadable. That's why it says reasonable because it doesn't sound so good well persuadable, does it?

Well, the idea is you are open to reason; that you can be reasoned with. You are willing to really consider another viewpoint. Now not about the essentials of the faith. No. Not about black and white issues in Scripture, but everything else. There is a sense in which you are willing to be reasoned with. You are willing to listen. "I really want to understand where you are coming from." A person like that has true wisdom. A person who jumps to

conclusions and dismisses people's opinions and their ideas quickly, is not walking in true wisdom. They are the ones that have selfish ambitions, jealousy. They are taking offense at everything because they think someone is trying to take their position. They have big toes. They are easily offended. That's a great analogy, you think if you have big toes that are sticking out on the table, people just step on your toes all the time. You're walking around, and your toes are so big nobody can help but step on them. Well, that is a picture of an attitude of heart that is so concerned with self, that is so self-focused, that is so selfishly ambitious, so jealous that, "I'm easily offended."

Wisdom is not like that. Wisdom is loving like we see in 1 Corinthians 13, love hardly notices when others do it wrong. True wisdom that sees God for who he is, that sees myself in a relationship to him, he saved me in spite of the wicked sinner I am, in spite of all the things that I have done against him, the way I hated him and wanted to live for myself and he saved me and on a daily basis I find myself still being appalled at how little I think of him, how I should think of him more and love him more, and yet here he is loving me because of Christ. When I see myself that way, you see, when I see myself wisely, when I apply that truth to my life, myself, that's wisdom. Suddenly when you offend me, I see it in right proportion.

Do you see that? Your offense against me, I used to would have taken as huge but now when I compare it to what I have done to God, it changes everything and then when I add some other things that I've learned, that God is sovereign over everything, that not anything happens in the universe apart from his will, then even your offending me, even you stepping on me in this area right now, even if you are sinning 100% and I'm not, which the odds aren't that great of that particular percentage happening, maybe 95, maybe 90, but anyway. Even if you are sinning against me right now, God has brought this into my life to do some work in my heart and as I see myself start to get angry, I go to the cross and, "Wait a minute, I can't respond like this. Look at me. Here I am taking offense in my heart," but I'm catching it before I say anything because I'm living in wisdom and I'm dying to it and I'm saying, "Lord, help me listen. Help me be patient and kind." And then suddenly wisdom is being applied and I am acting like this. That's what God wants for all of us who love Christ, to look like this: peaceable, gentle, reasonable. This means willing to yield on nonessentials. There is a disposition to be yielding.

Now, there is a place where you can be overly yielding but you have to balance that. But if something is really important to you and it's not essential, though, you are really willing to start listening and say, "Maybe we can do it differently." That's wisdom. You see, wisdom puts everything in its proper place. You get the first thing first, you get God where he needs to be, and you start working out from his word and everything starts to fall into place appropriately. That's what we're striving for.

Now the next thing is "full of mercy." The fifth point. So I didn't really give you my subpoints. A: pure. B: peaceable. We went through those real quickly. C was gentle. D was reasonable. E is full of mercy and good fruits. The fifth point is: full of mercy and good fruits. So as wisdom is applying itself and we are becoming more open and reasonable, now that we've stopped reacting and protecting self, someone comes to us

with an issue, like I said, we are offended, maybe they are saying something harsh, they are being unkind and we are dying to our own desire to retaliate and we are asking the Lord to help us see it and we are being reasonable, open, full of mercy, suddenly we now are able to see their need. This is when wisdom is being just gloriously revealed. Now I'm seeing this other brother or sister's hurt. Their woundedness. And my heart is moved with mercy and compassion to them.

Full of mercy. The word "full" means "filled to overflowing." Full of mercy and mercy is that attribute of God wherein he looks upon misery, human misery and suffering, he looks upon it, even self-inflicted misery, and his heart is moved to alleviate that suffering. That's the mercy of God. As Paul says in talking about the wonder of our salvation, the riches of God's mercy, because of the riches of his mercy and the love with which he loved us while we were yet dead in our sins, think about that, we were dead in our sins. We had sinned against God and we were running away from God, we were hating God, we were loving ourselves, loving pleasure, loving everything but him, not giving him the time of day. We were dead in our sins really deserving his holy wrath but because he was full of mercy and love, he made us alive together in Christ, with Christ, for by grace you have been saved. His heart of mercy moved him to action to alleviate our suffering.

So what James is saying is when you are relating to God rightly, that mercy becomes a part of your heart. And I love it, he says "full of mercy and good fruits." He puts that together. I think it's really just one subpoint. It's full of mercy and good fruits. If your heart is full of mercy, it can't help but result in action. You can't be merciful and not act. Mercy acts. It moves toward that person and, therefore, that's the good fruit. Mercy leads to action so that you see the person's heart and suddenly instead of saying, "Hey, why are you coming after me like that? What have I done to you?" Do you see how defensive that is? You're saying, "What's going on? This isn't like you to talk like that. What's happening? What's going on in your heart? Help me understand what's happening." You are really caring about the person, really going out of your heart to meet their need. That's what he's saying, full of mercy and good fruits.

Then he adds the sixth subpoint, F: unwavering. Literally without partiality would be a better translation. It means without prejudice. It's the same word used in James 2:4 about when he was talking about prejudice, prejudging believers or people that come into the church based on the way they look and the way they dress, external appearances, don't be like that, he says in James 2. The same word, that true wisdom is impartial. It's not a respecter of persons. You treat everyone the same. This is what's going to happen as you are growing up in wisdom, these character qualities are growing up and you're becoming less and less prejudiced. More and more you see people the same all the way across the board. Every one of us is a child or daughter of Adam, every single one of us. We are all sinners and so we see each other that way and no matter what the sin you struggle with, like I said earlier, you're talking to someone who may have a lifestyle that is so radically different and so far from where you are, but you know that they are just another human being just like you and there but for the grace of God would you be. So there is kindness in the heart. It speaks truth, but it does so in love and mercy. Without partiality.

The seventh subpoint, G, would be without hypocrisy. It's not an act. It's not people pleasing. It's not that we show these things out of a desire to look a certain way, to convey an image. No, it's unfeigned. It's not fake. It's genuine. This is what mercy, this is what wisdom looks like as it grows up into the full plant. This is when you are looking at the leaf of the tree. Remember the dogwood tree. This is now a dogwood, you know. There is no hypocrisy, no partiality. There is fullness of mercy and good fruits. Now, none of us is going to be perfectly that way but is our life moving in that direction? Then if it is, you can say, "I'm progressing in wisdom by God's grace." Give him the glory. What do you have that you didn't receive? Don't be proud. You're going to undo the whole thing if you start doing that. But if you think you're wise and you look around you and you see broken relationships and you see an unwillingness to make things right, James says stop deceiving yourself. Instead, pursue true wisdom.

And the eighth subpoint is a fruit of righteousness. You're going to have a harvest of all kinds of righteousness. Because you are dealing with your heart issues and these attitudes are changing, you're going to be doing more and more godly things. They're just going to become even more prevalent in your life.

He says that's what true wisdom looks like. You want a character sketch of true wisdom, we just saw it in those verses. Now, if you don't have that, if you realize, "I think I've been overestimating my understanding of the things of God," what do you do? Well, you go to Jesus Christ. That's what we need to do. No matter where we are, the answer is always go to Jesus. God has given him to us. The Christian faith is not a religion, it's not a set of ideological beliefs. I mean, it is that, it's not merely that. It's much more than that. It's a relationship with a person. It's a relationship with the eternal Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So you say, "I believe I'm a believer but I'm not walking the way I need to, and I am concerned about that." Well, go to Jesus and talk about this with him. Pursue him in love. Go to the Gospel and look at the wonder of what he has done for you. If you are unkind and you're not pursuing peace, you're not reflecting enough on the fact that he has made peace with you and you go back to the Gospel and you confess your sins to other believers. Some of us need to look around us, we need to go to our family members and say, "I'm sorry. I've been living in a way that is so ungodly and so unwise." And how offensive it must be when we do that when we are even professing wisdom. And I say this to my own shame, my own life and thinking about the ways that I have missed the mark even while preaching on Sunday as a pastor at times in our married life where we were struggling, and it was because of me, and how hard it was for Patti, for my kids to take, "He thinks he's wise." They didn't know this passage maybe. They may have probably read it, but they hadn't worked on it like we have now, but they knew intrinsically, "This is not right. Something is not right." But God is a God of grace and if you will go to Jesus Christ, he will help you. He is helping me, and we can all find in him true wisdom. He has been made to us, as Paul says in Corinthians, he has been made to us wisdom from God. Do you want wisdom? You need Jesus.

You say, "I know Jesus." Well, you need more of Jesus. You don't know Jesus, you need Jesus. Go to him today. He's done everything necessary to make you right with him. He came into the world to save sinners like us. He lived a perfect life, died an amazing atoning death paying for our sins, bearing our sins in his body on the cross, experiencing the wrath of God for every ugly thing that everyone who would ever believe in him has done. He experienced the wrath for us. There remains no more need for a sacrifice for sin. It's all taken out of the way. His next-to-last statement on the cross was, "It is finished." Then he said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." It is finished. It is paid in full. He has taken it out of the way.

Now go in the wonder of that. Think about your sin. Think about it is taken out of the way. Jesus has taken it away and now dwell on that. Meditate on that and watch how it begins to transform the way you treat others. It's always the Gospel. It's always loving Jesus. That's the Christian life and there is nothing more wonderful, nothing more delightful, nothing more beautiful than a person who is being transformed into this image by his grace because we are looking more and more like Jesus. When you say, "Follow me," as I said earlier, you evaluate your leaders and your teachers and when someone says, "Follow me as I follow Christ," we're supposed to say that one another. We should say that to our children, "Follow me as I follow Christ." One of the beautiful things is when they look at us and we are becoming more like Jesus. When you follow Christ, you're supposed to look more like him by his grace.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for the amazing gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. We stand in awe of you that you would find a way and you would have a desire to show mercy to people who did not deserve anything but your anger and judgment and wrath. And yet because of just the greatness of your mercy and the great love with which you loved us, you have made salvation a reality, made it available to any who come to you through Jesus Christ. Father, forgive us for living inconsistent lives. Those of us who know you and who realize this morning that we have not been living as we should, that we have not been walking in true wisdom, continue to search us, continue to expose areas of sin that need to be repented of, and help us at each point to really be broken over our sin, but help us to run to Jesus and to receive in him forgiveness and restoration and power to change. Father, we pray that we would look like this more and more and more, that each of us. For those of us that don't know you this morning, may you give them grace today to go directly to Jesus, to be reading the Gospels and to be crying out to Jesus to save them. And we thank you, Lord, that you promised that the one who comes to you, you in no means will cast out. You will never turn away a person who sincerely wants you. How gracious you are. We pray in your name. Amen.