

LIVING out LOUD

James

Studies in Practical Christianity

Session #6 The Way Wisdom Works

James Chapter 3 Verses 13-18

*“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.
Do what it says.” – James 1v 22*

Sladebrook Evangelical Church

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Introduction and Aim of this Teaching Series:

The book of James is often considered to be the most practical book in the Bible. Apart from the logical lessons of the Proverbs and, of course, the unavoidable challenges we find in the Sermon on the Mount that is probably true! As the half-brother of Jesus, James shoots from the hip; having witnessed firsthand what a life before God should be lived like, he speaks clearly with penetrating truths that leave little room to manoeuvre or excuse.

James wrote with divine insight that cannot be compromised. His epistle, written to scattered saints in need of encouragement, comes fresh upon each reading. Some books of the Bible require not only careful examination, but also careful interpretation, as different views can surface and political persuasions are formed. Not so with James. The challenge of this short book of 108 verses is not so much interpretation, but application! The meaning is all too clear and the challenge unequivocal. James' message throughout is clear: Practical Christian living reflects genuine faith that goes on to transform our lives. So says James, if you believe it, your life should show it!

The aim of this series is to highlight this teaching and the need to "Live it out Loud" personally and within our corporate context. James wrote to Jewish Christians facing all sorts of trials and who due to their heritage, were tempted to resort to the thankless task master of law keeping, rather than to Christ. James' message is clear: We are to aim for all that God intends us to be; not by merely verbalising a creed, or looking back to law, but by expressing a radical, counter cultural Christ-life that defies the wisdom and ways of this world. As a local church, we need to hear James' words again and heed their heart beat if we are to embrace all that Christ would have for us, both within the fellowship and as we reach out to those yet to see what genuine faith looks like: As God's people, may we learn to "Live out Loud" the truths we discover during the time we spend in the book of James.

LIVING out LOUD #6: Introduction

“Get wisdom, get understanding... wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom.” (Pr. 4v4 & v7) So speaks Solomon in one of his Proverbs. He describes wisdom as if it is the must-have product this and every year. The reader is exhorted to start searching, for here is something worth acquiring. Regardless of other brands of “wisdom” that vie for our attention, only the real thing will do. In Solomon’s eyes, only heavenly wisdom is authentic and worth pursuing. It is therefore considered the rarest of commodities worth coveting above all else. Wisdom is described like a woman worth attending to; if you treat her well, says Israel’s wisest king, *“... she will protect you; love her and she will watch over you.”* (Pr. 4v 6)

Old Testament wisdom was tantamount to “getting” God Himself: Acknowledging His Word and Way and trying to walk within them, resulted in sure steps and satisfying outcomes. According to James, Heavenly wisdom is still precious. It commends the salvation of its adherents, who seek to live by true faith. Wisdom charts a compelling course for all committed to following Christ; bringing blessings into their lives, sustaining them amidst the trials of life and reminding them of all that they have in Him.

At the beginning of his letter, James invited *“any of you...”* lacking in wisdom to ask *“God who gives generously to all...”* (1v5) He promotes not simply the acquisition of new, extra layers of knowledge, but an informed, authentic lifestyle that undeniably points to Jesus. For James, wisdom meant going God’s way, living for Christ in an expression of relational faith. “Living out loud” says James, means presenting and promoting Christ in our lives and to do that we need to “get” wisdom! In this most self-searching part of his letter, James calls us to examine our steps, see if we are walking in the narrow, but essential way of wisdom and remain committed to it.

James has already challenged us to guard our mouths, for what comes from them reveals their source (3v11-12). Yet we are not just called to steward our speech. In the same way, the fruit of our lives is the most accurate gauge as to whether we are truly following Christ or not. The Christ-life should characterise our conduct as well as our conversation. He paints a stark comparison, not only between salty or freshwater springs (v11), but between two kinds of wisdom and the walk they produce: The Spirit-fuelled step which comes from following heavenly wisdom (v17) follows a purposeful path, where the character of Christ is beautifully revealed, confirming the convictions of those who embrace it (v13). Whereas those wooed by worldly wisdom, betray a godless gait, characterised by disorderly steps and destruction (v15-16). In both cases, says James, it is not just what we say, but how we act that ultimately influences our direction and dedication to Christ.

The Way Wisdom Works

James compares two kinds of wisdom and the fruit they produce. Having already highlighted that words reflect the heart that motivates them, he now reminds us that the things which feed our minds also fuels our actions.

1. V13: Wisdom Working itself out: How wisdom changes your walk

Humility is the fruit of godly wisdom. When someone claims to follow Christ, it not only shows in knowledge, but in the good and godly life produced by wisdom.

2. V14-16: Wisdom Worming its way in: How worldly wisdom is worthless

Worldly wisdom is no wisdom at all. Self-serving and godless, it produces the unhealthy bi-products characteristic of spiritual decline and disorderly conduct.

3. V17-18: Wisdom Winging its way down: How wisdom from Heaven looks

Avoiding vague propositions, James earths his examples of what wisdom looks like in practical terms. Followers of Christ should strive to live in a similar way

LIVING out LOUD:

- *Describe wisdom. How is wisdom different from simply knowing a lot?*
- *Think of one of the wisest people you know. What characterises them?*
- *In what ways can we “get wisdom”?*
- *When did you last ask God for wisdom? What was happening at the time? Did you get it? How did it happen and how did things change?*
- *How does the world peddle its wisdom? (v15) Do you think at times you have been guilty of fallen for it?*
- *Do you harbour any bitterness or envy? (v14) How can this creep into church? How should we deal with this and prevent it from surfacing again?*
- *What do you think “a harvest of righteousness” is? (v18)*
- *Take some time to look back and evaluate your attitudes and actions over recent days. Do they convey Christ? What challenges them? What encourages them?*
- *Ask God to help you develop faithful fruit, consistent with your Christian claims. Think about how you can demonstrate some of the examples of wisdom James mentions here in the way you deal with people this week.*