

**James**  
**Wisdom from Hell vs. Wisdom from Heaven, Part 1**  
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It was two and half years ago that my family and I moved here to Texas. This week, I was thinking about the fact that as we were wrapping up things at Grace, they held a party for me: a kind of going away party. And one of the gifts they gave me was – ah, sort of tongue-in-cheek – was a book called *How to Speak Texan*. They wanted to prepare me for the cross-cultural experience that I was about to experience. Coming from Los Angeles to Texas is a bit of cultural whiplash, and one by the way, for which I am very grateful. But as I thought about that, I was reminded of the fact that cross cultural communication, true cross-cultural communication really is an extremely difficult thing.

In fact, I recently read some examples of international businesses trying to breach the great language divide and often not fairing very well. For example, when Kentucky Fried Chicken entered the Chinese market, they discovered that their slogan “Finger Lickin’ Good,” came out as “eat your fingers off.” When Pepsi entered the same market (Chinese) a few years ago, the translation of their slogan meant, “Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the grave.” Now there’s a soft drink worth drinking. In Tokyo, there was a car rental firm that understood they were going to get a lot of English speaking business, and so they translated a little helpful booklet about how traffic behaves there in Japan into English for their English-speaking customers. But it’s obvious that the person who translated it, English was not their first language. Because when they wanted to give instructions about how it was you were to use your horn there in Japan, this is how the booklet read: “When a passenger of foot heave in sight, toodle the horn. Trumpet him melodiously at first, but if he still obstacles your passage, tootle him with vigor.” Some of you did that even this week.

But my favorite was the dairy association; you know their huge success here in the States with their advertising campaign “Got Milk?” Well, it was so successful that it prompted them to expand their advertising to Mexico; however, it was soon brought to their attention that the Spanish translation, instead of “Got Milk?” read, “are you lactating?”

You know, as I thought about those slogans and the problems with communicating in a foreign language, I was reminded of the fact that there are times when the language of the Bible is a foreign language to us (even though it’s been translated into English), because it comes from a

certain culture and a certain background that is foreign to us. And so while the words are in English, comprehending their meaning and getting a feel for the richness that's there requires some work. Unlike what many urge us to do today, our job is not to bring the Bible into the twenty-first century. God chose to reveal His truth in the time period He chose to reveal it. Our job as Bible students is to go back into Bible times, understand through all the tools that are at our disposal what God intended to communicate in that culture, and then when we understand its meaning, we bring it into application and into life today. One example of a passage that I think is almost a foreign language to us is the last paragraph of James 3, the text to which we come today in our study of this magnificent book. Let me read it for you, James 3:13:

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. ... 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.

Obviously, the theme of this paragraph is wisdom: particularly two kinds of wisdom. One, we will learn, is the wisdom from heaven; the other is wisdom from hell. James wants us to reflect on a number of points concerning these two opposite kinds of wisdom. He begins his paragraph with a common biblical attention getting device, and one that's popular among good speakers and writers of all kinds, and that is: with a rhetorical question. And the question in verse 13 introduces us to the first point that we really need to grasp in order to understand this paragraph. We're really today going to look more at the background. We're going to try to immerse ourselves into the world of James so that we can understand this paragraph in the weeks ahead.

The first point that he introduces us here to in this question is this: the categorical priority of Godly wisdom. The priority, the great importance and priority of Godly wisdom. Look at verse 13 again, "Who among you is wise and understanding?" Before we can unpack the rest of James' comments and the rest of the paragraph, we have to back up for a few minutes and understand the culture, understand the mindset from which these words come. Because for most twenty-first century Christians, just hearing the word "wisdom" brings a yawn and an attitude of indifference, but beneath this question lies two huge presuppositions. One of those presuppositions is that wisdom is absolutely crucial in the Christian life and experience, and the

second presupposition is that it is ultimately desirable, that all of us should long for this skill that's called wisdom. You see this is not a peripheral issue to James. Wisdom is at the heart of our faith.

Now remember that James was raised in a Godly Jewish home. He was taught by Joseph until Joseph's death. Best we can determine, Joseph died shortly after the visit to the temple when Jesus was twelve. It would have then been Jesus' responsibility as the oldest brother, the oldest man now in the family after the death of Joseph, to teach the Scriptures to the rest of His family, including this next youngest brother James. So, James' life was absolutely immersed in the Old Testament, in the Hebrew Scriptures. Certainly, our Lord was the perfect teacher. He fulfilled those words in Deuteronomy 6: speak of the words of God when you get up, and when you lie down, when you walk by the way. And so, James had a life and a heart that was permeated by an understanding of the Old Testament Scripture. And one of the greatest goals and the highest ideals that is held up in those Scriptures is the attainment of wisdom. It was one of the highest aspirations of the ancient world. It's not a surprise that James himself, because he was so immersed in it, is called the wisdom literature of the New Testament.

Wisdom literature, as it's often called, has an ancient tradition. In fact, secular wisdom literature goes back six hundred years before Abraham. There're existing documents dating to 2700 B.C., but it reached its zenith, (this emphasis on wisdom) it reached its apex, its highpoint, during the life of Solomon in Israel. You remember in 1 Kings 3, Solomon asked God to give him a discerning heart, to give him wisdom, and God was pleased with that request, and He lavished wisdom upon him. Chapter 4 says, gave him "breath of mind like the sand that is on the seashore." No one, God Himself says, has ever been as wise as Solomon (apart from our Lord Jesus Christ). He was about twenty years old at the time, and God gave him this great wisdom. He took that wisdom then, and Solomon collected for us what we call the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. He wrote three of the five books that we call Wisdom Literature. He wrote Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. But together, think about it for a moment, there are five books in our Bible specifically devoted to teaching us Godly wisdom; and when you survey those books, as I did this week, you find that wisdom makes some amazing promises.

We're told that wisdom will confer upon us some amazing things, some amazing benefits. For example, wisdom protects and delivers us from all kinds of troubles, Proverbs 2:8. Wisdom helps us master every kind of difficulty that we might face in life, Ecclesiastes 8:5. Wisdom, Proverbs 13:14, rescues us from things that would destroy us. Proverbs 24:3, wisdom achieves lasting results. Ecclesiastes 9:11, wisdom brings success with it. Proverbs 3:35, wisdom

bestows honor. It brings blessing, according to Proverbs 12:18. And when you look at the scope of the wisdom literature, and specifically when you look at Proverbs 3, as we'll do in a few moments, you discover that wisdom pleases God. It invites the favor of God on the life of the one who possess it. That's why you read passages like this in Proverbs 16:16, "How much better it is to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen above silver." Turn over to Proverbs 3. Listen to how Solomon extols wisdom. Proverbs 3:13,

How blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding.  
For her profit is better than the profit of silver And her gain better than fine gold.  
She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her.

Listen, Solomon was one of the wealthiest, if not the wealthiest man in the world at that time. So he knew what it was to have wealth. And he knew what it was to have wisdom. He had wisdom more than any other man, and he says when I compare the two, let me tell you: I have them both, and if I had to give up one there's not even a question, I'd give up the wealth. In fact, he says there in verse 15, "nothing you desire." Think for a moment about the one thing you would ask God if He gave you a chance to fulfill one request. Solomon says, if you would ask for anything but wisdom, then you're dead wrong; nothing you desire compares with her. Verse 16,

Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast.

But without question, the highest praise that Solomon gives to this virtue of wisdom is in chapter 8. Turn over just a few pages to Proverbs 8. Here is the highest praise of Godly wisdom. This entire chapter is an ode to wisdom. In verses 1-5, Solomon lays out the reality that wisdom is for everyone. He says listen, it's in the market place, verses 2 and 3. She calls out, verse 4, to all men. He personifies wisdom here and he says, wisdom says "my voice is to the sons of men," and it doesn't matter where you find yourself, even if you're the most naive. "Naive," the Hebrew word literally means "wide open." It means you are swayed by the latest person or idea to come along. If you're *wide open* you can understand prudence. If you're a *fool*, then you can still understand me and understand wisdom. In verses 6-13, Solomon tell us (as he personifies wisdom) that wisdom produces right conduct, that wisdom and Godliness are synonyms. In verses 14-21, he explains that wisdom is the key to all success in life. Look at verse 14:

"Council is mine and sound wisdom; I am understanding, power is mine. By me

wisdom kings reign, and rulers decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, all who judge rightly. I love those who love me; and those who diligently seek me will find me. Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness.”

He’s not talking just about the sort of health, wealth, prosperity gospel here. He’s saying, I’m talking about enduring wealth, even the wealth that is righteousness. Verse 19,

“My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold, and my yield *better* than [the] choicest silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, In the midst of the paths of justice, to endow those who love me with wealth, that I may fill their treasuries.”

And he’s just talked about righteousness. Again, the point here is not physical wealth, although that sometimes comes with wisdom as well, but not always. The point is, there is a wealth of Godliness. In verse 22, down through verse 31, he reminds us that wisdom was the key principle behind the act of creation. When God created, He used wisdom; and if God needed wisdom to create the world, then we need wisdom to live in this world.

And then he comes in verse 32, to the climax of the entire chapter. Here he tells us that wisdom is the most important thing in all of life, and he calls us to a decision.

“Now therefore, *O* sons, listen to me, for blessed are they who keep my ways. Heed instruction and be wise, and don’t neglect *it*. [Pursue wisdom.] Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at my doorposts eager to get wisdom. For he who finds me finds life, and obtains favor from the Lord. But he who sins against me injures himself; all those who hate me love their own death.”

Solomon says, I want you to understand the priority of love. There’s not a single thing in life that you should desire more than wisdom.

You say, well that’s fine for Solomon, that’s fine for the Old Testament, but what about the New Testament? Does it ring the same call to pursue wisdom? Absolutely! We open the New Testament being told in Luke 2:52, that Jesus, as He grew, one of the most important things to understand about Him as a human being was that He increased “in wisdom.” When you come to Acts 6:3, even those who were called upon to serve tables, to serve the widows in the church in Jerusalem, were required to be full “of wisdom”. In Acts 6:10, Stephen spoke to the Scribes and

Pharisees, and we're told that they were unable to refute the wisdom with which He spoke. You see, wisdom is required to serve God in the most menial tasks, and wisdom is required to handle God's Word and speak it accurately.

In Romans 16:19, Paul says I want you to be wise in all that's good. This is to all of us as believers. We are to be wise: we are to have wisdom in everything that's good and right and holy. Colossians 1:28, "We proclaim ... [Christ], admonishing every man and teaching every man and we do this ministry with all wisdom...." Again, stressing the fact that a teaching ministry requires the wisdom of God.

But turn to Ephesians 5. Let me show you Paul's application of this on a wider front. Ephesians 5. He's just been speaking about the fact that we're not to participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, we're not to be living like the people around us live. Verse 15, he says, "Therefore be careful how you walk." In biblical language, your walk describes your pattern of behavior: how you act, your lifestyle. He says, be extra careful how you live, what your lifestyle looks like. And how is it that we should walk? "Not as unwise men but as wise." He says your walk as a Christian, your lifestyle, your behavior, the things that characterize you, should be characterized by wisdom. In Colossians 4:5, "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders." Wisdom is absolutely essential not only in the Old Testament but also in the New.

Now let me ask you, is wisdom this kind of priority to you? Is this how you think of wisdom? Do you consider wisdom to be better than all earthly wealth? than gold, and silver, and precious stones? Now for a moment forget you're in church, and that the right answer here is *yes*; and ask yourself really, truly, do you consider wisdom to be more important than success in your job? than the accumulation of wealth here? If you had to choose between truly being wealthy here and having wisdom, which would you choose? Solomon says I've had both, and let me tell you, there's nothing you desire that can compare with wisdom. Is this a categorical priority to you? Is this the great priority of your life? as it obviously is to God. Do you really understand that nothing in life is more important than Godly wisdom?

Now that raises an obvious and important question. What exactly is this wisdom? So, let's examine together a second issue that we need to understand to get the background here: not only the categorical priority of godly wisdom but the biblical definition of godly wisdom. Back in James 3:13, James introduces us to the definition by the words that he uses: "Who ... is wise and understanding?" The word "wise," is a word from which we get the name "Sophia". You recognize that. If you know any Greek words at all, you understand that "sophia" was the

classical Greek word for “wisdom”. The Greeks loved and pursued “sophia”. In fact, Socrates, the greatest of the Greek philosophers, at least felt by many, (He lived and died, actually died at about four hundred B.C.) and Socrates said don’t call me sophia; don’t say that I have sophia; don’t call me sophras because that would be blasphemous; instead, simply call me a *lover* of sophia. Pursuing sophia, they loved it. They loved wisdom, and they passed along that love of wisdom to us. You understand this if you’ve ever been to college. You remember a course or two that you took in college in philosophy. Well our English word “philosophy”, is actually a compound Greek word made up of the word “phileo,” “to love” and “sophia,” “wisdom”. Philosophy simply means “a love of wisdom”.

And our culture is still dramatically influenced by the mindset of Greek wisdom, and we benefit from that as a culture; and yet as believers, listen carefully, it is a serious problem because Greek wisdom and biblical or Hebrew wisdom are vastly different. Let me give you a few points of comparison. Greek wisdom is man centered: man is the ideal, and he should grow up into this almost god himself. In Hebrew mindset wisdom is God centered: true wisdom centers on God. In the Greek mind, wisdom is an academic kind of knowledge. In the Hebrew mind, it is a practical ability or skill. Greek wisdom affects primarily your mind. Hebrew wisdom affects your entire being. Greek wisdom may produce absolutely no change in your life whatsoever. You can be wise in the Greek sense and still be unaffected in your life by it. Hebrew wisdom on the other hand, will show itself, will always display itself, in your behavior and your conduct.

Now, much of western education is based on the Greek model of wisdom. What matters most, what’s most important is what you know, what you’re an expert in, not necessarily what you yourself do with that knowledge. One of the most graphic illustrations I’ve seen of this recently was several months ago. I read an article by a doctor who’s a specialist in the care of the heart, and he made some good points. He was asked, you know, how it was that we should care for our hearts. And I was interested in that because there’s a history of heart disease in my family, and he made some good points, some you would expect, nothing really new in the article. For example, one of the leading issues was exercise. But then the reporter (unlike most interviewers) the reporter asked him about his own habits, and the doctor had to admit that he was just too busy to exercise and that he didn’t. That’s a boon to some of us. Yet this man was being quoted as an expert. Why? Because of his academic knowledge. He understands the field and how it functions. But biblical or Hebrew wisdom isn’t merely an accumulation of facts, it is the application of what you know to real life. So, you can see why it’s crucial that as we frame a definition, we build it from the Bible and not from the mindset that we come to the Bible with.

Where do we start to build a definition of wisdom? Well let's start with God, which is where the Old Testament starts. It's clear that whatever our wisdom is, it is simply a reflection of something that is most true of God. God is wise; God has true wisdom. H.B. Smith defined God's wisdom this way (I love this): "Wisdom is that attribute of God, whereby He produces the best possible results with the best possible means." The reason I like that is we often think of God as trying to produce the best possible results in our lives, right? Where the problem comes, is really believing that the path He's taking us down to get to that result is really the best. But the fact that God is wise means that both the ends He has in mind and the means He's using to get us there, however difficult they may be, are His best.

We see God's wisdom displayed on several stages in Scripture. We see His wisdom displayed on the stage of creation. Psalm 104:24: "O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You ... made them all." God's wisdom is displayed wherever you look in His creation. God's wisdom is also displayed on the stage of salvation, of redemption. After Paul unfolds the great doctrines of salvation in Romans 1 through 11, those magnificent chapters. After he completes that study, he comes at the end of Romans 11 to these magnificent words: "O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" God put Himself and His wisdom on display in salvation. Only God could have come up with the plan that we read of in the New Testament. God also puts Himself on display in providence (His wisdom). Romans 8:28, is the most familiar: "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God ... who are the called according to His purpose." Godly wisdom then, is a reflection of God Himself. Although we can never be wise to the same degree as God, the Scripture says that we can enjoy the same *kind* of wisdom that God displays.

So, when we think about us, what exactly is wisdom for us? Well, the Hebrew word that James borrows here, in James 3 this Hebrew word is a word that literally means "skill." In fact, in the history of the Old Testament, in the history of Israel as it flows through the Old Testament, the word "wisdom" is used most often of the technical kinds of skills, like the skill of a carpenter, the skill of a metal worker, the skill of a weaver. You can see that in Exodus 31:3-4. And when you come to the rest of the Old Testament, the word still retains this basic idea of skill; but instead of a skill in metal working or a skill with wood, it refers to a skill in living: a skill in living in the affairs of life in a way that pleases God, a very practical skill in managing life. To be wise means that you can manage life well, by, like God, choosing the best goals and selecting the best means to accomplish those goals. And, of course, at the very center of a life of wisdom is God Himself.



Godly wisdom, listen carefully, Godly wisdom is the practical ability or skill to live in the affairs of life, including in our relationship with God in a way that pleases Him. Ultimately though, listen carefully, biblical wisdom is centered on God. This is absolutely foundational to the concept of wisdom. Nowhere in Scripture are unbelievers said to have this kind of wisdom. They can be knowledgeable. They can be more knowledgeable than we are, but they're not biblically wise apart from God. Because to truly have the skill for living in God's world means that we have to be rightly related to Him. So, let's put together a short definition of wisdom. Wisdom, biblical wisdom for us consists of three basic elements.

Number one: fearing God. Proverbs 1:7: "The fear of the Lord is beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." Throughout the wisdom literature you see this repeated with different synonyms, but the bottom line is: the fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of wisdom. What does it mean by "beginning"? Does it mean it's a stage early on, and then you pass, and you don't go back to? No. By "beginning of wisdom," it means that fearing God is the first and controlling principle in wisdom. In other words, biblical wisdom must be Theocentric: it must be God centered. If you're going to be wise as far as God is concerned, then your life must be centered on God: you must respect Him, you must honor Him as God, you must fall down and recognize Him as the true Sovereign of the universe. And until that happens, you cannot be wise.

There's a second basic element: not only fearing God but understanding God's ways. Not only do we fear God, do we honor Him as God, do we respect Him, do we hold Him in the position of God in our minds and in our lives, but we understand Him, we understand His ways. Of course, the word "ways" in the Old Testament refers to predictable patterns of behavior: habits if you will. We understand the habits of God, His predictable patterns of behavior. We call them His attributes: this is how God is, this is how He acts. In Psalm 107:43, "Who is wise? Let him give heed to these things, and consider the lovingkindnesses of the Lord." The Psalmist says, if you're wise, you're going to think about what's true of God and how He responds to us: His way, His path. In Hosea 14:9, "Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them. For the ways of the Lord are right." To be wise is to understand God as He's revealed Himself in Scripture.

But there's a third basic element that sort of draws these together and is the focus of the Old Testament wisdom. Not only does wisdom consist of fearing God and of understanding God's ways, but thirdly: having the practical skill to apply God's ways and God's Word to life. Having the practical skill to apply God's ways that we now understand, and God's Word to our own life. I quoted Hosea 14:9, a moment ago: "Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; *Whoever*

is discerning, let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right.” The next line says, “And the righteousness will walk in them....” The righteousness person, the wise person, not only understands God’s ways but walks in them. Psalm 111:10: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments.” But turn back to Proverbs 8. When we went through this passage just a few minutes ago, I skipped a section purposely. I want us to go back there now and see how this plays out. Proverbs 8, this great chapter praising wisdom. In the middle of the chapter from verses 6-13, Solomon tells us that biblical wisdom always produces the application of truth to life. Notice verse 6:

“Listen, for I will speak noble things, and the opening of my lips *will reveal* right things. For my mouth will utter truth.” [Now watch immediately how wisdom turns to life.] “And wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing crooked or perverted in them.”

In other words, immediately, wisdom reflects itself in speaking the truth to us. And watch how it affects us, verse 9:

“They are all straightforward to him to understands, and right to those who find knowledge. Take my instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than choicest gold.”

Verse 12: “I, wisdom dwell with prudence, and I find knowledge *and* discretion. and here it is, verse 13, The fear of the LORD is to hate evil....” A person who’s wise (like wisdom itself) hates pride, arrogance, the evil way, and the perverted mouth. So, wisdom displays itself in wise behavior, in the right kind of life, in applying the Word of God and the way of God to my own life: that’s wisdom.

We’ve witnessed the categorical priority of biblical wisdom, the biblical definition of Godly wisdom; now, let’s briefly examine the practical acquisition of Godly wisdom. How do you get it? If it’s so important, if it’s so vital to my life as a believer, if it’s so important to God, how do I acquire it? Well ultimately, wisdom is a gift from God. Proverbs 2:6, says, “The Lord gives wisdom.” But according to the Scripture, there’re several ways God gives wisdom to us. He doesn’t just wave a sort of magic wand over us and make us suddenly wise. There are means (as is always true with God), there are means that He uses to make us wise. What are those means biblically? Well, there are four of them, very quickly.

Number one: first and foremost, God makes us wise through a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 1:30, says: “By ... God’s doing you were in Christ Jesus, [listen to this] who became to us [who are now in Christ] wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.” Now notice the order. Would you have put wisdom first in that list before righteousness? that is, justification and sanctification and redemption? (probably referring to our ultimate redemption when we stand before God, redeemed from the wrath of God in the future). Would you put wisdom first? In addition to that, the Greek construction makes wisdom not one of four things, but wisdom *includes* the other three. In other words, what you get at salvation can ultimately be called the wisdom of God; and that wisdom of God plays itself out in your justification, in your sanctification (the process of being made holy), and in your ultimate redemption. Colossians 2:3, “In ... Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom.” True wisdom from God’s perspective begins when a person puts his faith in Jesus Christ. J.I. Packer writes:

“Not until we have become humble and teachable, standing in awe of God ‘s holiness and sovereignty, acknowledging our own littleness, distrusting our own thoughts, and willing to have our minds turned upside down in Christ, can divine wisdom become ours.”

John Blanchard writes: “Only when we become God centered do our relationship to Christ, do we have our first experience of true wisdom.” You will never be wise from God’s perspective until you become a follower of His Son. In fact, God says if you are not a true disciple of His Son, you are a fool. Because what does it gain a man to have the whole world, and lose his own soul? You’ll never be wise from God’s perspective until you come to His Son.

But there’s a second way God gives us wisdom: and that’s through a thorough knowledge of His Word. Through a thorough knowledge of His Word. James, back in James 3:13, uses the word “understanding.” It’s a word that only occurs there in the New Testament, and it refers to the knowledge of an expert. It describes knowledge acquired through careful study and observation. The implication is that we learn God’s Word by careful study, and that makes us better qualified and equipped to live the Christian life. But there are other texts that speak to this much more directly. Listen to Psalm 19:7, speaking of the Word of God, “The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.” The Word of God makes people wise in God’s eyes. It makes them wise. Psalm 119:98, “Your commandments make me wise.” Proverbs 2:6 says, from God’s mouth comes wisdom.

In other words, from revelation, from what we have on the pages of Scriptures come wisdom to

us. God mediates wisdom to us, not magically, but through an understanding of His Word as we read it and study it. Second Timothy 3:15, Paul says: "... from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith ... [that] is in Christ Jesus." Listen, wisdom comes not only through coming to Christ, but through revelation, through the Word of God; and you will only become wise as you use your mind, and as you use the tools God has given you to really understand this book. Many Christians have lazy minds. John Blanchard writes:

"Every Christian has an inescapable responsibility to use whatever ability God has given him to appropriate spiritual truth. There has never been a time in the history of the world when God's people have had such readily available material to help them in their study of His Word. Boy, isn't that true. We have so much, but he goes on, he says Yet indolence, undisciplined, and laziness have made pygmies out of many who should be giants. God has given us all the written directions we will ever need on this earth in His infallible Word, and we will grow in wisdom only as we immerse ourselves in it and allow it's truth to permeate every part of our lives."

Do you believe that? Do you really believe that? Then let me ask you a question: how much time did you spend this last week learning the wisdom of God in His Word?

Number 3: we learn wisdom, God mediates wisdom to us, through the influence of wise companions. Proverbs 13:20, "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm." Listen, who are your friends? Who is it that you spend your time with? Would God say they're wise? Or from God's perspective are they fools? Don't think for a moment you can play with fire and not be burned, and Proverbs says, listen, if you hang around fools you're going to become like them. And one way that you can begin to grow in wisdom is to hang around people who have God's wisdom.

And finally: we gain God's wisdom through prayer. Ephesians 1:17, Paul says I pray that God may give you a spirit of wisdom in the knowledge of Him. Listen, I want you to gain God's wisdom; and I pray that God would open up His Word to let you see Him, to let you gain His wisdom. Colossians 1:9: "... we have not ceased to pray for you and ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of [God's] ... will [that is, that's revealed in the Bible, how?] in all spiritual wisdom." In other words, I'm praying that God would open up your understanding of the Word of God as you study it, as you read it. In James 1:5, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of

God.” (We studied that.) When you encounter trials, ask God for wisdom, and He gives to all. How does He give it? He doesn’t wave His wand over you. He does it through the other three means: He does it through coming to Christ; He does it through studying and coming to a through knowledge of His Word; He does it by hanging around the right people and being influenced by those who are Godly.

Now, that’s the background paragraph we want to examine in James; we’re ready to understand James’ language. We’re ready to speak his language when he speaks about wisdom, and that’s the biblical context in which the paragraph comes. And next week, Lord willing, we’ll look at it together, but before you pack up let me ask you a couple of questions.

Are you currently knowing what it means to have the wisdom of God in Christ? Do you know Christ? Has He become to you the wisdom of God? That the first step on this path to Godly wisdom, this bowing the knee to Jesus Christ as Lord. Are you pursuing wisdom and the knowledge of God by faithfully being in the Word of God? There are no magic wands folks; God gives you wisdom by a through knowledge of His Word. Who are your best friends? Are they people of Godly wisdom? people God would say are wise? Or are they fools from God’s perspective? And are you lifting up your voice for understanding in the words of Proverbs 2? Are you crying out in prayer for wisdom? Do you pray for wisdom from God? That’s how you get it, and there’s nothing you ever have wanted or will want that can be compared to Godly wisdom.

Let’s pray together.

Father, thank you for Your Word. Thank you for the reminder of how important wisdom is to You.

Father, I pray that You would help us to understand what it is to fear You, to understand Your ways, and then to apply Your ways and Your Word to our own lives. Father, give us the skill. Help us first of all to find it in Your Word. Help us to be diligent to study Your Word, and as we study, Lord, I pray that you would give us Your wisdom. Help us to hang around those people and to befriend those people that are wise in Your eyes. And Father, help us to consistently cry out to You to open up our eyes as we study Your Word, to understand Your wisdom.

Father, I pray for anyone here this morning who has not come to gain the path of wisdom. They haven’t taken the first step toward wisdom because they’ve never bowed the knee to Your Son. I

pray that today would be the day that You would bring them to Yourself; You would produce in their hearts a desire to know You, to fear You, to understand You, and to live lives that are in conformity to Your way and Your Word.

I pray it in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.