

“Wisdom”

James 3:13-4:8 & Mark 9:33b-37

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Prayer for Understanding Creator Spirit, who hovered over the waters at creation's birth, who descended in the form of a dove at Jesus' baptism, who was poured out under the signs of fire and wind at Pentecost: Come to us, open our hearts and minds, so that we may hear the Word of life and be renewed by your grace. Amen

If you were to sum up Godly wisdom in one word, what word would you choose?

Perhaps, peace, gratitude, coexistence, loving, harmonization, serving, reconciliation, inclusive, gentleness, cooperation, graciousness, mutuality.

James writes: **James 3:13-4:2A NLT** “If you are wise and understand God’s ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, do not cover up the truth with boasting and lying. For jealousy and selfishness are not God’s kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. Wisdom is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others.

Wisdom is without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. Wisdom is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. Wisdom shows no favoritism and is always sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness. What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don’t they come from the evil desires at war within you? You want what you do not have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you cannot get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them.”

Listen again to James from The Message paraphrase. **James 3:13-4:8 MSG** “Do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here is what you do: Live well, live wisely, live humbly. It is the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts. Mean-spirited ambition is not wisdom. Boasting that you are wise is not wisdom. Twisting the truth to make yourselves sound wise is not wisdom. It is the furthest thing from wisdom—it is animal cunning, devilish plotting. Whenever you are trying to look better than others or get the better of others, things fall apart and everyone ends up at the others’ throats. Real wisdom, God’s wisdom, begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. Wisdom is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, not hot one day and cold the next, not two-faced. You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honor. Get Serious. Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way, and fight for it deep inside yourselves. You lust for what you do not have and are willing to kill to get it. You want what is not yours and will risk violence to get your hands on it. You would not think of just asking God for it, would you? And why not? Because you know you would be asking for what you have no right to. You are spoiled children, each wanting your own way. You are cheating on God. If all you want is your own way, flirting with the world every chance you get, you end up enemies of God and God’s way. And do you suppose God does not care? The proverb has it that “God is a fiercely jealous lover.” And what God gives in love is far better than anything else you will find. It is common knowledge that “God goes against the willful proud; God gives grace to the willing humble.” So let God work God’s will in you. Yell a loud no to the Devil and watch the devil be scarce. Say a quiet yes to God and God will be there in no time. Quit dabbling in sin. Purify your inner life. Quit playing the field.”

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Scripture declares: “Whenever you are trying to look better than others or get the better of others, things fall apart and everyone ends up at the others’ throats. Real wisdom, God’s wisdom, begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. Wisdom is peace loving, gentle at all times, and

willing to yield to others. Wisdom is without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. Wisdom is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. Wisdom shows no favoritism and is always sincere.”

Today we might describe the teachings of James as zero-sum situations are destructive and Godly wisdom is striving for goodness for all. In zero-sum situations the fortunes of the participants are inversely related. If one side wins, the other side loses. One group's gain is the other's loss. In contrast, in non-zero-sum situations both sides experience gains. The desired outcome is a gain of more than zero for everyone. In zero-sum there are rich and poor. In non-zero-sum there is enough for all, because everyone shares.

A game is zero-sum when the only desire is winning. One side wins, the other loses. One side is joyous, the other side miserable. One side is celebrated, the other side is demonized, name called, and the enemy. A game is zero-sum when community is fractured. A game is non-zero-sum when winning is a focus, competition is intense, and the opponent is respected, valued, and appreciated. A game is non-zero-sum when both the winning side and losing side learn about themselves and are driven to enhanced performance. A game is non-zero-sum when community for everyone is built. I experienced this in seminary flag football. We prayed before the games for the safety of everyone and for everyone to have fun. The games were intense. Everyone wanted to win and there was no ill will toward anyone. I needed stitches after one game. After the games we gathered for prayer. We celebrated the winner and the good plays of the loser. Everyone enjoyed friendship, community, and fun. Everyone got exercise, enjoyed a post-game feast, and a few of us got to experience the free health care by the Princeton University health center. The sum was far above zero.

In a heated debate if one's sole focus is to be right, to win, then this is zero-sum destruction. Wisdom is seeking progress, listening, understanding opposing views, finding common ground, finding a way forward that benefits both sides. The conflict may remain intense and both sides adamant their option is better and **and** both sides value and appreciate the other and desire to stay in relationship and desire to find a mutually beneficial way forward. Usually when one wins a debate by crushing the other, there is no joy even for the winner because of the pain of the damaged relationship.

The same holds true in day-to-day interactions. An interaction can be zero-sum, one side has positive vibes the other negative vibes. A wise interaction is non-zero-sum, both sides experiencing positive vibes.

Destructive politics is win at all costs, spreading fear and hate. Wise politics is seeking the wellbeing of everyone, spreading peace and love.

Wisdom is communicated by the triune nature of God. Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer do not put each other down or claim their aspect of love is superior or fight with each other or say their way of loving is the only right way. Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer complement each other expanding love and goodness.

You can be wise, because God has given you a superpower, peace. Peace that enables you to bring life enhancing blessings for everyone from every interaction. God designed the cosmos to exist in peaceful harmony.

The gospel of Mark proclaims: **Mark 9:33b-37 “Jesus asked the disciples, “What were you discussing out on the road?” But they did not answer, because they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest. Jesus sat down, called the twelve disciples over and said, “Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else.” Then Jesus put a little child among them. Taking the child in his arms, Jesus said to them, “Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not only me but also God who sent me.”**

The disciples were operating in strictly zero-sum territory. They are only interested in winning and losing, who is the greatest and who is the least. Jesus offers them wisdom. Wisdom is serving everyone. Wisdom is serving the least, the outcast, the rejected. Jesus modeled this wisdom and yet the disciples still regressed back to selfish ambition. Jesus understood that love for all would be brought to earth not by seeking greatness for only self, rather by establishing each person, everyone, as great. Jesus invites us to be wise, to servanthood, to beyond zero-sum to win-win for everyone. Celebrating the redeeming grace of God that is make each person, even your most despised person, glorious. Every person reveals a facet of God's goodness, even that person that infuriates you. Wisdom Jesus explains is loving them and serving them. Jesus' wisdom explains that there will be no first and last, no winners and losers. All will be equal. All will be glorious. Jesus served in a way that did not elevate self above anyone. Jesus served to befriend everyone, to lift everyone out of hell to heaven, to weave everyone into a tapestry of life-giving relationships with all people and God. The question is

not "Who is the greatest?" rather "How can we cooperate with God's will to achieve the greatest good for everyone?"

When Jesus was fully human and fully God on earth, the least valued were children. You want to be wise, look around for the person who is least appreciated by our culture and serve them. You want to be wise, identify the person you dislike the most and serve them. In this silence, picture yourself serving someone who is challenging for you to serve. //silence// Wisdom is serving that person. If, you and I, the church, continue to grow in serving the least then peace will come.

President Theodore Roosevelt said: "Comparison is the thief of joy." Let go of comparing yourself to others. Let go of comparing any group, organization, church, and politic party to another. Let come serving everyone. Let go of comparing yourself to expectations. Let come being fully alive. Let go of comparing your services to another. Let come serving out of love, compassion, joy, and gratitude.

If you were to sum up Godly wisdom in one word, what word would you choose?

Listen again to the words of James: "**Whenever you are trying to look better than others or get the better of others, things fall apart and everyone ends up at the others' throats. Real wisdom, God's wisdom, begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. Wisdom is peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. Wisdom is without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. Wisdom is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. Wisdom shows no favoritism and is always sincere.**"

Amen