



James 3:13-18

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

Special Music: “Christ Our Wisdom”

Breathe Back Ministries

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkpA2Hbp6g>

A SOURCE OF WISDOM

Forrest Blankenship was retired for the most part. But he still liked to keep his hand in things about town. For years he had been the only handyman in Parable, working odd jobs that needed to be done that no one else seemed inclined to do. He knew it was time to let it all go, but there wasn't anyone ready to replace him. It wasn't that he needed the money. His father had left him a great deal of land in west Texas and the oil leases kept him more than comfortable. But he liked to work with his hands, helping people out with various maintenance needs, especially those who could not afford someone of a professional caliber. He would paint what needed to be painted, unclog things that were clogged, fix a switch or fan, repair a fence or gate. It didn't really matter what it was, he just wanted to stay busy. He just couldn't imagine himself sitting stone faced all day in a recliner watching the nonsense on the television.

Every morning, Forrest started his day with breakfast at Daisy's Diner. Since Daisy was a widow and her son Myron was so busy, Forrest often took care of the little annoying maintenance things to keep the restaurant running properly. On any given day, you could find him working on an appliance, replacing a window, or fixing a door. In return, he never paid for breakfast and Daisy kept him well fed. Since Matthew (Pastor Chuck's son from First Community Church) had come back to town, Forrest had let him help out, which allowed Forrest to slow down a little. So, most days, Matt would join him for breakfast to see what he was up to for the day.

Forrest would be turning 80 this year, but he didn't find it to be a detriment to the things he liked to do. He had messed up his leg in a traffic accident a few years back with made it a little difficult to climb ladders and carry anything too heavy. Doc Adams was always telling him that he should take better care of the leg, at least use a cane to get around to take some of the pressure off the knee. But like most of the people in Parable, Forrest was, I don't like to use the word, stubborn. But let's just say that he saw that cane as a mark against his pride. He knew he needed to use the cane, but he just couldn't bring himself to admit that he needed to use it. So, if there was climbing or heavy lifting to be done, he was glad that Matt was around to help him out.

Forrest always sat at the same sunny corner table at Daisy's. He liked the feel of the warm morning sun coming in through the windowpane. It was almost like his office. He didn't allow himself to be tied to a cell phone, so if people wanted to talk with him, they had to come to Daisy's. Office hours were 8 to 11 and no appointments were necessary. But there was a price. If you wanted to talk with Forrest, you had to buy him a cup of coffee. The coffee collection always went to the local thrift center to help those who were struggling. Everyone knew that Daisy gave him all the coffee he wanted for free, but Forrest felt this was a good way to keep people in touch with the community.

Of all the tools in his skillset that Forrest had at his disposal, the most needed one seemed to be his wisdom. He even looked the part of an old sage with his unkempt grey hair, steely blue eyes, and rivers of wrinkles baked into his skin by constant exposure to sunlight, which lent to the notion that here was a

man who had lived life to its fullest and had the experience and wisdom of an old soul. People would come to pluck nuggets of wisdom from him about every topic under the sun. “Why are my tomato plants turning yellow?” “What type of wood should I use to build a well house?” “What kind of oil should I use on my door hinges?” “If I need a loan, is it better to get a personal loan or borrow against my house?” “Mary Sue has quit talking to me. What should I do?” “Coyotes keep breaking into my chicken coop. What do you think I should do?” “Donna May keeps cutting school. How can I get her to understand that school is important?” There were no taboo subjects when talking to Forrest. Sometimes people even lined up to take their turn at jawing with him over the little things that were driving them crazy.

At one point, when the traffic was slow at the diner, Matt got his attention and asked him outright, “Forrest, how did you get to be so wise? You seem to have the answers for just about every question and problem. The people here in Parable respect you and look to you for solutions to their issues, and you always seem to have one.”

“There’s nothing special about me, Matt,” Forrest mumbled. “I’ve had a pretty good life, and God has blessed me with a great deal of common sense, just because I have faced most of these problems myself at some point. Nothing special about that.”

“Nothing special? What are you talking about. People are lining up to talk to you.”

“Now Matt. I didn’t ask them to come. It’s not like I hung out a shingle or anything. It’s kind of nice that they want to get my opinion on the things that seem to matter the most with them.” Forrest shook his head and then took a sip of his coffee. Coffee, which, by the way, was always black and never cold.

“But Forrest, don’t you know that people would be willing to pay to talk with you? And I’m not talking about coffee money.” Matt replied.

“Don’t be silly, Matt. Nobody would pay to talk to an old man like me. Besides, that would just cheapen the advice. Right now, I am their friend, and I prefer it that way. I don’t need their money and most of them don’t have much to begin with. I’m am happy when someone buys me a cup of joe. And Matt, let me tell you right out, wisdom can’t be bought. Just ask your dad. Nobody understands that better than a preacher. Wisdom comes from experience doled out by the grace of God. Solomon didn’t pay God to make him wise. Wisdom is a gift. Besides, I don’t really consider myself very wise. Just experienced.”

“Forrest, I don’t think you understand what I am trying to tell you.”

“Son, I know exactly what you are trying to tell me, and you are having a hard time hearing what I am trying to explain to you. Wisdom is not about handing out advice. Wisdom has to be learned. Wisdom comes from doing. Do you understand that? It’s not about spouting some mystical quip and expecting everyone to go ooo and ahhh.

“Well, not really,” Matt replied.

“Listen carefully, Matt. Do you think that all these people I help come here to listen to me because I speak pretty? Do you think that they would be happier if I used a few big words here and there? No. Mr. Johnson may come to me looking for advice on what kind of paint he needs for his house. Why is that? Well, it’s because I have painted my fair share of houses in my life. That’s why.

“Jackie Simpson may come to me asking about how deep to dig a hole for a fence post. She does that because I have dug more than my fair share of fence post holes. Taylor Baxtor may ask me about why her daughter is so anxious to get her ears pierced. Do you think for a minute that I am some kind of ear-piercing expert? No! But I have a daughter that went through the same thing.

“These are all things I have learned along the way in life. And yes, I have been blessed to have done a great many things. And there are a number of things that I haven’t done. I never give out advice on things in which I have no experience. Please don’t ever ask me about computers or cell phones. What little wisdom I have comes from being a doer, not a speaker, or advisor, or pastor. Are you beginning to understand?” Forrest took another sip of his coffee. He thought that the young man might be starting to get the message.

“So, what you are saying, Forrest, is that wisdom isn’t the goal, it’s the result?”

Forrest closed one eye and looked directly at Matt. “Son, throughout life we make choices, good and bad. Either way, God gives us wisdom lessons. We learn from our successes, but even more important, we learn from our mistakes.

When we follow God's path, we gain wisdom. When we fail to follow God's path, we gain wisdom. The lessons we learn may or may not be profitable, but they are always free if we take time to listen to what God says about our choices."

Forrest drained his coffee cup and said, "Times a wasting, Matt. Tina McGregor's wheelchair ramp isn't going to build itself. Let's go before it gets too hot. Wisdom awaits."

I was watching a reel on Facebook the other day that was an excerpt from the 2007 movie *Evan Almighty* where Morgan Freeman, playing God, says this:

"If someone prays for patience, you think God gives them patience? Or does he give them the opportunity to be patient? If he prayed for courage, does God give him courage, or does he give him opportunities to be courageous? If someone prayed for the family to be closer, do you think God zaps them with warm fuzzy feelings, or does he give them opportunities to love each other?"

I think this is a profound way of looking at how God helps us to grow, both in character and spiritually.

If you haven't noticed, 1st and 2nd Kings and 1st and 2nd Chronicles run parallel to each other, relating many of the same stories from two different perspectives. I always tell people that if they want to truly understand these four books, there is a certain wisdom to referencing common places and stories found in them. Sometimes the differences are profound. Sometimes they are inconsequential. But when we read both perspectives, it gives us a better picture, a more three-dimensional picture, than reading the books singularly. It's a lot like a police officer taking statements from multiple people who are witnesses to the same accident or an event.

The story of how Solomon receives wisdom is found in both 1 Kings chapter 3, and 2nd Chronicles 1. We have all heard the story of how Solomon has ascended to the throne of Israel after the passing of his father David. At Gibeon,

God comes to Solomon in his dreams and Solomon, wanting to be the best king that he can be for his people, asks God to grant him wisdom to rule over the Israelites. God is pleased with this and grants his request. And from that time on, people from all parts of the world come to Solomon's court to seek his advice on just about every subject under the sun.

I want us all to put on our thinking hats for a minute and relate this to our personal experiences. We have all prayed for things like patience, mercy, grace, and courage, as well as our personal relationships. Can any one of us say that after we have prayed a single prayer for any of these things, that we have noticed that we suddenly find ourselves patient, merciful, gracious, courageous, or that our relationships are better? Just because God snaps his fingers? Or do we begin to notice that we are suddenly more aware of opportunities in our lives to practice patience, mercy, grace, courage, or relationship resolution? It is important for us to understand this. If we ask God to help us grow as Christians, we don't suddenly know all we need to know to be better Christians. If we ask God to help us overcome our bad habits, God expects some involvement on our part to achieve that goal. God is not a vending machine, and yet we often treat him as such. We toss a few coins into the collection plate, and suddenly we are no longer smokers, alcoholics, addicted to drugs, or angry around other people. We toss in a couple of dollars and suddenly we become gracious, kind, generous, or merciful. We often look at it like it is a wishing well experience.

No, God expects us to do the work. He is going to offer the opportunities, but he expects us to engage in the opportunities, to strive to be better.

So, with this understanding, why do we indulge ourselves into thinking the story of Solomon is any different? That God was so pleased with Solomon that he zapped him and suddenly he was wise? Or did God answer Solomon's request by bringing him the opportunity to practice wisdom, so that he could grow wiser, maybe with a greater sense of justice and discernment with each decision that he rendered? Every day, people from all parts of the world would come before Solomon to listen to his wise decisions and with every pronouncement, his wisdom grew. The opportunities to grow his wisdom came from his council with other wise men and the situations that were brought to him.

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

How do we get to be wise? Are we praying and then waiting for God to zap us with wisdom, or have we told God that we are committed to becoming wise, that we are willing to do the work if he will offer us the opportunity? God loves it when we seek to grow in our faith, but most of us are simply not willing to do the work. We are quite happy if the food of growth is put on a beautiful serving plate and brought to us by a waiter. But please don't ask us to spend time in the kitchen preparing the food. We want God to prepare the food of growth for us. What we fail to realize is that he is providing the opportunity to eat at his table and as we grow, we realize that a great deal of the depth in Christian experience comes from our time in the kitchen, before the meal and cleaning up afterward. Jesus taught us that. The table offers us the opportunity to eat, but the kitchen offers us the opportunities to develop the skills necessary to serve.

Wisdom breeds humility. The wiser we become, the more we realize how unwise we really are. The more we thirst for wisdom, the greater the opportunities to grow in wisdom.

Whence Cometh Our Wisdom? That's a harder question than one might think. I hate to say it, but many of us have become spiritually lazy. If we need wisdom in our lives, do we turn go God asking for it? Or do we turn to social media looking for someone who agrees with our train of thought? Do we seek the counsel of the wise people in our lives? Or do we believe that all our answers can be found in Wikipedia? How do we know wisdom when we see it? I'm not talking about intelligence. I'm talking about wisdom. There are a great number of people in the world who are extremely intelligent but have no wisdom. Wisdom is gained through experience, and it expresses itself through living life.

So, how do we discern wisdom from foolishness when we hear it? Just because we read or hear something from someone we respect, does not make those words wise or even truthful. Accepting the rational and wisdom of man without running it through the filter of God's wisdom channel, is, to be blunt, foolish. James is kind enough to tells us how to discern wisdom by asking a few questions:

- 1. Is the source of the wisdom living a good life? A quality life? A life that is a good example for the people they engage with?**
- 2. Is the source of the wisdom humble? If the words you hear are come from a braggart, then the words are probably self-serving and not wisdom. Like James says:**

But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

3. Is it pure? Uncontaminated? Non-judgmental? Non-self-serving?
4. Is it Peace-Loving? Does it bring people together or does it drive them apart? Does it encourage healthy debate without causing strife? Does it seek to bring peace, or does it incite anger?
5. Is it considerate? Does it value all points of view? Does it acknowledge that the differences between people may not be resolved, but they can be appreciated and valued?
6. Is it submissive? That’s a hard one for us. But what this is talking about is not the fact that we have differing points of view, but that we remain are reminded of our role as servants to all God’s children, even those we disagree with.
7. Is it full of mercy and good fruit? Unresentful. Merciful in understanding and compassion. Do we keep the fruit unspoiled by our insistence on being respectful of others? Does the wisdom bring good fruit to the table? Ripe with grace and mercy?
8. Is it impartial? Does it lose its flavor through bias? Lack of comprehension? Lack of respect? Do we keep our prejudices in check? Does it promote grace above legalism?

9. Is it sincere? Insincere wisdom is like wax fruit, all the promises of great tasty fruit with no substance when we bite into it. This is not wisdom at all, but instead an attempt to manipulate.
10. Is it righteous? Does it remind the people listening of the presence of God? Is it expressed with the love of God for all his children? Or does it condemn people and leave them wanting?

Wisdom demands that all these qualities are met. If any of these traits are lacking, then what is being said is something other than wisdom. James says:

Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

If we truly want to be wise as Christians, then we need to acknowledge that God is the source for wisdom, and as we grow in the spirit, the words we speak and the actions that we take point others to wisdom of the cross and the gracious fruit of our Heavenly Father.

In our story today, the people found wisdom when they spoke with Forrest, and he was the first to remind everyone that wisdom is accumulated over time. Also, Forrest claimed no credit for that wisdom. He did nothing to gain wisdom except live his life in service. His humility guided him in his quest for greater wisdom.

It is my prayer for each of us that we seek the wisdom of God with that same humility, understanding that the opportunities for growth that our gracious Creator offers us, comes with the caveat that we are open to those opportunities,

that we seek growth and a closer presence with our Lord. It is only by doing so that we can properly serve his children. God loves it when we seek wisdom and will always provide the opportunities we need to grow in wisdom. But we do have to be sincere in our search and constant in our prayers.

God bless you all,

AMEN

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