

WISDOM IN QUARANTINE

James 3:13–18

INTRODUCTION

During this unconventional time of uncertainty in the world, it is difficult to know what to do. If you're anything like me, you might be tired of being stuck inside, frustrated with how things are being handled, or anxious. You may even be in a state of mourning—over a loved one, a senior year, canceled plans, a life event.

Thankfully, we have a pretty good guide to get through all this: the Bible.

Back in the early days of Christianity, James the Just (also known as James, brother of Jesus) wrote a book to the Jewish Christians. It was about how to act in times of trouble and what to do as a Christian—someone who possesses faith and God's love.

MAIN SCRIPTURE

To jump right into the Scripture, let's read James 3:13–18:

“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. 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. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. 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. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness” (NIV).

OPENING ILLUSTRATION

I don't know if you're a sports fan missing sports as much as I am, but this passage makes me think of the way my dad watches football. Without fail, during every game we watch my dad, along with aunts and uncles, sits in front of the TV and tries to tell the coaches what to do. Telling them the coaches cannot hear them has no effect on their lecturing; if anything, it makes it worse.

Consistently throughout the season, with the ability to rewind and to see the whole field (plus the wealth of wisdom from that year they played high school football) they say, “If I was in charge this whole team would be different.” But you know what? They aren't in charge—they are fans. And as much as it might make us feel better to yell at a TV because we think, “I could do this better than them,” that's not actual wisdom or knowledge. It's not going to change anything.

I think this global pandemic and subsequent quarantine is a lot like that. We sit in our house because we can't go anywhere, and in our "wisdom" we think:

- "If I was a leader in the government I would do this better."
- "If I was a teacher, I would do this whole teaching online thing differently."
- "How annoying and dumb is it that she put on a full face of makeup even though she can't leave the house."
- "If people don't come out of this quarantine with a new skill, they lacked discipline not opportunity."

I know for me it's easy for those thoughts to be my default. However, that's not what we are to do in a time like this.

The thoughts above are just examples, but the Bible says that is not wisdom from heaven. That "wisdom" will lead to disorder and unhappiness instead of peace. So what is wisdom from heaven? What does that look like in a time of quarantine? James answers these questions for us.

POINT 1

Wisdom from heaven is pure and peace-loving. I think that starts with our thoughts. When you are watching the news or scrolling through social media this week, prayerfully consider if what you are thinking about is encouraging and peace-loving. If it's not, it could be time to take a break from social media or the news. But beyond the practical solutions, ask God to soften your heart toward others. Spend time praying specifically for leaders you might be judging or peers on social media you feel annoyed by.

POINT 2

Wisdom from heaven is submissive. In a time like this, being submissive might just mean staying home when your governor says to. It means doing your assignments or hopping onto the Zoom call you're not excited about. It means not going to prom or canceling the trip you were looking forward to. In the context of wisdom from heaven, submission during a pandemic is following the rules and making hard choices that keep the most people healthy.

POINT 3

Wisdom from heaven is considerate, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. As Christians, we are the Church—we are a part of the global body of Christ. Even though there isn't a building to go to right now, there is still community. If you are or would like to act with the wisdom from heaven, this is the heart of the Lord. It doesn't matter class, age, or race, small business or large business, governments or local churches. Everyone, at some level, is struggling.

I want to challenge you to look at the needs of your community. There are so many who are alone and need support during this time. Be considerate of your neighbors who might not have family or access to groceries, and be impartial when you give. The virus does not discriminate, and God also does not discriminate. His people shouldn't either.

Also reach out to your church leaders and ask how you can serve. It may be as simple as continuing to give financially or making calls to check in on elders in the church. Look for people to support and encourage on social media. The person who seemingly has the perfect life? They might be grieving the loss of their senior year, a family vacation, a job, or a family member. Extend kindness and produce "good fruit" on the internet.

CLOSING CHALLENGE

In every stage of our Christian walk, the book of James is a call to action. These five simple chapters tell you that you have God's love—no question about it. There is nothing you can do to earn His love, but as someone who possesses it, there are things you are compelled to do.

Especially during times of trouble, regardless of whether you think you're smarter than someone or could do things better, as someone who possesses God's love you are called and compelled to action, submission, peace, purity, impartiality, compassion, and kindness.

As we read James chapter 3 and then look at the world around us, we are simply called to do good deeds in the wisdom of heaven.

PRAYER

God,

Thank You for Your unfailing love. Thank You for not making me earn it but giving it freely, and also for compelling me to spread Your love. During this unconventional time, soften my heart. Help me judge less and be more humble. Heal my heart from any disappointment I feel, and give me patience and purity as I encounter others. Show me where there is need in my community and in my church, and equip me to help meet those needs with Your love and provision. Heal this world and draw us closer to You. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) What does it mean to be wise and understanding?
- 2) What is the difference between earthly wisdom and wisdom that comes from heaven?
- 3) How are you being submissive during this time? What do you feel you are doing well, and what could you improve on?
- 4) How can you be considerate and full of mercy? Think about this in regard to family, friends, and strangers.
- 5) What role do you play in supporting your local church? How does this look different than normal due to the pandemic?