



SEA CHANGE
CHURCH

THE CURRENT

Storm Proof: A Study in James · S2E1

Wise as Hell

A 7-Day Study

"Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

James 3:13–18 ESV

Pastor Adam Stadtmiller · October 11, 2026

THIS WEEK'S MEMORY VERSE

"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere."

James 3:17

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Each week, The Current walks through a piece of Sunday's passage: a short verse study, encouragement, journal questions, and a daily prayer.

Take one day at a time. There's no need to rush.

DAY 1

Who Is Wise?

JAMES 3:13 ESV

"Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom."

VERSE STUDY

James opens with a question rather than a claim, the kind of question that makes a room glance around. Who is wise and understanding among you? The letter has been called the Proverbs of the New Testament, and it earns the name here: practical, blunt, and uninterested in wisdom that stays in the head. Martin Luther famously had little patience for the book because it says so much about what believers actually do. That emphasis is exactly what this verse is about.

The answer James gives is not the person with the most impressive opinions. Wisdom is shown, and it is shown by good conduct. The test is not what someone can explain but what someone does, repeatedly, over time, in the places where nobody is keeping score. A wise life is visible before it is articulate.

Then comes a phrase that sits awkwardly in the present moment: the meekness of wisdom. Attention has become the currency of the day, and the loudest, most polarizing voices tend to collect the most of it. Very few platforms are built on meekness. Yet James treats meekness not as a personality type but as the texture wisdom takes on when it is genuine.

The wisdom in view is not everyday common sense, the kind that keeps us from wandering across a freeway. James means the deeper wisdom that shapes how we treat a spouse, a coworker, a rival, and that sets the direction of a life. Over the next six days the study walks through his answer one verse at a time.

TAKE HEART

Meekness is not weakness, and it is not the absence of conviction. It is strength that no longer needs to win every exchange to feel secure. That is good news for those of us who are tired of performing. Wisdom, by James's measure, does not require a platform or a following. It shows up in ordinary conduct on ordinary days, which means it is within reach for every one of us, starting with whatever this week already holds.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. If wisdom is shown by conduct rather than by opinion, what would someone watching our week conclude about the wisdom we live by?
2. Where does the pull toward being heard compete with the meekness James describes?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long. Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies."

Psalm 25:4–5, 8–10

ACTION CHALLENGE

Choose one decision this week and, before making it, consider what good conduct would look like rather than what argument would win. Then let the conduct do the talking.

NOTES

DAY 2

Bitter Jealousy

JAMES 3:14 ESV

"But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth."

VERSE STUDY

James names the root before he names the fruit: bitter jealousy and selfish ambition, held in the heart. The word behind jealousy is *zēlos*, the same root that gives us zeal, and on its own it is not always a bad thing. Scripture describes God himself as jealous for his people. Zeal for what is good is a gift.

So James adds a qualifier, and the qualifier changes everything. *Pikros* means bitter, sharp, harsh, resentful, and the word almost sounds like what it means. This is zeal that has curdled. It keeps score. In the words of the sermon notes, jealousy turns life into a competition in which someone else winning registers as our losing.

Selfish ambition travels with it. Paul uses the same word in Philippians 2:3–4, urging the church to do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, and to look not only to its own interests but also to the interests of others. Both apostles are describing one posture: a life organized around getting ahead, in which other people become rivals rather than neighbors.

James adds a warning that is easy to skip: do not boast and be false to the truth. Bitterness almost always arrives with good reasons attached. Passed over for the promotion, outworked by someone who cuts corners, ignored after asking again and again. Some of those grievances are entirely real. Adam was candid about that, and drew a line worth keeping: it is possible to be right and still get it wrong.

TAKE HEART

Someone else winning does not mean we have lost. That is one of the quieter freedoms of the gospel. We are not competing for a limited supply of God's favor. A season of being overlooked, the kind where walking out would feel deeply satisfying, can turn out to be a season God was using all along. Trusting him with the timing is not passivity. It is refusing to let bitterness set the agenda.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. Where in our lives has zeal for something good quietly turned bitter?
2. Whose success do we find hardest to celebrate, and what does that reveal about where we are keeping score?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb. Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil."

Psalms 37:1–8

ACTION CHALLENGE

Name one person whose success stirs something sharp in us, and bless them concretely this week: a word of genuine congratulation, a prayer for them by name, or a quiet act of help.

NOTES

DAY 3

Not From Above

JAMES 3:15 ESV

"This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic."

VERSE STUDY

James gives the wisdom that grows from bitterness three labels, and each goes a step deeper than the last. It is earthly: its perspective stops at the horizon of this world and its concerns. Human beings were formed from the dust and given breath by God, and the two were meant to work together. Earthly wisdom lives as though only the dust were real.

It is unspiritual: it runs on natural human impulse rather than the leading of the Spirit. This kind of wisdom can be sophisticated. It can be well argued, culturally fluent, and persuasive. A great deal of what passes for wisdom in a culture of constant online debate is genuinely clever and still entirely earthly. Cleverness is not the test James applies.

And it is demonic. This is the word that gave the week its title, and the point from the pulpit was simply that this is what the text says. Not every poor decision is the work of demons, a distinction the sermon was careful to make. But wisdom from below serves the purposes of an enemy who delights in chaos and destruction, and its proposals often make perfect sense to the flesh. That is precisely what makes it dangerous.

The contrast is with wisdom that comes down from above, and James has already said how to receive it: if any of us lacks wisdom, let us ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach (James 1:5). Sometimes the answer comes quickly, sometimes it takes days, and sometimes it turns out we already knew it and had simply not acted on it. One line from the week is worth keeping close: God cannot be rushed.

TAKE HEART

The wisdom from above is not rationed. James describes a God who gives it generously and without reproach, which means without scolding us for needing to ask. There is no shame in admitting we do not know what to do. The admission is the doorway. Heavenly wisdom is not reserved for the especially spiritual; it is promised to anyone who asks.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. Which of our recent decisions were shaped more by earthly reasoning than by seeking what God might want?
2. What would change if we brought one open decision to God in prayer and were willing to wait for the answer?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light riseth up in darkness for the godly. Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what thou wouldest have us to do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in thy light we may see light, and in thy straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Book of Common Prayer, For Guidance

ACTION CHALLENGE

Bring one open decision to God by name every day this week without forcing a conclusion, and note anything that becomes clearer along the way.

NOTES

DAY 4

Where Disorder Grows

JAMES 3:16 ESV

"For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice."

VERSE STUDY

Verse 16 is James tracing cause and effect. Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. Wisdom from below does not stay contained. It produces chaos in households, in workplaces, in friendships, and in whole cultures.

A story from years of marriage counseling put the point in very ordinary terms. After two years of asking a spouse to deal with the kitchen, one partner finally loaded the unwashed dishes into the front seat of his car. It was satisfying, and there is an argument that it was deserved. The question James presses is not whether the action could be justified. It is whether it led to peace or to more disorder.

Part of what feeds disorder is speed. Under pressure, and especially under decision fatigue, the easiest choice is usually the one that feels good in the moment. James has already named the remedy earlier in the letter: be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God (James 1:19–20). The sermon's phrase for it was learning to off throttle, easing back rather than pressing harder.

Wisdom from above seems to move at a different tempo. It is slower, and it settles rather than stirs. That does not make it passive. It means the deeper decisions get made from a quieted heart rather than a heated one, and the difference tends to show up in everything that follows.

TAKE HEART

Most of the disorder in our lives is not the result of one catastrophic choice. It grows from small, reactive decisions made in a hurry. That also means the way back is made of small decisions: a pause before replying, a night's sleep before acting, a prayer before the hard conversation. Peace can be rebuilt one unhurried choice at a time.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. Where is there disorder in our relationships right now, and which of our own decisions might be feeding it?
2. What tends to be true of us when we make choices we later regret: tired, rushed, hurt, or something else?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forevermore."

Psalm 131

ACTION CHALLENGE

Before any reply that carries an edge this week, whether an email, a text, or a conversation, wait a full hour. Spend some of that hour in prayer, and consider whether the reply will lead toward peace.

NOTES

DAY 5

First Pure, Then Peaceable

JAMES 3:17 ESV

"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere."

VERSE STUDY

Having described what wisdom from below produces, James turns to wisdom from above, and the list he gives is ordered. First pure. Purity comes before everything else, because wisdom from above starts with motives that are not mixed. It is not quietly angling for advantage while appearing to seek peace.

Then peaceable, gentle, open to reason. These are relational words. Peaceable wisdom looks for a way forward that does not require someone to be crushed. Gentle wisdom handles people with care, even when the conversation is hard. Open to reason means willing to be persuaded, willing to hear the other side out. In a culture that rewards digging in, that last quality may be the rarest of all.

The list echoes Paul's description of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). That is no coincidence. Wisdom from above is not a technique to be mastered. It is what the Spirit produces in a life that is yielded to him.

One image from Sunday is worth carrying. It is possible to shake the tree of wisdom rather than pick its fruit: to make a partly wise decision while still holding on to some of the impatience, the need to just get it done. The fruit still falls, and it is still edible, but it is bruised, and it does not keep as long. Wisdom from above cares about clean hands as well as a good outcome.

TAKE HEART

Purity can sound like an impossible standard, but James is not describing people who have never had mixed motives. He is describing what God's wisdom is like and inviting us to receive it. The Spirit who produces gentleness and peace does that work in us; it is not a performance we have to generate by effort. Our part is to keep bringing our motives into the light.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. Where might our motives be mixed in a decision or conflict we are facing?
2. Which quality on this list, pure, peaceable, gentle, or open to reason, comes hardest to us, and why?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

*"Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid:
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love
you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen."*

Book of Common Prayer, The Collect for Purity

ACTION CHALLENGE

In one disagreement this week, restate the other person's view fairly, in words they would recognize as their own, before offering a response.

NOTES

DAY 6

Full of Mercy

JAMES 3:17 ESV

"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere."

VERSE STUDY

The second half of verse 17 keeps going: full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. The word is full, not partly. Wisdom from above does not dispense mercy in carefully measured portions to those who have earned it. It overflows.

Impartial and sincere complete the picture. Impartial wisdom does not tilt toward those who can do something for us, a theme James pressed hard in chapter 2, where he confronts favoritism toward the rich in the gathered church. Sincere wisdom has no hidden agenda; it is what it appears to be. Both qualities resist the instinct to play angles.

Taken together, the list works like a diagnostic. Adam compared it to a mechanic plugging a car into a diagnostic tool, where a code appears and tells exactly what is going on underneath. James offers the same kind of test. If the wisdom guiding a decision is producing bitterness, rivalry, and disorder, it came from below. If it is producing purity, peace, gentleness, and mercy, it came from above.

The diagnostic has an inward side too. Decisions made from earthly wisdom often come with a recognizable feeling, a rush of satisfaction at having shown someone. An old piece of pastoral advice captures it well: if hitting send on an email felt like victory, it was probably the wrong email. Wisdom from above tends to feel different, harder to choose in the moment and then followed by a settled peace.

TAKE HEART

The mercy wisdom offers to others is the same mercy God has already shown us. He does not deal with us according to our sins. That is the source of every merciful choice we make: we are not inventing mercy from scratch but passing on what we have received in abundance, which means the supply never runs dry.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. If we ran this week's biggest decision through James's diagnostic, what would the results show?
2. Where are we most tempted to offer mercy only in measured portions, and to whom?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him."

Psalm 103:8–13

ACTION CHALLENGE

Write out the qualities in verse 17 and keep the list somewhere visible. Before one significant decision this week, check the decision against each word on it.

NOTES

DAY 7

A Harvest of Righteousness

JAMES 3:18 ESV

"And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

VERSE STUDY

James closes with an agricultural image: a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. Peace appears three times across verses 17 and 18. Wisdom from above is peaceable, its harvest is sown in peace, and it is sown by those who make peace. James could hardly be more emphatic about what wisdom is for.

Making peace is not the same as avoiding conflict. Avoidance leaves the problem in place and hopes it goes away. Peacemaking does the harder work of moving toward reconciliation, which sometimes requires an honest conversation, offered gently and for the sake of the relationship rather than for the satisfaction of being right. Jesus said of peacemakers that they shall be called sons of God (Matthew 5:9).

Sowing peace does not usually feel good at first. Offering mercy and forgiveness to someone who has not earned it can feel like losing. It did not feel good for Jesus either, nailed to a cross on behalf of people who did not deserve it. Yet that is exactly where the greatest harvest of righteousness was sown, and every peace we make is an echo of the peace he made for us.

The week's practical takeaway comes down to one question to carry into every decision: will this action produce righteousness and peace? The sermon offered a homely way to weigh it. The pain of letting go of what the flesh wants is usually far smaller than the cleanup on aisle five that follows pushing through anyway. Wisdom from above often looks like letting something be, and trusting God with where it goes.

TAKE HEART

A harvest takes time. Seeds sown in peace this week may not show anything for a while, and that is how harvests work. The righteousness James promises is often felt first by the one who chooses peace: a lighter chest, better sleep, a bitterness no longer carried. Beyond that, God is the one who brings the harvest in. Our part is the sowing.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. In the situation we are facing right now, what is the difference between making peace and simply avoiding conflict?
2. Where is God inviting us to replace earthly wisdom with wisdom from above this week?

DAILY PRAYER

Before we pray, let us spend a few quiet minutes with today's verse: read it slowly once more, or simply sit in silence and let it settle. Then, when we are ready, let us pray this over the day ahead:

"Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen."

Book of Common Prayer (1979), A Prayer attributed to St. Francis

ACTION CHALLENGE

Before acting this week, especially in a tense moment, pause on one question: will this action produce righteousness and peace? Let the answer decide the next step.

NOTES

MEMORY VERSE

"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere."

James 3:17

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