

## STUDY 3

# THE GETTING OF WISDOM

Did you know that sociologists have estimated that the volume of knowledge in the world has doubled:

- In 1500 – every 500 years...
- In 1900 – every 100 years...
- In 1945 – every 25 years...
- In 2000 – every 10 years...
- In 2024 – every 12 hours!

What an incredible rate! But as much as this knowledge, information and discovery has grown – what of *wisdom*? Eugene Peterson reminds us that, *‘Wisdom is not primarily knowing the truth, although it certainly includes that; it is ‘skill in living’.. James practically unpacks his brother’s declaration that if his followers ‘live skilfully’, that ‘**by this** all men will know that you are MY disciples’.* (John 13:35)

So how does James encourage us to **live skilfully with heavenly-wisdom** (Greek: *‘sophia’ / ‘σοφία’*) as Jesus-followers?

- James both begins and finishes his letter with an exhortation to patience and prayer.
- James invokes his brother’s ‘Sermon on the Mount’, as well as principles from Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.
- James preaches a gospel of good works, based upon love to God and love for others.

## Read Together

### James 3:13–18

*Do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here’s what you do: **Live well, live wisely, live humbly.** It’s the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts. Mean-spirited ambition isn’t wisdom. Boasting that you are wise isn’t wisdom. Twisting the truth to make yourselves sound wise isn’t wisdom. It’s the furthest thing from wisdom—it’s animal cunning, devilish*

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*conniving. Whenever you're 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. It 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.*

James both warns and encourages us to differentiate between 'two kinds of wisdom' – earthly and heavenly. It is critical as Jesus-followers that we discern the difference between them both as we live life. James 3:13–18 describes two types of wisdom:

### Earthly Wisdom

- Appeals to the brokenness of our sinful heart
- Gratifying to our senses – but never-satisfying
- Demonic and comes from evil
- Fixates on 'here and now'
- Bitter and envious
- Mean-spirited and ultimately ambitious
- Destroys unity and provokes rivalry

### Heavenly Wisdom

- Purity
- Peace-loving and promoting
- Considerate and reasonable
- Submissive
- Overflowing with mercy
- Full of 'good fruit'
- Impartial
- Sincere

Loving God – and therefore, 'living skilfully' – involves passion (heart and soul), prayer (humility to seek) and intelligence (mindset and convictions transformed by the Holy Spirit). How do we do this?

## CONSIDER AND SHARE TOGETHER

Discuss together the following three points (taking turns reading the supporting verses)

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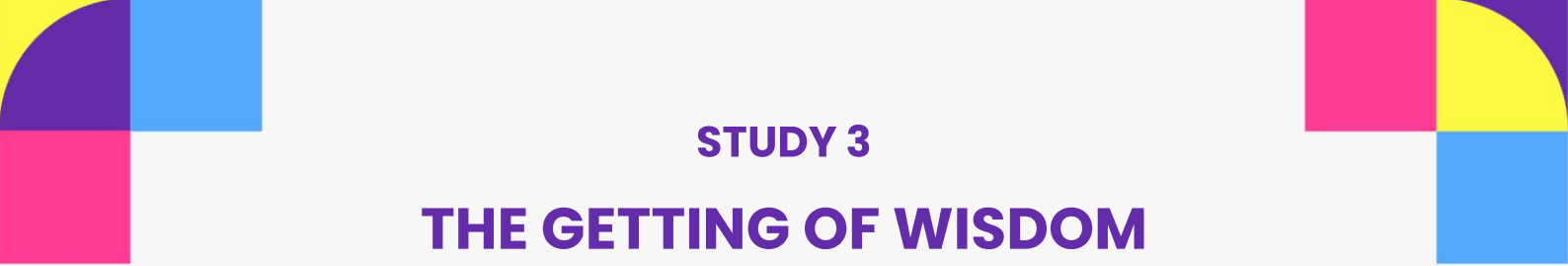
- 1. What is heavenly-wisdom like? (James 3:13-18)** – James describes heavenly-wisdom as ‘real wisdom’ that is characterised by both a holy life and the ability to get along well with others with our decision-making and actions.
  - **DISCUSS:** *Who do you have in your life who demonstrates heavenly-wisdom? What is it about them that encourages you?*
- 2. Heavenly-wisdom guards us (Proverbs 2:6-15)** – There is an assuredness with heavenly-wisdom. It acts as a ‘personal bodyguard’ that keeps watch and ‘pays special attention’ to guarding those who seek it for living skillfully.
  - **DISCUSS:** *Read Proverbs 2:1-5 and Colossians 3:15-17 – When have you asked God for wisdom, and He has given it to you?*
- 3. Seek heavenly-wisdom through prayer (James 1:5-8)** – Saint Hegesippus (circa A.D. 175) noted how James was known as, ‘Old Camel Knees’ because he spent so much time on his calloused knees in fervent prayer. We need to prayerfully attune our hearts to a heavenly-wisdom that God both freely provides.
  - **DISCUSS:** *Read Philippians 4:7 – What parts of your life are needing heavenly-wisdom and peace that “transcends all understanding”? Take some time to pray together and ask God for what you need.*

## EXPLORE FURTHER

### Leadership Lesson

#### Wise leaders listen

Look to Acts 15:1-12 when the Early Church was debating whether the Gospel was exclusively for the Jews, or for Jews and Gentiles. James – known in tradition as ‘James the Just’ – listened quietly to both sides. He patiently listened and allowed them to fully express all their opinions, concerns, and arguments. Only after they stop speaking does he respond, and his answer demonstrates his knowledge of the Scriptures; his discernment; and strong, impartial leadership.



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### PRAY TOGETHER

*Lord, teach me to seek Your heavenly wisdom with all my 'passion, prayer and intelligence'. Write this passage in my heart and in my mind so I can 'live skillfully'. Give me a deeper love and understanding of the qualities of heavenly-wisdom - a pure and sincere heart, so I can live a life free of selfishness, envy, and ambition. Make Your glory my heart's cry in all I say and do. Amen.*

### EXTRA RESOURCES

- Book  
[\*The Wisdom of God - Letting His Truth and Goodness Direct Your Steps\*](#) - A.W. Tozer
- Book  
[\*On Living Well - Brief Reflections on Wisdom for Walking in the Way of Jesus\*](#)  
- Eugene Peterson

### PREPARE

Read the following passage - James 4:7-10 - in the coming week to prepare for the next study, 'DRAWING NEAR'.

