



AWAKEN TO BLESSING

May 2 | Devotionals

Day 1 - Devotion

What is the most foolish way to make a decision? When asked this question responses included: fortune telling, astrology, Magic 8-balls, Ouija Boards, rolling dice, drawing straws, rock/paper/scissors, coin tosses, and waiting for a “sign.” One person admitted she would pick up her Bible, close her eyes, flip the pages, and wherever her finger landed on a page, she would take that word, phrase, or passage as her “answer.” Another person said it’s most foolish to ask his family for wisdom. Big yikes! In this digital age, how often do we count on the internet to inform our decisions? With endless information at our fingertips, we can trick ourselves into believing we can control our lives based on data and anecdotal evidence.

We can laugh about the absurdity of some of these methods, but the reality is, we long to have a say in the outcome of our decisions. The query “how to make a decision” delivers over 1.1 billion results on Google leading to articles, books, videos, charts, and blogs all somehow connected through algorithms to the topic of decision making. There are countless ways presented to help people make decisions. At the end of the day, when faced with decisions in your life, ***do you rely on worldly wisdom or Godly wisdom?***

St. Ignatius of Loyola said, “Sin is unwillingness to trust that what God wants is our deepest happiness.” David Benner adds to that, “Until I am absolutely convinced of this, I will do everything I can to keep my hands on the controls of my life, because I think I know better than God what I need for my fulfillment.”

There is nothing inherently wrong with Googling things to help inform our decisions, but knowledge needs to be held in tension with wisdom. Wisdom goes beyond obtaining knowledge. It is not about answering the question of “is it right or wrong?” but instead asking “is it wise?”

How do we access God’s wisdom? **James 1:5** tells us to ask for it and it will be given to us. Through prayer and scripture reading, we increase our knowledge of the Lord. We use the practice of discernment to engage the Holy Spirit to serve as our guide and counselor and ultimately help us answer the question “is it wise?”

Godly wisdom gives us direction and focus when we have to choose between what sounds good, feels good, looks good, and what IS good. Earthly wisdom appeals to our senses and our emotions. How often have you heard (or said), “Go with your gut,” “Follow your heart,” or “Seeing is believing?” Godly

Day 2 - James Study Breakdown

Today we are going to examine what James has to say about the characteristics of God's wisdom. James is clear that wisdom is shown in action. True wisdom is revealed in the way one lives their life, in humility (**James 3:13**). He goes on to say that wisdom fueled by envy and selfish ambition is not actually a sign of wisdom. It might *seem that way*, but those kinds of people have themselves fooled (**James 3:14**). This kind of wisdom causes us to put ourselves first, acting like people of the world, not people of Jesus. When we live out of worldly wisdom, our lives become disordered and our relationships are broken. Our rejection of God's wisdom creates destruction all around us. James goes on to describe the characteristics of wisdom from heaven by describing what life lived in God's wisdom looks like.

For today's Bible study breakdown, we're going to provide three translations of this passage on wisdom (one of the best ways you can study your Bible is by reading multiple translations of the same passage!)

After taking a moment to be silent and quiet your thoughts, read the passage below from *The Message*, the English Standard Version, and the New American Standard Bible. As you go through, circle all the words describing what God's wisdom **IS**. Then go through these one more time underlining what God's wisdom **IS NOT**.

James 3:13-18 in *The Message*

¹³⁻¹⁶ 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 plotting. 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.

¹⁷⁻¹⁸ 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 3:13-18 from the *English Standard Version*

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

¹⁷But 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. ¹⁸Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

James 3:13-18 from the *New American Standard Bible*

¹³Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. ¹⁵This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, free of hypocrisy. ¹⁸And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace [g]by those who make peace.

Questions for reflection:

1. What comes to mind when you meditate on the characteristics of God's wisdom?
2. Where do you see characteristics of Godly wisdom in your life? What about ungodly wisdom?
3. How do you feel God is calling you to respond to this passage?

Day 3 - Scripture Survey

Wisdom is the focus of numerous passages in Scripture, often making a distinction between wisdom of man (the world) and wisdom of the Lord.

Read **James 3:13-18** and then look up the following passages. Under each passage note any similarities you find between it and our James passage this week. What words or phrases do you see used to describe the different kinds of wisdom? Look for any similarities between the passage in James and the ones below. Finally, ask, "God, what are you inviting me into as I read and look through these verses?"

- **Proverbs 1:7**

- **Proverbs 3:1-35**

- **Proverbs 14:12**

- **Romans 1:21-25**

- **1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16**

Day 4 - Story Work

You have a story of awakening. Maybe for you that looked a lot like James or Paul where Jesus changed everything in your life in an instant. Or maybe you've always had a constant awaken-ing. As you've gotten older, you've had your eyes opened more and more to who Jesus is and how that impacts your life.

Today we're going to continue looking at our own stories through the lens of James. This week's focus will be on choosing Godly wisdom over worldly wisdom and what that has looked like in your life.

Reflect on your story using the questions below. Invite God to lead as you look back on the words that have been spoken over you and the words you've spoken over others. Ask him to lead you through the questions with his grace and love.

1. Can you pinpoint a time in your life that you would characterize as foolish living, trusting wisdom of the world over the wisdom of God? What were your priorities at that time?
2. What were some consequences you experienced due to foolish decisions? How did your foolish living affect others? How have you been affected by others motivated by the wisdom of the world?
3. When faced with difficult decisions, who in your life can you trust to help you discern God's wisdom? What is it about those individuals that makes you trust them? How has your relationship with them influenced your life?
4. In what areas of your life are you more prone to stray from God's wisdom? What truths about God do you need to embrace to fully trust in His wisdom and open yourself up to His will in your life?

Day 5: Hear & Do

For this last day, let's slow down and pay attention to what God has been inviting us into as a result of this week's passage. Find a quiet space. Silence any technology around you. Spend some time reviewing your devotions this week. We want to be hearers of God's Word and we want to be doers of God's Word. Jot down your thoughts to the following reflection questions:

As you look over this week, what words, phrases, Scriptures, etc. have stood out to you? What was the most significant thing? Why?

Where else outside of your devo time did you notice "these things" pop up in your week?

How do you think God is calling you to respond?

Consider some of these suggestions as possible action steps as you step into living this week's truths:

- Identify a decision you are currently facing and invite a trusted individual into the discernment process. Ask them to listen to you and with you as you prayerfully seek God in your decision.
- Make a list with two columns. In the first column identify decisions in your life that have been guided by worldly wisdom. In the second column identify decisions in your life guided by Godly wisdom. What patterns do you see in your life as a result?
- Pray for someone in your life who is struggling to seek God's wisdom in their life. Pray for God to show you how to encourage them.