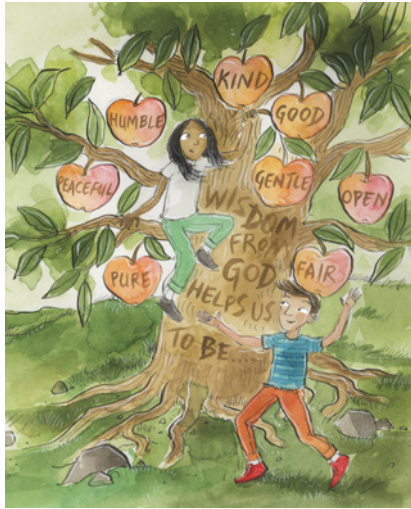


James 3:13–4:3,7-8a

Choosing God, choosing wisdom

James outlines the qualities of a wise person, which come from above, while the qualities of the world (envy, selfish ambition) cause disorder and conflict in the church and beyond. The solution is to submit to God.



Bible notes



The Letter of James is concerned above all else with the *life* of faith. It is not a doctrinal piece. The writer is concerned that his readers should make good, holy, wholesome choices. Such choices are informed by wisdom, a virtue particularly prized in the Hebrew Scriptures but maybe less so today. In his book *Waking up to God*, Neil Richardson suggests that 'wisdom is a blind spot in our economically dominated, globalised culture. Clever, skilled, well-informed people we recognise and value. But a wise person? What might a wise person contribute to the economy?' Typical of James is the emphasis on faith lived out (3:13). It is interesting to note the similarities of the characteristics of wisdom listed by James to the fruits of the Spirit and their opposites, the fruits of the sinful nature that Paul speaks of in Galatians 5. There is another parallel with Paul in 4:1 when James speaks of the 'cravings that are at war within you' (cf Romans 7:24-25). So, maybe contrary to what Luther thought (allegedly), James isn't that different to Paul after all. The wisdom that James writes of is the gift of God, not the achievement of humanity. So, in choosing the way of true wisdom we are essentially choosing God.

'Submit to God' (4:7) is an unusual New Testament phrase (the only other place it occurs is Hebrews 12:9, NIV; NRSV translates this as 'subject to'). Usually, the word submit is used of human authorities or interpersonal relationships. On the devil, Michael Townsend argues James 'undoubtedly believed in such a *devil*, i.e. a spiritual power in opposition to God'. Townsend suggests that 'Those who find this belief difficult to share, and who prefer to regard the terminology as metaphor for the mystery of human evil, nevertheless need to recognize the emphasis of standing up to such evil'. Here we have a reminder that wisdom and discernment are close cousins when it comes to making wise, godly choices. We then have comforting and assuring words affirming the faithfulness of God – a key attribute of God that will be both celebrated and questioned across the focus passages in this edition of Roots. There are echoes in these verses of the temptation narratives where Jesus, drawing on the wisdom of the Scriptures, resists the devil and angels come to attend to him.

The passage ends in a rather blunt and unusual way for James whose normal form of address is brothers or dear friends. The Greek word for sinners, *hamartolos*, is used for someone who is wilfully disobedient and who positively loves the sinful life. James' call for change is pretty forthright.



Recipes for breaking bread have been handed down through the generations. Reflect on the process of kneading, how we must submit to a recipe and have patience as you make some Wisdom Bread. Scan the QR code for the recipe.

REFLECT



Where do you go to get wisdom and advice? A trusted counsellor or friend? Social media, Google or the library? The Bible? How would you know if the advice is good and leading to a good or godly life? TED talks were 'invented' in 1984, to share new ideas on Technology, Entertainment and Design. They are now widely used, and subject to 'rules' to ensure they are delivered effectively. Dip into some examples online (e.g. Malcolm Gladwell: Choice, happiness and spaghetti sauce – scan the QR code) and draft ideas for a TED talk about God's wisdom/the Bible readings. Is there something which could be presented in a new and entertaining way? Could you present the talk to a group outside Church?

First impressions

- How do you make good choices?
- Whose wisdom do you respect?
- What good fruit might you see if you act according to God's wisdom?



A sending out prayer

Wise and loving God,
help us to think about what is right
so that we can follow you, not other people.
Help us to do what is right for the good of others. Amen.

Write

Gratitude Challenge – Make a list of 10 things you are grateful for. When you are tempted to compare yourself with others, read that list out loud and thank God for what you have.