

m MASTERCLASS | JAMES

DAILY DEVOTION

DAY 14

READ

JAMES 3:13-16

FOCUS

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.

REFLECTION from PASTOR DOYLE SURRATT

Many years ago a man started attending our fledgling little start-up church. After a few weeks, he indicated that he had some history in ministry (had previously pastored a church himself) as well as in counseling. He told me that he would be willing to help me lead our church, share the speaking responsibilities with me, and, in general, be a ministry partner. While we were desperate for leaders (or even attenders) at that point, something in the way he "made himself available" to do ministry seemed off. I couldn't put my finger on exactly what it was, but he seemed anxious to lead--and not as excited, by the way, about serving or tithing. He had lots of good words, some pretty impressive knowledge of theology, and a very persuasive manner but still...

In this section of James 3, we find the author speaking still to those who would aspire to lead. He says that your words are not proof of having wisdom to share. Wisdom worth sharing comes from having life mastery of the subject matter at hand = being more like Christ. The indication of the presence of wisdom in an individual is not a plurality of words or grasp of concepts, but the humility that comes from knowing Jesus and knowing how to apply His words to everyday life. Otherwise, the desire to lead may just be an indication of some hidden need to be seen, or to be respected, or personal advancement or ...? James is saying that if gentleness (power under God's control) isn't present, then maybe the motivation is all wrong--the source of the desire for leadership may be from a whole other (ungodly) place. And it is guaranteed that the results will always be disastrous, ending in "disorder and every evil practice".

So, what's the take away for those of you who don't aspire to church leadership? When I first went into ministry I would attend conferences where the pastors of the largest churches would speak about how to most effectively do ministry. Best-selling Christian authors would talk about their latest insight into God, scripture, the human condition...or whatever. I remember thinking, "Someday I will be one of those people." Not a bad aspiration, I guess, except that desire wasn't from God because He didn't call me to that: He didn't gift me for it and in the end I wouldn't have been fulfilled doing it. A time came in my life when I realized that I wanted to be one of "those guys" for a less than noble reason. I don't actually like to fly in, speak, and leave a place (I'm much more about sticking around and building something). I am not good at sitting down and writing long tomes, and I really don't have anything original to say. But what I do have is a desire to be admired, affirmed, and acclaimed. It would seem that my aspiration had much more to do with my need for attention than having real wisdom to share. Turns out, it's not really who I am supposed to be--it was all ego. Have you ever said something in a group only to realize that you hadn't added any wisdom to the conversation but, rather, had only spoken to impress others? The way I test myself on thi is to ask myself, "What percentage of my words are meant to impress others--and are thus unnecessary?" The application is obvious for all of us: live out your faith by your deeds, be gentle, and, when you recognize envy or selfish ambition in your life, deal with it swiftly and harshly--lest you end in disorder and evil habits. James says our lives will reveal if we have any real wisdom.

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By the way, in very short order, my all-too-eager-volunteer-to-be-co-pastor friend I told you about at the beginning was revealed to be exactly what this passage talks about: filled with all kinds of stuff from the wrong source, lived out in a life unworthy of being called a Jesus follower--much less a leader in the faith. When I confronted him about obvious sin in his life (and told him that, as a result, he wouldn't be leading anything at our church) his response was intense anger, screaming, and near violence. On the surface, he was so calm and collected, so seemingly wise and understanding, but underneath was disorder and evil practices. God always knows and, eventually, so will everybody else.

QUESTIONS

- DO YOU ASK GOD ON A REGULAR BASIS TO REVEAL ANY WICKEDNESS IN YOUR HEART?
- DO YOU HAVE OTHER SINCERE CHRIST-FOLLOWERS IN YOUR LIFE WHO HAVE PERMISSION TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH ABOUT YOU?
- HAVE YOU CHECKED YOUR MOTIVES LATELY (IN EVERY ARENA OF YOUR LIFE)?