

James IRL, Warning Lights, James 3:13-4:17, 11/5/23

3¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.

¹⁵ This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Pray. On September 1, 1983, Korean Air Flight 007, departed from JFK International Airport en route to Seoul, South Korea. However, the [flight path] mistakenly led them into restricted Soviet airspace which alerted Soviet fighter jets who immediately intercepted the aircraft. Despite efforts to communicate with the Korean Air crew, the fighter jets shot down Flight 007, resulting in the tragic loss of all 269 people on board.

How could the flight crew have gotten so far off course leading to such a devastating tragedy? At the heart of the problem was a malfunctioning navigational system. The aircraft's Inertial Navigation System was malfunctioning giving them an inaccurate reading of their flight path. The crew believed they were safely and accurately headed to Seoul, their destination, when in fact they were flying into dangerous territory. This tragedy would have been easily avoided if they would have realized this malfunction and recalibrated their navigation system to reality. A tragic story that serves as a warning light for us today.

Title Slide We all have an internal navigation system that we use every day to guide us through life. Many of us many not even be aware of what it is, but we all have one. We need a navigation system to guide decisions as mundane as our daily routines and as complex as discovering the purpose of our lives. James in our text calls this wisdom. **Wisdom is the set of underlying assumptions, beliefs and values applied to all life circumstances.** We all need wisdom. Think about it: why did you get up and come to church this morning? Well there are underlying assumptions, beliefs and values around the priority of church you applied to your decision to come this morning. Well some of you may say, because my wife or husband, or mom or dad dragged me here...OK I'm grateful they did, and you are welcome here...but this is also true for you, you have a set of underlying assumptions, beliefs and values that it will go better for relationships and your future to obey your parents or listen to your spouse to come today. We need a navigational system, wisdom, to guide us in how we spend our time, money, navigate conflicts, if and whom we will marry, career decisions, facing hardships, spiritual habits, what we believe about what makes life worth living.

Now here's the key: we all have one, the question is what kind? How do we know that our underlying assumptions, beliefs and values align with reality, with what is true? How do we

know our navigation system isn't more like the tragic story of Korean Air Flight 007? The answer to this question is the difference between our lives arriving safely at destination that God intends for us or potential disaster: disaster in our relationships, maybe our careers, our spiritual life, and ultimately eternity. And so in James, I want to help us distinguish:

The Navigation Systems of Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom

Two Outcomes

Three Examples

One way to Recalibrate

Two Outcomes

James as we have seen throughout this letter is preeminently concerned about how it works...He doesn't evaluate faith based on talk alone, but on how it works in real life. He says, I will know what kind of wisdom you are using to navigate by looking at the outcome. What is the outcome of worldly wisdom? ¹⁵ *This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.* ¹⁶ *For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.*

Jealousy feeling threatened by what someone else has that you want to take it from them.

Selfish ambition Fascinating word used originally as a political term by Aristotle to describe a self-seeking pursuit of an office using unfair means. The NT authors use it to describe this same spirit that is self-promoting and will use whatever means available to get ahead of others.

Disorder Confusion, instability

Vile Practice: A catch all phrase- Worthless or evil results. In summary I would say that Worldly Wisdom leads to dysfunction in various areas of life.

In contrast, what is the outcome of heavenly wisdom? ¹⁷ *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.* Heavenly wisdom is first **pure**. That is, it is wisdom that is calibrated not to what is efficient, what you can get away with, or what gets you ahead...it's calibrated to what is pure. Do what is right, for the right reasons. **Peaceable**- Not trying to stir up conflict but looks to resolve conflict. Gentle, open to reason, **full of mercy** Not punitive, but that is quick to forgive and not hold a grudge. **Impartial** doesn't judge others based on their family name, their power or money or influence or ethnic profile, treats people fairly. Sincere. In summary heavenly wisdom leads to functioning, thriving in all areas of life.

Blank Slide So what James says is the primary way you can tell what navigational system someone is using is by looking at the outcomes. What is being produced in their lives? What about in their community and society? Is it dysfunctional, or functional and thriving? This is why James says in v. 13 Who claims to be wise among you? See, James says you can talk a big game about what we believe and value...that God is first in our lives, that we love people...but the proof will always be in the outcome of your life: how is that seen in your relationships? Your workplace? Your habits? Your finances? Your decisions?

Now we are about to move into chapter 4, and a cursory reading of this chapter may just look like a bunch of disconnected issues, random things that James isn't happy about. But the more I studied this, what I believe James is doing is showing us 3 examples of how being guided by worldly wisdom leads to the dysfunctional outcomes we discussed. I believe he wants these believers to look at their outcomes so they might recalibrate their navigational systems to heavenly wisdom. And right in the middle of the chapter he gives us the one way, the only way to recalibrate so that we can navigate according to heavenly wisdom.

Three Examples

Example 1: Fighting

4 *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.* Now most of us, when we ask "What is the source of my conflict?" we say, "Easy," and we point to the person we are in a conflict with. "It's you lady in the slow car ahead of me that is making me late!" "It's you, boss who isn't giving me the raise I deserve", "It's you, spouse who isn't appreciating all the work I do around this house." But James says when you point the finger at someone else, you find three fingers pointing back at you. The problem is you! Your self-centered desires are all you care about. And it's leading to dysfunction in your relationships. What is the worldly wisdom guiding these conflicts? **My Happiness is what matters most.** Isn't this the message of our world? We see this in the mantras: "Look out for #1", "Do whatever makes you happy." "Go get what you deserve." And as James points out, many times what we think we make us happy is what other people possess: status, material possessions, that pool, that watch, that set of golf clubs...and most importantly money. Like the words of Gordon Gecko from Wall Street, "Greed is good." I need to make it to that magic number...and I don't care what office politics I need to use, or who I need to climb over, what business ethics I need to bend, or how many hours I have to work at the expense of my family to get it. James says, look underneath your conflicts, what will it tell you about your navigation system?

Example 2: Judging

¹¹ Do not speak evil against one another, brothers...¹² But who are you to judge your neighbor? When we put ourselves in a position as judge by looking down on someone we are elevating ourselves above others. We think of that person as less than. Isn't this the **worldly wisdom of superiority?** Thinking you are better, smarter, more deserving than others.

Example 3: Presuming

James **⁴¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit" —¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring.**

What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

What was it that James was warning against? Not planning ahead, not trying to have a successful business or profit. Those are good things. It's presuming that you know what is best for your life and presuming the future of your life as if God isn't God. It's the mental map that says "I am the master of my own destiny." It's the **worldly wisdom of self-determinism**, that we are self-made people. Worldly wisdom says- I determine my own agenda, my own status, my own success, my own name, my own morality, even my own pronouns. What do these worldly mental maps produce? James says, boasting and pride, essentially putting us in place of God and his sovereignty, his right to rule over his creation. Not rightly placing ourselves under God's will. Living as if we are going to live forever with no consequences. But James says we are like a mist! This is a great way to put us in our place. Your life is so short but we act as if we are going to live forever with no consequences of living without God. Do you know the name of your own great grandfather? He was likely on this earth just a few decades ago, his blood is coursing through your veins, and yet we can't even remember his name. Life is a mist.

So this is worldly wisdom and its dysfunctional outcomes. And James does not mince words. He says if our navigation system of our life is being guided by worldly wisdom it puts us on a collision course with God himself. *4⁴Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* Now if you are an Eagles fan you get this... especially because it is Dallas week. I've never met someone who said, my favorite team is the Eagles, and my second favorite team are the Cowboys. That doesn't work. It's incompatible. To be an Eagles fan is to be an enemy of the Cowboys and vice versa. We cannot buddy up to worldly wisdom and still claim to follow God. It puts us at odds with God's ways and wisdom for us.

What set of maps is guiding your internal navigation system? Is it worldly wisdom or heavenly wisdom? You will know by looking at the outcomes. Is it producing dysfunction in your relationships? Look specifically at these examples or others in your life. Is it producing healthy thriving relationships?

The One way to Recalibrate What do I do about it? There is great news, because it's never too late with God! He is a God of fresh starts and new beginnings. *6⁶But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* *7⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* *8⁸Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.*

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9⁹Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Recalibration through Repentance. **Repentance: #1 Humility.** Properly place yourself as creature and God as creator. Properly grieving, taking seriously how you have gotten off course and walked away from the heart of God. **Confession** "cleanse your hands" that you have been in the cockpit navigating yourself, based on your own self-centeredness, worldly wisdom. **Submission.** That is, accept that his maps, his navigation system is better and yield to him. **Resistance.** Don't

give into the lies that God is ripping you off, restricting your freedom, trying to make your life miserable. Say no. **Worship.** (Draw near) Worship God and experience his love, acceptance, his grace toward you even now. He draws near to you. Will be with you.

We have an opportunity to recalibrate through repentance right now as we approach the communion table. Because the only reason we can draw near to God and he draws near to us is because of what Jesus did for us. **Ephesians 2 ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace.**