

How to Treat People Wisely

Message for Sunday, February 23, 2020
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: James 3:13-18

Children's Message:

Set up a pretend "brain washing machine" (but don't say that it's pretend): a helmet with wires connecting it to a laptop computer. Explain that when someone uses the machine, they instantly get a year's worth of TV commercials pumped into their brain. Let's see what effect it has...

I pick a volunteer (arranged ahead of time) to try the machine. "How are you feeling today?"

"Oh fine, I'm having a good day."

"How are things at home, with your family?"

"Pretty good, most of the time. We have occasional... differences of opinion. Really, though, we care about one another."

"Nice to know that. Well, put this on," handing over the helmet.

When the person says "I'm ready," push button on the computer. The screen will have a series of images flash by quickly, over the space of thirty seconds. The person head and shoulders tremble under the onslaught of so much material all at once. When it's over, Bruce helps take the helmet off.

The very *instant* upon exiting, the person begins a rapid-fire list of demands, such as:

- Hey, why are my clothes still on the floor? I left them there last night for you to pick up and wash for me. Do I have to do everything around here?
- I want bacon and eggs for breakfast. Make it quick, I'm in a hurry.
- For my birthday, I want the Barbie swing set, Barbie racing car, Barbie mansion, and a trip to see the Barbie movie set in Hollywood. Oh, I also want a new bicycle, a new computer, all new clothes. And while you're at it, I want a new family. The old one is too lazy.

This is an example of what happens when we follow what's on TV or somewhere else. It's all focussed on me, me, me! The Bible tells us to follow the wisdom that God gives. God's wisdom leads us to care for others.

Message: "How to treat people wisely"

How many of you had some sort of conflict with someone last week? Maybe at home; at school; with a worker or customer at work; someone at church; someone in your family; a total stranger; any sort of conflict? How many of you have been in some sort of conflict in the past week or so?

The part of the letter of James which we're looking at this week gives us some very practical advice in how to get along with other people. The key is wisdom. So many times we treat people in very foolish ways, and we provoke the exact opposite behaviour of what we want in our relationships.

1) You can show wisdom without showing off

James 3:13, New International Version:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

I can picture James coming into our worship service and asking if there are any wise people here. If any of you put up your hand, James would tell you, "Good! Now prove it. Show me your wisdom by your behaviour."

He's not going to ask you how smart you are. Intelligence is not the same as wisdom. People love to show off how smart they are, or how good they are at sports. But how do you show wisdom? The answer is in verse 13, and it's very simple: by treating others with humility and kindness ("good deeds").

If I were to do a survey of your family, your neighbours, your co-workers, would they tell me that you treated them with wisdom?

2) Worldly "wisdom" isn't wise at all

James 3:14-16, New International Version:

¹⁴But if you harbour 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, of the devil. ¹⁶For

where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

Let's suppose again that James comes to visit our church, and this time he asks if there is anyone here who is jealous and selfish. I wonder how many of us would put up our hands. I would. I don't think I'm particularly jealous, but I know I'm selfish. As James puts it in verse 14, I'm not boasting about it, but neither am I denying it. It's the truth.

This false "wisdom" causes problems; as a matter of fact, it causes all kinds of problems in your life. James even goes so far as to say that the result is "evil" [verse 16]. That's pretty strong language... but it's true.

This is not surprising, considering its source: verse 15 tells us that it's "earthly, unspiritual, of the devil." Consider for a moment the difference between the values the world teaches us and what the Bible teaches us:

World	Bible
Get even	Love your enemies [Matthew 5:44]
Get ahead	Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. [Philippians 2:3]
Get power	I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet. You, then, should wash one another's feet. [John 13:14]

Here's an example of this selfish ambition, right among Jesus' disciples!

Mark 9:33-34, Today's English Version:
They came to Capernaum, and after going indoors Jesus asked his disciples, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they would not answer him, because on the road they had been arguing among themselves about who was the greatest.

They were too ashamed to tell him what they had done. Has that ever happened to you? You've done something bad — something so appalling that you can't look people in the eye when they ask you about it.

Isn't it fascinating how a thing takes its proper place when we see it through the eyes of Jesus? While they had been arguing, it all seemed reasonable. But

when they had to do their arguing in front of Jesus, they all realized how petty they had been.

Can you think of some argument you've had in the last few days, or perhaps last few years? Something you're still simmering about?

Consider this: imagine having that argument while Jesus is watching over your shoulder. It changes your whole outlook, doesn't it?

The envy and selfishness are rooted in our hearts, way down deep. We're talking here about a spiritual disease, not just a clash of personalities. The solution is pretty obvious: we need a new heart.

3) You reap what you sow

James 3:17-18, New International Version:

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 raise a harvest of righteousness.

James says that every day in every relationship, you're planting seeds. Seeds of anger, jealousy, peace, confidence, insecurity ... many different kinds of seeds. So you're going to inevitably harvest what you sow.

For example, the first seed James mentions is being pure. "Pure" means to be "uncorrupted, authentic." So being wise means being real, not fake; being a person of integrity. Be a person who is honest, who is fair, who can be trusted.

Speaker and author Nicky Gumbel tells about the head of one of the biggest department stores in Britain, who had recently hired a new assistant. This assistant answered the phone one day, and told his boss that such-and-such person wanted to speak with him. "Tell him I'm not in," said the boss.

"You tell him yourself," replied the assistant, handing the phone over.

When the boss finished his call, he tore into the assistant. "Don't you dare ever do something like that again! When I tell you to do something, I want it done! He added a few more choice words and then started to walk away."

The assistant spoke up, “Sir, I cannot act as you wish. Furthermore, you should be aware that if I can lie *for* you, I can also lie *to* you.” That assistant became the most trusted and valued employee in that firm.

He planted the seed of integrity, and that’s the result he got in the end.

4) Ask for wisdom

We read this verse a few weeks ago.

James 1:5, Today’s English Version:

If any of you lack wisdom, you should pray to God, who will give it to you; because God gives generously and graciously to all.

So we pray, “God, give me wisdom, because I really need it!”

But remember, the key to wisdom is not in your head; it’s in your heart. It’s a gift from God, and that gift has a name: Jesus. Ask him to come into your life, and that will be the wisest thing you ever do. Ask him to help you grow and become more and more like him.

Next Steps:

- Pray: Ask for wisdom. But remember: the purpose of wisdom is not so you can get ahead. The purpose of wisdom is to give us humility and kindness. Go back and read verse 13.
- Practise: Now put that wisdom to good use!
- In particular, how will God’s wisdom guide you in your relationship with that difficult person in your life?