

Wisdom's Gentleness

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Reading from a different translation sometimes makes a verse or phrase come alive in a way it never has before. Most of us are familiar with James 3—that chapter about our unruly tongues. I've attended countless classes and Ladies' Days that used this chapter as the text. I've studied it and even taught on it. It seems that, as women, we study this passage more than men, and maybe for good reason. But recently, against the backdrop of a world full of division and criticism and selfishness, I was reading James 3, and two words jumped out at me: *Wisdom's gentleness*. That's the way the HCSB translates the last phrase of James 3:13. Other versions say:

The gentleness of wisdom (NASB).

The meekness of wisdom (ESV, NKJV).

Humility that comes from wisdom (NIV).

The gentleness that wisdom brings (NET).

I don't know about you, but the wisdom I've seen being offered lately, whether on social media, in the grocery store, and sometimes in our churches, has come across as anything BUT gentle.

It seems everyone has "wisdom" to offer about everything these days. Social media has given us all a soapbox to express our ideas, passions, and positions. We have access to infinite knowledge in a matter of seconds. We armchair quarterback other people's decisions. We hide behind screens to criticize and jeer. We claim expertise in areas of life we ought to have a PhD to even discuss, and we are willing to forfeit relationships over it. We are posting a lot and doing little, discussing more and accomplishing less than ever. We divide and categorize each other and attach wholesale assumptions to each label. Sadly, this has even bled over into our in-person interactions with our families, friends, and brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul tells the Ephesians to "walk worthy of the[ir] calling ... with all humility and gentleness ... diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds us" (4:2). That's the same Greek word for "gentleness" used in James 3:13. It is also used when Paul mentions the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:23 and is how he tells the Colossians to clothe themselves (3:12). What caught me off guard in the James passage is that he says *gentleness comes from wisdom*. Worldly wisdom makes us proud, puts us above others, makes us somehow "better than." James 3:16 says the result is disorder and every kind of evil.

We don't have to wonder then what godly wisdom, the wisdom we should be longing for, looks like. James tells us in verse 17, and what a different world we could be living in if we all let godly wisdom shape us! Spend some time over the next few days meditating on these individual words, these traits we are to possess as children seeking the wisdom from above. Think about the ways you interact with others in person, online, and even in your thoughts.

Does the wisdom that comes from your lips produce strife and disorder, or is it characterized by the things from James 3:17 listed below?

Pure (holy; innocent)¹ – James 4:8; 2 Corinthians 7:11

Peace-loving (conducive to a harmonious relationship) – Matthew 5:9; Hebrews 12:11

Gentle (not insisting on every right letter of the law; yielding; tolerant) – Titus 3:2

Compliant (reasonable; accommodating; willing to yield) – Philippians 2:8

Full of Mercy (kindness and compassion for someone in need) – Luke 6:36; James 2:13

Full of Good Fruits (producing good results) – Ephesians 5:9; James 2:14-18

Without Favoritism (not being divisive; unwavering) – James 2:1-4

Without Hypocrisy (genuine; sincere) – Romans 12:9

Let us all strive—today, this week, this month, this year—to be wise in the things of God. Let us not get caught up in worldly strife, but instead, may we intentionally “seek to lead a quiet life” (1 Thess. 4:11) full of wisdom’s gentleness.

¹ Definitions and synonyms in parentheses after each word in the list come from the BDAG, a Greek lexicon.