

Are we friends or enemies of God?

James 3 v 13 – 4 v 12 – Leaders version

For a one hour study, just do the starred * questions

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

In the last study we learnt about the use of our tongue – to praise or to destroy. In this study we are continuing to think about words we use, including our thoughts and attitudes.

What does the passage say and mean?

90 minutes

*1. Read James 3 v 11-18. James tells us about two types of wisdom – from heaven and from earth. (Wisdom, in this context, is a way of life, or an attitude, not a measure of cleverness). What is the evidence in v13 that someone has 'godly wisdom and understanding'?

Their behaviour. At the end of the previous study, we learnt that the water in a spring and the fruit on a tree tell us the true nature of the spring and the tree, 3 v 11-12. In the same way, our behaviour reflects the truth about our heart. Our lives reflect our true love – for God or for self.

Make sure the group understands that the good deeds James refers to come as a result of godly wisdom (salvation) and are not the origin of it.

*2. What is the evidence someone has 'earthly wisdom'? (v14-16)

Bitter envy, selfish ambition, disorder, evil practices – write these on the flip-chart, under the title 'earthly wisdom'. James is writing to Christians: the world, the flesh and the devil still influence the believer, but we know that Jesus is more powerful and it is Him whom we serve. We know that we are forgiven for our sins but this is not permission to sin.

*3. Where does 'earthly wisdom' come from? How does that make you feel about it?

From the world (other people, media, culture, etc.), the flesh (our own sinful desires) and directly from the devil (temptation). Discuss with the group whether they want their lives to be controlled by the world, the

flesh and the devil, or by God, and why?

*4. Read James 3 v 17. What do you learn about godly wisdom (wisdom from heaven)?

It is pure, peace-loving, considerate etc. Write the list on the same flip-chart page, in a different colour, titled 'Godly wisdom'.

*5. Read James 1 v 5. How do we get godly wisdom?

We need to ask God for it! It's not part of human nature.

Questions 6-8 are **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTIONS**. You need to write them on flip-chart sheets for the group to work on in pairs.

6. **SDL** What kind of fruit does the life of someone who has godly wisdom bear?

Good fruit, v17. As with the fruit trees in v12, the fruit of our lives identifies the nature of our heart. Unpack what 'good fruit' might mean, using the other words in the v17 list as much as possible.

7. **SDL** Read James 3 v18. What do you think it means to 'sow in peace' and 'reap a harvest of righteousness'?

Put up the flip-chart from Q2&Q4 – consider the relational outcome of these two ways of life. To live with godly wisdom leads to peace in relationships, to live with earthly wisdom leads to strife. Allberry (p102) says that a harvest of righteousness is two-fold – to please God and to attract others to the message of the gospel as they see the witness of our changed life.

8. **SDL** Does this godly lifestyle sound easy? Where do we find the strength and ability to live like this?

From the Holy Spirit. This is not in the passage, but it's important that the group understand that we can't do this on our own. We are sinners who naturally live as God's enemies and that's why Jesus had to die to save us.

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Be honest, would you rather hang around with someone who has godly wisdom or earthly wisdom? Why?

Keep the flip-chart list from Q2&Q4 on view as you discuss this.

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Unpack what 'godly wisdom and understanding' might look like in our lives.

Living God's way in all areas of life, serving others, in our decision making, etc.

*9. Read James 4 v 1-3. Do you agree with James? Why? What does he say is the root issue in fights and quarrels?

Root issue = my desires (not the other person!). V 1-3 describes selfishness, self-centredness and acting in self-interest. Take some time think about why this is living by 'earthly wisdom' and not 'heavenly wisdom'.

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How do you think God would want you to sort out issues with other people?

Spend some time thinking about how to avoid fights and quarrels and how to sort things out as a 'peacemaker who sows in peace' (3 v 18).

*10. Read James 4 v 4-5. Why is a friend of the world an enemy of God?

Because you can't be a friend of God and a friend of the values of the world. It's talking about who we submit to, who is in authority over us i.e. who is our Lord. If we submit to God's authority (through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus), then the world (and the flesh and the devil) have no authority over us and should have no influence over us. They can only do so if we choose to obey them. James calls believers who have a friendship with the world 'adulterous' (v4) because they are unfaithful to God.

11. Read James 4 v 6-10. What does it mean to be humble (v6) and what does God do for the humble?

It means to surrender to God, to stop being his enemy, to stop being a friend of the world (whichever phrase ties in best to the discussion you've had in Q9). Being humble before God means that you recognise that he is God / he is in authority over you / he is able to save you, etc. and that you are none of these things. God shows favour to these people – he saves them from their sins and gives them eternal life.

*12. Read v7 again. What two things does James tell us to do and how are they linked?

Submit to God and resist the devil. When we submit to God, we are recognising his authority over us – this involves surrender of our worldly desires. As a believer, we can resist the devil in Jesus' name, and he will flee away because of Jesus' authority over our lives (not because of any authority or will-power of our own).

13. What one word could be used to sum up James 4 v 8-10?

Repentance. Consider how each element of these verses helps us understand what repentance is:

- *Come near to God and he will come near to you = in the context of Christians turning back to God in repentance, having drifted away*
- *Wash your hands, you sinners = refers to our actions i.e., stop your sinning*
- *Purify your hearts, you double-minded = stop your spiritual adultery*
- *Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom = recognise how deep is the offence of your sin before God and be grieved by this (this does not mean 'become depressed' or lose the joy of living). This leads to repentance*
- *Humble yourselves before the Lord = know that He is God and is able to save you (and you are not God and cannot save yourself)*
- *And he will lift you up = And He will save you.*

14. Read James 4 v 11-12. What does it mean to slander someone and why is this wrong?

To slander someone is to say something about them that is untrue and which harms their reputation. This is lying, which is against the (OT) law.

15. Why are slander and judging someone wrong? (v11)

OT law tells us not to lie (which includes slander) and not to judge others (individuals judging one another, not referring to a Court of Law). To do these things is to decide that OT law is wrong and to 'sit in judgement on the law' i.e. to decide you know better.

NB The law referred to is OT moral law, which reflects God's morality and so does not change with time. OT sacrificial law and ceremonial law do not still apply post-cross.

16. Who is the one Lawgiver and Judge and what are we told about him?

God. He is able to save and destroy. This should take us back to thinking about repentance and whether we want to have God's spirit dwell in us or to be God's enemy? There is no third option...

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Are you still an enemy of God or do you know that your broken relationship with him has been mended by Jesus paying for all your sins? What difference does this make to your thoughts, words and actions?

Check out – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.



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