

TURNING THE CASUAL INTO THE ACTUAL

Part VII: To Live Under God's Wisdom James 4:11-17 (NLT)

Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (James 2:17)

When I was a little boy I felt like I was invincible. Basically what that meant was I had no wisdom in understanding life at all. Take for example the time I first learned how to ride a bicycle. After mastering the art of balancing and riding on a straight path, I quickly moved on to the next step of bicycle riding, doing tricks. Now, mind you, at this point I had only learned to ride a bike for one day. But, my lack of experience did not prevent me from trying new challenges that laid before me. I wanted to be king of bicycle tricks.

There were speed bumps outside my house. Naturally my first trick was to use these bumps as ramps so that I could jump high and far. I distinctively remembered ignoring my shoulder pads and helmet on the ground; everyone knew only sissies wore these equipments. I was about 25 yards away from my targeted speed bump. I could envision my ability to jump not only this bump but the bushes beyond it. All of my friends would worship me as the best there is.

Of course, things never turn out the way you planned. As I approached the speed bump I began to lose control of the bicycle. I guess my lack of experience coupled with the speed had something to do with it. When I hit the bump I was no longer going straight; it was more of a sideway motion. While in the air I remembered that my hands were off the bicycle handles; I think they were flailing all over the place since at this point I was no longer on the bicycle itself. As I separated myself from the bicycle I noticed that I clearly missed the bushes that I was supposed to jump over. Instead, a metallic hood of a car was to be my final destination. What did I get to show for my adventure? A huge bruise on my forehead and a broken ego. Such was the life of a little boy who tried to live life without wisdom by his side.

Without wisdom our lives are already on shaky ground. Can you imagine how much worse it could be when we do not live according to God's wisdom? To have a successful and blessed life we have to truly understand the biblical basis of God's wisdom and our relationship to him.

Now, what is true wisdom? For that we need to review James 3:13—4:10.

Review of James 3:13—4:10

1. True wisdom is connected to the **purpose and mission** of God.
 - Wisdom = our thoughts and words that promote the will of God through our behavior

The source of wisdom does not come from our educational systems or from professors and scholars. Wisdom is not based upon scientific or philosophical principles. Nor is wisdom the ability to use common sense in our interaction with this world.

It is very clear in the Bible that wisdom comes from God alone. To be wise means we need to understand his ways, his commands, and his laws. This makes perfect sense since the source of all life is God himself. Since he is the designer of life, we must depend upon his wise instructions to know how to live successfully with one another.

More specifically, wisdom from God is:

- Wisdom from God
 - ‘a life of steady goodness’ (strength under control)
 - ‘does not brag’ (we honor God as we humble ourselves)
 - ‘pure’ (free from corruption)

On the other hand, wisdom that is not from God looks like this:

- Wisdom that is not from God
 - ‘bitter jealousy and selfish ambition’ (seeks for personal gain only)
 - ‘disorder and evil’ (does not build up the person at all)

Thus, we can conclude that a life apart from God’s wisdom is a life doomed to destructive behavior:

2. **Communities and relationships are fractured** when our wisdom does not come from God.

Now, James 4:11-17 continues this theme of God’s wisdom and its significance upon our lives. James explicitly warns us what happens when we detach ourselves from divine wisdom and the consequences of such separation. All of this is to show that God demands our faith to be active and real, connected to his very purpose, and to accomplish his will in each of our lives and to the nations of the world.

James 4:11-17

¹¹*Don't speak evil against each other, my dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize each other and condemn each other, then you are criticizing and condemning God's law. But you are not a judge who can decide whether the law is right or wrong. Your job is to obey it.* ¹²*God alone, who made the law, can rightly judge among us. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to condemn your neighbor?*

¹³*Look here, you people who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit."* ¹⁴*How do you know what will happen tomorrow? For your life is like the morning fog--it's here a little while, then it's gone.* ¹⁵*What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that."* ¹⁶*Otherwise you will be boasting about your own plans, and all such boasting is evil.*

¹⁷*Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.*

We have to comprehend the magnitude of the consequences when we live apart from the wisdom of God.

3. Such fracture will take place on **all levels of relationships** when we do not live under God's wisdom. (verses 11-12)

More specifically, three areas of relationships are damaged:

- Our relationship with **God**

When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus responded by saying one needs to love God and to love his or her neighbor. (see Matthew 22) Love is the greatest law established by God. All that we are and all that we do must reflect this unconditional love. As believers we are designed to showcase this love to all people. Thus, when we speak evil against one another, not only are we not reflecting love, but we are also speaking evil towards the Maker of the law of love.

God's law of love shapes us to embrace one another, not to speak evil against one another. When we condemn one another we are saying that God's law of love is worthless to us. When we criticize each other we are saying that God's law is useless and impractical for human relationships. When we destroy relationships with our words and behavior what we are saying is that we, and not God, have the right to become judges over other people. When we are judges we are denying God's role as the true Judge over all creation. Instead of obeying God, we play gods, deciding what is right and wrong based upon our imperfect wisdom.

- Our relationship with **our neighbors**

Of course when we ignore God's wisdom in the law of love it will have negative consequences in our relationships with one another. When we disobey God's law to love one another, we will interact with each another based upon behavior that is impure and sinful. Criticism, corruption, destruction... these are words that vividly describe what our relationships will be like with one another when we do not live under the wisdom of God. Because we do not have spiritual guidelines to follow we will treat one another in sinful contempt and selfishness.

- Our relationship with **ourselves**

Ultimately, such demising relationships are reflections upon the evil lives of each of our existences. We are evil towards one another because we are evil individuals. We breed condemnation because of our sinful personalities. When we distance ourselves from God's wisdom, not only does that hurt our relationships with people, but eventually it destroys the very person God had designed us to become. All levels of relational bonds are broken and damaged because we fail to secure ourselves under God's wisdom. Our connection to the divine, our connection with fellow humankind, and our connection with our souls, are destroyed because we chose to separate ourselves from God in disobedience, choosing to live as judges instead of faithfully depending on the one true Judge who knows right from wrong.

Besides fracturing all levels of relationships when we do not submit under the wisdom of God, we will actually experience failure on all levels of life:

4. We will experience failure on **all levels of life** when we do not live under God's wisdom. (verses 13-16)

¹³*Look here, you people who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit."* ¹⁴*How do you know what will happen tomorrow? For your life is like the morning fog--it's here a little while, then it's gone.* ¹⁵*What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that."* ¹⁶*Otherwise you will be boasting about your own plans, and all such boasting is evil.*

Based upon the illustration in verses 13-16 we can note four areas of failure in our lives.

- Failure in time

One of the greatest mistakes we make is when we predict when success will take place in our lives. For many of us we follow predictable patterns because we want to achieve triumph at a certain point in life. When we graduate from high school we automatically go to college. After college some of us go to graduate school for further training. After our educational life we find a career that hopefully matches our learning experience. We work for forty-some years, saving money for retirement. We go through this whole journey so that by the age of sixty-five we can retire with financial security and make plans to travel all over the world.

We depend on our human wisdom to determine our "todays and tomorrows," but without God's wisdom we are doomed to fail. Apart from God we do not know what will happen to us and whether we will be blessed at all. When I entered college I was a biology major because my parents decided that I should be a doctor. In college I switched to psychology in hopes of doing research in criminal justice. When I graduated from college I worked as a program director for a non-profit company, reaching out to our surrounding communities. I did all of these things because I wanted to be a successful person respected by people by the time I retired. But, today I am a pastor of an international church. You see, whenever I (or somebody else) decided that my life should be this or that, God turned it down. Only he knew what I was to become and when it will take place. I tried very hard to shape my future, but God did not allow it to happen. Only when I submitted to his wisdom that the Lord revealed to me who I was to become. If we want our futures to bear good fruits we must surrender them under God's wisdom. He has a wonderful plan for each of us, but we must give up our "todays and tomorrows" in order to experience his authority over and through us.

- Failure in destination

Another life mistake we make when we detach ourselves from God's wisdom is where we will end up in life. Like I mentioned above most of us envision our lives to be secure and peaceful by the time we are set to retire. We work extremely hard today so that we can relax and coast through life when we are sixty-five years old.

Again, many of us will fail in this endeavor because we are not allowing God to decide where he will take us. We would rather be in control over our destination, but who is to guarantee that we will make it there and find any accomplishments? Only God knows what the right destination is for each of us. What he has started in each of our lives he wants to bring to completion, but only if we fully obey and follow his ways. We will reach the destination that God has set for us when we remain faithful to him alone.

- Failure in occupation

Where we want to go in our destination will affect what careers we choose. For many of us, we want to end up in life with lots of money, a big house, multiple cars, on a tropical island. In order to accomplish this we will involve ourselves in careers that will pay the most money to finance our dreams.

Again, apart from God's wisdom we will fail in the area of our careers. Our jobs and occupations play a significant role in what God wants to accomplish in our lives. We do not work so that we can earn money and enjoy life. We work because God wants to use our occupational experiences to promote the message of the gospel. We are not in business because that is where the money is; we are in business because God wants to use our talents to fulfill his law of love in this world. God wants to use your specialty and training to show people how much God loves them. God wants you to be a student now because he wants to use your experience to reach out to other college students. We fail to understand how our careers fall into God's plans because we do not connect ourselves to his wisdom.

- Failure in results

Lastly, failure in the areas above will naturally lead to failure in results. Don't fool yourself to believe that choosing where you want to go, how you want to get there, and when you will get there will translate in thriving results for your life. We have already learned that apart from God's wisdom our lives are like a morning fog – it is here for a little while, and then it disappears. We have to comprehend that blessings can only come about when we trust in the Lord with all of our hearts. We must always lean upon the ways of God and not trust in our imperfect sinful wisdom.

5. Therefore, do what we are supposed to do – **live under the wisdom of God!** (verse 17)

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