

"Wisdom Applied"

Reading: Mark 2:1-12; James 5:13-20

Written and preached by [Luke Richards](#)

There is the motivational speaker's brand of wisdom: a squishy, happy-talking, "you can do it" sort of wisdom that glorifies our Western sense of individualism. It tells us that each of us has all the tools we need somewhere within us as long as we're willing to work hard enough to get them, or if we think the right things to unlock them, or if we repeat the right words to ourselves every morning when we get out of bed. We like that wisdom. It's flattering to be told that I'm good enough on my own, or at least I have all the potential locked up inside me, waiting to be set loose. It feeds that little beast that I usually try to keep quiet, the one that always makes excuses for my bad choices and tells me how great I really am. On some level at least we have bought into this wisdom that tells us that wisdom is not only all about me, it is also something that I can grasp all by myself *for* myself because I am enough on my own.

When that sort of wisdom lets us down and we realize that each of us isn't enough on our own, then we start liking a more community-centered sort of wisdom. This is the pat-you-on-the-back, surround-you-with-hugs sort of wisdom. It tells us that our worth and value are at least contributed to by those around us because we need each other for encouragement to make it through the hard times. Wisdom, after all, is about giving us instructions for living a worthwhile life, and so there is a lot of wisdom out there reminding us that we should help one another out, we should watch one another's backs, and we should tell one another how great we all really are. It's a group hug brand of wisdom: we live our separate lives, coming together every once in a while for a group hug, and we then go our separate ways until we run out of steam and need another hug.

This is not to say that these two brands of wisdom are without merit; certainly we want individuals to be able to take responsibility for themselves and think for themselves, and certainly we want to be there for one another and support one another. But perhaps you've noticed by now as we've worked our way through the book of James that godly wisdom at the very least has something to say to other sorts of wisdom, if indeed it doesn't reject them altogether. And here, at the end of James's book of wisdom, we see a wisdom that tells us that we cannot live a worthwhile, godly life on our own, and in fact we can't even do it just by being surrounded by friends and family encouraging us.

James focuses on two things for his concluding statements on wisdom. A wise person realizes that all things come from God, and therefore a wise person returns all things to God. James especially mentions prayer, then, as a way for us to remember with our lives that we are to be entirely God-centered, whether we are living in happy times or troubled times. And James's second focus is on our relationships with one another. He goes far beyond just patting one another on the back or giving one another hugs; wise Christians are deeply involved in one another's lives. When one of us is sick, we gather around them and intercede before God on their behalf. When one of us has done wrong, we call one another to confession and then we proclaim forgiveness. When one of us wanders, we guide one another to reconciliation with God.

This is wisdom that is defined by the state of our relationships. You can't be wise by yourself, and it's not enough for us to reassure each other that everything is going to be okay, pat one another

on the head, and then go our separate ways until next Sunday. We can only live a godly life of value when we are rightly connected to God and one another. We can't be complete unless we have nothing that is not centered on God, and we can't completely worship God unless we are right with one another. We turn it all over to God, and we take responsibility for one another. Our entire lives are seen as one great act of worship to the God of everything, and our lives are inextricably intertwined with our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is greater wisdom than those others we mentioned. It is a wisdom that teaches us to be whole, and we cannot be whole without being deeply focused on God and one another.

This is why James instructs people to "be patient" in the face of suffering, or to pray in times of trouble. This sort of wisdom applies broadly. It doesn't mean that we should *only* pray or be patient, and that we should never go see a doctor or come up with a plan for getting out of our time of trouble. Wisdom does not mean never being pragmatic. It just means that pragmatism does not overwhelm our desire to draw near to God. Last Sunday we saw how the wisdom of God is not primarily concerned with what works, in the sense that it's not concerned with making you happy or successful or any of the other things the world values. Those things may happen, but the main goal of God's wisdom is to help you be more godly, to be more a part of God's family. So the application of God's wisdom is to learn how in any situation, good or bad, to make our priority getting nearer to God, trusting him, and living more fully in his family.

Today we are especially concerned with healing. As is the case with its view of wisdom, our world has an incomplete understanding of what it means to be healed. People think being healed means to take a pill and feel better, and if you aren't comfortable then you aren't healed. And this raises the question in some peoples' minds as to why God heals some people and not others, but they have an incomplete understanding of healing. The physical healing we see of an injury or disease is only a sign of God's greater work; it's a glimpse of something larger. We read the account of Jesus healing a paralytic, a man who was carried to Jesus by his friends, and a man whom Jesus first healed by forgiving his sins. We get excited by those who are healed of a disease, but it's like we're getting excited about the frame and ignoring the painting inside the frame. The greater healing we're concerned with is making broken people whole by reconciling them with God and one another; a person can be dying of a disease but still *whole* by the grace of God because God can work in them to free them from sin and give them the hope of resurrection in Christ. It is far, far more than healing of the body, it is healing of the community, healing of families, healing of marriages, healing of friendships, healing of emotions, and especially healing of a person spiritually.

As we pray for healing for one another, this is not merely a prayer that the pastor prays for you over whatever illness or injury you have. This is healing that the body of Christ participates in, and so if during this time you have a broken relationship with someone else here, make that relationship right as a part of our worship. Or if there is someone asking for anointing and prayer and you would like to come and pray over them, then by all means do so. Our prayer is offered to ask God to make you whole, not just physically, but emotionally, relationally, and spiritually, and so we would be glad to pray for any of those needs. Also, you are welcome to ask for prayer and anointing on behalf of someone else if they are not able to be here. But it is our prayer that God would make us whole.

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Just as we as one body offer our prayers to God, so he offers his grace to us as his body. It is that strange brand of wisdom again, that wisdom that says that we are at our most complete when we are gathered and reconciled as the people of God. There are times when we take communion in small groups or even as individuals, but it is unusual. This gift of God — this gift of himself to us — is best given and received as a community of faith. It's not just about me reflecting on how God is offering his grace to *me*, wretch that I am, it's about also watching while God offers that same grace to all those other wretches in the room *with* me. And it's about watching while we as the body offer this grace to one another, and watching while we each humble ourselves by confessing our mutual need for God's grace. This act of communion is saturated with mysteries: the mystery of how Christ chose to offer himself to us in something so simple as bread and juice, the mystery of how God brought us all together today to celebrate his feast, the mystery of God's love offered in spite of our sin, and above all, the mystery of Christ who was willing to die for us. Yet our communion is also a time of revelation, when we see the grace of God handed to us, when we speak the words that Christ has given his body and blood for us, and when we see that we partake as one body. And so we ponder the mystery, and our eyes are opened to his revelation revealed to his church.



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