

### Discussion Starter

Can you think of someone that you have known whom you would describe as truly wise? What is it about them that makes them wise – can you identify particular characteristics, habits or personality traits? Share these together and see if any common themes emerge.

### Worship Together

Today we are going to meditate on a passage of Scripture together. Read these instructions to the group and then take ten minutes in silence to each meditate on Ephesians 3:14-21.

- Ask God to speak to you and to bring His word alive as you read it.
- Lay before Him any distractions, concerns or thoughts which are likely to hinder you hearing Him speak. You may need to confess something to Him. Meditating on the Bible is not about emptying your mind, but it does involve clearing your mind of distractions so that you can fill it with God's word.
- Read the passage through slowly, if it is very familiar to you try to see it as if for the first time. Does anything strike you in a new way?
- Read it again, clause by clause, reflecting upon its meaning for you personally. Respond quietly to God as He speaks to you.
- Read it a third time, as a prayer for yourself and the group.

After everyone has finished looking at the passage on their own, allow a few minutes for anyone who wishes to share anything from the passage which has particularly stood out to them, or which they feel God has highlighted for some reason.

### Bible Study

"I do not want the peace that passeth understanding. I want the understanding which bringeth peace."  
*Helen Keller*

#### Read James 3:13-4:3 and discuss the following questions...

- Discuss together what this passage teaches us about wisdom. How closely does James's thinking on the subject agree with the ideas you shared earlier?
- What do you think James means by the "harvest of righteousness" that will be raised by peacemakers? How does being a peacemaker lead to this?
- There is quite a bit said in this passage about submission and being lovers of peace. What does this add up to for the Christian life? Is the truly godly man or woman a push-over who allows themselves to be mistreated, hurt or abused without standing up for themselves? If not, how do we go about deciding when and how to submit to others?
- James attributes both divisions within the church and unanswered prayers to our wrong motives and desires (the words translated *desires* in verse 1 and *pleasures* in verse 3 are the same Greek word). How, practically, can we evaluate our own motives in situations about which we feel very strongly and which are sometimes highly emotive for us?
- What, if anything, can we learn from this passage about resolving arguments and disagreements in church?

### Pray Together

In the ideal world there might never be "fights and quarrels" amongst Christians. However, this side of heaven there are always going to be disagreements, sometimes sharp ones. Without mentioning names or specific situations please pray for our church, that as a fellowship we might be increasingly characterised by the kind of wisdom that comes from above and that under God's hand we might put aside all wrong motives and desires.

## Meditations

A few things to consider before your group discussion.

### Read James 3:14

Envy is one of those sins that we barely ever hear mentioned in church and yet it can be devastatingly destructive to both our inner being and our relationships with others. How easily we fall into comparing ourselves with the people around us: how do we measure up in terms of our gifts, our relationships, our possessions, our looks, our role in church, our spirituality or some other criteria? If only I were a bit more like... If only life had dealt me the hand it dealt them... Ask the Lord to reveal any envy you are holding in your heart towards anyone. If He does, ask his forgiveness and that He would transform the way you think about that area of your life.

### Read James 3:14

There is a lot in this week's passage about our motivations. There is nothing wrong with ambition per se, we all have dreams, desires and aspirations; what makes these things good or bad is where they come from and the motivation behind them. *Selfish ambition* (the Greek word could be translated as *electioneering* – promoting oneself) is not just about seeking good for ourselves, it is doing so at the expense of others. Hold your dreams and ambitions up to the light of God's scrutiny and, if necessary, ask for His cleansing power.

### Read James 3:17-18

James describes the kind of wisdom that comes from God in terms that are reminiscent of Paul's description of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). In both passages the emphasis is on a co-operative relationship with God: only He can bring about the kind of inner change that is required for us to bear such "fruit", and yet unless we actively co-operate with what the Holy Spirit is doing within us the harvest will be small at best. Take time to thank God for the changes He is bringing about within you but also to ask Him to reveal where He is wanting you to work with Him.

### Read James 3:17-18

Meditate on what it means to be peace-loving, or a peacemaker. When there is a dispute or bad feeling between others at work or in church, what effect does your presence have on the situation? Is your natural inclination to try to bring about reconciliation, or to add fuel to the fire? Of course, conflict is sometimes necessary and, if approached in a godly way, can even be beneficial, but we should never delight in it.

### Read James 3:17 and Isaiah 53:7

Meditate on what it means to be submissive. Some people struggle with ever being submissive, others struggle to ever be anything but. Which way are you more likely to lean? Are you someone who finds it hard to back down or to let the other person have their way? Do you always find yourself objecting to people in authority? Bring your thoughts to God in prayer.

### Read James 3:17

Meditate on what it means to be sincere. The Oxford dictionary describes sincerity as "the absence of pretence". No "keeping up appearances", no hidden agendas, no half-truths, just unadorned reality – the popular term these days is *authenticity*. To what extent do you think this characterises your relationships with others at home, at work or in your group? Turn your thoughts to prayer.

### Read James 4:3

There are many reasons that our prayers may not appear to be answered as soon as or in the way that we would like. Here James describes just one of them. Ask God to search through the desires that are uppermost in your heart and to speak to you about your motives. Of course, our motives may be entirely pure and yet our prayers still may remain unanswered, but it is good to develop a discipline of constantly asking God to reveal and refine the motives behind our desires.