

Wisdom That Looks Like Jesus

Pastor Mark Johnson on Humility, Obedience, Transformation, and Being a Faithful Witness

Pastor Mark Johnson

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Program Summary

Pastor Mark Johnson continues James 3:13-15 and the contrast between earthly wisdom and wisdom from above. God's wisdom can initially feel strange because it runs against the flesh: forgive, celebrate another person's blessing, worship freely, give generously, and obey Scripture even when feelings resist. The conversation emphasizes humility, submission, transformation, and the biblical calling to be a faithful witness whose life supports the claim to follow Jesus.

Key Takeaways

- Godly wisdom is applying Scripture when obedience feels unnatural to the flesh.
- Humility is central to heavenly wisdom because it rejects envy, selfish ambition, and self-promotion.
- Feelings are real but unreliable rulers; Christian obedience is shaped by God's truth.
- Christianity is transformation through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, not merely external religious actions.
- The wisdom of the world may look popular while still producing brokenness.
- The Christian calling is deeper than becoming an influencer; it is becoming a faithful witness.
- A credible witness requires conduct that supports the claim to follow Jesus.
- Small acts of kindness can influence another life in ways I may not discover for decades.
- Good works do not save me, but salvation calls me toward good works that glorify God.
- Healthy conviction draws me toward God, while condemnation pushes me away.

Scripture References

James 3:13-15, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Galatians 5:22-23, Philippians 2:3-5, Matthew 5:16, 1 Corinthians 15:7, James 4:8, Romans 5:8

Quote of the Day

"We are called to represent Christ everywhere we go, in every set of circumstances."

Broadcast Notes

Pastor Mark compares obeying God's wisdom with doing something that initially feels awkward. He remembers lifting his hands in worship, carrying a Bible to school, initiating faith conversations, and praying one-on-one. The discussion moves through humility, feelings, transformation, cultural influence, and the responsibility of Christians to represent Jesus. Mark Burns then shares a recent call from Bill, a coworker from a Jewel food store forty years ago, who said that Mark's witness in aisle 12 helped influence his surrender to God. The program closes by encouraging ordinary good works, saturation in God's Word, dependence on the Holy Spirit, and healthy conviction that draws believers nearer to Jesus.

Practical Applications

- Practice one biblical act of obedience that currently feels awkward.
- Celebrate another person's blessing instead of envying it.

- Before acting on what feels right, ask what Scripture says.
- Examine where I may be seeking recognition instead of God's glory.
- Replace the goal of being impressive with being a faithful witness.
- Do one quiet good work without seeking recognition.
- Ask whether my conduct helps people see Jesus more clearly.
- Thank someone whose ordinary witness influenced my faith.
- Invite the Holy Spirit to expose selfish ambition or pride.
- When conviction comes, move toward Jesus for grace and change.

Today's Challenge

For the next seven days, intentionally practice being a faithful witness in one ordinary place where I spend time. Each day ask the Holy Spirit for one opportunity to show Jesus through humility, encouragement, service, generosity, truth, or kindness, without seeking recognition.

Closing Prayer

Father, teach me wisdom that looks like Jesus. When Your way feels strange to my flesh, give me courage to trust Your Word and obey. Purify me from envy, selfish ambition, pride, anger, and the desire to be noticed. Keep my feelings from becoming my master. Transform me from the inside out by Your Holy Spirit. I do not want merely to influence people; I want to be a faithful witness who represents Jesus well. Let my conduct support my confession. Open my eyes to ordinary opportunities to serve, encourage, give, listen, and do good without needing recognition. When You convict me, draw me nearer rather than letting condemnation drive me away. Saturate me in Your Word and make my life increasingly reflect Jesus. In His name, Amen.

About Today's Speaker

Pastor Mark Johnson serves at Calvary Church in Springfield and regularly joins the Mark & Friends studio audience for verse-by-verse Bible discussion. A seasoned pastor, teacher, counselor, and storyteller, he brings many years of ministry experience to practical conversations about applying God's Word to everyday life.

About Today's Host

Mark Burns is General Manager of the WLUJ Family of Stations and Great News Radio Network and host of Mark & Friends. For decades, Mark has been involved in Christian radio and ministry, with a heart for helping listeners know Jesus and grow deeper in God's Word. Through Mark & Friends, he brings pastors, ministry leaders, teachers, missionaries, authors, and everyday believers around the microphone for biblical teaching, testimony, conversation, and encouragement.

Proofread Broadcast Transcript

We're glad you're here. We're glad you're here. Fellowship sweeter.

Knowing you're here. It's so good to see you. We hope that it's clear.

Everyone loves you. We're glad you're here. Reading from James 3, 13-15.

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from heaven, but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.

That was James 3, 13-15. And that was Christi doing that fine reading for us. And it's not a groundhog day, if you're familiar with that.

Who's that actor that every day is over again? Bill Murray. We did cover these verses last week, but there's so much good content and truth and hopefully points of application. Whenever you're reading the Bible or listening to a message or maybe a program, always ask God's Spirit to lead and enlighten your mind and heart so that you can draw a biblical truth, something that you can utilize to change in your life or to refine maybe some of those gift sets God's given you or be used to bless others.

God wants us interactive, bringing hope and healing to our hurting world. And I hope something that's said and shared today, you'll find a point of application so you can put it into practice. And last week, I have a bunch of notes still in front of me about taking an inventory and finding good counselors, those that can speak truth and those that can help guide and lead us and utilize the Scripture.

It's God's spoken word to find illustrations or points that we can follow and understand. We want to be praying up our situation and circumstances and really have godly counselors around us. And the Holy Spirit, for those of you that haven't asked Jesus into your heart, you don't have the benefit of the Holy Spirit living and abiding in you.

So it all begins that relationship with God by accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And so hopefully, maybe if you haven't made that decision today, this will be the day that you ask Jesus into your heart, that you recognize you're a sinner, that you're flawed, that you can't earn your way into heaven. But when you surrender to Jesus, you recognize that He paid the price for our sins on the cross and receive that and recognize that.

Then you have that new birth and the Holy Spirit can abide in you and guide you and lead you. And when you read the Scriptures, you'll be inspired and encouraged because it won't be just the text or some old stories or narrative that you're reading. It'll be God's wholly inspired word to bless and guide you.

So today we're going to cover again two kinds of wisdom. We talked a lot about it. Wisdom is much more than just having knowledge.

It's finding practical ways to use that knowledge and do it in wise and God-honoring ways. So, Mark, we're reading or rehashing some of the verses from last week. You have a lot more to say about it? Yes, there's a lot more good things to say about it.

I want to tell you about my wife. She has a way of getting people to do things they would never guess they were about to do. So a few years ago on her birthday, we woke up, and I said, happy birthday, and she looked at me, and she said, sing happy birthday to me.

Getting up in the morning, so I sang happy birthday, and then she smiled, and she said, I'm going to see how many people I can get to sing happy birthday to me today. And all day long, whenever she was talking with someone, she would say, it's my birthday, they'd say happy birthday, and she'd say, would you sing happy birthday to me? So I'm sitting there, and I'm hearing her in her office, people coming and going from her office, and I'm hearing people sing happy birthday to her. We're out at a restaurant, and she tells the waiter, and the waiter sings happy birthday to her.

We go to the grocery store, and we're walking through the checkout lane, and before I know it, the checkout person is singing happy birthday to her. Just every place we went, people were singing happy, total strangers would look at her for a minute, and then just start singing happy birthday. She'll try this with me a lot of times.

She'll say, stand right here in front of everyone and do this, or here, put this hat on, just for a second. Just put this hat on for a second. You can do it.

It's going to be fun. You'll like it. Put the hat on for a second.

And I have learned that a lot of times I just go along with it, but if I'm not going to go along with it, I have to give an emphatic no. And even if I give an emphatic no, she'll say, oh, it's going to be so much fun. It's going to be such a good, it's going to be so nice.

And I have to go, no, I am not going to do that. And that's just her ability to do something. So let me ask you a question about God.

Have you ever been asked by God to do something that really felt weird, so out of your norm that it was hard to even make the first move? That was the way I felt the first time I was in a worship service as a young man. And since the presence of the Lord, and since I should lift my hands and worship him, I should do that. And it felt odd.

It felt weird. I felt like everyone in the room is looking at me. And the reality is, is they were all worshipping God, and they weren't paying attention to me at all.

But I felt like the spotlight was on me. There's a lot of things God's going to ask us to do. I remember the first time I felt challenged to carry my Bible to school with me.

And I had this little pocket Bible, and I felt like I was carrying one of those big family Bibles around all day long. I felt like that's what I had in my hand. The first time I felt like I was supposed to initiate a conversation with someone with the intent of worshipping to them.

I felt like I was standing on a 50-foot high dive contemplating whether I was going to jump off or not. The first time our youth choir sang down on the square here in Springfield and we proclaimed Jesus, I felt like everybody in town walked by. It just felt so out there, strange, different.

The first time I prayed one-on-one with someone, it didn't feel natural at first. It felt weird. The same thing is true with us when God's wisdom begins to get applied to our life.

He whispers to us, Just celebrate what they have. Don't envy what they have. And it feels unnatural.

Just forgive them. They don't have to say they're sorry. Just forgive.

Well, I want them to say they're sorry. God, they should have to apologize to me. No, they don't.

It's not about them now. It's about you. What are you going to do? So this idea of doing something.

Maybe the first time you put your tithe in an offering plate, it felt really out there. But when we learn the Scripture and we trust the Scripture and we say this is the way life is supposed to be and I begin to trust God, all of those things that seem weird at first because they're against the flesh become more and more natural and we walk in wisdom. I believe that's a big call of what James is calling us to do.

I don't think any of us have been asked to do anything as weird as Hosea was. Hosea was the guy told to marry the prostitute. God doesn't say anything like that to us.

But he does ask us to do things that don't feel natural to us because of the sin nature. And so now I've got to decide, am I going to walk in the wisdom of God or am I going to walk in my own wisdom? That's what this passage, I believe this passage is really all about and that we should hold on to Scripture. I wrote down the word humility, deeds done in humility and that's kind of so hard for so many of us because we want to be recognized, we want to be credited, we want to be known.

Seldom do we want to do something out of humility. Some people maybe are more naturally that way but for me and I think maybe many that are tuned in today, it's hard to be humble. Yeah, think about this.

In 2 Corinthians Mark it says, since we have these promises dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit. So understand this, our body and our spirit is contaminated. We cannot trust it.

People will say, we've talked about this before. Well, it feels right. Feelings lie.

They mislead us because we have a sin nature. So we are supposed to be perfecting holiness out of reverence for God, learning how to act out of reverence for God. The words of my mouth, even the envy of my heart, the selfish ambition of my spirit.

Why should I sing that solo and not them? Why should I get to do that and not them? Is there a selfish ambition in this? Why do I want my ministry to grow? Is it really about the glory of God's kingdom or is it about me? Examining our life for godly wisdom. That's what we're talking about in this. Yeah, and the feelings, another word that I just wrote down because when we're guided by our feelings, generally they can be wrong or I don't feel in love today.

So do I mistreat my wife because I don't feel in love? What is it? Love is a decision. It's not a feeling. That's probably some of your counseling.

Thankful to God, thankful to God for all the feelings of love that he gives us. But we're not ruled by the feeling. I may be having a bad day.

I may be fighting with a real bout of selfishness. All kinds of things may be going on. I may have had some people do some nasty things to me and it spills out on somebody else.

Listen, this passage in James does not fit with the message that we get even in a lot of Christian circles today that Christianity is an easy life and should always be easy and always be simple. Live any way you want to. God is with you.

No, this is a passage of submission. It's a passage of humility. It's a passage of dying to yourself and a living in the nature of Christ.

That's where wisdom is found. And I see there's two different kinds of wisdom here. There's the earthly wisdom and the wisdom that comes down from heaven.

So listening friend, you might be smart and you might have some great gift sets. That's maybe some knowledge, but it's not necessarily the wisdom that God would want you to operate in. We talk about even our school system.

We need to get prayer back in school. Let me tell you, there's something far more dangerous in many of our schools than a lack of prayer. It's a lack of God, period.

It's a secular mindset. It's a mindset that doesn't bring God's rules into place. It's a mindset that rejects God's foundational rules and accepts secular, godless wisdom as being the right way to live.

And that wisdom, when it's finished, bringeth forth nothing but death. And if we don't understand that, we will be like blinded mice following the piper into death. It sounds like the rampage of influencers.

Everybody wants to be an influencer. And it's never about right and wrong. It's about looking a certain way and liking what we would think are risky behaviors and saying, well, you know, if that's right for you, or I dress this way because it's right for me, but there's no clothes on this person, and stuff like that.

And it's a goal of people to be an influencer. And what they're influencing us to do, you can't find godly goals there, it seems like. We touched on this a little bit last week.

But you take a religion like Islam. Islam is teaching personal discipline. If you pray so many times every day, if you dress this way, if you do this, if you do that, then you will be all right with Allah.

Christianity is different than every other religion that teaches about actions and good acts. It talks about transformation. I need to be transformed.

So I come to God broken. I come to God empty. I come to Him with nothing to offer.

I come to Him saying, make me a new creation in you. And so, yeah, the wisdom of the world is gonna seem popular and fun and exciting, but it always ends in brokenness. And so our call as Christians, anyone who's listening, if you're a Christian, our call is to seek out the wisdom of the word and to apply it to our life, not as a ritual to please God, but as a revelation of God of what wisdom really is.

And so we seek Him, and we seek how to act the way He would have us to act. And I'm telling you, when you start, it feels weird. It feels like a lack of wisdom.

It feels like, boy, I should be promoting myself more. I should be pushing myself more. I should be doing this more instead of being a person in the nature of Christ.

And so that's what we're talking about in this passage. And I know Christi just pointed this out, that the strategic ways that people want to be influencers and get so many likes or followers and all that stuff. But what happened to the word about being a witness? Do we not use that anymore? Now we all want to be influencers, but how can we encourage that listener today to fall back on being that witness for Christ that faithful follower of Jesus that brings into the workplace that witness? You know, the idea that as a Christian, the second I take on that label, what I'm saying to the world is this.

When you look at me, you can see Christ. Think about the responsibility of that. That is a huge responsibility.

I was thinking about this earlier today. I hope there will be many people in heaven that will say, God used Mark Johnson to be an influence in my life to point me to truth. I hope there won't be anybody in hell that'll say, if I hadn't met that Johnson guy, I wouldn't be here.

That's terrifying. We are called to represent Christ everywhere we go in every set of circumstances. And that's how we become a witness.

That's how we become a righteous influence. And it's not always received. Everybody's not going to receive our message.

Everybody didn't receive Jesus' message. Not everybody's going to receive it. We're called to be faithful to proclaim it.

And it starts with, do I live a life that backs up my claim? Does my life support this claim? That's the wisdom of God moving in us. When we started talking about James, he, for a long time, rejected the example and the witness of his brother, Jesus. And it took time and for him to witness everything before he was won over.

Yeah, it took the resurrected Christ showing up and revealing himself to him. We read that in Corinthians. One of the people he showed up to was his brother, James.

And so it took a lot for James to cross that bridge that big brother isn't just big brother. He is really the Son of God. But all of us, we live in this world where people see us and either we glorify the image of Christ, or we deter from the image of Christ.

What am I doing? Now, hopefully, I'm getting better and better every day. Yeah, we kidded before the program that we didn't want to have somebody years later says, you were a Christian when I worked with you, when I knew you? Oh, I would have never guessed that. But I had an interesting call.

I guess it's about eight days ago. His name was Bill. He worked with me at a Jewel food store 40 years ago.

And he's been trying to track me down for 40 years. And we got in touch. He called the station.

And we've had a number of conversations. But he said that was in aisle 12 of the grocery store where I met God and started surrendering to him. And you and others really influenced me.

And it's really neat how we're now talking and becoming best of friends. We've talked a number of times. But it was like 40 years ago.

And I wouldn't have thought that grocery store, I didn't think I had a very strong testimony. The grocery store after that and the other one, God clearly called me. And I went into those stores knowing that I was a worker for God, paid by Jewel food stores, but working for God.

But I was very intentional. That store, it's like, oh, I don't even remember being much of a witness. But he said, no, you really impacted my life.

So we have the blessing sometimes of learning that. But listening friend, I share it because oftentimes it might be just a caring word. You might hold the door open for somebody.

Maybe you give a veteran a gift card. You just want to say, hey, thank you for your service. There's so many different ways.

You rake the lawn of a neighbor that can't afford to have a workman over there. I mean, there's so many different ways we can witness and testify to God's goodness. You know, Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, let your good work shine before men, that they may praise your Father in heaven.

So good works don't save me. But when I'm saved, I'm called to good works. I'm called to do good things.

I'm called to answer the accusations of the world by not being a person of pride, not being a person of selfish ambition, not being a person of arrogance, not being a person of anger. I'm called to be a light of the gospel by being like Christ. And again, as we talked last week, the great place to start is the fruit of the Spirit.

Do I want the best for everyone? That love there is not a love about goosebumps. It's a love about wanting the best for others. And being willing, in Philippians, he says, you know, consider others better than yourself.

Put others before yourself. And so this willingness to say, I want what's best for everyone around me, and I'm going to do my best for them. Well, listening friend, did you get some good healthy conviction? Healthy conviction always draws you to God.

Yeah, you recognize you're a sinner, you're flawed, you can't measure up. But healthy conviction will say, Lord Jesus, I need to lean into you. I need your empowerment.

I need your help. I need your Spirit's leading. Condemnation doesn't come from God.

It comes from the evil one, and that has us kind of turn away from God. Well, that's not what God would want. He desires all of us to draw near to Him, and He'll draw near to you.

And I hope something out of James chapter 3, we again looked at verses 13 through 15, and we'll continue this study next Friday. Each and every Friday for the last few months, we've been going through this book of James. I hope you're really appreciating it.

There's only five chapters, so Monday through Friday you can read a chapter each day, or read all five chapters this weekend, or read it five different times this weekend. Pastor Mark began this series some months back, and he said, read it a number of times, five, six, seven different times. Be saturated by God's Word and His leading.

And always pray. It's a great practice to say, God, enlighten my mind. Holy Spirit, help me draw truths, insights, points of application.

Help me understand this Word, so that I can represent You into this hurting world. And as was just recently mentioned, the importance of living it out, applying it, but living it out, not by your feelings, but by the love that God has extended to you and to me. He showed and demonstrated His love while we were yet sinners.

Christ died for us. It wasn't when we cleaned up our act or did everything right. We'll never measure up.

He did it because of His love for you and His love for me. If you missed a portion of today's broadcast, want to hear it again, want to read the transcripts or the verses that have been discussed, talking points, there's a lot of information at greatnewsradio.org and wluj.org under the Mark & Friends tab. And there's other resources, and even a prayer for you today.

Stop by one of our websites, greatnewsradio.org or wluj.org. Well, thanks for listening. Thanks for being a part of our radio listening family. This is Mark Burns and Pastor Mark Johnson and a room of friends with the Ministry of Great News Media.

God bless you and have a great day, night and weekend. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.