

The Root Seeds of Foolishness

Pastor Mark Johnson on Envy, Selfish Ambition, Self-Examination, and Walking in Godly Wisdom

Pastor Mark Johnson

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Program Summary

In this historic Friday edition of Mark & Friends - the first broadcast recorded from the new downstairs WLUI studio - Pastor Mark Johnson continues the verse-by-verse study of James 3:14-16. With a room full of friends gathered around couches beneath a single ceiling microphone, the discussion contrasts heavenly wisdom with earthly, unspiritual wisdom. Pastor Mark defines wisdom as the proper application of godly knowledge and challenges listeners to examine the fruit of their lives rather than simply the image they have of themselves. James identifies bitter envy and selfish ambition as root seeds of foolishness that produce disorder and harmful choices. The conversation moves through self-examination, identity in Jesus, cultural compromise, Solomon's warning example, forgiveness, spiritual battle, and the need to ask God for wisdom. The central call is to stop blaming, honestly inspect what is producing repeated disorder, repent where envy or selfish ambition is present, and apply God's Word even before feelings catch up.

Key Takeaways

- James identifies bitter envy and selfish ambition as root seeds that produce disorder and foolishness.
- Knowledge and wisdom are not the same; wisdom is the ability to apply godly knowledge and insight properly.
- The Bible is both prescriptive and descriptive, and faithful reading requires recognizing the difference.
- Self-examination asks not merely who I think I am, but what the actual fruit and repeated patterns of my life reveal.
- Repeated disorder in relationships, emotions, finances, or decisions may be a signal that my 'programming' and assumptions need biblical correction.
- Godly wisdom begins with humility: I come to God admitting that my fallen thinking cannot reliably guide my life apart from His Spirit.
- My identity as a beloved child of God should direct wisdom toward kingdom purposes rather than selfish achievement.
- Christians are called to stand out through character and become lights and ambassadors who bring healing, hope, encouragement, and the message of Jesus.
- Envy refuses gratitude for how God has made and gifted me; selfish ambition turns teams, workplaces, churches, and relationships toward disorder.
- Knowing the right thing is only the beginning; wisdom grows as I obey God's Word even when my feelings have not yet caught up.

Scripture References

James 3:14-16, James 1:5, James 1:22, Romans 10:14-15, Philippians 2:14-15, 2 Corinthians 5:20, 1 Kings 3:5-14, 1 Kings 11:1-13, Galatians 5:16-25, Ephesians 6:10-18

Quote of the Day

"What does the fruit of my life say about me?"

Broadcast Notes

This program marks the first Mark & Friends broadcast from the new downstairs studio at WLJ in Springfield. Mark describes a room of roughly thirty friends seated on couches and chairs, speaking beneath a single ceiling microphone while Steve engineers from the adjoining room. Tad Jagitsch reads James 3:14-16, and Pastor Mark Johnson resumes the ongoing study of wisdom in James. He explains the distinction between prescriptive and descriptive portions of Scripture and defines wisdom as properly applying godly knowledge. A childhood memory of a downed electrical wire illustrates how knowledge becomes wisdom only when it changes behavior. Pastor Mark then urges deep self-analysis: repeated trouble should prompt the question, 'What does the fruit of my life say about me?' The group discusses worldly and heavenly wisdom, the tongue, identity as God's child, kingdom purpose, and the Christian calling to be light and ambassadors. James's words about envy and selfish ambition become the central diagnostic: rather than deny or excuse these motives, believers should admit them, repent, and take on the nature of Jesus. Solomon is discussed as a warning about compromising God's truth through cultural alliances. The program closes with the reminder that knowledge alone is insufficient; wisdom begins to grow when believers obey the Word even when obedience is difficult, while remaining alert to spiritual battle.

Practical Applications

- Ask God to show me one repeated area of disorder in my life and honestly examine my own choices before blaming someone else.
- Use James 3:14-16 as a heart check: where do I see envy, comparison, selfish ambition, boasting, or denial?
- When I learn a biblical truth, write down one specific way I will apply it rather than stopping at knowledge.
- Review one strained relationship and ask whether pride, envy, self-interest, or an unwillingness to forgive is influencing my response.
- Thank God specifically for how He has made and gifted me instead of measuring myself against someone else's gifts or success.
- Before speaking, ask whether my words reflect the Spirit of God or the fallen impulses I already know can get me into trouble.
- Examine one area of success and ask whether I am using that strength for kingdom purposes or primarily for myself.
- Ask whether my family, workplace, church, and community can see a distinctively Christlike character in the way I respond to pressure.
- When I know the right thing but do not yet feel like doing it, ask God for grace to obey first and let Him continue healing my heart.
- Pray James 1:5 daily and approach God humbly, believing He delights to give wisdom to those who ask.

Today's Challenge

Choose one area of life that repeatedly feels disordered - a relationship, emotion, habit, financial pattern, work conflict, or recurring frustration. For seven days, refuse to begin with blame. Instead ask: What does the fruit reveal? What knowledge has God already given me? Where might envy or selfish ambition be present? What would obedience look like today? Write one sentence each day about the wisdom God is teaching you, then take one concrete step of application.

Closing Prayer

Father, I need Your wisdom. Help me see myself honestly, not merely as I prefer to imagine myself, but through the fruit my life is actually producing. Show me where envy, selfish ambition, pride, excuses, or blame are creating disorder in me. I do not want merely to possess biblical knowledge; teach me to apply Your truth faithfully. Renew the programming of my heart and mind through Your Word and Your Spirit. Remind me that my identity is found in

Jesus and that the gifts and wisdom You give me are for Your kingdom purposes, not my own glory. Make me a light in dark places and a faithful ambassador who brings healing, hope, encouragement, and the good news of Jesus. When I know the right thing but do not yet feel it, give me grace to obey and continue healing my heart. Protect me in the spiritual battle and help me recognize lies before I follow them. I humble myself before You and ask for wisdom, trusting that You delight to give it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

About Today's Speaker

Pastor Mark Johnson serves at Calvary Church in Springfield and regularly helps facilitate the Mark & Friends verse-by-verse Bible discussions. A seasoned pastor, teacher, counselor, and storyteller, he brings years of ministry experience to practical conversations about applying God's Word to everyday life. In this continuing study through James, Pastor Mark challenges listeners to move beyond possessing knowledge and toward godly wisdom - honestly examining the fruit of life, rejecting envy and selfish ambition, and allowing the Holy Spirit to shape choices, character, and relationships.

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. His desire is that each program help listeners learn, grow, and faithfully live out their relationship with Jesus.

Proofread Broadcast Transcript

Mark & Friends Welcome Song

We're glad you're here, we're glad you're here,
Fellowship is sweeter, knowing you're near.
It's so good to see you, we hope that it's clear,
Everyone loves you, we're glad you're here.

We're glad you're here. We're glad you're here. Fellowship is sweeter, knowing you're near.

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 chapter 3, verses 14 through 16. 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. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. That's James chapter 3, verses 14 through 16.

And that was Tad Jagitsch, who drove in from Champaign. We appreciate him being with us, along with this great room of friends. This is our first ever historic broadcast from the New Mark & Friends studio in the downstairs area.

Kind of like our lobby entryway of WLUJ in Springfield here. We are seated at couches with just one microphone in the ceiling. Appreciate Steve in the other room.

He's engineering the program. First time for him to do that. I'm usually engineering it.

It's a little different without any microphones. We're all facing each other. We're downstairs.

We're all prayed up. I think, what, 12 or 15 of us had prayed. It's a room full, but there's still room for a few more of you.

We have extra chairs, so in a couple weeks when we do this again, we would love for you to come and attend. But we're going to be looking at James chapter 3, 14 through 16. We've been going through the book of James for about four months now or so.

Many Fridays you'll tune in and we'll cover a verse or two. It's verse-by-verse study through James. We're seeking it out for wisdom, for God's leading, and who knows who else might show up because there's a door and people can enter right in, so there might be some guests that will come in later on.

I think Paul's our doorman today, and we appreciate all the effort of the many people involved. Ani's not with us today or her dad, Bernie Lutchman. They're on vacation, but he'll be joining us, and Ani always provides some great appetizers and food.

Now, where's Joyce? Joyce, where are you? Oh, she's over at the desk there, so it's a roomful. I haven't counted, but at least 28, almost 30, and more probably still coming. But we appreciate you tuning in for the Friday edition of Mark & Friends.

As mentioned, this is our first downstairs studio here at WLUI. Pastor Mark Johnson of Calvary Church here in Springfield helps facilitate our discussion, appreciate his efforts and interest in equipping the saints and yet reaching those that maybe haven't come into a relationship with Jesus. So we're glad you're tuned in today wherever you're at on your faith journey, maybe far from God, not even realizing he loves you to the senior saint that wants to finish well and loves a good Bible study.

So Mark, James 3, 14, and 16, why are we looking at this again? This is a really important passage. When you think about the Bible, the Bible is filled with all kinds of information. Doctrinal information in there, there's historical information in there, and there's very practical information in there.

When you hear people attack the Bible sometimes, they don't understand the fullness of what's happening in the Bible. The Bible is both prescriptive and descriptive. So you think about prescriptive being something that you apply it to your life like a prescription.

Descriptive is something that just describes something, and usually in the Bible what it's describing is the depravity of man. And they'll point to some terrible story in the Bible, and they'll say, is this what the Bible's really, is this what God is? No, he's describing a fallen man. He's showing us how far we can fall down into sin.

Now, the two books of the Bible that are really focused on practical application to our life, all the Bible has in place is a practical application, but the two that are really focused intently on that are the book of Proverbs and the book of James, and they are both teaching us how to be wise, and in some cases, like in this passage, the root of foolishness. The root of what leads us to not be wise. So we think of wisdom as the ability to apply knowledge, godly knowledge, godly insight, properly.

And this is what this passage begins to teach us. This passage here is showing us, it has in quotes, quote unquote, wisdom that does not come from heaven, but is earthly and unspiritual. What it's all about, and that's what we're looking at a bit today.

Do you have an opening question for our many guests here in the studio? Well, I would ask everybody to think about, have you known somebody who had knowledge? Maybe there's been times in your own life where you've had knowledge, but you didn't have wisdom. You didn't know how to apply it, and because you didn't know how to apply it, you kind of get into messes. When I was a boy, a young boy, we were still living in a small town, and it was before we moved to Springfield, and a storm had come through.

I remember so clearly, I was probably four years old, and I remember this event very clearly. The next day, we were at the church, and I was out in the churchyard, and I wanted to play out there, and my mom had come out with me to keep an eye on me. One of the wires from one of the poles had been knocked down and was on the ground.

They hadn't gotten there and fixed it yet, so power was still out. And she pointed at that wire, and she said to me, don't ever go close to a wire on the ground like that after a storm. It could be full of power, and it could really, really hurt you.

And I've remembered that since I was four years old. That, boy, if you see something, you get knowledge, and what does knowledge give you? The wisdom not to go try to pick up that wire. You've got to learn how to apply knowledge in your life.

So, Mark, what I would say is I've met a lot of people in my life, talked to them about their life, talked to them about the ups and downs. Maybe they're struggling in some place, maybe in another place. I've never had somebody look at me and say, you know, I'm just a complete fool.

Bad things happen because of me. Be careful around me because I am so foolish that around me all the time is trouble. Nobody's ever said that.

But I've met people that bad things are constantly happening all around them, where there's trouble around them all the time. And they always seem to be surprised when people get upset or surprised or angry about the reaction of people. And it's because they're acting foolishly.

They're not acting wisely. And we have a hard time. This is one of the hard things we have to do as Christians is this self-analysis of our life, a deep look into who we are and not just who we think we are, but what does our life say we are.

What does the fruit of my life say about me? And when bad things are the norm in your life, that's probably because you're not making good decisions. You haven't learned how to apply knowledge rightly. So we have to learn that the knowledge of heaven, wisdom that comes from heaven, we have to learn how to hear it, learn how to apply it in our life, and learn how to walk in wisdom.

Elder James talks about teachers and your tongue and be not only hearers of the word but doers of the word. But going along with what Pastor Mark is saying, could worldly wisdom and heavenly wisdom be compared to the schools nowadays? Worldly wisdom is teaching in the school system, from what I gather, that you can be a boy or a girl, take your pick. They took God out because the world is saying we don't need God.

But heavenly wisdom, would that be something comparable to, yes, we do need God in the school system. Yes, we do need to hear more about God. We need to evangelize, we need to spread the word of the gospel to each other and abroad.

As this radio station here is doing, it's spreading the Word of Jesus throughout the nation, which kind of reminds me of Romans 10, 14, where it kind of goes to, how can someone call on the one that they have not believed in, on and on and on, but this spreads the word. I was thinking, Mark, the difference with the knowledge and wisdom. How many times, and I'm sure there's others in this room, that you're thinking to yourself, I'm going to say something, no, I really probably shouldn't.

But then you go ahead and say something and then you put your foot in your mouth or you regret saying it. So it's trying to discern, Lord, how do I operate in the spirit and not say some of the things I shouldn't say. When you think about this wisdom, godly wisdom, worldly wisdom, that can be in any setting.

So you take a radio station. A radio station can be a place that promotes godly wisdom or it can be a place that promotes worldly wisdom. Entertainment can be something that promotes godly wisdom or it can promote worldly

wisdom.

Whatever setting we're in will promote one or the other because they have a feeling that they're right. So we have to come back to this basic knowledge of who we are. We are the creation of God and we are fallen.

God gave us this free will. We've abused that free will. We are fallen creatures.

So I can't relate to the world or to others out of my own thinking. I don't think right. I don't feel right.

I don't see others right. I don't balance my life out the right way. I balance it out from my sin nature unless I surrender that sin nature to the Spirit of God and let him rule me.

We're like computers that are being asked questions but all the wrong information has been programmed in and so we spit out the wrong answers. We do the wrong things. Now, we're not flawed and broken because God failed in creation but we're flawed and we're broken because he gave us the power of choice and we rebelled and now we know no other way.

We live in a world filled with the pain of rebellion and filled with the foolishness of the world. So that's where we have to begin as a follower of Christ is I come to him destitute. I come to him poor.

I come to him with nothing to offer and I ask him to change my life. And it is in James where it talks about when we seek God and ask for wisdom he delights to give it to us. And I wrote down the word identity.

I think that's really important too as we recognize our identity as a beloved child of God and then we seek him for wisdom and it's not just so that we can accomplish things or have better skill sets or achieve things in the world. Ultimately, we're supposed to use those gifts and that wisdom for kingdom purposes. All my life is supposed to be about kingdom purposes.

You think about what Paul teaches us. We're all supposed to become stars, lights in the darkness. Our life is supposed to shine differently from them.

We're not called to fit in with the world. We're called through our character to stand out in the world, to be different from the world, to respond differently. Our families should see that.

The places we work should see that in us and this comes from discovering the wisdom of God. So I would say, Mark, it's a good time to ask yourself, if you're trying to examine your life, why is my life such a mess? Why am I so depressed? Why am I so emotionally broken? Why am I so angry? Why am I so frustrated? Why do I feel like such a victim? Why do I act the way I act? Why are my relationships the way they are? Why are my emotions the way they are? Why are my finances the way they are? Why are they such a mess? So you can see people, maybe in one area of their life, they've got some wisdom. But you've got to be careful even there.

So a person may be financially rich and they think, I am very successful in this. But they use those riches to manipulate others. They use those riches selfishly.

They use those riches for their own intent. They use those riches in a negative way. And they're going to come up someday with the emptiness of this world instead of the fullness of what God has for them.

So if my life's a mess, I've got to ask myself, all my relationships are a mess. All my emotions are a mess. My finances are a mess.

Why is all this such a mess? Well, it's probably because my programming is wrong. And the second you say that to somebody who's really foolish, maybe your programming is wrong. Maybe you need to rethink how to approach relationship.

So many of them will go, nope, it's not me, it's them. It's not me, it's them. They don't even take a moment to look inside themselves.

There's no inspection of their own life. There's only excuses and blame on other people's lives instead of backing up and saying, wait a second, how did I get into this mess and how did I walk into it? And so they never learn wisdom. And a couple times it's referenced in here about selfish ambition and not boasting or denying the fact that you're boasting.

And then the envy, envy and selfish ambition. So those might be key words for all of us today as we think about how we interact at the workplace or with our neighbors or with different people in the community. What's our intent? And I wrote down another word, ambassadors.

We're called to be God's ambassador, bringing healing and hope and proclaiming Jesus. Morgan, and I would tell somebody who's listening out there maybe who's going through something, what this means is it doesn't mean we never have problems. Followers of Christ have problems.

We face issues from time to time. The question is, are they constant? Is it constant in my life? If it's a moment in time, somebody's not acted right, I haven't acted right, okay, but is it constant? Is it every place? Now, what you're talking about when we talk about envy and selfish ambition, what James is saying here, here's the root seed of foolishness. Here's two seeds that will build foolishness in you.

If you envy others, instead of being grateful for how God has made you, thankful for the gifts he's given you, satisfied in who he's made you, or if you have selfish ambition, if you get a group of people together on any team, any workplace, any church, and somebody is selfishly ambitious, it's going to stir problems. And so he's saying, you've got to examine yourself, admit, hey, I have some envy here. Oh, wait a second, I am ambitious for myself here.

Don't deny that, admit it, repent from it, turn from it, and take on the nature of Christ. Does anyone want to share an example? Oh, I see a hand going up. Well, I'm thinking popular culture today, talk shows, it's all about everybody getting attention over airing their dirty laundry.

And I'm looking at this and I'm going, okay, if you have selfish ambition in your heart, don't boast about it. And like, that's what most of this stuff is. Everybody's going, look at me, look at me, look at my problems.

I'm interesting because I've got all these terrible problems. And everybody gets caught up in watching that. And I'm going, not only should you not talk about this, but don't go looking for it in other people.

I think that the call of the Christian is to recognize we live in this fallen world. And our call is to be a light in that world and to live so differently that the world sees it. And at first, there's going to be people who reject that.

Now, here's a problem that Christians have. If you learn about the love of God, and you don't learn about the justice of God, then you can begin to lightly treat God. I can begin to be a person who, oh, well, God loves me.

He's going to put up with me. He's going to put up with my faults. He's going to put up with all this stuff.

He loves me. But the justice of God demands that He judge us for our actions. Now, getting my actions right doesn't get me saved.

I need the grace of God to get saved. I need His grace for salvation. But once I come to salvation, I don't want to walk into that thinking, oh, God's just going to put up with me the way I am.

No, I've got to walk into that. What fruit of that is I want to please God. And so I've got to turn from the things that are wrong and harmful to others.

Today, many discover the love of God before they discover the justice of God, and that's a problem. I was going to bring up the book of Kings, where Solomon, that great wise man, but he failed to learn to word little things, even though God gave him the greatest wisdom of all. Would you comment on that? Yeah.

Solomon's a great example of somebody who started off with the right spirit. And what happened, if you study Solomon's life, is he broke the law of God. He began to marry for the sake of making peace treaties, for the sake of coming into unity with other countries.

He began to marry all of these foreign women and princesses, and they brought into Jerusalem, they brought their gods, they set up their altars, they did those things, and it swayed him away from what he had known at the very beginning. So that's a great warning for all of us to make sure that we do not get ourselves married into our culture to the point that we begin to compromise the truth of God's Word. That's a fantastic thought.

And to finish that story of Solomon, the beauty of it is he came back around. So we all can benefit and appreciate if we start out okay, we fail, we got off track, but then the Lord is always there waiting for us mercifully to welcome us back. That's the story.

That's certainly our hope. That's certainly our hope. But don't forget, we don't find Solomon's name listed anywhere among the heroes of faith.

We don't find that name listed anywhere. And the fruit of what he did caused an absolute brokenness in Israel for the rest of their history because of the kings that came up from his lineage, the fruit of that continued throughout all of Israel. Ten of the tribes just disappeared into nothing.

Yes. My thought, we live in a fallen world with a fallen culture, with a damaged and fallen mind and heart. It's who we are.

We have to be taught to have wisdom. We have knowledge. We can get that on our own.

But we have to be taught how to have wisdom. And what does Scripture tell us? We must ask, and he's faithful to give it to us. That's humbling.

We have to humble ourselves for that. And in this world, in this culture, where it's all about me, that is just almost unheard of. It's a warning sign to us.

It's a warning call to us. Walk carefully. Crying out for wisdom is a step.

I need knowledge to discover wisdom. I can have knowledge and not have wisdom. I'm not going to have wisdom, though, unless I get knowledge.

So the Bible pours out knowledge for us on how to act. Forgive others. It gives us knowledge.

Forgive them. Now, as I've talked on this show many times, there's times when that's really hard. And there's times when I pray, God, I want to forgive them.

And so bless them, Lord. Now, Lord, you know I'm lying. So please forgive me for lying.

And heal my heart. Because I know this is right. I know this is the right knowledge.

I know this is the right way to pray. It's the right way to act. But I don't feel it yet.

And God, in His time, will heal us if we come to Him sincerely and say, Help me. And so to take the knowledge of the Word and then apply it, even when we don't feel like it, but we obey, that's where wisdom begins to percolate in our heart and the Spirit of God begins to reveal wisdom to us. We have to remind ourselves that we're all in a spiritual battle with the enemy, Satan.

He is right there. Whenever we hear some wisdom, Satan is right there putting his lies in our ears and our hearts and minds, and we have to be careful. We're all guilty of falling into that trap sometimes.

We have to remind ourselves, spiritual battle. We'll talk a little bit more about this next week. Yeah, so we're closing out our time.

Steve, you're still doing good in there. Steve's engineering our program today. This is the first historic.

Mark and friends in our new downstairs studio here at WLUI. In a couple weeks, we'll have a new bunch of people. Maybe all of you will return and we'll have, somebody mentioned bleachers or upper deck seating.

We can get more of you in here. We love that Pastor Mark devotes time to studying the Scripture and desiring that we all grow and learn and raise high the name of Jesus and have that personal relationship. These two kinds of wisdoms, there's that earthly wisdom which will get you far and you can accomplish things with it.

But godly wisdom is always the best. It's what God would desire us to be, his ambassadors using that wisdom to bring healing and hope and encouragement and blessing to others. But it should always point to Jesus and not to ourselves.

So the best wisdom is the wisdom that God gives us that brings him the glory. And so I hope you are encouraged today by the broadcast. This is so different not having a microphone in front of any of us.

We have our new ceiling mic that's working for all of us in the room. I guess we're at about 30. A few more people came in.

So we'll continue this discussion in the book of James next week looking at chapter 4. I hope you can join us again. There are other resources, the transcript of today's broadcast, talking points and tools to help you grow in your walk with Jesus. So stop by greatnewsradio.org and wlui.org and you can listen to this program anytime or send it on to a friend.

And be blessed by the truths that are God-honoring that will help you grow in your walk with Jesus. So thanks for listening. Thanks for being a part of our Radio Listening family.

This is Mark Burns, Pastor Mark Johnson, and a room of friends. Thank you guys for watching.