CRAIG: Good morning. Thought we'd begin our time together with a reading from one of my favorite theologians, Dr. Theodore Geisel, more affectionately known as Dr. Seuss. “Now, the Star-Belly Sneetches had bellies with stars. The Plain-Belly Sneetches had none upon thars. Stars weren’t so big, they were really so small. You might think such a thing wouldn’t matter at all, but because they had stars, all the Star-Belly Sneetches would brag, ‘We’re the best kind of Sneetch on the beaches.’ With their snoots in the air, they would sniff and they’d snort, ‘We’ll have nothing to do with Plain-Belly sort.’ And whenever they met some when they were out walking, they’d hike right on past them without even talking. And one day, it seems, while the Plain-Belly Sneetches were moping and doping along in the beaches, just sitting there wishing their bellies had stars, a stranger zipped up in the strangest of cars.

‘My friends,’ he announced in a voice clear and keen. ‘My name is Sylvester McMonkey McBean and I’ve heard of your troubles. I’ve heard you’re unhappy, but I can fix that. I’m the Fix-It-Up Chappie.’ Then quickly Sylvester McMonkey McBean put together a very peculiar machine and he said, ‘You want stars like a Star-Belly Sneetch? My friends, you can have them for three dollars each. Just pay me your money and hop right aboard.’ So they clambered inside and the big machine roared. And it clonked, and it bonked, and it jerked, and it berked, and it bopped them about, but the thing really worked. When the Plain-Belly Sneetches popped out, they had stars. They actually did, they had stars upon thars.

Then they yelled at the ones who had stars at the start, ‘We’re exactly like you. You can’t tell us apart.’ ‘Well, good grief,’ groaned the ones who had stars at the first, ‘We’re still the best Sneetches and they are the worst. But now, how in the world will we know,’ they all frowned, ‘if which kind is what, or the other way around?’ Then up came McBean with a very sly wink and he said, ‘Things are not quite as bad as you think. So you don’t know who’s who, that’s perfectly true. But come with me, friends. Do you know what I’ll do? I’ll make you, again, the best Sneetches on beaches and all it will cost you is $10 eaches.’ And that handy machine working very precisely, removed all their stars from their tummies quite nicely. Then with snoots in the air, they paraded about, and they opened beaks, and they let out a shout, ‘We know who is who. Now there isn’t a doubt, the best kind of Sneetches are Sneetches without.’

And, of course, those with stars all got frightfully mad, to be wearing a star now is frightfully bad. Then, of course, old Sylvester McMonkey McBean invited them into his star-off machine. And then, of course, from then on, as you probably guess, things really got into a horrible mess. All the rest of that day on those wild screaming beaches, the Fix-it-Up Chappie kept fixing up Sneetches. Off again, on again, in again, out again, through the machines, they raced around and about again, changing their stars every minute or two. They kept paying money, they kept running through, until neither the Plain nor the Star-Bellies knew whether this one was that one, or that one was this one, or which one was what one, or what one was who. And then when every last cent of their money was spent, the Fix-it-Up Chappie packed up and he went.”

When I was a kid, I remember thinking the Sneetches were stupid. Now, I actually realize how incredibly easy it is to become a Sneetch. Do you know what I mean? How incredibly easy it is to get in a place where you value something that’s ultimately not very valuable and yet, the efforts that you’re willing to make to achieve that thing that’s not worth achieving, the efforts we make to pursue the things not worth pursuing actually cause far more expensive harm than the things themselves are worth. It’s exactly what James actually begins to draw our attention to. In the book of James, if you join me in chapter three as we continue our study, what we’re gonna see is that James begins to talk about exactly what Dr. Seuss talks about.
What he’s gonna say isn’t gonna rhyme, I’ll just warn you right now, but he’s even more pointedly going to make us understand how incredibly important it is that we value what’s actually valuable. He says this in chapter 3:13, he says, “Who is wise and understanding among you?” We’re just gonna stop for a moment there because that is the question of the passage today. What he’s really asking is who among you has true wisdom? Usually, at the end of a message, if you’ve heard me for a while, you know that I usually kinda give three or four questions to wrestle with, but I’m not gonna do that today because there’s really just one question we need to ask and it’s the one that James is asking right here. Do you have true wisdom?

Wisdom, by the way, just so we’re on the same page with it, here’s how I define wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to move things from where they are to where they should be. So it’s not just intelligence. Wisdom is how we apply our intelligence to actually bring changes. It’s the way that we look at a conversation and you go, this conversation’s not going the way it should. How do I get this conversation so that it’s going the way that it should? It’s what allows us to look at our marriages, our families, or our churches and go, you know what? We’re not where we should be. How do I get us from where we are to where we should be? And that’s what wisdom is. It’s the ability to move us from where we are to where we should be.

Because that raises the question, well, how do you know where we should be? Like, how do you know what the end goal is? And the answer that James is gonna give us is, it depends entirely on which kind of wisdom you’re using. There’s two very different kinds of wisdom in the world and they’re kinda like a computer’s operating system. What James is gonna say is that there is an operating system that the world uses, there’s an operating system that God uses. And as the followers of Jesus, obviously, we’re supposed to be running God’s operating system. We’re supposed to be using God’s wisdom, but the reality is that we’re often influenced by this other one.

And so what James really begins to do in this passage is to help us figure out which kind of operating system we’re running, which wisdom it is that we’re running. So that’s really the question. What operating system are you running? And if your question is, well, how do I know, that’s what James begins to tell us. He says, “Who’s wise and understanding among you? Who has true wisdom?” He says, “Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.” He says wisdom, true wisdom, God’s wisdom, God’s operating system produces humility which leads to the kind of deeds that lead to a good life.

And really what he’s saying here is the kind of thing that he’s been saying up to this point in the book of James. He’s saying real religion, real faith, isn’t just a matter of what we believe in our heads, it comes out in our lives. Real religion drives the way that we speak, it drives the way that we act. So, real religion can be seen with our eyes, real religion can be heard with our ears. And now what he says is that real wisdom is the same way. Real wisdom produces results that are in keeping with God’s will. It produces deeds that are done in humility since wisdom produces humility. Now, humility is one of those words that I think we struggle with.

I mean, it’s interesting to me that I’ve noticed in America, we do a very weird thing when we talk about humility. See, in America, as I talk to you about humility, what I often hear from people is, well, humility means that you think other people are better than you. You think that you’re insignificant, you’re inferior. That’s true humility. But what’s weird about that is that that definition of humility all comes back to you. It’s all about what you think of yourself and that’s not the way the Bible talks about humility at all. Biblically, humility is not about the way you think about yourself, it’s the way you think about other people.

I heard it said this way that biblical humility doesn’t cause me to think less of myself, it just causes me to think of myself less, that my real focus is on other people. Real humility doesn’t say, “I have no value,” it doesn’t say, “I don’t matter,” it says, “Other people do matter.” Interestingly enough, the word that James is using here for humility can also be translated as gentle. Humility and gentleness are very, very closely aligned. And think about it this way, when I got married, people gave us fine china. I still don’t know why, okay? But here’s the thing. At my house, we have fine china, we very rarely use it, but we also have plastic plates. And the thing is I treat the two different kinds of, like, dinnerware very differently. The plastic plates, I sometimes see
how far back I can stand and still get them into the sink. I don’t do that with the fine china. The fine china, I don’t even put in
the sink, okay? The fine china can only be washed with distilled water. As Jim Gaffigan says, it has to be cleaned with white
kittens, okay? The thing is I treat fine china very, very gently. And here’s the thing, I don’t treat it gently because I think it’s more
valuable than me, I treat it gently because it’s valuable and that’s biblical humility.

It says we treat somebody gently because we recognize that they have value. So, biblically, humility is the insistence on treating
others gently because we realize that they matter to God and therefore they matter to us. Does that make sense? Humility
doesn’t say that you don’t matter, it says that others do. And because they matter we treat them gently and so what James says
is here’s one of the ways you can tell if you’re running God’s wisdom because God’s wisdom produces a humility that looks at
others and sees value in them and then acts accordingly. These are the good deeds that make up a good life. So true wisdom
sees the value in others and it treats them accordingly.

So, we push into that for just a little bit and we go, okay, think about it. How do I think about other people? Do I think about other
people? And do I treat them with the gentleness that comes from recognizing that they have value? Do I treat my wife, or my
husband, or my kids, or my neighbors, or my co-workers, do I treat them with a certain kind of gentleness and respect because
I realize they are valuable, that they matter? It’s not about whether they matter more than me, it’s just that they matter. And if
the answer is, yeah, that’s how I treat others, that’s my default reaction. Other people matter and I treat them with gentleness
because of that, well, that’s an indication that you’re running God’s operating system.

On the other hand, if you go, not as much as I’d like to. I mean, the reality is I don’t really always treat my wife, or my husband,
or my kids, or my neighbors, or people as though they have value, that’s an indication that this other value system has invaded.
And James goes on and begins to describe this other value system. He says, “But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition
in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Instead, search your hearts.” He says, “Such wisdom does not come down
from heaven, but is earthly. It is unspiritual, it is demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder
and every evil practice.”

He says there’s another operating system out there. There’s another version of so-called wisdom in the world and it has the
ability to influence us in tremendous ways. He says that it’s earthly, it’s worldly, it doesn’t come from heaven. He says that it’s
unspiritual, it doesn’t come from God’s Spirit. He says, in fact, that it’s demonic. And he gives us a couple of descriptions,
characteristics of this wisdom so that we can begin to recognize it. One of them, he says, is that it is full of bitter envy. Full
of bitter envy. Now, bitterness, so we’re on the same page, here’s how I understand bitterness. Bitterness is...it is a present
antagonism rooted in a past frustration. It’s present antagonism rooted in past frustration.

So, if somebody speaks meanly to you and you speak meanly back to them, that’s not bitterness. I’m not saying it’s a good
idea, but I’m saying it’s not bitterness. But if somebody in the past spoke meanly to you and you still remember it and so you’re
constantly speaking harshly and roughly to them because of that thing they did to you back then, that’s bitterness. It’s a present
antagonism towards people rooted in a past frustration. If somebody has hurt you in the past and you continue to view them
through that lens and so you continue to hurt them back for what they did to you back then, that’s bitterness. It’s a present
antagonism rooted in a past frustration. Now, those frustrations can come from lots of different things.

Frustration, basically, is just...it’s a feeling that comes when our expectations don’t meet our experiences, when there’s a gap
between our expectation and experience. When we expect one thing and we don’t experience it, we feel frustration. There’s
nothing inherently wrong with that, although it depends to some degree on what it is that you were expecting, whether or not
what you expected was reasonable. I mean, if you feel frustration because somebody made a promise and didn’t keep it, it’s
reasonable to experience frustration. What you have to be careful about is not to allow that frustration to turn into bitterness,
so that no matter what they do going forward you’re always gonna treat them as the person who broke that promise. That’s
bitterness.
But sometimes, frustration comes from unreasonable expectations. Sometimes we experience frustration because we expected something and we didn’t experience it, but what we expected wasn’t reasonable. And that’s where James begins to talk about envy. See, envy is...it’s a passion to possess what others have, okay? It’s a passion to possess what others have. Maybe it’s material things, maybe it’s the car, or maybe it’s the house, or it’s the career maybe. Or maybe they’re less tangible things, maybe you go, man, I wish my marriage looked like her marriage looks like, I wish my wife would do what his wife does, I wish my kids were like their kids.

And what happens is, it’s not necessarily a big deal if you just have that passing thought, oh, it would be nice to have a car, oh, it would be nice if our marriage looked like that. What happens is that that passing thing develops into a passion, where you’re so insistent on getting what it is that others have that you begin to cause damage in the process of that. That’s why it’s called a passion to possess it, not the passing thought, but a passion to possess it, that leads you to the behavior that James calls selfish ambition. Selfish ambition, we have these two words in English. The Greek is actually just one word, they have one word that means this thing, and what it really means is, it means seeking your own welfare at others’ expense.

The Greeks have one word for that meaning, I’m going after that thing that I want and I don’t care what damage it does to other people because I have to have it. See, bitter envy leads to this selfish ambition. Nothing inherently wrong with ambition itself, but an ambition that says, “I’m gonna get what I want regardless of what it does to others,” that’s a problem. That’s a problem. And maybe it’s that you’re fully aware of the damage it’s doing and you don’t care. Maybe you know that your pursuit of that promotion is causing damage at home.

Maybe you know that your pursuit of that kind of life is causing damage in your relationship. It’s putting pressure and it’s doing all kinds of things that are divisive and disorderly and just doing all kinds of bad stuff and you go, I know, but I don’t care because I gotta have that thing. Yeah, I would hope that would be an immediate red flag, but I think for most of us, the problem is not that we see the damage that it’s causing and we don’t care. But for most of us, the problem is that we don’t see because we don’t care to see. We’re so fixated on that thing that we want or those things that we want that we’re not asking, what cost am I asking others to pay in my pursuit of this thing? I need this promotion and so we never ask what it’s doing to our kids who need us.

We never ask what it’s doing to our families or spouse. It’s not that we’re aware of the damage, it’s that we’re blind to it. James says that’s selfish ambition and he gives us two commands related to bitter envy and selfish ambition. He says, “Don’t boast about your selfish ambition and don’t deny the truth about your bitter envy.” It’s the two commands. He says, “Don’t about your selfish ambition,” and you might go, well, who’s gonna boast about that? And the answer is the world does it all the time. We have little phrases that we use, we say, “You gotta look out for number one because if you don’t, who will?” We call ourselves self-made men, self-made women.

I got where I was going and we’re not asking the question about who we stepped on to get there. This is my favorite one. You gotta break a few eggs to make an omelette. Yeah, what if you’re the egg? But see, we do, we boast about it. I got this. Yeah, it caused damage, but you know what? That’s what you just have to do to get to where you gotta be. But the thing is that what James is saying is that’s a pretty clear indication that you’re operating off the world’s wisdom system. He says don’t boast about it. The other thing he says is don’t deny the truth about your bitter envy and I think that one is probably a bigger struggle for the Church. Because I’ll tell you, after 25 years in ministry, I think bitter envy is an epidemic among Christians and it’s destroying our marriages, it’s destroying our churches, it’s taking our families out of the race for God’s purposes and glory.

But the problem is that we don’t recognize it for what it is. We look around us and we see what others have and here’s the big thing, we see what we think others have, that’s a fundamental key. We only see the, you know, the face that they present to things and we judge others without any real awareness of what’s going on and the thing we go, that’s what I need, that’s what I have to have. That’s what I need to possess. And why don’t I have it? My husband isn’t doing what he needs to do so I have it,
my wife isn’t doing what she needs to do to have them, my kids are not this, so we have the family, and God isn’t showing up and God isn’t doing what needs to happen so that I get this.

And there’s that bitterness that begins to creep in. But we don’t call it what it is, we don’t recognize it for what it is. And so James says the first step in dealing with it is to call it what it is. It’s a passion to possess what others have that has deepened into a bitterness, that changes the way you approach others and it changes the way you approach God and you gotta call it what it is. If that’s operating in your life, the first step is to call it what it is. And you go, okay, but how do I know if I have it? And he actually gives the answer to that. He says, “Because where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.”

He says this operating system, this way of looking at the world, there’s the presence of bitter envy and selfish ambition, you can look at the fruit it produces. What it produces is disorder and every evil practice. And that evil practice word doesn’t just mean morally bad, it literally means worthless, unable to accomplish what God wants accomplished. He says here’s how you know if you’re harboring bitter envy and selfish ambition. Look at what you’re producing in your relationships. Is it disorder, and division, and depletion? Then you gotta call it what it is. He says, “Listen, we can recognize the influence of this demonic version of wisdom by the disorder and the division that we produce in our relationships.”

And so, we have to kinda take stock of our relationships. We go, what am I producing in these? What am I contributing to these relationships? He goes on and he says...well, as you begin to recognize this other kind of operating system and the influence it has, you need to begin confessing that and you push it aside, but you need to begin replacing it with something because if you don’t replace with something, you’re gonna go back to the default every time. And so he begins to give us the replacement, he begins to describe God’s operating system and he says this, “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure. And then it is peace-loving, it is considerate, it is submissive, it is full of mercy and good fruit, it is impartial, it is sincere.”

It’s probably not a coincidence that as he begins to describe heavenly wisdom, God’s wisdom, he gives us seven characteristics of it. Seven was the number for divine perfection among Hebrews, and so he says God’s wisdom has these seven characteristics. Anyway, what we’re intended to do as we hear these is to go, okay, that’s what I’m supposed to replace that other operating system with. So, he says the first thing is that it’s pure. It’s the same language he’s been using, he said, you know, religion that God considers pure is religion that’s not corrupted by the world’s value system.

He says, so religion that God considers pure says, “Widows and orphans are valuable, not because they can offer me any return, but simply because they’re valuable to God.” And so he says true wisdom is free from the world’s system of valuing others for what they can do for you. That’s the first sign of true wisdom. It’s free from the world’s system of valuing others just because of what they can do for you. He says true wisdom also is peace-loving. That it loves peace. But it’s more concerned with peace in our marriages, it’s more concerned with peace in our families, it’s more concerned with peace in our churches than it is with personal preference. You know, we started this service off today with some dancing and we’re a Baptist church.

Some of you are like, we’re Baptists? And Baptists, historically, they don’t do any dancing, okay? But see, here’s the thing, like, you know, there’s a long-standing belief in a lot of Baptist circles that, you know, dancing is absolutely wrong, you gotta get rid of it, but the thing is, like, we recognize our ability to reach out. We have, like, 700 kids in this building this week. They’re gonna be hearing the love of Jesus, they’re gonna hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news of Jesus. And you know what? If dancing in appropriate ways helps that, you know, we’re gonna set aside that historical approach.

We’re gonna set aside, maybe, some of those preferences. Some of you may come and go and you know, these colors, they are not contributing to my reverence of God. Yeah, they don’t do it for me either. Like, I don’t see orange and go, Jesus, except for the orange team down in the kids’ side. Yeah, you definitely make me think of Jesus, so let me go with bright green. I don’t think of bright green and think of Jesus, but see the thing is we’re setting aside those preferences in order to reach people for Jesus. See, what James says is that true wisdom values peace which allows things to go forward more than personal preference.
True wisdom doesn’t insist, no, no, no. You’re doing that wrong, or that’s not the best way, or that’s not the way I would do it, alright. And I think you know, actually, this is not the way that I’d like it. True wisdom goes, yeah, yeah. Peace is what matters most. I’m not saying we set aside truth. If somebody says Jesus isn’t the son of God, I’m gonna argue. Somebody says the Bible is not the word of God, I’m gonna argue. I’m not gonna set those things aside, but there’s so many things that we insist on doing our way and James says that’s not God’s way. God’s operating system says peace matters more than all those things that we put on the front burner and cause division, disorder, and depletion with.

He says true wisdom is considerate and that’s a little bit of a hard one. Considerate is a good translation, but there’s not really one word in English that quite captures this. The idea with considerate here is that it’s a person who has been proven right, but they don’t insist on exercising those rights at somebody else’s expense. It’s actually...it’s a legal term in the ancient world, it was used to refer to the person who, you know, maybe was taken to court, and in the court when all the evidence was out there, they were proven right. And then the judge said, “Okay, you’re right. Your opponent is wrong. How do you wanna punish him for what he did to you?” And the person who’s proven right goes, “I don’t wanna do anything. Let’s just end this thing.”

It’s referring to somebody who has the right to exact revenge, has the right to exact retribution, but chooses to set that aside. I mean, this is an unspiritual way to think about it, but you remember the movie “Christmas Vacation”? Here’s what comes to mind when I think about this word that James is using. It’s the scene where Clark Griswold, basically, has a temper tantrum and he describes his ideal Christmas wish at this point, which he says, “Somebody would go get my boss out of his happy little home and bring him here so I could show him what a miserable jerk he is, how much damage he’s done. That would be a great present.”

And Cousin Eddie does it. Like, he goes and he gets the boss and he ties him up and he puts a huge bow on him and he brings him into the house and as you might imagine, eventually the police show up and they’re about to make some arrests and the boss suddenly goes, no, no, no. You don’t need to do that. I’m not going to be pressing any charges. He has every right to press charges, but he chooses not to press charges. And that’s the word that James is using. It’s those of us who have been proven right. Somebody hurt us and we were able to demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt what you did was wrong. Somebody misunderstood us and we were able to prove without a shadow of a doubt that they were wrong, and yet, rather than exacting revenge, rather than pushing into that we go, okay, it’s over. It’s done.

So what he says is that true wisdom chooses not to remember or return mistreatment. It chooses not to remember or return mistreatment. How much of that is evident in your life? Or how much do you turn the knife every time you’re proven right? How many times do you remind them over and over and over again, I was right and you were wrong? James says that’s not true wisdom. He says true wisdom is submissive and I think there’s a lot of connotations attached to that word that make it difficult for us to understand what he’s saying. James is not talking about submitting to authority here. It’s actually a different word that the Bible uses to talk about submitting to the governing authorities or to our leaders.

We are called to submit to those that God has put in authority over us, but James isn’t actually using that word here. He’s using a word that, honestly, I think teachable is a very good translation. He’s talking about people who are willing to admit that they’re wrong when the evidence demands it. Yeah, you have an opinion, you have a belief, you think it’s this way, and then evidence comes and it’s put on the table and you realize, huh, I was wrong about that. He says true wisdom says, “I was wrong. I don’t believe that anymore. I’m not gonna push for that anymore.”

Now, some of you probably know people who are not that way. Like it didn’t matter how much evidence you put on the table, it doesn’t matter how clear it is to everybody that they’re wrong, they’re still gonna dig their heels in. Anybody know anybody like that? Anybody is that person? You don’t have to hold your hand up, that’s okay. Don’t look at each other. I was playing Trivial Pursuit years ago and I landed on space and the person I was playing with pulled out the card and the card said, “What constellation of stars is mentioned by name in the Bible?” And I was like, I know this, because I’ve just been reading Job and the Book of Job mentions the constellation Orion, so I said, “The answer is Orion,” and they said, “Nope. The answer is Pisces.”
I was like, okay, so it also mentions Pisces, but it definitely mentions Orion. Like, no, the answer is Pisces. No, no, no. Get out my Bible. Right here. It’s right here, black and white. Nope, it’s not the answer. I mean, here’s the proof of how much I still struggle with this. It’s been 20 years and it’s still enough for me to share it with you, okay? I need to be right, okay? I have this intense need to be right. I don’t know why that is, it’s probably because I usually am. It’s the only thing I can figure, right? I’m glad you laughed. So, I don’t have this all nailed, okay? But see, this attitude that goes, it doesn’t matter what the facts are, I’m not gonna give in, James says that’s not God’s wisdom.

God’s wisdom is submissive, it’s teachable, it changes its mind when the evidence requires it. True wisdom changes its mind when the evidence requires it. He says that it’s full of mercy and good fruit. You know, mercy is withholding a consequence, a negative consequence that somebody deserves. They earned it, but I choose not to give it to them. That’s mercy. But he also says it’s full of good fruit, it gives blessing even when they don’t deserve it. It’s what we might call grace. What he says is that the true wisdom does both of those things, that it’s quick to bless others whether they deserve it or not. God’s wisdom, God’s operating system, is quick to bless others whether they deserve it or not.

And he says true wisdom is impartial. It’s the opposite of what he was talking about earlier and he said that the church, you’re showing partiality, you’re showing favoritism to the rich. You’re giving them the best places in the worship services because you think they’re gonna be able to help you, so you wanna be on their good side. He says, “But you’re showing favoritism. You’re being partial.” He says true wisdom doesn’t do that, true wisdom is impartial. It uses God’s standards to judge value and importance, even if it’s personally costly. Even if you’re giving up some potential benefit by choosing to bless others and shower favors upon others who don’t have anything to offer in return. He says true wisdom uses God’s system of assigning value to people even when it cost you something.

And he says true wisdom is sincere. Sincere is a great translation, but the literal world is interesting. It’s literally the word for hypocrite with a negative at the beginning of it, so it’s a not-hypocrite. So, true love is, or true wisdom is not hypocritical. And I like the word hypocrite because it has an interesting history. The word hypocrite literally means false face. It was used in Greek theater for the masks that people would put on to hide their identity. They’d put on a false face so nobody knew who they were and over time, that word came to be used for people who pretend to be something they’re not in order to get something that they want.

Hypocrites pretend to be something they’re not in order to get something they want, it means that that’s not God’s operating system, that’s not wisdom as God defines it. He says true wisdom doesn’t pretend to be something to get something that’s down the line. True wisdom has no hidden motives. True wisdom has no hidden motives. It shows who you are and it’s right up front about what it cares about. It got no hidden motives. Now, there’s a lot there, right? And what James calls us to do is to push into each of these characteristics and say, “How much of that do I see in my life?” I mean, that’s kind of our homework.

How much? How much purity do I see in my life, in my relationships? How much do my relationships prove that I love peace more than being right, more than personal preferences? How much do my relationships prove that I’m considerate? That I don’t push in and turn the knife, even when I’ve been proven right, but now I don’t return or even remember wrong? How much do my relationships prove that I’m teachable, that I’m full of good things even when people don’t deserve them? That I’m impartial, that I’m sincere? I mean, that’s what James is calling us to push into and that’s a lot of work. So I think what James says to round out this thing is to kinda...he kinda boils it down to the bare bones and he says, let me make it a little bit simpler for you.

Do you wanna know if you’re running God’s operating system? Here’s what it looks like when somebody runs God’s operating system. He says verse 18, he says, “Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.” Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness. So, if you wanna know if you’re running God’s operating system, let me make it simple. Here’s the question you need to be asking. Do I produce peace in my relationships? Is what I value, is what I run after, is the way that I do it, is it producing peace in my marriage? Is it producing peace in my family? Is it producing peace in my neighborhood,
producing peace in my workplace? Am I a person who produces peace? Because at the end of the day, that’s the clearest evidence that you’re running God’s operating system, that you’re working off of God’s definition of wisdom.

Wisdom, remember, it moves things from where we are to where things should be and God’s wisdom says where things should be is a place of peace. Because peace is the field, it’s the soil in which true righteousness grows. Unlike the Sneetches, who pursued what was not valuable and ultimately produced division, disorder, and depletion, all their money was spent, James says God’s wisdom produces peace, it produces harmony which is the soil in which true righteousness, what really is valuable, can grow. And so the question that James leaves us with is based off of this one very clear teaching through the whole passage which is this, that true wisdom produces peace. True wisdom produces peace. God’s operating system produces peace. So, what operating system are you running? What operating system are you running?

God, we can laugh at a book like “The Sneetches” and yet we can recognize that our lives look a lot like theirs. We find ourselves running hard after things that really have no value. We’re spending tremendous resources pursuing what’s not worth pursuing. In the process of doing that, we sow division, disorder, we deplete our resources until we’re left with nothing and we’ve achieved nothing of value.

Lord, in contrast to that, you give us a picture of what true wisdom looks like and we confess that our lives don’t always exhibit the fruit of true wisdom. And so we ask that you’d speak to us, not just in this moment, but throughout this next week and beyond. Lord, convict us of the ways that we’re not running your operating system, that we’re not running your version of wisdom. Show us where we’re sowing division and then give us the strength to ask the deeper question of what is it in me that’s leading me to sow that division? Lord, would you make us people of peace, people who are humble? And so produce peace.

Lord, we think of Jesus and we realize that there’s no clear example of true humility that produces peace. The King of Glory humbled himself and became one of us. He set aside his rights, he set aside honor and glory, and they were his, but he set them aside. He was abused and mistreated, he was treated wrong, but he didn’t hold that against them. In fact, he said, “Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they’re doing.” And ultimately, he died on the cross, the perfect picture of humility. And yet, Jesus, it was your death on the cross that brings us peace, forgiveness, redemption of our relationship with our Father, transformation.

Your humility, Jesus, brings us peace. Would you make us people who operate from God’s wisdom, who run God’s operating system? And so, we like you, Jesus, we are people who produce peace in our relationships which is the soil in which true righteousness can grow. Lord, convict us where we need to be convicted, strengthen us where we need to be strengthened, pour into us peace and pour out from us peace, for Your glory, for Your honor, and also for our good. In Jesus’ name. Amen.