



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### **How to Raise your Spiritual I.Q.**

*By Matt Hook (Based on thoughts from David Walls)*

*James 3:13, 17-18 "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 the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness."*

Casey Stengel's had one of the highest "Baseball" IQs in the business. He was a successful player, but more so as a manager. Casey landed the job with the New York Yankees. He won 10 pennants in 12 years, including five straight world championships. Following three dismal seasons with the Mets' expansion, Casey finally called it a career. He spoke in "Stengalese." Listen to his wisdom:

- "The key to being a good manager is keeping the people who hate me away from those who are still undecided."
- "There comes a time in every man's life and I've had many of them."
- *(To Outfielder Bob Cerv)* "Nobody knows this [yet], but one of us has just been traded to Kansas City."
- "The only thing worse than a Mets game is a Mets double header."
- "They've shown me ways to lose I never knew existed."
- "Sure I played. Did you think I was born at the age of 70 sitting in a dugout trying to manage guys like you? "
- "If we're going to win the pennant, we've got to start thinking we're not as good as we think we are."
- You look up and down the bench and you have to say to yourself "Can't anybody here play this game?"
- "It's wonderful to meet so many friends that I didn't used to like."
- "If Hook could only do what he knows..." (It seems Jay Hook, the pitcher who is credited with the first Mets win, explained to a reporter the aerodynamics of why a curve ball curves. The reporter won article of the week for the NY Times.) Hook was on the bench talking to the reporters after being taken out of a game early.

Casey walked by and said "If Hook could only do what he knows..." Casey was talking about my dad. But Casey's advice is sure true for all of us, isn't it?

**It's one thing not to know something. It's another to know something, but not learn from it...not to change your behavior as a result of what you know.**

As we've been studying James, the half brother of Jesus who wrote to Christ followers scattered around the world, we've seen he's concerned *not* with what we know, but with how we live. He wants our faith brought to life. He wants positive change because of what we know. The only way to show we have spiritual wisdom is by how we live.

Don Shula, the former head coach for the Miami Dolphins, says that “learning is defined as a change in behavior. You haven’t learned a thing until you can take action and use it.” Just like faith: Faith isn’t faith until you put it into action. Up until then, it’s just belief.

James says it *this* way in verse 3:13: *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.*”

**How’s your spiritual IQ?** Do you consider yourself to be, in some measure, spiritually wise? That’s the question James proposes. But while we go around acting spiritual and wise, James interrupts our daydreaming with the “final” answer: **Spiritual wisdom shows up in a changed life. Godly wisdom is not demonstrated by talk, but by actions.** There is false wisdom, but the way we know God’s wisdom is that **God’s wisdom always changes the way we behave.** That means if you and I haven’t changed, we can’t claim it.

It is those positive behavioral changes that James hands us in verses 17 and 18. James’ spiritual I.Q. test is not a written exam, it’s an on-the-job evaluation. Listen to the kinds of answers that God wants from our spiritual IQ: *“But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.”*

God will fill us to capacity based on our willingness to obey. The size of our obedience will determine how much of God’s Spirit and wisdom we will experience. When we are spiritually wise, when we’re doing what we know, God will graft these onto our lives. We see changes in two categories: our relationships, and our reactions. One of the first things that God wants to change in our lives falls under the category of our **relationships** to one another. James describes the consequences of God’s spiritual wisdom in us with the words “peace-loving, considerate, and submissive.”

To be “*peace-loving*” is to be someone who promotes harmony. This word comes from a Greek word that means “the termination of strife; and the absence of quarreling.” In other words, peace-loving Christ followers go out of their way to create unity, as much as they possibly can. They make it a habit to avoid arguing with people. People with a rising spiritual I.Q. attempt to preserve unity where it exists and to promote it where it does not exist.

Sometimes within the church, we breed a strain of persons who oppose everything and everyone. We’ve almost elevated this kind of behavior to the level of spiritual gift. Their sentences usually begin with the little word “But...” Nothing and no one is good enough. To this kind of person, answers are never complete enough, efforts are never strenuous enough. Attention on them is never focused enough. They glory in their ability to divide and disrupt a church. Chuck Swindoll describes these people:

“Some of you are causing tremendous problems because of your attitude. You are capable. You are intelligent. You are qualified and maybe even respected for your competence. But your attitude is taking a toll on those who are near you – those you live with, those you work with, those you touch in life. For some of you, your home (and church) is a battleground, a mixture of negativism, sarcasm, pressure, cutting comments, and blame. You are laughing less and complaining more...”

I always thought I was peace-loving. But painfully, just this week, God showed me I do this with one of my kids, in particular. I’m never quite satisfied. I complement him, and follow it with a “But you could do that better...” So instead I’ve tried to raise my spiritual IQ and tell him nothing but how glad I am that God made me his dad, and how proud I am of him.

Did you know there is more in the New Testament written on unity in the church than many other more commonly talked about issues? God the Father does not want his children to fight with each other. Why? **Because disunity in a church drives people away from Jesus.** Listen to Jesus’ words, as he prays for the future church: *“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”*(John 17:20-23)

**Unity creates belief.** How will the world believe that Jesus was sent by God? Not by if we agree on every issue. Not if we win every argument. Not if we are unanimous on each vote. But if we are united and demonstrate through our unity, our love for each other. Unity creates belief. “The continuous and widespread fragmentation of the Church has been the scandal of the ages. It has been Satan’s master strategy. The sin of disunity probably has caused more souls to be lost than all other sins combined.”

So you may be thinking: “Okay, so I’m a little negative, and maybe I associate with people who are always looking to create a disturbance. So help me out. How do I raise my spiritual I.Q.? How do I move toward peace-loving territory?”

The answer is in the next two words of verse 17. Let’s read it together: “*But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.*”

The word “*considerate*” means to be “non-combative and reasonable in evaluating others.” We know what it means to be considerate: not shooting your mouth off first thing, not insisting on your own way, looking for the best in even the worst of people. But the “biggie” is it describes people who are willing to forgive others even when they have every right to do otherwise. How rare is that, even in the church? And yet, our spiritual and emotional and even physical health is hugely dependent upon our attitude toward those who hurt us and even sin against us. We will spiritually grow up or spiritually wither up depending on our ability to forgive others. (Our marriages will thrive or die based on this). Christian psychologist, Archibald Hart explains “forgiveness is surrendering my right to hurt you for hurting me.” And that is a mark of godly wisdom in our lives.

What’s amazing is how many people who call themselves followers of Jesus simply refuse to live this way. When they feel wronged or envious, they just wait to spew dragon breath and strike back. They move on only when they have hurt those who have hurt them. Only after they inflict damage in return are they satisfied. And it happens in church.

That is not the way of Godly wisdom. God’s wisdom oozes forgiveness. It chooses deliberately not to hold something against another. It chooses not to respond in a way that the other person deserves, but rather to give to them what Christ would give – and that’s grace. Historically, Methodists were called “the people of Grace.” Why? Because that’s the nature of the God we worship!

This isn’t rocket science. Jesus says be forgiving. Be considerate. (Tell you neighbor “I already knew that”). It’s simply doing what we know. Being “*considerate*” marks godly wisdom and moves us up the spiritual IQ scale. And so does a “*submissive*” spirit.

The word “*submissive*” simply means “willing to yield, open to reason, easily persuaded.” This does not mean that a person is weak or gullible – the emphasis is on being willing to bend to others when we’re not dealing with unalterable biblical issues. A person raising their spiritual I.Q., who models God’s wisdom is not so entrenched in his or her opinion that they refuse to listen to alternate points of view. Being “*submissive*” is simply the opposite of being stubborn and unyielding.

Beware of always living with your own opinion. You’ve probably encountered a lot of “unyielding people” in church. And yet, Godly wisdom is not being always right, nor inflexible. The wise person is open to suggestions, and ready to listen. Let me ask you: When is the last time you or someone you know backed down from their position? When is the last time you willingly and joyfully let something go in the name of unity? Remember, we’re not talking about clear and biblical mandates. When did you yield to others, even though you may feel that you are right? When did you submit to the other point of view and then not complain for a year or two? When was the last time? (Turn to your neighbor)

When we do what we know, our relationships with people point to a rising spiritual I.Q. And that moves into the second area: our reactions to them, when James speaks of being “*full of mercy and good fruit.*”

“*Mercy*” is James’ way of saying that people of godly wisdom make every effort to reach out to people around them. But the emphasis of this word is not simply that you pray with someone, though that is important. “*Mercy*” means “to reach out to someone with practical help.” Mercy is not simply something you feel, it is an action and it insists on dealing with people in terms of their need, rather than what they deserve. **When we spot someone in need, we are to react with mercy.** Why don’t we do what we know? Sometimes

we over-analyze things. And **when it comes to mercy, “too much analysis creates paralysis.”** Our family is hosting Sarah from Guyana, who had major surgery last week. If Leigh and I had thought much about how we’d need to care for baby Sarah after surgery, we might have missed the incredible blessing of this little girl. She’s touched our lives, our family’s lives, our church life, the schools, and the neighbors with whom we try to share the love of Christ. We’re not *that* merciful. We’re just trying to do what we know. But when we’re obedient, God brings us mercy. And mercy doesn’t keep score. I realize that as we move toward mercy we run the risk of being used by people, and some people live by taking advantage of mercy. But it’s a risk we must take, if we want to increase our spiritual I.Q. The trick about mercy is we give it to people in trouble, even when the trouble is their own fault.

That’s a lot of people. Who’s on your list? Maybe a son who’s failing college, or a daughter who drinks too much, or a wife who you think isn’t the woman you married, or a friend who violated a confidence, or a church that hasn’t met your expectation. That leaves us with the final area of behavioral changes that come as we raise our spiritual I.Q. **Being real** with others.

*“But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.”*

The words are “*pure, impartial, and sincere.*” They stand together. *Pure* means sincere integrity – no false motives in connecting with God or people in the church. The pure person shows up at church because they sincerely desire to draw near to God and worship Him. *Impartial* means they are consistent in their connections and relationships with people. They are the same person no matter where they are or whom they’re with. *Sincere* means “without hypocrisy.” This person doesn’t pretend or play out a part in order to influence people. Those people who act out parts and lay aside their true identity do whatever it takes to make themselves look good.

These are simply what God grafts into our lives when we raise our spiritual IQ. Hear the Good News: It doesn’t take special knowledge, or special chants, or special lotus positions. It takes a special heart – a changed heart. God’s heart. Because God didn’t keep his wisdom aloof and lofty. He came to earth and died on a cross, to live to help others and pay the penalty for our sins. When you and I put our faith in that, our hearts change. The problems occur when we try to clean up God’s act a little too much. We do what the Pharisees did. We make a religion out of it. But Jesus *lived out* what God said. He did what he knew. He got down and dirty. It’s different from all the other religions. It’s doing what you know. And God wants you to put your heart into it. Put your heart into Him.

God will not give more of his Spirit than you are willing to obey. The person with a high spiritual I.Q. is filled with Godly wisdom. They are doing what they know. And now you know too. And if it’s the Godly kind of wisdom, it’ll change your life today. So let’s do what we know!