

**Worship Material**  
**Choosing God, choosing wisdom**  
**Material from Roots Bible Study**  
**Sunday 22nd September**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

Creator God, you make us and shape us;  
you provide for all our needs  
and you guide our paths.  
Help us to live our best lives for you,  
bringing your peace to our world.  
May we be like Jesus  
in how we live alongside others  
and so draw nearer to you.

**Amen.**

**Read James 3.13-4.3,7-8a**

**Bible notes**

The Letter of James is concerned above all else with the life of faith. It is not a doctrinal piece. The writer is concerned that his readers should make good, holy, wholesome choices. Such choices are informed by wisdom, a virtue particularly prized in the Hebrew Scriptures but maybe less so today. In his book *Waking up to God*, Neil Richardson suggests that 'wisdom is a blind spot in our economically dominated, globalised culture. Clever, skilled, well-informed people we recognise and value. But a wise person? What might a wise person contribute to the economy?'<sup>1</sup>.

Typical of James is the emphasis on faith lived out (3:13). It is interesting to note the similarities of the characteristics of wisdom listed by James to the fruits of the Spirit and their opposites, the fruits of the sinful nature that Paul speaks of in Galatians 5. There is another parallel with Paul in 4:1 when James speaks of the 'cravings that are at war within you' (cf Romans 7:24-25). So, maybe contrary to what Luther thought (allegedly), James isn't that different to Paul after all. The wisdom that James writes of is the gift of God, not the achievement of humanity. So, in choosing the way of true wisdom we are essentially choosing God.

'Submit to God' (4:7) is an unusual New Testament phrase (the only other place it occurs is Hebrews 12:9, NIV; NRSV translates this as 'subject to'). Usually, the word submit is used of human authorities or interpersonal relationships.

On the Devil, Michael Townsend<sup>2</sup> argues James ‘undoubtedly believed in such a devil, i.e. a spiritual power in opposition to God’. Townsend suggests that ‘Those who find this belief difficult to share, and who prefer to regard the terminology as metaphor for the mystery of human evil, nevertheless need to recognize the emphasis of standing up to such evil’<sup>3</sup>. Here we have a reminder that wisdom and discernment are close cousins when it comes to making wise, godly choices. We then have comforting and assuring words affirming the faithfulness of God – a key attribute of God that will be both celebrated and questioned across the focus passages in this edition of Roots. There are echoes in these verses of the temptation narratives where Jesus, drawing on the wisdom of the Scriptures, resists the Devil and angels come to attend to him. The passage ends in a rather blunt and unusual way for James whose normal form of address is brothers or dear friends. The Greek word for sinners, *hamartolos*, is used for someone who is wilfully disobedient and who positively loves the sinful life. James’ call for change is pretty forthright.

### **Prayer**

God of blessing and joy, thank you for your gifts,  
which are more than we can ask or imagine.

Thank you for the gift of life, which is precious and sacred.

Thank you for the gift of faith, which is a light in the darkness. Thank you for the gift of hope, which is an anchor for the soul. Thank you for the gift of love, which is the greatest of all.

Thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ,  
who is our Lord and our friend.

**Amen.**

### **A prayer to conclude**

God, may we be great in your eyes  
by being humble. (*bow heads*)

Help us to be wise  
by following your Word. (*open hands like a book*)

May we be blessed  
by being a blessing (*open arms to include others*)  
and by choosing you.

**Amen.**