

[In the verse from Proverbs the word 'fear' means 'respect'. We do not need to be afraid of God. Respect for him makes us wise.]

1. This could be a short sermon: 'Be wise; become wiser. Amen.' Wisdom is vitally important in life. See the effects of its absence in certain politicians! Abraham Lincoln said, 'I don't think much of a person who is not wiser today than they were yesterday.' Let's unpack this theme a bit.
2. What is wisdom?
 - It is a characteristic of God and also a gift from God to us. James urges us to pray for it. The children's song which we heard in the service says it is 'Thinking like You'.
 - Various books in the Old Testament are wisdom books: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job. Here we learn the wisdom which God gave to Israel. The author of some is king Solomon. He was known as wise, but he did not live up to his reputation: he married too many wives and went astray as a result.
 - For us wisdom is embodied in Jesus. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:24, 30: 'Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God' 'you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God'
 - Paul also refers to the cross of Christ as wisdom. Unbelievers think it is foolishness, but believers know that this is the way God saved the world.
3. Genuine wisdom is never dull; it manifests itself in proper behaviour. But wisdom has a timebound element: dress codes vary over time and it is wise to wear clothing that does not make you stand out. There was a time when the bowler hat was the thing to wear, but no longer. There are times when it is wise to use the M25 but also times when it is best to avoid it. So we learn that what is wise is not constant; we need to know the times in which we live.
4. God uses various sources to give us his wisdom: teaching by parents, teaching in the church, the Bible, conversations with good friends.
On the other hand, there are sources of foolishness. Shun bad friends, shun the red top newspapers, shun conspiracy theorists, avoid much of the internet.
5. Verse 17 is a list of the properties of true wisdom. In 'The Message' it goes like this: "Real wisdom, God's wisdom, begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, not hot one day and cold the next, not two-faced.
You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results *only* if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honor."
This paraphrase brings out that James has a social definition of wisdom: wisdom is relating well to the people around you in God's name.
6. I would like to add that it is wise to acknowledge that we humans can't understand God's ways. We don't understand the suffering of righteous people and we don't fully understand the necessity of the cross of Jesus. Apparently, there was no other way for God to defeat sin than the death of Jesus, but we don't know why this is so.