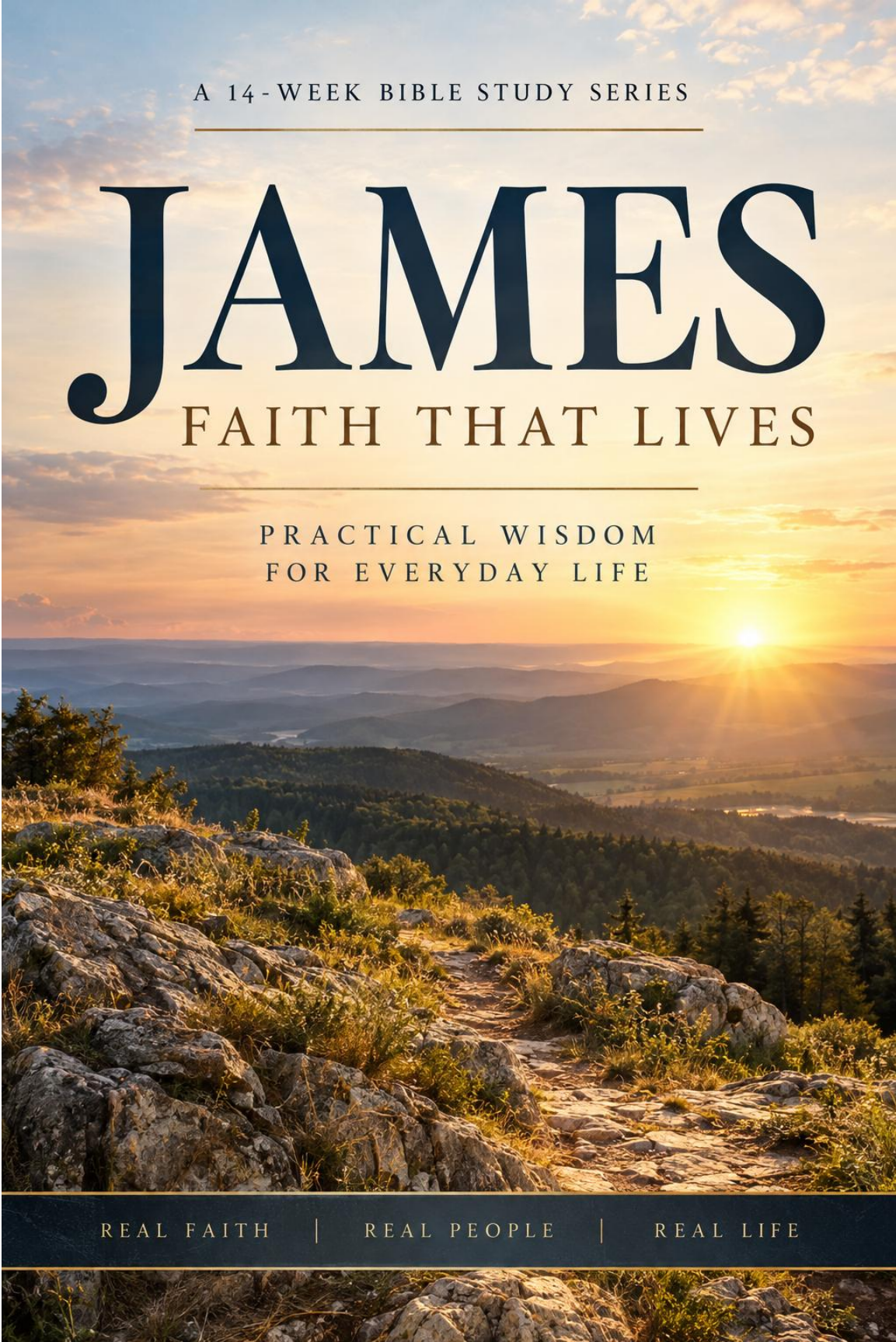




A 14 - WEEK BIBLE STUDY SERIES

JAMES

FAITH THAT LIVES

PRACTICAL WISDOM
FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

REAL FAITH | REAL PEOPLE | REAL LIFE

The Epistle of James

14 Lessons on Life as Follower of Christ from the Epistle of James

by Chris Mullis

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Scan to Listen:



Scan to Watch:



Welcome to James: Faith That Lives

Dear Friends,

I'm glad you've chosen to join us on this journey through the Epistle of James!

James is one of the most practical books in the Bible. He doesn't spend much time discussing complicated theological ideas. Instead, he gets right down to the everyday challenges of living as a follower of Jesus Christ. How do we handle trials and temptations? How should we treat others? What do our words reveal about our hearts? How do we put our faith into action?

Throughout this 14-week study, we'll discover that genuine Christian faith is more than something we believe. It's something we live.

Each lesson includes a Scripture passage, a message to help us understand and apply it, and personal reflection questions. I encourage you to read each lesson before we gather, consider the questions, and come prepared to share your thoughts and experiences. Our discussions will be richer as we learn from one another.

My prayer is that this study will do more than increase our biblical knowledge. I hope it will challenge us to examine our lives, strengthen our relationships with Christ and one another, and inspire us to live out our faith in meaningful ways.

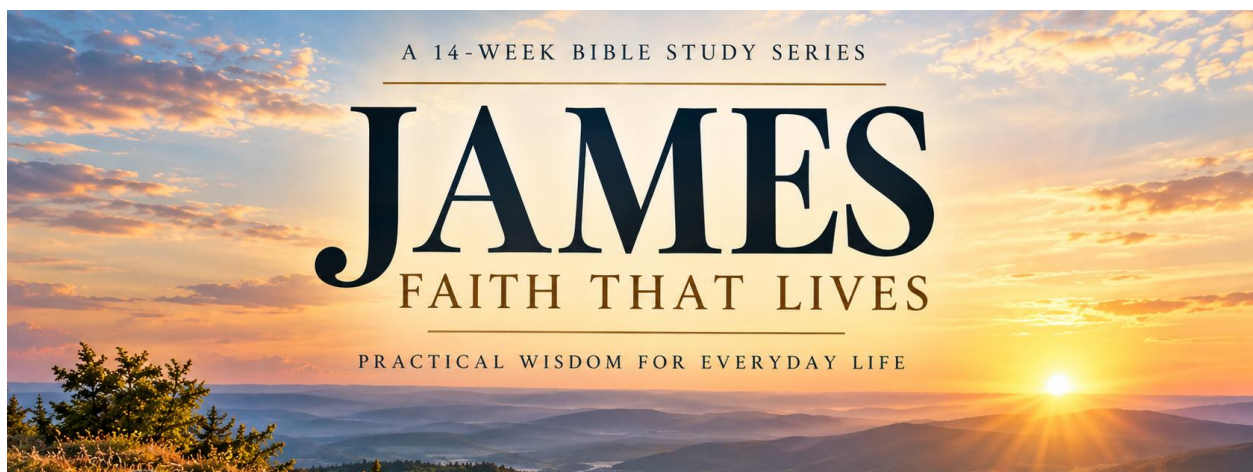
After all, James reminds us, **“Don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says.”**
(James 1:22)

Let's grow together in a faith that truly lives!

In Christ,

Pastor Chris Mullis

October 12, 2026



Suggested Format for this Study

The following format is a suggestion that has worked well for me, but feel free to adapt it to your teaching style and the resources available. Each lesson can easily be adjusted to last between one hour to an hour and a half.

Pre-Study Preparation

I recommend providing participants with a schedule, which can be created using the “Schedule Template” document. This helps keep everyone informed of the material to be covered in each session. Additionally, you might consider starting with an “Orientation” session. This will give you a chance to introduce yourself, get to know the participants, distribute study materials, explain the study format, and answer any questions they may have. It can also encourage community to offer light refreshments at the beginning of each session. Participants can sign up to take turns providing simple snacks, such as coffee and cookies. This not only helps set a relaxed tone but also gives participants a sense of ownership in the study. They can sign up for refreshments in the "notes" section of the “Schedule Template.”

Weekly Materials

Each week, participants will receive a sermon to read in preparation for the following session. I suggest distributing one sermon at a time to help participants stay focused and not read ahead. However, feel free to provide all the sermons at once if that works better for your group.

The General Session Format

Below is a general format for each small group session:

- 1. Begin by welcoming participants and sharing any important announcements**
- 2. Intercessory Prayer (5-10 minutes)** – Allow participants to share any praises or concerns, and then pray over them as a group. It can be helpful to keep a list of these requests to follow up on them in future sessions. InterPrayer (5-10 minutes)
- 3. Group Discussion (20-30 minutes)**
 - After the introduction, guide the group through the activities and discussions in the “Leader’s Guide” at the end of each sermon.
 - Your role as the facilitator is not to have all the answers but to guide and encourage meaningful conversation. The provided questions are a starting point— feel free to adapt or ask follow-up questions based on the group's thoughts and interests.
 - While some discussions may naturally stray from the topic, it’s important to discern whether these tangents are worth exploring or if it’s time to steer the group back to the main topic.

Bible Study – The Epistle of James

Start Date: _____ **| Time:** _____

Join us for a 14-week Bible study exploring the practical wisdom, spiritual maturity, and everyday faith found in the Epistle of James. Written to believers facing hardship, James speaks directly to everyday Christian life—how we handle trials, speak to others, treat people, resist temptation, use wealth, and live out genuine faith. This discussion-based Bible study be full of thoughtful conversations about the short New Testament book of James. Whether you are new to Bible study or have studied Scripture for years, you are invited to join us as we grow together in wisdom, faith, and spiritual maturity.

Date	Theme	Scriptures We will Study	Refreshments:
Week 1	Hello. My Name is James.	James 1:1	
Week 2	Trials and Temptations	James 1:2-18	
Week 3	Listen and DO	James 1:19-27	
Week 4	Impartial Love	James 2:1-13	
Week 5	Faith that Moves	James 2:14-26; Matthew 17:20	
Week 6	Controlling the Tongue	James 3:1-12; Acts 2:1-4	
Week 7	Godly vs. Worldly Wisdom	James 3:13-18	
Week 8	Submit to God, Flee from the Devil	James 4:1-10	
Week 9	Warning! Do Not Judge!	James 4:11-12	
Week 10	Life is a Mist	James 4:13-17	
Week 11	A Warning to the Rich	James 5:1-6	
Week 12	Patience and Endurance	James 5:7-12	
Week 13	The Power of Prayer	James 5:13-18	
Week 14	The Wanderer	James 5:19-20	

Introduction to James

Who Wrote the Epistle of Epistle?

James 1:1 states the author is James. Some believe this is a pseudepigraphal attribution. Others believe James is indeed the author. If so, this could be the brother of Jesus who was also the leader of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). According to Biblica.com, “Four men in the NT have this name. The author of this letter could not have been the apostle James, who died too early (44 AD) to have written it. The other two men named James had neither the stature nor the influence that the writer of this letter had.”

Jesus had several brothers. James may have been the oldest since he is listed first in the list of Jesus’ brothers in Matthew 13:55. Jesus’ brothers did not understand his ministry at first, but James became a leader in the early church in Jerusalem after Christ’s death and resurrection.

James was one of the people to whom Christ appeared after his resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:7. Galatians 2:9 calls James one of the, “pillars of the church” along with Peter and John.

James was an important leader at the Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15. He helped the Church decide the standards required of Christians throughout the world, including the decision that gentile Christians were not required to be circumcised or follow other Jewish customs to be Christian.

When Was The Epistle of James Written?

According to Act 12, Jesus half-brother, James, was martyred during the reign of King Herod Agrippa (around 62 AD). If this is the same James who authored the epistle, he must have written prior to his death in 62 AD. Biblia.com points out there are several indications, it was written even before 50 AD.

First, “Its distinctively Jewish nature suggests that it was composed when the church was still predominantly Jewish.”

Second, “It reflects a simple church order—officers of the church are called “elders” (5:14) and “teachers” (3:1).”

Third, “No reference is made to the controversy over Gentile circumcision.”

Fourth, “The Greek term synagogue (“synagogue” or “meeting”) is used to designate the meeting or meeting place of the church (2:2).”

Other scholars who argue for pseudepigraphal authorship of James date the letter to the early second century.

To Whom Did James Write?

James 1:1 states, “I am writing to the “twelve tribes”—Jewish believers scattered abroad.” The whole epistle has a Jewish tone; for example using the Jewish title for God, “Lord Almighty” in 5:4. Perhaps these were believers from the early Jerusalem church were scattered by the “great wave of persecution” (Acts 8:1) that broke out after Stephen was martyred for his faith. Biblia.com states, This may “account for James’ references to trials and oppression, his intimate knowledge of the readers and the authoritative nature of the letter. James writes to exhort suffering Christians to persevere.



The James Ossuary – 1st century artifact



The inscription, carved Aramaic, reads: “James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus”

Bibliography:

Biblica.com - <https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-james/>

Listen:



Week 1 – Hello. My Name is James.

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James 1:1



Introduction

Today, I'm begin a study through the Epistle of James. James is a power packed letter filled with practical advice for living as a Christian in an unchristian world. Therefore, we are going to take out time and work our way through the letter slowly, lesson by lesson so we don't miss anything, because everything in this letter is important. I invite

you to follow along each week as we learn everything we can from this short but important book in the New Testament. Let's start at the very beginning.

James 1:1

This letter is from James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am writing to the “twelve tribes”—Jewish believers scattered abroad. Greetings!



Writing Letters

My wife and I wrote a lot of letters to each other when we were dating. In high school, we would pass notes back and forth regularly. Then I moved away for college and we wrote each other letters every week. We still have those letters packed away in boxes somewhere in storage.

Much of the New Testament in the Bible is a collection of letters written by early church leaders. Today, we may think of letters as out of date. Few write letters anymore, other than for very official purposes. Most chose to use email or instant messages. But in New Testament times, writing letters was sort of a cutting edge new technology for common people. It is true that people wrote letters way back into very ancient times--millennia before the New Testament. But ancient letter writing was typically reserved for royal officials because writing materials were very expensive, few were literate to read and write, and there was no post service to send letters long distances.

But by New Testament times, several factors came together at just the right time to aid the spread of the Good News about Jesus Christ. Writing materials became cheaper and available to common people. More people could read using the common Greek language almost everyone spoke to some degree. And due to the expansive Roman Empire with well maintained roads and shipping routes, mail could be sent from one end of the Empire the other. The writers of the

New Testament took full advantage of this to spread the message that Jesus, the Son of God, had been crucified and then rose from the grave.

You may have learned in school letters have a general structure. First, a letter has a heading that tells who it's from and who it's to. Then, there is the salutation where you say, "Dear So and So..." Next comes the body of the letter that contains the main points, followed by the closing: "Sincerely, Your Best Friend Chris." We often find similar patterns in the letters from the New Testament, like James.

Most letters in the New Testament are written by the Apostle Paul. Paul was a prolific letter writer and many of his letters have been preserved in the Bible. However, the Epistle of James by a man named James, who had his own style of writing and his unique perspective on living as a faithful Christian.



Who is James?

Who is James? In the letter, James says: "I am a slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

What is a slave? In 1st century Israel, a slave was typically considered property of the owner, lacking personal freedom and autonomy. People entered slavery due to debt, poverty, as a penalty for crime, or possibly if conquered in battle. While slaves

sometimes had legal protections under various legal codes, they were still fundamentally bound to serve their masters' needs. And since a slave's master was the one with all the power, abuse was rampant despite any laws on the books to protect slaves.

We don't like the word slave in the 21st century. Some Bible translations try to sanitize the word from the New Testament and change it to servant. However, servant doesn't really capture the essence of the meaning the biblical writers were trying to convey. Servant is too nice a word. The Greek word the Bible uses is *doulos*, which literally means bondservant, a person who sold themselves into slavery to repay a debt they had no means to repay. A bondservant doesn't just work for their master; they are owned by their master.

Slavery is a dirty word to our ears for many reasons. People were never meant to be owned by other people. It is an abomination. Another reason against slavery is it creates a serious imbalance of power. Human masters cannot be trusted to hold so much power over another human being—even if that person willingly submits to being a slave. People sometimes can't even be trusted to properly care for a dog or cat, let alone another human being. Perhaps that is why it is such a fearful responsibility to become a parent. A parent has nearly absolute power and authority over a fragile human life—their child. And parents do not always know what to do nor do they always choose the best thing to do. Yet this is the nature of human life. Parents beget children and (hopefully) do their best to exercise benevolent authority over their children for nearly two decades until their children are old enough to become independent.

James self-identifies as a slave of—not another human being, but—God and the Lord Jesus Christ. And based on Scripture, God is a good and worthy Master. He always seeks the good of His slaves. He doesn't treat people like slaves. In fact, Jesus (who is God) said in John 15:15, "I no longer call you slaves, but friends..." But James calls himself a slave.

Who is this James? Do we know anything about him? We do! And it is fascinating! The Bible says Jesus had brothers and sisters. Matthew 13:55 says His 4 brothers were James, Joseph, Simon, and Jude. James is always listed first, which typically means he was the oldest of Jesus' younger brothers. After Jesus was crucified, James would be the eldest living brother of Christ, responsible for being the head of the household. And according to tradition and most scholars, the James who wrote the Epistle of James was Jesus' younger brother.

As far as we know, Jesus never wrote anything down Himself; or if He did, none of it survived. So we don't have anything written directly from Jesus. But in this letter from James, we may have the closest thing to the hand of Jesus. James grew up with Jesus, spent some 20-30 years with Him. He knew him through all the years that the Scripture writes about as well as what the Scripture leaves unmentioned. And as we read the letter of James, we're reading the thoughts of a man who knew Jesus deeply and personally the way only a brother sometimes can. Now, James and his other brothers didn't believe in Jesus at first. Maybe it's hard to think of your brother in such divine terms as being "the Son of God". Can you imagine growing up the brother of Jesus Christ? I can imagine Mary getting upset with James from time to time over something stupid he did (mistakes all mortal people make). Maybe, in frustration, she said something like, "Why can't you be more like your brother Jesus!" And maybe James smarted off to Mary with, "Oh! Jesus is so perfect! You act like he walks on water!" Of course, I'm being facetious, but on a serious note, I guess it might have been hard to grow up in the shadow of "the Son of God" or to think of your older brother as the long awaited Messiah.

At any rate, Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him at first. Mark 3:20 says Jesus' brother thought He was out of his mind. They came and tried to take Him away so He didn't stir up trouble. But at some point, probably after Jesus actually died and rose from the grave as He said He would, James became a believer. You might think James would trumpet his status as Jesus' brother. "Listen to me. I'm Jesus' brother!" But James doesn't do that at all. Instead, he humbles himself and says, "I'm a slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ."



To Whom Was James Writing?

Letters are written from someone to someone. To whom was James writing? He says, "I'm writing to the 'twelve tribes'—Jewish believers scattered abroad." What does that mean?

The term "Twelve Tribes" was a cultural term among Jewish people that recalled their tribal history. They started out as twelve tribes and had often experienced trials and

tribulations that scattered them abroad. In fact, there were no longer 12 tribes. 10 of the tribes had been scattered into oblivion when the Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians. All the inhabitants of the northern 10 tribes were carried away and never seen again as a distinct people group. The 2 tribes that remained were Judah and Benjamin. The Jewish people derive their name from the tribe of Judah. And even they had experienced a great deal of "scattering" over the centuries.

At this stage in Christian history, almost all Christians were Jewish believers. Scholars sometimes point out James was writing to Jewish Christians, not Gentile Christians. Some of you who are serious students of the Bible have probably heard that. But that's kind of a pointless argument. Almost all Christians were "Jewish" at this point in Christian history.



The real point here is that believers (Christians) are being scattered because they are fleeing persecution. The Jews who believed Jesus is the Messiah who rose from the grave are being kicked out of their churches (synagogues) by the Jews who didn't believe. And at the same time, they are being ostracized in their communities, leading some to lose their livelihoods. Others are being badly

persecuted, some arrested. Some are even being beaten or killed. It was a difficult and dangerous time for Christians and many had to flee their homes and move away to new towns seeking safety.

God did not let these early Christians suffering go to waste. As they are scattered, they go from town to town telling people about Jesus every where they go. So Christianity is spreading, not being silenced. And the Apostles, like Peter, James, and John as sending letters to these scattering Jewish Christians--creating a written record of the early Christian faith, which we have preserved in the New Testament of our Bibles.

Unfortunately, being scattered can make you feel lonely and really tests your faith. You are tempted to just keep your mouth shut about Jesus, even though Jesus commanded His followers to speak up for Him. And that's one of the reasons James is writing—to encourage Christians who feel lost and lonely in a world that doesn't have their same values.

Feel Like You Don't Belong?

Do you ever feel like you don't belong in a world where people seem so mean, angry, unloving, judgmental, and immoral? I know I do sometimes.

The world around me right here in America is becoming foreign in many ways. Sometimes it feels like common sense and common decency have been flipped upside down. But I know there are others around the world that have it even worse. I texted with a Christian friend who lives in Pakistan the morning I wrote this message. He lives in a country that is 95% Muslim. Many in that country who practice a very militant form of Islam think people like my Christian friend are crazy or guilty of blasphemy. Christians are face discrimination, are frequently persecuted, mistreated, falsely accused, arrested, and even killed. I know they often feel scattered, lonely, and discouraged.

If you ever feel like I do or like my friend in Pakistan, like a remnant of the faithful believers scattered in a lost and hostile world, James is a letter written to encourage you to be faithful and not give up. But James is more than just clichés and platitudes. James is a real talk. In 5 short chapters, James shares powerful, practical wisdom about how to live as a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. Whereas other writers often focus on philosophy and theology, James gets down to brass tacks and focuses how Christians live out faith in actions—not just beliefs.

Every paragraph in James is important. So we're going to take our time and work our way

through James slowly, lesson by lesson. And I hope you will come each week and pay close attention. And I challenge you to go deeper in your walk with Jesus, deeper than just what you believe, as you learn to live out your Christian faith by what you do day to day.

Closing

James was Jesus' brother. But anyone who give their life to Christ and becomes a Christian is a brother or sister of Christ. We are not alone. We are part of a royal family—the family of God. If you are a Christian, you are my brother, my sister. You are not alone. We are in this together.

In the Old Testament, Jews initiated their children into the people of God by circumcising their children on their 8th day. For Christians, baptism is the sacred ceremony we use to initiate people into the family of God. It is a sacrament Jesus told us to practice that God uses to pour out His grace upon us. No one deserves God's grace. But He gives it freely to all who repent and seek His help.

I want to close today by inviting you to become a Christian. If you believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and Savior of the world who died on the cross and rose on the third day, then chose today to follow Him. Turn away from your sin and turn to Jesus and He will save you. You will become a child of God, my brother or sister. And though you may sometimes feel alone in this hostile world, you will never actually be alone. For you will be part of the family of God with brothers and sisters all over the world. And even more important, Jesus will walk with you through everything you face by the Holy Spirit that lives inside you.

And if you have if you have never been officially baptized and initiated into God's family, I invite you to schedule your baptism today. If you live close to me, contact me and we will talk about how you can be baptized. Or, find a faithful, Bible-believing church near you, and be baptized in obedience of Christ our Lord and in expectation of the grace baptism represents. Finally, I challenge to read this blog each week as we work our way through the powerful letter of James. I usually post my blogs each Monday. I pray you will read and receive the blessings and guidance God wants to give through my feeble words.

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. What stands out to you most about James' journey from doubting Jesus to becoming His devoted servant?
2. In what ways do you sometimes feel “scattered” or out of place because of your Christian faith?
3. What would it look like for you to think of yourself more fully as a servant of God in your everyday life?

Week 1 Leader's Guide – Hello. My Name is James.

Text: James 1:1

Goal of the Session – By the end of the class, participants should:

- Understand who James likely was and why his testimony matters.
- Appreciate the humility of James in introducing himself.
- Understand the situation of the scattered believers.
- Begin to see themselves as modern-day "scattered believers."
- Anticipate the practical wisdom James will offer throughout the study.

Welcome - Thank everyone for participating and reading the preparation materials.

Opening Prayer – Go over the prayer list, make updates, and pray.

Icebreaker Question – Have you ever received a letter, note, email, or message that had a lasting impact on your life? What made it memorable?

Read James 1:1 aloud together. What stands out to you in this verse?

Allow several responses before moving on.

Who Was James? (15 Minutes)

Observation Question - What did you learn about James from the handout that surprised you?

Possible responses:

- He was Jesus' brother.
- He didn't believe in Jesus at first.
- He became a leader in the Jerusalem church.
- Jesus appeared to him after the resurrection.
- He led the Jerusalem Council.

Digging Deeper - Why do you think James doesn't introduce himself as 'James, the brother of Jesus'?

Possible discussion:

- Humility
- His authority came from Christ, not family connections.
- His relationship with Jesus had changed from brother to Lord.

Reflection - If you had the credentials James had, would you have been tempted to mention them?

A Servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ (15 Minutes)

Point out that James chooses the title "servant" or "slave" rather than brother.

Discussion Questions

- What images come to mind when you hear the word servant?
- What makes people uncomfortable with the word slave?"
- Why might James have intentionally chosen such a strong term?"

Application – What does it mean today to belong completely to Christ?

Follow-up – What areas of life are hardest for Christians to surrender to Jesus?

Possible answers:

- Time
- Relationships
- Politics
- Money
- Ambitions
- Personal opinions

Scattered Believers (15 Minutes) – Review the background of the "12 tribes scattered abroad."

Discussion – What challenges did those early Christians face?

Expected answers:

- Persecution
- Loss of community
- Economic hardship
- Isolation
- Fear

Modern Connection - Do Christians today ever feel scattered or out of place?

Allow people to discuss:

- Workplace pressures
- Family situations
- Social media
- Cultural changes
- School environments

Personal Reflection – When have you felt like your Christian values put you at odds with the culture around you?

Why Study James? (10 Minutes) - Remind them that James is intensely practical. It focuses on living faith, not merely believing certain doctrines. **Ask:**

When you think about spiritual growth, what areas of Christian living would you most like to improve?

You may hear:

- Patience
- Speech
- Consistency
- Prayer
- Wisdom
- Self-control
- Relationships

As we begin this study, what are you hoping God will teach you through James?
(Have people share.)

Key Takeaway – James introduces himself as a servant of Jesus Christ writing to believers who often felt isolated and pressured by the world around them. In many ways, that's our situation too. This letter was written to help ordinary Christians live extraordinary lives of faith. If we take its message seriously, James has the power to deepen our faith and transform how we live every day.

Before next week: Read James 1:2-4 several times. Read the next sermon manuscript. Ask yourself: How do I normally respond to trials? What might God be trying to produce in me through difficult seasons?

Closing Prayer

Listen:



Week 2 – Trials and Temptations

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James 1:2-18



Introduction

We're working our way through a study of the Epistle of James—lesson by lesson. Last week, we discovered the writer of James was the brother of the Lord Jesus. He was the biological son of Mary and Joseph and grew up in the same household as Jesus. At first, he didn't believe in Jesus. But after Jesus died and rose from the grave, James believed and became one of the leaders of the early

Christian church.

The Epistle of James is short—only 5 chapters—but it is packed full of powerful, practical wisdom. The reading today is a perfect example. In just these few verses, we have several words of advice. Let's go back through each of them.

James 1:2-4

² Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. ³ For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. ⁴ So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

Joy is not the emotion most of us would associate with trials. Yet, James suggests that trials are not just obstacles but opportunities—opportunities to grow in faith and endurance. These difficulties test our faith, and through perseverance, our character is refined and strengthened. And a mature faith equips us to handle life's challenges with a steadier hand and a more hopeful heart.

James is not suggesting we become masochists—who seek out and derive pleasure from painful ordeals. We're not happy about the trials, but can be overjoyed about the *fruit we gain* when we trust God in the midst of our trials. James says they make us perfect, complete, needing nothing. And consider this: You will never get to go through the trials of life ever again in eternity. We often talk about how great eternity in the Kingdom of Heaven will be, where there will be no more sickness or suffering or pain. But we often forget, God put us on this earth for a reason. And we only get to experience life in this way (broken as it is) one time for maybe 80-90 years. We never get to do this again. Let's not miss this once in an eternity opportunity to learn and grow from the struggles we face.

James 1:5-8

⁵ If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. ⁶ But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸ Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.



2 Points

James gives two points of practical advice here. First of all, when you're going through trials: ask for God's wisdom. That's not what we normally do. We may ask for God to take away the challenge; heal us; make the problem go away; etc. But James says, "Ask for wisdom." Proverbs 3:14 says wisdom is better than silver and gold. In other words, it one of the most precious things you can gain

in life. Don't miss the precious chance to gain wisdom through your trials just because you want God to make your life easy.

The second point James makes is a warning. Make sure you're putting your faith in Jesus alone and not the world. People have a tendency to want to hedge their bets. Let's take an example: suppose you are facing a huge trial—maybe you have cancer. So you pray for Jesus to heal you. But while you're at it, you decide it can't hurt to pray to the Muslim god, Allah. And you figure, you might as well pray to the Hindu gods of India and the native America gods and African gods of animism. You figure, "I'll take all the help I can get." James says, a person like that shouldn't expect to "receive anything from the Lord. Their loyalty is divided between God and the world..." And he says, "They're unstable." Let us never forget, there is only One True and Living God. And He will not share you with any other supposed god. You must be loyal to Him and Him alone. You are either *all in* with Jesus Christ—who is Lord of all—or you are not in at all.

James 1:9-11

⁹ Believers who are poor have something to boast about, for God has honored them. ¹⁰ And those who are rich should boast that God has humbled them. They will fade away like a little flower in the field. ¹¹ The hot sun rises and the grass withers; the little flower droops and falls, and its beauty fades away. In the same way, the rich will fade away with all of their achievements.



Let Go of Worldly Concepts of Wealth

and Status – Verses 9-11 reminds everyone, regardless of your social or economic status, put your hope in God alone. The poor are reminded to take pride in their high position—because the Lord Jesus Christ lifts them up. The rich are reminded of their vulnerability—like a wildflower, their wealth will fade away. They could lose it in the blink of an eye. In fact, they *will* lose it all

when they die. For whatever wealth you have in this life will be gone forever in the next. You cannot take your possessions with you. In heaven, we will all be on equal social and economic footing.

This passage calls us to embrace humility, recognizing that our true value comes from our relationship with God, not our earthly status or possessions. It's a liberating mindset—reminding us all to live authentically and with compassion, appreciating our blessings and empathizing with others regardless of their or our circumstances.

And then in verses 12-15, James tells us the blessings that will last forever actually come from the trials of this life.

James 1:12-15

¹² God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. ¹³ And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, “God is tempting me.” God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. ¹⁴ Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. ¹⁵ These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.

Tests and Temptations

While our earthly wealth and treasures will fade away like flowers in a field, the blessings we inherit from testing and temptation will last forever. These become a crown of life *if* we endure and are faithful.

God is the giver of all good things. God does not tempt us. Temptation comes from the Devil and from *our own* selfish, internal desires. God uses both the tests and temptations we face in life for our own good—to expose and root out the ungodly attitudes and characteristics inside us keep us from being all we are meant to be. And when we endure trials, our faith grows stronger and we learn endurance.

James 1:16-18

¹⁶ So don’t be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. ¹⁸ He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word.

And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession.

Summary

Today, we’ve explored how trials can be a source of joy, how wisdom from God is our priceless aid, how humility guides our conduct, and how perseverance leads to divine rewards.

This week, I challenge each of you to reflect on the trials you are facing. Can you see them as opportunities for growth? Seek



God's wisdom in prayer, approach life with humility, and strive to persevere.

We say we believe in Jesus. We believe He faced the cruel cross of Calvary.

We believe He rose from the grave. His death and resurrection won our freedom and eternal life.

Now, let’s do more than just say we believe. Let’s put our faith into action.

Let's live out our faith, embracing each day with courage and hope,

counting all trials as joy, because they lead to eternal rewards that we will possess forever.

Personal Reflection Questions

1. What trial in your life right now might God be using to strengthen your faith or develop endurance?
2. When difficulties come, do you usually ask God to remove them or to give you wisdom through them? Why?
3. What desire or temptation do you need to recognize more clearly so that it does not grow into sinful action?

Week 2 Leader's Guide – Trials and Temptations

Text: James 1:2-18

Goal of the Session – By the end of the class, participants should:

- distinguish between trials and temptations
- understand God's purpose during trials
- recognize where temptation actually comes from
- leave encouraged that God is always good

Welcome - Thank everyone for participating and reading the preparation materials.

Opening Prayer – Go over the prayer list, make updates, and pray.

Icebreaker Question – Tell us about something difficult in your life that, looking back now, actually helped make you a stronger person.

Say: *“James begins by saying God often grows us most through difficult experiences.”*

Read James 1:2-18 aloud. Listen for what surprises you.

What surprises you about what James says?

If someone who wasn't a Christian read verse 2, what do you think they would say?

Does James say we should enjoy pain? They why should we count trials as joy?

Why do we usually pray for the trial to end instead of asking God what He wants to teach us?

James doesn't say, "Ask God to remove the trial." He says, "Ask God for wisdom."

Why do you think James says to ask for wisdom instead of escape?

Have you ever prayed like that? What happened?

James also warns against divided loyalty.

What does divided loyalty look like today? *Maybe:*

- trusting money more than God
- trusting politics more than God
- trusting ourselves more than God
- wanting Jesus while refusing His authority

James also talks about the rich and the poor.

Why do you think James suddenly starts talking about rich and poor?

Let them wrestle with it...

Eventually guide toward: *Trials expose what we're really trusting. Rich people are tempted to trust wealth. Poor people are tempted to believe they have no value. James corrects both.*

If all your possessions disappeared tomorrow, what would still be true about you?

James say temptation comes from our own desires. He doesn't let us blame Satan, society, parents, government, or circumstances. He says look in the mirror. The temptations sprouts from something already in you—a desire, a craving, a feeling of emptiness that you're trying to feel.

What can your temptations reveal about your own spiritual condition?

James end by reminding us God is always good. Every good gift comes from Him.

End by asking everyone to finish this question:

One thing I need to remember the next time life gets difficult is _____.

Challenge for this Week:

Whenever something frustrating happens, before asking: "Why me?"

Stop and ask: "Lord, what wisdom are You trying to teach me?"

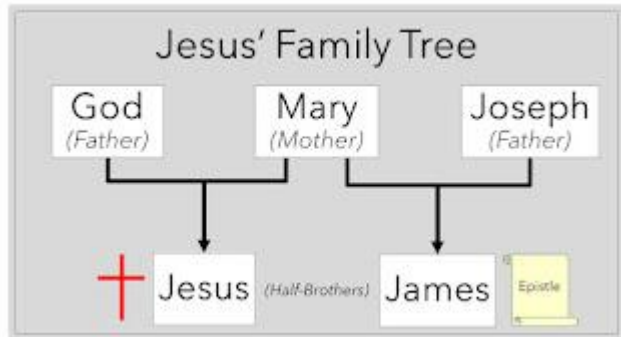
Closing Prayer



Week 3 – Listen and Do

Copyright April 29, 2024 by Chris Mullis

James 1:19-27



Introduction

We are studying the Epistle of James. James is a short letter packed full of powerful wisdom. It was written by Jesus' half-brother. We say that James is Jesus' "half-brother" because Jesus and James both shared a biological mother—Mary. But Jesus was the biological son of God while James was the biological son of Joseph.

Did you even know Jesus had a brother? He did. Matthew 13:55-56 says Jesus had 4 brothers and that he had sisters too (but doesn't tell how many). And James was probably the oldest of Jesus' younger brothers. And James was the author of the Epistle of James.

Last week, James wrote that we should not seek so much to be saved *from* our trials and temptations, but that we pray to be saved *through* our trials and temptations, because God uses them to teach us enduring faith that refines our character. But James has a new lesson for us today; listen to what he says. Let's read it together in our pew Bibles on page 1721.

James 1:19-27 (NIV)

¹⁹ My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

²⁶ Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.



Listen and DO

James says, “My brothers and sister take note of this: be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry...” To whom is James writing? He’s not talking about his biological brothers and sisters. He’s talking about believers, fellow followers of Christ. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 12:50? He said, “Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother

and sister and mother!”

It's important to note that James is not writing to unbelievers; he’s writing to Christians who are already following Jesus. You cannot be saved and *become* a Christian by doing good deeds. We are saved by faith alone. We must trust Jesus and decide to follow Him. But once we are saved, we should respond to the saving grace of God by *doing* something. And James writes to remind Christians what we should *do* and how we should live.

And what should we do? We should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Now this is great wisdom. God gave us two ears and only one mouth. That’s a great reminder God has design right into your face to listen at least twice as much as you speak. Every time you see your face in the mirror, remind yourself, “Today, I’m going to listen twice as much as I speak.” And don’t just say it. **DO** it. Really listen. Don’t just hear. Listen and try to understand people.

Sometimes that means listening to more than just the words they're saying. It means understanding them as a person, what’s motivating them to say the things they say. Ask for God’s wisdom every day to really listen to and understand people and where they’re coming from. And the Holy Spirit of God who lives in all believers can reveal people’s heart to you so you really understand them.

And be slow to anger. There are times for righteous anger. Remember, Jesus got angry when He saw the money changers in the Temple desecrating His Father’s House while cheating people out of their hard earned money. However, we need to be slow to anger, because our anger is rarely as righteous as Jesus’. And human anger does not bear good fruit like God desires. Instead, it creates wounds and dissention and damages relationships. It clouds our judgment and can even damage our health. So put away anger and learn grace to be patient and stay calm so you can listen and understand people and be quick to forgive. This is what followers of Jesus do.

James 1:22-24 (NLT)

²² But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.



James 1:22-24 (NLT)

²² But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. ²³ For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. ²⁴ You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like.

When we look into the mirror, what do we see? I don't know about you, but I see a

sinner saved by the grace of God. God's Word says we are saved by God's grace. It's not because of the good things we do. It's a free gift from God through Jesus Christ. We don't deserve to be forgiven and saved from Hell, but—in God's loving grace—He sent Jesus to save us anyway.

So when we look in the mirror, we should see someone that God loved so much He sent His Son to save us—to even die on the cross for us. So we see someone who is precious to God, but who also has some serious flaws who needs saving and it is a salvation that cost God dearly. So don't forget that face—the face of a precious child of God bought by the blood of Jesus.

And don't forget how you still have some things to work on—not to earn God's love, but because of God's love. God already loves you completely and unconditionally, but we know we have some flaws we want God to heal in us. So listen to God's Word in the Scripture and let the Holy Spirit empower you to do it.

There are so many ways I fall short of God's Word it can be overwhelming where I should start. Thankfully, James gives us a couple places to start—some things everyone can work on. First of all, he says:



James 1:26 (NLT)

²⁶ If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.

James 1:26 (NLT)

²⁶ If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.

I love how straight forward James is. He puts it so well. Controlling your tongue—learning when to be quiet, when to speak, and what to say and how to say it—is something we all need to learn and

something we all *can* learn. It's harder for some than others, but it is something we can learn and *should* learn. You see, a lot of time in church, people want to worry over some deep theological question or some mysterious and obscure story in the Bible. When what we really need to do, most of the time, is pretty simple. Learn how to control your tongue.

Now, some will say they just can't do it. But you can if you really focus on it. And you can *if* you will invite the Holy Spirit of God to come in and take control of your tongue for

you. If God can create stars that are trillions of light years away, He can control your tongue. However, a lot of people just don't want to submit their speech to the Lord. But James says, that's what we need to do.

And James gives another simple thing we can do—show compassion. He says:



James 1:27 (NLT)
27 Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.

James 1:27 (NLT)

27 Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.

In New Testament times, orphans and widows were the most helpless and vulnerable people in the world. They had almost no way to make it in the world—no

way to earn a living, support themselves, or protect themselves—aside from the compassion of people willing to help them. So what James is talking about here are the most helpless and vulnerable people.

When we look around today, who do you see who are the most helpless and vulnerable people? Widows and orphans are still on that list, but there are many others too--the elderly, the foreigner among us, and anyone else who is vulnerable who will not be able to make it if someone does not sacrificially step in to help them. James says, pure and genuine religion in the sight of God is caring for them. And you don't have to be a Bible scholar to do that. You don't have to have all the answers. You just have to have compassion in your heart and a willingness to do something.

Summary

So let me summarize everything for you. And I want you to *practice* these things this week. What can you do this week to *practice* these, because we want to be *doers*, and not just *hearers*.

1. Listen More, Speak Less – Will you practice listening more and speaking less this week?
2. Control Your Tongue – Will you invite the Holy Spirit in to start taming your tongue?
3. Practice Compassion – What can you do this week to help the helpless, give hope to the hopeless, and protect the unprotected?



I challenge you this week to be doers of the Word, and not hearers only who deceive themselves.

Personal Reflection Questions: Which is hardest for you right now: listening more, speaking less, or being slow to anger? Is there something God's Word has already shown you that you know you need to actually do?

Week 3 Leader's Guide – Listen and Do

Text: James 1:19-27

Main Idea - God's Word was never meant merely to inform us—it is meant to transform us. Genuine faith listens to God's Word and then obeys it.

Goal of the Session – By the end of class participants should:

- distinguish hearing from obeying
- identify barriers that keep us from obeying Scripture
- recognize three marks of authentic religion James identifies
- leave with one concrete act of obedience for the coming week

Welcome - Thank everyone for participating and reading the preparation materials.

Opening Prayer – Go over the prayer list, make updates, and pray.

Icebreaker Question – What's something you know you should do, but keep putting off?

Say: “*Knowing and doing are often two different things. James says the same thing is true spiritually.*”

Read James 1:19-27 aloud.

If you could summarize this passage in one sentence, what would it be?

Eventually guide toward – *Followers of Jesus don't just hear God's Word—they obey it.*

Quick to Listen, Slow to Speak (vv.19-21)

James begins with practical wisdom. He says “Be quick to listen, slow to speak

- Why do you think James starts with listening instead of speaking?
- Which comes easier for you: listening, speaking, controlling your anger?
- James says human anger does not produce God's righteousness. Does anger have a place and a purpose? Can you think of a time when anger made a situation better?

Hearing Isn't Enough

Why do you think people enjoy learning Scripture more than obeying Scripture?

Mirror Illustration

A mirror isn't just for admiring ourselves. A mirror shows us what needs attention. James says Scripture functions the same way. It reveals sin, pride, selfishness, and areas needing growth. But walking away unchanged is like forgetting your own reflection.

Has there ever been a Bible verse you knew God wanted you to obey—but you resisted?

Three Tests of Genuine Religion

James give three practical test of genuine religion.

1. A Controlled Tongue
2. Compassion
3. Personal Holiness

Why do you think James begins with our speech? What kinds of words are hardest to control?

Why do you think James specifically mentions compassion towards widows and orphans?

In his time, they represented the most vulnerable people in society.

Who are today's widows and orphans?

James ends with "...keep oneself from being polluted by the world." I.E. worldly values instead of God's values. If we're not careful, we can look and act just like everyone else who is not following Jesus.

What pressures today make it difficult to remain spiritually distinct from the world?

If someone watched your life for one week, would they conclude:

you know the Bible or you obey the Bible?

"This week, I will obey God by _____. (Choose just one thing. Write it down. Do it.)

Closing Prayer

Listen:



Week 4 – Impartial Love

Copyright May 6, 2024 by Chris Mullis

James 2:1-13



Introduction

Today, we gather to celebrate a significant milestone in the lives of our graduates—the completion of their high school or college journey. As we send them off to their next chapters, it's crucial to reflect on the kind of journey they—and indeed, all of us—are called to embark upon as followers of Christ.

In the Book of James, chapter 2, verses 1 to 13, we find a powerful message about how our faith should be lived out daily. James challenges us to look at our hearts, at our actions, and at the way we treat others.

We learned last week in James 1:19-27 that Christians must listen to God's word and then DO IT.

If we only listen but don't live it out, we're only fooling ourselves. Today, James shares one of the simple ways people will either live out or *fail* to live out genuine faith. Let's read these verses, understanding their relevance, not just for our graduates, but for all of us as part of God's family.

James 2:1-13

¹ My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. ² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. ³ If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," ⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

⁵ Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

⁸ If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. ⁹ But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

¹² Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, ¹³ because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.



Why is Favoritism So Bad?

Most people can see favoritism is unfair. Suppose Hank and Jackson are both hired to do the same exact job and both have no experience. It would be unfair if Jackson got paid twice as much just because the boss was friends with Jackson's dad.

But favoritism is not just a social faux pas in business; it is fundamentally at odds with the

way the Kingdom of God works. In the family of God, all stand as equals—we are all sinners saved by God's grace. If you favor one person over another in the Church because of how much money someone has or how they dress or their connections, you are living by the world's standards and not God's standards. And remember what James said last week, we can't just *hear* God's Word; we must *live* God's Word. So it is absolutely necessary that we put away the old worldly thoughts and attitudes that say: this person is more valuable, or more desirable because they are esteemed by the worldly standards or wealth, possessions, status, and influence.



Who Do You Look Up To?

I want to challenge our graduates (and all of us) to think about who you value and why. Who do you want to be like as grow and mature? Who will you model your life after?

Some might be tempted to measure their life after someone who, by outward appearances, seems to be very wealthy and

successful. But I would challenge you to look beyond external measures of success. People can easily fool you with outward appearances.



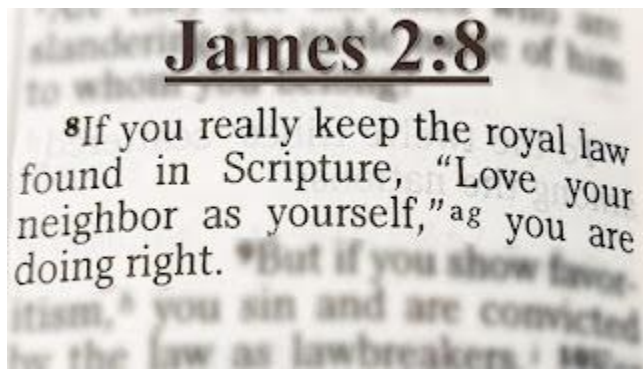
One man has \$80,000 in the bank and a paid-off \$1,000 work truck. People may assume that guy is broke because of what he drives and how he looks. Another man has a no money in the bank and an \$80,000 financed truck he can barely afford. He is deep in debt and barely making it, but people assume that man is doing great. It's important not to let material possessions fool you into judging someone.

James reminds us, God chooses the poor in the world to be rich in faith. In my 50 years on this earth, here's what I have observed: In general, those who are poor are *required* to have more faith than those who are rich. Let me explain. The poor often have nowhere else to turn, but to God. They have very little money to buy their way out of their troubles.

All they have is God and prayer. Suppose their car breaks down. It may be a huge crisis for them. They cannot afford a big bill with the mechanic to repair their car nor can they just buy another one to replace it.

The rich, on the other hand, often feel like they don't really need God. After all, they have their own resources if they run into trouble. They might not say that out loud or even consciously think it. But subconsciously, they are aware they have the resources to handle their problems. If their car breaks down, it is an inconvenience. However, they can afford to have the car fixed or may just decide to buy a new car. So they aren't required to trust God since they can trust their own resources.

The world often teaches us to value people for their apparent wealth, influence, and outward appearances—attributes that can be easily misrepresented. God says value people's faith and commitment to God and their character. In fact, you must or else you are not **doing** God's Word; you are only **pretending** to be a Christian.



James 2:8

The royal law of love, first put forth by God in the Old Testament and later affirmed by Jesus in the New Testament is "Love your neighbor as yourself." And Jesus showed us how to practice this kind of love when He died for *us* on the cross. Jesus didn't love us because we are loveable (for we were sinners who rebelled against God). Jesus loved us sacrificially because that's what real love does.

So, we are called to love others this same way. That means treating all people fairly, avoiding discrimination, showing kindness to all, and working for justice. I want to encourage our graduates to apply this law everywhere you go—whether at college, in the workplace, or in your community. And this is how every Christian should live—not just our graduates.

James 2:12-13

In conclusion, let me read again verses 12-13, this time from the New Living Translation.

¹² So whatever you say or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law that sets you free. ¹³ There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you.

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. What kinds of people are you most tempted to judge by outward appearance, status, or success?
2. Who in your life might you be overlooking because they do not seem important by the world's standards?
3. What is one practical way you can show impartial love and mercy to someone this week?

Week 4 Leader's Guide – Impartial Love

Text: James 2:1–13

Main Idea: Genuine faith sees people the way God sees them. Christians are called to love others impartially, showing mercy instead of favoritism because every person bears God's image and every believer stands equally in need of God's grace.

Goal: By the end of class participants should:

- recognize the subtle ways favoritism shows up today
- understand why favoritism is incompatible with the gospel
- appreciate the "Royal Law" of loving our neighbor
- commit to showing mercy rather than judging people by outward appearance

Welcome - Thank everyone for participating and reading the preparation materials.

Opening Prayer – Go over the prayer list, make updates, and pray.

Icebreaker (10 minutes)

Optional Object lesson – Bring two wrapped gift boxes to class. One should be beautifully wrapped but contain something of little value, while the other should be wrapped very simply but contain something valuable. Ask the class which gift they would choose, then reveal the contents. This illustrates how looks can be deceiving, but God looks on the inside.

Have you ever been unfairly judged because of your appearance, your job, where you lived, your age, or something else? How did it make you feel?

- Have you ever been pleasantly surprised after getting to know someone you initially misjudged?

Read James 2:1–13

What word or phrase stood out to you?

Why do you think James chose a wealthy man and a poor man for his example?

Favoritism isn't just about wealth. Some outward things we might judge people by today are:

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| • designer clothes | • political affiliation | • church position |
| • expensive vehicles | • social media | • attractiveness |
| • education | • popularity | • age |
| • race | • occupation | |

Appearances can be deceiving and that God values faith and character rather than possessions or status.

Looking Through God's Eyes

When God looks at people, what does He see that we often miss?

- | | | |
|---------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| • their heart | • their potential | • someone Christ died for |
| • their faith | • their struggles | |

Why might poor believers often develop deeper faith?

[People with fewer earthly resources are often driven to depend more fully on God.]

Personal Reflection

Without naming anyone, what kinds of people are easiest for you to overlook?

The Royal Law (vv.8–11)

Look in verse 8. What is the royal law James spells out?

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Why do you think James calls this the "Royal Law"?

- *It comes from the King.*
- *It summarizes much of God's moral law.*
- *Jesus identified it as one of the greatest commandments.*

What would it actually look like to love your neighbor as yourself this week?

Why do we often find it easier to love people who are like us?

Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment (vv.12–13)

What do you think James means when he says, "Mercy triumphs over judgment"?

[Allow discussion before explaining.]

Say: *Because God has shown us incredible mercy, we should become merciful people. Mercy doesn't ignore sin. Mercy treats people the way God has treated us—with undeserved grace.*

Personal Reflection

Which comes more naturally to you – judging or extending mercy?

Why do you think that is?

Bringing It Home

What kind of person would be most likely to make people uncomfortable? Why?

How could our church intentionally become a place where *that* person feels welcomed and loved?

Weekly Challenge

This week intentionally do something for someone you might normally overlook.

Sit beside someone new. Invite someone to lunch. Visit a shut-in. Speak to someone everyone else ignores. Encourage someone with no obvious way to repay you

Closing Prayer

Gracious Heavenly Father, remove prejudice from our hearts. Help us see people through Your eyes. When we are tempted to compare people, give us compassion instead. Help us make Stark Methodist known as a church where everyone is welcomed because everyone is loved by Christ.

Week 5 – Faith Moves

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James 2:14-26 & Matthew 17:2

Listen:



Introduction

I spent the day working outside in my garden yesterday. What a beautiful day! The garden was full of life—bees and butter were moving from flower to flower. Birds were singing. And the cicadas were droning! I thought a lot my message while I worked, because it's about *living* faith. And, in general, living things move and *dead* things do not. Birds and bugs move (*if they are*

alive). If they are dead, they don't move. Even the plants growing in the garden move—although slowly. My pole beans are climbing up their trellis. The rocks and sticks, which are dead, do not move (unless I move them).

Today, we continue our journey through the Epistle of James and today he teaches about living, moving faith. Remember, James is Jesus biological half-brother. And James wrote his letter to Christians to encourage them to remain faithful in the face of severe persecution that scattered them abroad. His readers were already Christians who professed faith in Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah. So James doesn't write to convince them to convert. He writes to tell how truly converted people live. The title of the message today is "Faith Moves." Let's read the text from James 2:14-26.

James 2:14-26 (NIV)

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

²⁰ You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ²¹ Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

²⁵ In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? ²⁶ As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.



James 2:14 (NLT)
What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?

Faith and Action

James starts off with a tough question: "What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?" (2:14 NLT)

Here, James isn't just making small talk; he's challenging us to look at the reality of our faith.

Faith without works is dead. James says if we see a brother or sister without clothes and daily food, and we say to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but do nothing about their physical needs, what good have we done? Now, I want to make something clear: James said "brothers and sister", which is a phrase we use for a fellow believer, a Christian (In the Christian church, we consider other believers family, a brother or sister.) So we're not talking about some random stranger on a street corner asking for help. We're talking about family.

If your brother or sister is in need and you *do nothing*, what good is that? That faith is dead.



A Living Faith

James knows that talk is cheap. He challenges anyone who says they have faith without deeds to show it. He's bold about this. He says, "I will show you my faith by my good deeds." (2:18 NLT)

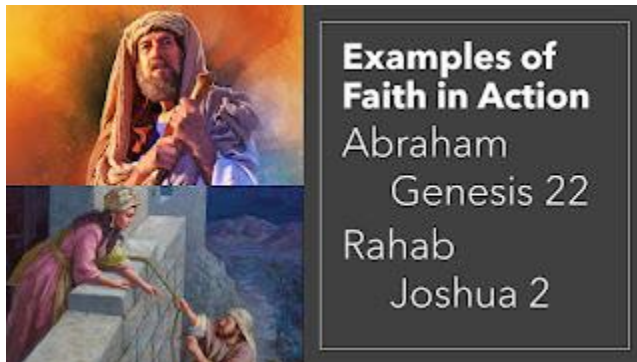
Do you remember what Jesus said about faith? In Matthew 17:20, he said, "If you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible." The point is, it doesn't take much faith at all; even a small amount of faith can move mountains. So if your faith doesn't move at all, it's a dead faith that doesn't do any good at all. Living faith moves. It moves mountains. It also helps a Christian brother or sister in need.

Here are 7 Ways a Living Christian Faith Moves:

1. **It Loves Actively:** It goes beyond words, showing love through actions that support, heal, and uplift others.
2. **It Serves Willingly:** It seeks opportunities to serve within the community and beyond, embodying the servant-hearted nature of Jesus.

3. **It Forgives Readily:** It extends forgiveness, understanding that grace is a cornerstone of the Christian experience.
4. **It Shares Generously:** It shares resources, time, and talents, reflecting the generosity of God.
5. **It Prays Continually:** It maintains an ongoing conversation with God, seeking His guidance and offering thanks and supplication.
6. **It Learns Eagerly:** It engages with Scripture and teachings of the church, always seeking to grow and deepen in understanding and faith.
7. **It Witnesses Boldly:** It shares the message of the Gospel with others, not out of obligation but out of a genuine desire to see others experience the love of Christ.

This is a living faith that moves—the kind of faith that sees a mountain in the way and starts moving it piece by piece. It's not just believing God can do something; it's living like He will.



Examples of Faith in Action

The Bible is full of examples of people with a living, moving faith. And James points out two.

First, there is Abraham, who was considered righteous for what he did when he offered Isaac on the altar. Here is a man who God told to leave his homeland and everything he knew to go to a "Promised Land" he did not

know that God said He would show him. I took a lot of faith for Abraham to obey. And he did this when he was already an old man with a lot to lose. And when God blessed Abraham and with a miracle child, Isaac, in Abraham's old age, Abraham was willing to sacrifice Him in obedience to God's command. (God saved Isaac and provided a ram as a replacement--foreshadowing the salvation winning sacrifice of Christ on the cross--but the point is Abraham trusted God even with his son Isaac.)

Second, Rahab was considered righteous for welcoming the Israelite spies. She believed God had a future for her among His people and was willing to throw her lot in with the Israelites and helped them, turning away from her life as a Canaanite prostitute. Her faith saved her and her family and gave her a new legacy as an ancestor of Christ, the Messiah.



Since it is Mother's Day as I write this, I can't help but think of my mom who had the faith to leave an abusive situation. She will be the first to tell you she is shy and timid and has always lacked self-confidence and struggled with low self-esteem. All she wanted was to be married and be a mom. But she found herself with four children and stuck in an abusive marriage. But what could she do? She didn't

think she could take care of herself and four kids alone. So, for a long time, she endured things she should not have had to endure for the sake of security until, finally, her faith overpowered her fear. She stepped out in faith, not knowing how she could do it, and left her abusive husband. And somehow, she finished raising her children as single mother. I have always admired her faith and it is a powerful example of how God can help people do anything when they trust His help.



Faith That Moves Mountains

In Matthew 17:20, Jesus says if we have faith as small as a mustard seed, we can move mountains. This isn't just poetry; it's a *promise* that our faith, when put into action, has tremendous power. And it's not about *how much* faith you have. You only need a little—the size of a mustard seed. So it's not about having *enough* faith. You either have faith or you don't. Your faith is

either alive or it is dead.

What are the "mountains" in your life right now? How can your faith move these mountains? Perhaps it's through prayer, service, or a courageous act of love. Perhaps it is stepping out into the unknown that you know God is calling you to. Whether your challenges are big or small, faith moves. Is your faith alive and moving or is it dead and still?

Conclusion

As we wrap up, remember,

James isn't just talking to people out there; he's talking to us, to believers.

He's urging us not to be satisfied with a faith that's merely intellectual or emotional, but a faith that is dynamic, active, and alive.

Let's be people whose faith is not dead but alive and moving.

Let's be doers of the Word, not hearers only.

Let's have the kind of faith that sees mountains, not as obstacles but, as opportunities for God to show His power through us.

Personal Reflection Question: Which area of your faith needs to "move" more right now—serving, forgiving, giving, praying, learning, witnessing, or something else?

Week 5 Leader's Guide – Faith moves

Text: James 2:14-26 & Matthew 17:2

Main Idea: Saving faith is living faith. It isn't merely something we believe—it is something that changes how we live. Genuine faith always produces action.

Goal – By the end of class participants should:

- Understand that James is describing the evidence of faith, not the means of salvation.
- Recognize the difference between merely believing facts about God and trusting Him enough to obey.
- Identify practical ways living faith "moves."
- Leave challenged to take one concrete step of faith this week.

Opening Prayer

Icebreaker (10 minutes)

Have you ever:

- Trusted a doctor enough to have surgery?
- Loved someone enough to get married?
- Trusted someone to teach you to drive?
- Had the confidence to start a new job?
- Had the courage to jump off a diving board?
- Had the faith to buy a house or move to a new community?

Tell about a time you believed something enough to act on it.

Would you say you really believed it if you never acted on it?

Read James 2:14–26

What jumped out at you from the Scripture or from the lesson over the last week?

Dead Faith vs. Living Faith (vv.14–17)

James begins with a practical illustration about what living faith looks like.

What is the relationship between faith and deeds according to James?

Christian doctrine and Scripture like Eph 2:8-9, Rom 3:28, Gal 2:16 indicate we are saved by faith alone apart from works. How do you explain the apparent contradiction in James?

The Faith of Demons – Vs 18-19

What's the difference between the faith of a demon and the faith of a disciple?

[Faith involves surrender, not merely agreement.]

Why does a demon's faith make them shudder?

Dig Deeper - The Lessons of Abraham and Rahab

Who can summarize the stories of Abraham and Rahab James references?

Why do their examples illustrate James' teaching about the link between faith and action?

When has your faith ever been put to the test? Can you share how and what that was like?

The Trial of a Christian

I have an activity I hope will be fun and informative. We're going to have a trial.

(Name of one person in the group) has been placed under arrest for **being a Christian**.

[Have the person come sit in a special chair to be tried as a Christian.]

Read the following in the style of a lawyer or courtroom judge:

"(Name of the accused) has been accused of being a Christian. The definition of a Christian is: **'a person who believes in or has 'faith' in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.'**

Since it is difficult to see or measure such an intangible virtue as 'faith', which one cannot see, we will call witnesses who to testimony to the deeds of (name of the accused) that clearly show, beyond a reasonable doubt, that (name of the accused) is does indeed have 'faith' in Jesus and is therefore proven to be a Christian.

I call to the stand as witness (choose a participant to testify).

(Name of witness), do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Witness: I do.

Can you tell me one behavior you have seen in (name of the accused) that might indicate they are a Christian who has faith in Jesus?

[call multiple witnesses and repeat the process]

Ways Living Faith Moves

If faith is alive, what kinds of things would we expect it to do?

Compare the classes list to the seven characteristics from the handout:

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Loves actively | 5. Prays continually |
| 2. Serves willingly | 6. Learns eagerly |
| 3. Forgives readily | 7. Witnesses boldly |
| 4. Shares generously | |

Which one comes easiest for you? Which one is hardest?

Moving Mountains

In Matthew 17:20, Jesus talked about moving mountains. What kinds of mountains do you think He had in mind?

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| • fear | • grief |
| • addiction | • anxiety |
| • unforgiveness | • ministry opportunities |
| • broken relationships | • impossible situations |

What is one mountain you're trusting God with right now?

Closing – What is one thing you are going to do this week because you trust Christ? You don't have to answer out loud. **But let's take a minute to think and about it.**

Maybe you will: forgive someone, make a phone call, serve someone, give generously, pray daily, invite someone to church, reconcile a relationship... Whatever it is, let's pray about it.

1 minute of silence and then close with a group prayer.

Week 6 – Controlling the Tongue

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James 3:1-12 & Acts 2:1-4

Listen:



Introduction

We have been working our way through the Epistle of James. And I think the Lord has a sense of humor, because today is Pentecost Sunday and it is also the day I have scheduled to preach on James 3:1-12. Tongues are an important feature both passages. For in Acts, the Holy Spirit descends on the church and appears over the heads of Christians as “tongues of fire” and

James tells us we need to control our tongues. So let’s get right into it. First let’s read what James says about our tongues.

James 3:1-12

¹ Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ² We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

³ When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

The Power of the Tongue

James compares the power of our words to the three things:

- 1) A bit in a horse’s mouth,
- 2) a rudder on a ship, and
- 3) a spark that sets a fire.

The first two remind us about the power of our tongue to change the direction of our lives. A bit attached to reigns tells a horse where to go and a rudder tells a ship where to go.

I have never owned a horse, but I have been horseback riding several times. You always get an orientation at the beginning of the excursion about how to get up on the horse and how to direct the animals. You push the reigns o the right to go right or left to go left and pull back to make the animal stop. They will often tell you, "You don't have to yank on the reigns." It's not necessary to yank or pull hard. The horse's tongue is very sensitive to the metal bit across its tongue (that's attached to the reigns). Just a light pressure on the reigns and the bit is all it takes to steer a horse that weighs 1,000 pounds.



Cargo Ship

And James says a small rudder tells a ship where to go. The OOCL Hong Kong is one of the largest container ships on earth. It is as long as 13 football fields and as wide as 2 football fields. It can carry 330,000 tons, which is about the same as 8,000 fully loaded tractor trailers! That's huge, yet the ship is steered by a tiny rudder.

That's the potential power you have stored in the words that come out of your mouth! Your words have tremendous power to direct your life and the life of people to whom you speak.

What you tell yourself makes a huge difference. We all have an internal voice. When we wake up in the morning and look in the mirror, you might say, "Man, you look awfully tired today." Or you may say, "You can do anything God wants you to do with His help." Or you may be critical and say, "You're just a sorry excuse for a man. You can't do anything." Now what you tell yourself has a powerful effect on what you will be able to do. We have to train ourselves to speak kindly and positively and truthfully and helpfully to ourselves, because it has a tremendous impact on the direction of our lives.

What you say to a child can change the course of their life. I was at a band banquet for the Coahuila Creek High School Band last Thursday and the band director, Mr. Dodge, told the story of two adults that said things to him when he was in college that changed the direction of his life. What they said to him when he was just a high school student made want to be a band director. Now he is in his mid-twenties, about to have his first baby, and he is a band director and has a whole career in music ahead of him. All this came from words people spoke to him in his youth.

Your words have the power to change someone's life. What you say to your spouse, your employees, your friends is powerful.



The Tongue is Also a Fire

James says, "The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell."

You know, fire is one of the most useful and powerful tools human beings can wield. Human beings are the only animals

known to purposefully start and use fire. It keeps us warm. Cheers our spirits. And can be used for many other important things. If you drive a car, you are able to get from one destination to another because of the fire that burns in the internal combustion engine. If you drive an electric car, it was probably charged on electricity that was created in a power plant that uses fire to generate electricity.

Fire is a central part of our worship service. In the center of our sanctuary, there on our sacred altar, are two candles burning with fire. They symbolize the dual natures of Jesus Christ: His divine nature and His human nature. Jesus is both fully God and fully man. Additionally, the lighting of these candles at the beginning of our service reminds us Christ is the Light of the World, bringing light into the darkness of sin.

Fire is good and useful—even holy—when it is properly used and controlled. But when it is misused or used carelessly, it can destroy and even kill. So it is with our words. They can be the most powerful and useful parts of our being. Jesus is known as The Word. And it is with The Word that God created everything in creation. It is with *your* words that you can praise God, witnesses to His goodness, and speak life to all. But, because of sin which corrupts our words, our words can also be a deadly fire that destroys.

Some of the ways our words can be a deadly poison, or a destroying fire are:
When we **gossip** about people. When we **slander** someone. When we **lie**.
When we are overly **negative** and **critical**. When we are **verbally abusive**.
When we are always **blaming** others. When we are prone to **angry outbursts**.
When we are always **sarcastic**. When we are **verbally manipulative**.

These ways of speaking are poisonous and an uncontrolled fire that destroys.

One of the important doctrines (or teachings) of the Christian Church is the concept of total depravity. Total depravity is the belief that sin has affected every part of human nature and all human faculties—intellect, will, emotions, and even our speech. This does not mean that people are as evil as they could be, but that sin has infected every aspect of a person's life. In fact, sin has even rendered people incapable of turning to God on their own. If it were not for the

prevenient grace of God, we wouldn't even realize how bad off we are and how we desperately need to turn to God to save us.

But the glorious Good News is, God pours out His grace on us—sometimes like a splash of cold water—that snaps us back to consciousness and we realize, “Oh my God! I am a broken, sinful, busted human being! Even my words can be a deadly fire I can't control!”

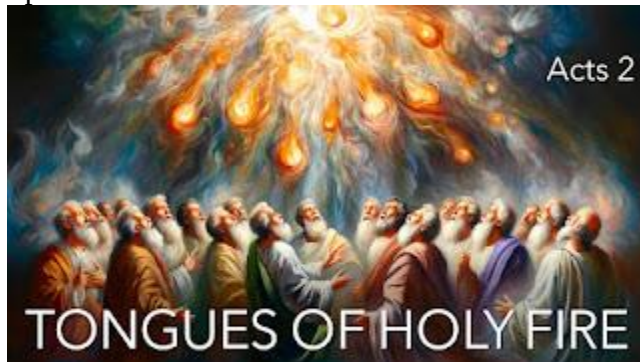
James says in verse 7-8, “People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, but no one can tame the tongue.” But Jesus words from Matthew 19:26 are the answer, “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible.”

God is the one with the power and the will to tame the human tongue. If you will turn your life over to Him, if you will turn your *tongue* over to Him, He can and will transform your words.

We see this dramatically displayed in the story of Pentecost—the birth of the Christian Church in Acts chapter 2 when God sent the Holy Spirit to inhabit His people, the Church.

Acts 2:1-4

¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.



Tongues of Fire

The believers who followed Jesus were gathered together praying and worshiping God in an upper room. And God did something amazing. Before this moment, the Holy Spirit of God was primarily found in one place—the Holy of Holies inside the Temple in Jerusalem. No one could enter the Holy of Holies, except one man—the high priest—one day a year, on the Day of

Atonement. A curtain separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple so no one would be tempted to enter or even look inside.

But when Jesus was crucified, the curtain was torn from top to bottom. It was torn from the top not the bottom, showing God was the one who tore it. It was torn to show there no longer needed to be a curtain to separate God from man, because Jesus died on the cross to atone for our sin once and for all.

And then on Pentecost Sunday, the Holy Spirit of God descended on the first Christians. No longer would His Holy Spirit live on the altar in the Holy of Holies. Starting on that first Pentecost Sunday, the Holy Spirit lives in God's people who follow Jesus Christ as Lord. The two candles you see burning on our altar are a symbol of who *you* can be *if* you will put your faith in Jesus. But it has

to be a *living* faith that moves and obeys. It is a living faith that hands your heart and your tongue over to God and every other part of you.

If you do this, then the Holy Spirit of God will begin to speak through you, just as He did through those first Christian in the upper room on Pentecost 2,000 years ago. He enabled them to speak in foreign languages so the people gathered in Jerusalem could hear the Good News about Jesus death and resurrection in their own native tongue. If God can enable humans to miraculously speak in other languages to accomplish His plans, then He can surely help you learn to control your own tongue.

The question is, do you trust Him? Will you choose today to let Him be in charge of your life?



Closing

As we worship here this Pentecost Sunday, let us remember the transformative power of the Holy Spirit that touched the first believers and is still active and available to us today. The same Spirit that descended as tongues of fire, enabling the disciples to speak in diverse tongues, invites us to surrender our own tongues—and indeed, our whole selves—to God's sanctifying grace.

Today, I invite each of you to consider the 'fires' your words may have kindled, the relationships they have shaped, and the paths they have set.

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to fill us anew, to

tame our tongues, to transform our hearts, and to use our voices for the glory of God.

As the candles on our altar symbolize the divine and human natures of Christ, let our words reflect the nature of Christ within us—words of life, hope, and healing.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit,
Grant us the courage to speak as the Spirit leads, transforming every word into a testament of Your love and power. May our lives and our lips always glorify Christ, the Word made flesh, who dwells among us and speaks through us. Amen."

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. When are you most likely to say things you later regret?
2. Are your words usually bringing life, encouragement, and truth—or criticism, frustration, and harm?
3. What specific part of your speech do you most need to surrender to the Holy Spirit?

Week 6 Leader's Guide – Controlling the Tongue

Text: James 3:1–12 & Acts 2:1–4

Main Idea: Our words reveal our hearts. Left to ourselves, our tongues are impossible to tame, but the Holy Spirit can transform our speech so that our words become instruments of life, encouragement, and truth rather than destruction.

Goal: By the end of class participants should:
Appreciate the enormous influence of their words.
Recognize how speech reveals the condition of the heart.
Understand why self-effort alone cannot tame the tongue.
Leave with practical ways to surrender their speech to the Holy Spirit.

Show and Tell – Show the James manuscript and talk about the ACE project...

Prayer List & Opening Prayer

Icebreaker

What is something someone said to you years ago that you still remember today? Why do words stay with us so long? [*a compliment, encouragement, criticism, hurtful words, wise advice*]

Read James 3:1–12 aloud.

Why is it such a big responsibility to be a teacher?

James uses 5 items as illustrations for the tongue/words. What are they? Which one speaks to you most?

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. the horse's bit | 4. the spring |
| 2. the ship's rudder | 5. the fruit tree |
| 3. the forest fire | |

Small Things Can Have Great Power (vv. 3–5)

When James talks about a bit and a rudder, why do you think James chose such small objects?

[Small things often have enormous influence]

Can you think of one sentence that changed the direction of someone's life?

Have your words ever changed someone's life—for better or worse?

The Tongue Is a Fire (vv. 5–8)

Fire can be both helpful and destructive. What are some good uses of words?

teaching	comforting	praising God
encouraging	witnessing	
praying	apologizing	

What kinds of words spread like wildfire?

gossip	angry outbursts	manipulation
slander	lies	
sarcasm	constant criticism	

Dig Deeper

Why is gossip so tempting? How do you stop gossip?

Can Anyone Tame the Tongue?

Read verse 8 again. “No human being can tame the tongue.” Is James telling us to give up?

James says we cannot tame the tongue ourselves. Jesus says, “With God all things are possible.”

[The answer isn’t greater willpower. The answer is greater surrender to the Holy Spirit.]

Pentecost and Transformed Speech – Read Acts 2:1–4

How does this passage from Pentecost connect with James 3?

How could the Holy Spirit use your words this week? Possible answers:

encourage someone	reconcile a relationship
witness	comfort someone grieving
pray with someone	

Fresh Water or Salt Water? (vv. 9–12)

Why is it inconsistent to praise God on Sunday and curse people during the week?

If someone listened to every word you spoke this week, what picture of your heart would they see?

Complete this sentence: This week I need God’s help to change the way I speak when...

I’m frustrated.	I’m at work.
I’m driving.	I’m talking about someone who isn’t present.
I’m talking to my spouse.	
I’m talking to my children.	I’m talking to myself.

Notice that your sermon wisely includes our internal dialogue as well as our spoken words. The things we repeatedly tell ourselves also shape the direction of our lives.

Weekly Challenge – Choose one speech habit to practice all week. Examples:

No gossip.	Pray before responding when angry.
No complaining.	Replace criticism with gratitude.
Speak one encouraging word every day.	

Closing Prayer

Week 7 – Godly Wisdom vs Worldly Wisdom

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James 3:13-18

Listen:



Introduction

As we continue through the Epistle of James, written by the biological half-brother of Jesus Christ, we come to the place where James compares two kinds of wisdom. One kind of wisdom represents wisdom that comes from God in Heaven. Another kind of wisdom is worldly, unspiritual, and demonic. Would you like to know the

difference between the two types of wisdom? Listen to James 3:13-18.

James 3:13-18 (NIV)

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.



Christians Should:

- Live an honorable life
- Do good works with humility

Christian Examples of Wisdom

Remember, James wrote his letter to people who were already Christians. And in it he basically says, if you are a Christian, you will live an honorable life and do good works with humility.

Can you think of some examples of people who lived an honorable life? Perhaps you might think of **Mother Teresa**, who

dedicated her life to serving the poor and sick, displaying humility, compassion, and selflessness, embodying the qualities of wisdom, mercy, and sincere love for others. Or maybe you would think of **Fred Rogers**, the beloved host of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," who dedicated his career to educating and nurturing children through kindness, empathy, and understanding, promoting peace and genuine care for others in his community and beyond. Or maybe you might think of **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, who bravely and peacefully fought for civil rights and promoted harmony, righteousness, and compassion.

Though all these examples are public figures who had fame and notoriety, fame and notoriety were not their goal. They did what they did with humility and compassion, willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of others. (It is interesting to note that all 3 were all Christian leaders.)

Of course, Jesus is the ultimate example of a man who lived an honorable life with good works and humility. He gave up the glory of heaven, humbled himself as a servant, lived a perfect life for the sake of others, and even died for sinners who didn't deserve His grace and forgiveness, but desperately needed it. Jesus is the embodiment of goodness and wisdom.

An honorable life, according to James, is one marked by humility, good conduct, and wisdom that is pure, peace-loving, considerate, merciful, impartial, and sincere, resulting in peace and righteousness. Christians are to live an honorable life and do good works with humility. Who have you known personally who has lived an honorable life, doing good works with humility? How did they inspire you to live like them?



Worldly Wisdom

Worldly wisdom, has an *appearance* of wisdom. It has the *false-promise* of success, but it is a lie. It is *demonic* and it leads to sin, suffering, and death. James says that worldly wisdom is full of envy and selfish ambition (see versus 14-15). Envy is a feeling of frustrated inferiority where you are jealous of others and what they have. Ambition can be a positive attribute

that drives people to achieve goals and succeed. But when ambition is coupled with envy and selfishness, it becomes sinful, focused solely on personal gain, often at the expense of others. Perhaps you can think of some people who embody the selfish ambition of worldly wisdom.

You might think of **Bernie Madoff**, the financier who orchestrated one of the largest Ponzi schemes in history, defrauding thousands of investors out of billions of dollars purely for personal financial gain, with no regard for the devastating impact on his victims.

Or perhaps you think of **Adolf Hitler**, the leader of Nazi Germany, whose ambition for power and dominance led to World War II and the Holocaust, resulting in immense suffering and loss of life.

James 3:16 says, “For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.” Sadly, we see a lot of this kind of demonic wisdom in our world leaders today. We need to pray hard during these troubled times.

Can't you see what worldly wisdom leads to? It leads to conflict and strife, dishonesty and deception, pride and arrogance, short-term gains with long-term consequences, and discontent and unhappiness. Be very careful of anyone who is full of *worldly wisdom*. You can clearly see where it leads. The Bible tells us. History has shown us. Yet people are still manipulated and

misled by people with worldly wisdom. You don't want any part of the "kingdom" they are trying to build.



Godly Wisdom

In verse 17, James tells us a better way—Godly Wisdom. This is the wisdom that come from God above—heavenly wisdom, the wisdom Christians should seek. “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.”

For wisdom to be **pure** means it is free from moral corruption, selfish motives, and deceit. It is characterized by sincerity, integrity, and a focus on what is right and just. Godly wisdom prioritizes truth, goodness, and the well-being of others, reflecting a heart and mind aligned with God's will and values.

Godly wisdom is **peace-loving** and promotes harmony, reconciliation, and understanding among people. Godly wisdom fosters an environment of cooperation and mutual respect, prioritizing the well-being of relationships and the community.

Godly wisdom is **considerate**, mindful of others' feelings, needs, and perspectives. It shows compassion, empathy, and respect and seeks to understand and value the experiences of others. Godly wisdom avoids harshness and insensitivity, instead promoting kindness, patience, and gentleness in all relationships and decisions.

Godly wisdom is **submissive**, meaning it is willing to listen, be open to reason and yield to others *when appropriate*. It has a humble/teachable spirit that values collaboration and respects authority. Godly wisdom is not stubborn or argumentative but is flexible, cooperative, and ready to consider others' viewpoints and make adjustments for the greater good.

Godly wisdom is **full of mercy**. It shows compassion and forgiveness. It prioritizes grace, reflecting a heart that is generous and ready to help others without judgment or condemnation.

Godly wisdom has **good fruit**, meaning it produces positive, tangible outcomes in a person's actions and character. This includes acts of kindness, generosity, and righteousness that benefit others and contribute to the well-being of the whole community.

Godly wisdom is **impartial**—fair and just, treating all people equally without favoritism or bias.

Godly Wisdom is **sincere**—genuine, honest, and free from pretense or deceit. It does not manipulate or deceive but is transparent and trustworthy, fostering trust and credibility.



Which Wisdom Will You Choose?

Think about these two very different kinds of wisdom: earthly wisdom that comes from Hell and leads to death or Godly wisdom that comes from Heaven and lead to eternal life.

Wisdom from above is what truly leads to a life of peace, righteousness, and genuine fulfillment. James, the brother of Christ, challenges us to embody this wisdom in our

daily lives, living with humility, purity, peace, consideration, mercy, good fruit, impartiality, and sincerity.

The ultimate example of godly wisdom is found in Jesus Christ. He lived an honorable life, full of mercy and truth, and gave Himself up for us so that we might be reconciled to God and to one another. As we seek to follow His example, we are called to come together in unity and love, reflecting His grace in all that we do.

Reflection Questions:

1. Where do you see envy or selfish ambition influencing your decisions or attitudes?
2. Which quality of godly wisdom—purity, peace, consideration, humility, mercy, impartiality, or sincerity—do you most need God to develop in you?
3. Think about a decision or relationship you are facing right now: what would “wisdom from above” look like in that situation?

Week 7 Leader's Guide – Godly vs Worldly Wisdom

Text: James 3:13–18

Main Idea: Wisdom is not measured by intelligence or success, but by the kind of life it produces. Godly wisdom reflects the character of Christ, while worldly wisdom is driven by envy and selfish ambition.

Goal: By the end of class participants should:

- Understand that biblical wisdom is demonstrated by conduct, not merely knowledge.
 - Recognize the characteristics of worldly wisdom.
 - Identify the qualities of wisdom from above.
 - Evaluate which kind of wisdom is shaping their own decisions.
 - Commit to seeking God's wisdom daily.
-

Welcome - Thank everyone for participating and reading the preparation materials.

Opening Prayer – Go over the prayer list, make updates, and pray. (After class, give the updates to Brandy so she can update the church prayer list.)

Icebreaker – Who is one of the wisest people you've ever known? What made them wise?
[some possibilities might be: humility, kindness, patience, good judgment, integrity]

Read James 3:13–18 aloud.

What stands out to you the most?

Why do you think James measures wisdom by behavior instead of knowledge?

Have you ever met someone who was very intelligent but not very wise?

[Discuss the contrast between intelligence with wisdom.]

Why is worldly wisdom so attractive?

Possible responses may include:

- It promises quick success.
- It appeals to our pride.
- It tells us to look out for ourselves.
- It often seems to "work" in the short term.

Where do we see this kind of worldly wisdom promoted today?

James lists some attributes of Godly wisdom. What are they?

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| • Pure | • Full of mercy |
| • Peace-loving | • Full of good fruit |
| • Considerate | • Impartial |
| • Submissive (open to reason) | • Sincere |

Which of these qualities is easiest for you? Which one stretches you the most?

Wisdom Produces a Harvest

Farmers don't harvest immediately after planting. Why do you think James uses agricultural language?

[Guide discussion toward: Wisdom grows. Character develops over time. Peacemaking is an investment.]

Have you ever seen someone patiently sow peace into a difficult situation?

Which of the following columns best describes the voices our culture encourages us to follow?

Worldly Wisdom

- Me first
- Winning
- Pride
- Envy
- Power
- Recognition

Godly Wisdom

- Humility
- Peace
- Mercy
- Truth
- Service
- Love

Personal Reflection

Think about a decision you're facing right now. Don't share it.

Now ask yourself: Which kind of wisdom has been shaping my thinking?

(Allow time for quiet reflection.)

Weekly Challenge

Each morning this week, pray James 1:5 before beginning your day:

"Lord, give me Your wisdom today."

Then ask yourself throughout the day:

"Am I responding with wisdom from above—or wisdom from below?"

Offer a Closing Prayer – Pray that God would give the class:

- humility
- discernment
- teachable hearts
- courage to reject worldly wisdom
- grace to become peacemakers

Week 8 – Submit to God, Flee from the Devil

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James 4:1-10

Listen:



Introduction

We've been working our way through the Epistle of James. Let me review a few important points to remember about this letter.

First, James is Jesus' biological half-brother; Mary was mother to both James and Jesus.

Second, James wrote his letter to people who were already Christians, who had been driven out of Jerusalem and scattered abroad by persecution. These were committed Christians who had already suffered for their faith.

Third, the vast majority of Christians at this time were Jewish. They knew the Jewish faith and the Old Testament of the Bible. (The New Testament was not formed yet.)

Our Scripture today is James 4:1-10, but we will take it in three sections.

James 4:1-3

¹ What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.



I am a Christian, but I Still Struggle

The first thing that strikes me from this section is how Christians still struggle with sin and envy. Remember, James is writing to *Christians*, not unbelievers, and these were hardcore Christians whose faith had been tested by persecution and they remained faithful. Christians still struggle with sin—both in Bible times and today.

People often mock Christians because we don't always live up to our own standards—we struggle with sin just like everyone else and sometimes we have bad attitudes and even do horrible things. Just because we are forgiven and saved from Hell doesn't mean God has fully healed our sinful nature yet. That takes time.

But that doesn't mean we get a pass to just live however we want. We need to let the Holy Spirit reform our character. And we should be getting better and better, day by day. James is very blunt—calling out the jealousy and selfish motivations of *Christians* and naming the evil it leads to: quarrels and fighting, even killing in order to get what we want.

I cannot help but wonder if James was thinking of a Jewish story from the Old Testament all of his readers would have known: the story of Joseph and his brothers. Do you remember the story? Jacob gave his son, Joseph, a beautiful coat of many colors. But Joseph's brothers were jealous because it reminded them their father loves Joseph more than them. So, they planned to kill Joseph, but his brother Reuben convinced them to sell Joseph into slavery instead. That's how Joseph ended up in Egypt where he eventually rose to power as second in command to Pharaoh. God used the brother's terribly evil plan to save Egypt and the whole middle east from famine. Now the Jewish readers to whom James wrote would have known the Joseph story like the back of their hand.

The Joseph story is the story of humanity—jealousy, envy, and using power to take what we want. Why does one nation attack another nation? Because they have something we want and if we have the power, we will take it—by force if necessary. And even so-called “Christian” nations throughout history have acted this way. Even though they claimed to act in Christ's name, they were doing things Christ would have called despicable. This is not God's way. And Christians must give up our love for the things of this world.

James 4:4-6

⁴You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁵Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? ⁶But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”



Friends with the World or Friends with God?

James says being friends with the world means being enemies with God. What does that mean? It means if we love the things of this world more than we love God, we're not choosing God's way. God wants us to be faithful to Him. He gives us grace to turn away from our selfish ways.

Think about Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' twelve disciples. Judas was close to Jesus, saw His miracles, and heard His teachings. But Judas loved money more than he loved Jesus. He chose to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. In doing this, Judas chose friendship with the world over friendship with God. His love for money led him away from Jesus, showing us the danger of putting worldly things above our relationship with God. Do you see how dangerous it is to flirt with worldly desires?

Now, you may say, “I would never do what Judas did. I would never betray Jesus.” Listen, if you love the things of this world, your desires will drive a wedge between you & God. A wedge starts out small, but it gets wider and wider. Who knows what evil you might be willing to do if you let those dark desires grow inside you.

That’s why James bluntly calls out our sin with strong language in verse 4, “You *adulterous* people...” “...anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an *enemy* of God.” James doesn’t pull any punches, because he wants you to know what you must do.

James 4:7-10

⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. And remember, Jesus is talking to Christians.



Make A U-Turn

James says, “Submit yourself to God.” Submission doesn’t sound fun—especially to Americans. We Americans are a proud people. We are proud of our independence. We founded our whole nation on the idea of *not* being subservient to a king! And we proud Americans want to hold our heads up high and not submit to anyone. So, it can be a foreign concept to be

submissive to God. We just don’t like to do it.

Imagine you're driving to a new place and you make a wrong turn. Soon, you realize you're lost. You have a choice: you can keep going in the wrong direction, hoping it will somehow lead you to your intended destination, or you can admit you made a mistake, turn around, and go back to where you messed up.

I do that sometimes—make a wrong turn. I hate turning around and going back. Maybe that’s a sign I have too much pride. I will often let the GPS re-route me so I don’t have to turn around. Usually, it only adds a few minutes to my commute. I can deal with that. But even as much as I hate to turn around, if my GPS says it’s going to take an extra 30 minutes or an hour if I don’t turn around, then even a stubborn old man like me is willing to humble himself and turn around.

Submitting to God is like admitting you made a wrong turn. It's recognizing that going your own way isn't working and deciding to turn back to God. When you submit to God, you let Him guide you. Just like turning around and getting back on the right road will help you reach your destination, submitting to God and following His ways will lead you to a better life, a more holy and Christ-like life.

James also says, “Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.” That doesn't mean we have to fight the Devil ourselves (we could never win). No, we resist the Devil by drawing near to God. We recognize that the evil, selfish desires in us—the way we “love the world”—are actually attacks from the Devil. So don't indulge those desires. Turn away from your love of the world and you are turning away from the Devil. “Come close to God, and God will come close to you.” And this makes the Devil flee.

Repent of your sin. Mourn for the ways you have turned your back on God and God will forgive you. You don't have to live in sin and you don't have to be overwhelmed with shame. Our God is a God of grace. He never gives up on us. We can never sin one too many times. God always welcomes us back when we turn around and come back to Him. Therefore, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.”

Conclusion & Challenge

James teaches us the importance of turning from our selfish desires, choosing God's way, and submitting to Him. We've seen how fights and quarrels come from our desires, how loving the world more than God makes us His enemy, and how we need to humble ourselves, resist the Devil, and draw near to God. Now, I want to challenge each of you to take a tangible step this week to put this message into practice. Here's what you can do:

Practical Steps This Week

1. **Identify a Struggle:** Think about an area in your life where you are struggling with selfish desires or where you feel tempted to go against God's will. It could be a relationship, a habit, or a personal goal that is leading you away from God.
2. **Pray for Strength:** Take time each day to pray about this specific struggle. Ask God for the strength to resist the Devil and the wisdom to make choices that honor Him.
3. **Seek Accountability:** Share your struggle with a trusted friend, family member, or someone from our church. Ask them to pray for you and to help keep you accountable. Sometimes, just knowing that someone else is there to support you can make a big difference.
4. **Actively Resist:** When you feel tempted, remember James' words: "Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you." Take practical steps to avoid situations where you might be tempted and make conscious decisions that align with God's will.
5. **Draw Near to God:** Spend time each day reading the Bible, praying, and worshiping. The closer you are to God, the stronger you will be in resisting temptation and living according to His ways.

Closing Prayer:

Dear God, thank You for Your Word and the wisdom we have learned from James. Help us to



turn away from our selfish desires and to choose Your way in every area of our lives. Give us the strength to resist the Devil and the wisdom to draw near to You. Guide us, Lord, and help us to support one another as we strive to live in a way that pleases You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. What desire, habit, or attitude in my life is most likely to pull me away from God or create conflict with others?
2. Where am I most tempted to value the things of this world more than my relationship with God?
3. What would it look like for me to truly submit to God, resist the Devil, and draw near to Him in one specific area of my life this week?

Week 8 Leader's Guide – Submit to God, Flee from the Devil

Text: James 4:1–10

Main Idea – Our conflicts with others often reveal conflicts within ourselves. James calls us to recognize the selfish desires pulling us away from God, humble ourselves, submit to Him, resist the Devil, and draw near to God.

Goals – By the end of the session, participants should:

- Recognize how selfish desires contribute to conflict.
- Examine what "friendship with the world" looks like in ordinary Christian life.
- Understand submission to God as an act of trust rather than defeat.
- See repentance as turning back toward a gracious God.
- Identify one area where they need to draw closer to God.

Welcome/Opening Prayer – Go over the prayer list, make updates, and pray

Opening Question – Have you ever stubbornly continued doing something your way even after you knew it wasn't working? What finally made you change course?

James 4 is really about recognizing when we're going the wrong direction spiritually—and having enough humility to turn around.

Read James 4:1–10 as you listen for **commands** James gives Christians.

What commands did you hear? [*Submit to God. Resist the Devil. Come near to God. Wash your hands. Purify your hearts. Grieve and mourn. Humble yourselves.*]

James says quarrels arise from desires battling within us.

When you're in conflict with someone, what is your first instinct—to examine yourself or explain what's wrong with them?

What kinds of desires can turn into conflict when we don't get what we want?

Possible answers: I want to be respected. I want to be right. I want control. I want recognition. I want things done my way. I want people to appreciate me. I want comfort. I want what someone else has.

Can the thing we want be good, but our desire for it become unhealthy? Can you think of some examples?

James says we can pray with selfish motives. **How can a perfectly legitimate prayer become a selfish prayer?**

[*"Lord, please change this person."* Vs. *"Lord, show me what You want to change in me."*]
Can you give some examples?

James says friendship with the world is hostility toward God. It is loving the things of this world more than God. Does James mean Christians shouldn't enjoy God's creation or have non-Christian friends?

[Distinguish between people/the created world and a worldly system of values opposed to God.]

What values does our culture encourage that can compete with God's values?

[Examples: wealth, status, appearance, power, pleasure, independence, popularity, winning at all costs]

The sermon handout uses Judas as an example because his love of money ultimately became greater than his loyalty to Jesus. What are some things that might to you or people you know? What are some warning signs that something is forming a wedge between us and God?

James says, "But He Gives Us More Grace" (James 4:6). Why is that important?

[It is more than simply, "*Try harder to be better.*"]

What does this tell us about God's response when a Christian realizes, "I've been going the wrong way"?

Why is it sometimes so difficult to admit, "I'm going the wrong way"?

[Possible answers: pride, embarrassment, stubbornness, fear, we've invested too much already, admitting we're wrong feels like failure]

How is repentance like making a U-turn?

[Repentance isn't merely feeling bad about where you're going. It's changing direction.]

James says SUBMIT TO GOD, RESIST THE DEVIL, & DRAW NEAR TO GOD

How do these three actions work together?

[Resisting the Devil isn't primarily about trying to overpower Satan ourselves. We resist him by turning away from the desires pulling us from God and drawing nearer to God.]

What's the difference between submitting to a cruel master and submitting to a loving God?

[Submission to God isn't surrendering to someone who wants to exploit us. It's trusting the One who knows where the road leads.]

What does resisting temptation look like practically?

[walking away, deleting something, avoiding a situation, changing a routine, confessing to someone. establishing accountability, saying no before temptation gets stronger]

What actually helps you feel close or "draw near" to God?

What is the difference between humility and thinking badly about yourself?

Closing Prayer

Week 9 – Warning!

Do Not Judge!

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James 4:11-12

Listen:



Introduction

Today, we continue our series on the book of James. Last week, we learned about choosing God's way over our own selfish desires. Today, we'll look at James 4:11-12 and talk about the power of our words. James says a lot in this short passage about how we speak to and about others. Let's see what we can learn.

James 4:11-12

¹¹ Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. ¹² There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?



Don't Slander One Another (James 4:11)

James starts out by telling us not to slander one another. Slander means speaking falsely or maliciously about someone, damaging their reputation. When we talk badly about others, we hurt them and ourselves. We are all part of God's family, and He calls us to love and support one another, not tear each other down.

Let me give you an illustration. If you are on a baseball team, it's important for everyone on the team to support each other and work together to win. But if someone is spreading rumors about their team mates, it creates division and distrust in the team and makes it much harder to work together and succeed. Well, as Christians, who is on our team? Everyone in our church is on our team. We aren't competing against each other, but against the powers of darkness among us. So, we should not slander and spread rumors because it creates distrust and makes it harder to work together and succeed in bringing God's Kingdom on earth.

And if you think about it, there are other people on our team even outside our congregation. Everyone in a Bible believing church is also trying to make disciples of Jesus and bring God's Kingdom on earth. So, we are not competing against other churches in our community. We all have the same goal. If they succeed, we succeed. If we succeed, they succeed. So let us not bring division in God's universal church or spread rumors and slander. Let us root for each other and pray for each other to all succeed.

And if we have a broader definition of success, we could include our whole community and our country as being on our team. Don't we want our community and country to succeed? Then, let us not tear each other down, but build each other up as much as it is in our power to do so.

Some Ways Christians Might Slander

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| ◦Gossip | Behavior |
| ◦Spreading Rumors | ◦Undermining |
| ◦Criticizing Leadership | People's Faith |
| ◦Judging Appearances or | ◦Complaining About Others |

What are some ways Christians may be guilty of slander?

Gossip – Sharing unverified or private information about someone else's personal life. Talking behind their back about their mistakes or failures.

Spreading Rumors – Passing along information that may not be true or is exaggerated, which can harm someone's

reputation. Speculating about someone's actions or intentions without knowing the full story.

Criticizing Leadership – Speaking negatively about church leaders or decisions they make without understanding the full context or offering constructive feedback. Undermining authority by questioning leaders' integrity or abilities.

Judging Appearances or Behavior – Making negative comments about someone's clothing, appearance, or lifestyle choices. Criticizing how others raise their children, manage their finances, or conduct their marriages.

Undermining People's Faith – Questioning the sincerity of someone's faith or relationship with God based on their actions or struggles. Making disparaging remarks about someone's participation or lack thereof in church activities.

Complaining About Others – Expressing frustration about the behavior or habits of fellow church members in a way that is unkind or unfair. Creating division by speaking negatively about different groups or cliques within the church.

James says, "Don't Slander!"

JUDGING OTHERS (JAMES 4:11-12)

Judging Others (James 4:11-12)

James goes on to talk about judging others. He says when we judge others, we put ourselves above God's law. "The law" is the moral and ethical teachings given by God, particularly the command to love one another. Remember, Jesus said the greatest commandment (law) is to love the Lord your God. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-39).

James 2:8 mentions this "royal law" found in Scripture: "Love your neighbor as yourself." When we speak against or judge others, we are not acting in accordance with this law of love. Rather, we act as though we are above the law. In essence, we are saying God's law of love does not apply to us, or that we know better than God. We put ourselves in a position to judge the holy law of God itself, which is both presumptuous and wrong.

Judgment condemns and looks down on others with a self-righteous attitude.

Discernment provides constructive guidance with love and humility.

Judgment divides,
but **Discernment** builds up and restores.

Judging vs. Discerning

Now, whenever I talk about not being judgmental, I need to remind us of the difference between judging and discerning (or between being judgmental and making good judgments).

There's a difference. For example: What is we want to hire someone to work in our church. We take applications and try to

choose the best candidate. How can we hire the right person unless we interview and "judge" the candidates?

The kind of **judgment** James speaks against is a condemning, self-righteous attitude that looks down on others and assumes a position of moral superiority. This leads to thinking or speaking negatively about others, spreading rumors, and causes division.

This is not the same as **discernment**, which provides constructive guidance with love and humility. When we interview people, we exercise discernment and wisdom. This includes evaluating a person's character, qualifications, and behavior. But the goal is to find the right person for the job, not to tear anyone down.

But what if someone is not acting right? What if their behavior is clearly wrong? What then? If we have someone in our church whose behavior is unacceptable, we go to them in love to hold them accountable to build them up and help them be more like Christ. Jesus even gave instructions for addressing sin among believers in Matthew 18:15-17. He taught us to:

- Go to the person privately and gently and respectfully point out their fault.
- If the person doesn't listen, take one or two others with you to help mediate and confirm the issue.
- If the person still refuses to listen, bring the matter before the church. The goal is always restoration and reconciliation (not proving you are right by tearing someone else down).



How we speak to and about one another is important. We are called not to slander or judge, but to speak with love and humility. By doing this, we honor God and build a stronger, more united community.

So there is a clear difference between being judgmental and making good judgments.

Humility is Key (James 4:12)

Remember, there is only one true Judge. Our role is to love and serve one another with humility. Humility is the key. It reminds us we have our own faults and need God's grace too. When we speak with humility, we build others up instead of tearing them down.



It's Our Job to Build a Better Future

It breaks my heart to see so much division and slander being thrown around in society. The ignorance, disrespect, and vitriol that characterizes our public discourse is troubling. It is ungodly, unholy, and unhealthy. What kind of world we are leaving for our children and grandchildren?

problem. Christians are called to be different than the world. We are called to be salt and light—to be a positive influence on our broken world. And we can, because we have the power of God's Holy Spirit living inside us.

If it concerns you too, then I invite you to be part of the solution and not part of the

The way we make a difference is to live differently, to speak differently. We are called to be holy as God is holy, to love as God loves, to act with humility and to treat people with dignity and respect. The way to change the world is not to gripe about it, but to be the change we want to see.

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. When am I most tempted to speak negatively about someone rather than speak directly to them with love and humility?
2. Is there someone I have been judging by assuming I know their motives, character, or relationship with God? How might humility change the way I see them?
3. What is one practical way I can use my words this week to build someone up rather than tear them down?

Week 9 Leader's Guide – Warning! Do Not Judge!

Text: James 4:11–12

Main Idea – Because God alone is the Judge, Christians should not tear others down through slander or self-righteous judgment. Instead, we are called to speak truth with humility, practice loving discernment, and use our words to build up rather than destroy.

Goals – By the end of the session, participants should:

- Recognize forms of slander that can easily be disguised as ordinary conversation.
- Understand why judgmentalism violates the law of love.
- Distinguish between **condemning judgment** and **godly discernment**.
- Understand that biblical accountability seeks restoration rather than condemnation.
- Examine whether their own words build people up or tear them down.

Welcome and Prayer Requests

Opening Question – Have you ever formed an opinion about someone and later discovered you had completely misjudged them? What changed your mind?

Why are we so quick to form conclusions about people when we usually know only part of their story?

Read James 4:11–12 (Twice)

What did you notice?

What is the difference between slander and simply saying something negative about someone?

Does something have to be false to be wrong to repeat?

[Something can be completely true and still be: private, unnecessary, hurtful, told with the wrong motive, none of our business]

When deciding whether to say something, you can ask yourself:

- *Is it true?*
- *Is it necessary?*
- *Is it loving?*

How would our conversations change if we asked those three questions before talking about someone who wasn't present?

Is it gossip or not?

Scenario 1 – Someone says, "I'm not gossiping. I'm only telling you this so you'll know how to pray for her..." Then they share personal details. Gossip or legitimate concern?

Scenario 2 – Someone disagrees with a church decision and talks to several friends about how bad the decision was—but never speaks to the people involved. Is that legitimate criticism or something unhealthy?

Scenario 3 – Someone tells you something negative about another person that you know is true. Should you pass it along?

We're on the Same Team – Christians within a congregation aren't competitors. Neither are neighboring churches. Slander and rumors create distrust and make it harder for God's people to accomplish their shared mission.

Why do churches sometimes begin acting other churches are competitors?

What changes when we genuinely believe, "If another church succeeds in making disciples, that's a win for the Kingdom"?

What would change in our congregation if we consistently viewed one another as teammates rather than competitors?

What do people usually mean today when they say, "Don't judge me"?

"You can't tell me I'm wrong." Or "Nobody has a right to evaluate anybody else's behavior."

An important distinction: James condemns a ***self-righteous attitude that looks down on another person and assumes moral superiority***. That is different from discernment, which evaluates something with the goal of providing constructive guidance in love and humility.

Judgmentalism	Discernment
Condemns	Evaluates
Looks down	Comes alongside
Assumes motives	Seeks truth
Tears down	Builds up
Wants to be right	Wants restoration
Comes from pride	Comes with humility

What if someone's behavior really is wrong?

[James isn't saying Christians must pretend sin isn't sin. Jesus gave instructions in Matthew 18:15–17: go privately first, involve others if necessary, and ultimately seek restoration and reconciliation—not victory over the other person.]

Why do you think Jesus tells us to go directly to the person first?

[It protects their reputation. It prevents gossip. It gives them an opportunity to explain. We may discover we're mistaken. It demonstrates love and respect. It makes reconciliation possible]

Why is talking *about* someone often easier than talking *to* them?

What does God know about another person that we don't know?

[their heart, their motives, their history, their struggles, their wounds, what they've been through, their relationship with God, the whole truth]

How does remembering your own need for grace change the way you respond to someone else's failures?

Closing Prayer

Week 10 – Life is a Mist

Copyright June 24, 2024 by Chris Mullis

James 4:13-17

Listen:



Introduction

I woke up early this morning and decided to get on up and come to church and finish up my sermon on James 4:13-17.

As I drove in through the dark morning air around 5:30, there were a few fingers of thin fog crossing the road in the dips and depressions along the way. It was pretty.

It's so dry, I knew the mist would evaporate before people got to church, but the mist brought to mind this morning's passage from the Epistle of James for it says our lives are like a morning mist that is here for a short time and then vanishes.

James 4:13-17

¹³ Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.



Proverbs 16:9
We can make
our plans, but
the Lord
determines
our steps.

Proverbs 16:9

It is said, if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. I believe that whole heartedly. I've always been a planner. It's something my mom instilled in me at a young age.

When I was in the 3rd or 4th grade. I was always pestering my mom to buy me those little toy airplanes with the windup propellers powered by a rubber band. So, she said, "I

think you can build one of those yourself." She started saving the Styrofoam trays that came in the meat packages from the grocery store. She would wash them and then give them to me and I would build airplanes out of them. I got creative and made all different designs. It was a lot of fun.

My mom said, "You know, you like building those so much you might like to be an engineer who designs airplanes." And I thought she was probably right so I started planning how I could be an engineer one day. And my mom in her wisdom said, "You know if you want to be an

engineer, you'll need to make good grades in school so you can go to college." And that encouraged me to do better in school. So, from the time I was only 8 or 9 years old, I was already planning ahead for my future. I planned to grow up and design airplanes for a living.

God had other plans. Proverbs 16:9 says, "We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps." When I graduated high school, I didn't have enough money to attend college to be an aerospace engineer. But a college in Marietta offered a full scholarship to be a textile engineer. So, my plans changed. And as I neared the end of my college degree, God changed my plans again. I started to feel God calling me to be a pastor instead of an engineer.

Jesus told the fisherman Peter, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." To me, Jesus said, "Follow me and I will make you an engineer of men, discipling them to grow closer to God." So, my plans changed again and I started pursuing a life of ministry as a Methodist pastor.

James says very bluntly, it is arrogant, sinful, and presumptuous to make plans without considering the Lord's will. More than that, if Jesus is truly our Lord (as Christians say He is), then we ought to be 100% sold out to Lord's will (as opposed to our own). So, we ought to seek to do the Lord's will and not just ask Him to bless our own plans.

I'm still a planner, but I've learned some new principles about planning from Jesus over the last 30 years that I want to pass along:



Godly Planning

First – Acknowledge God's Sovereignty.

God is sovereign. That means God is in control of everything and has the power and the right to decide what happens. James 4:15 says, "Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'"

When making plans, consistently acknowledge that God is in control and that

His will should take precedence over your own. Of course, this is an attitude and a state of mind, but it can help it become our state of mind when we actually say things like "if it is the Lord's will" and genuinely mean it.

Second – Seek God's Guidance Through Prayer. Rather than coming up with your own plans and then asking God to bless them, start by seeking God will from the get-go. Not only is it more efficient, it actually helps you grow closer to the Lord and practice being in-tune with His Holy Spirit.

Proverbs 3:5-6 - "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

Prayer is essential to Christian living. Regularly pray for wisdom and guidance when making plans. Ask God to reveal *His* will for your life and to direct your steps. And then follow Him in faith.

Third – Be Open to God's Redirection. Make your plans with great humility. Don't be so set on *your* plans that you cling to them if God wants to change them. And God might change your plans for any number of reasons.

Your plans might not be *His* plans. Which plans do you really want to follow?

Your plans might only align partially with God's plans. For me, going to college was only partially God's plan. I needed to go to college to fulfill my calling to be a Methodist minister (Methodist pastors must first get a bachelor's degree and then go on to seminary for a master's degree). Any bachelor's degree would do. But God had to alter my initial educational plans and I had to be willing to obey and adapt.

God may change His plans based on something you don't know about. He always knows better. Do you remember what you were doing on the morning of March 12th, 2020? I do. It was a Thursday morning and I was preparing to serve as a chaplain (spiritual director) on a Walk to Emmaus spiritual retreat. We had all heard of COVID-19, but it wasn't something that was really affecting our lives much on Thursday morning, March 12th.

But by the evening that day, my retreat and the whole world was shut down. Even church that coming Sunday, March 15, was canceled. Not just my church, but almost every church in the country. No one was supposed to gather in the sanctuary. What were we going to do? But God, in His wisdom, had helped us plan for it without our even knowing it.

Three years earlier (back in 2017), I had had a casual conversation with another pastor in another town who said they had started livestreaming their service on Facebook. "Yeah, we just have someone hold up their smart phone and livestream it." I thought, "Hmmm... We could do that."

So, we started doing it in our church. I got a few volunteers and we had people stream very bad quality recordings of the service. By January of 2020, we decided if we were going to keep live streaming, we really needed to up our game. So, we installed our first real camera in the church balcony for that purpose.

We thought it would be easy—just add the camera, but it caused all kinds of technical problems. And we experimented through January and February and by March we had all the bugs worked out. So, when March 15th rolled around and we couldn't have in-person church, God had already helped us get everything ready for a full livestream service without our even knowing what He was planning!

God is good! He sees things you do not. So, stay in touch with His plans.

Proverbs 19:21 – "You can make many plans, but the Lord's purpose will prevail. " When it comes to planning, remain flexible and be open to changes in your plans, understanding that God

may have different and better plans for you. Be willing to adapt when circumstances change, trusting that God is guiding you.

Fourth, Involve Wise Counsel. Proverbs 15:22 says, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." Christians live in community. We don't practice our faith alone. I don't care what anyone says, your faith in God is not a private matter. It is not just something between you and God. Don't believe that lie. Faith in Jesus Christ has never been something that was a private thing.

Jesus called 12 disciples and they lived out their faith together. Christianity in the New Testament was always an interaction between people living together.

Even before God created people or the world, He was not alone because God is a Trinity. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit live together in a perfectly harmonious relationship. And we are made in God's image. Therefore, we are to live in community. So, when you make plans, you ought to seek the wise counsel of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

One of the biggest mistakes I made when I answered the call to ministry was trying to figure it out all on my own. I didn't talk to anyone about it. I didn't even talk to my wife. How sad. It caused unnecessary strife in our marriage and even delayed my calling by three years. All I had to do was talk to her.

Humility involves recognizing that you don't have all the answers. When you plan, seek advice from trusted, godly friends, mentors, or leaders who can provide wisdom and perspective.



Life is a Mist

I hope you take to heart James' sobering reminder that our lives are like a morning mist—brief and fleeting. Just as the mist evaporates with the rising sun, our time on this earth is short and uncertain.

As I drove to church early this morning and noticed the drifting mist, I thought of the many people I have known—people my own age or even younger—who have already passed on. I've been thinking about that more lately.

My youngest daughter will be a senior in high school this coming school year. Then, Kelly and I will enter a new stage of life. I sometimes wonder what it will hold. Will we continue to be happy and healthy? Will there be a diagnosis of cancer or something worse? I don't know. I hope for the best. But I also know there are no guarantees. Life is a mist. We do not know what tomorrow holds, and we cannot control the future. But we do know who holds the future, and that is God.

James urges us to live with humility, acknowledging God's sovereignty in all our plans. We must recognize that while we can make plans, it is the Lord who directs our steps. This means

being open to His guidance and redirection, seeking His will through prayer, involving wise counsel, and being flexible enough to adapt when circumstances change.

Now, in light of the brevity of life, I want to challenge you to respond to this message today. If you have not yet given your life to Jesus Christ, do not delay. Accept Him as your Lord and Savior right now. Don't put off the most important decision of your life.

For those of you who are already Christians, consider if there is something God is calling you to do that you have been postponing. Maybe it's reconciling with a loved one, stepping into a new ministry, or making a significant life change. Whatever it is, don't wait. Take action today. Remember, James said "it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it."

Our lives are but a mist, and we must make the most of the time God has given us. Let's choose to live each day with purpose, seeking God's will, and trusting in His perfect plan for our lives.

Closing Prayer

Sovereign God, we come with humble hearts, acknowledging Your rightful rule over our lives. Help us to live with the awareness that our time here is short and to make the most of every moment by seeking Your will. For those who need to make a decision today, give them the courage to act now. For those who need to take a step of faith, provide them with Your guidance and strength. Thank You for being our constant guide and support. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. When I think about my future, am I truly seeking God's will, or am I mostly asking God to bless the plans I have already made?
2. Where might God be asking me to loosen my grip on my own plans and trust Him to redirect my steps?
3. Knowing that life is short, what good thing do I know God wants me to do that I have been putting off—and what would it look like to act on it now?

Week 10 Leader's Guide – Life is a Mist

Text: James 4:13-17

Main Idea – Wise Christians make plans, but they hold those plans loosely. Because life is brief and God alone knows the future, we seek His will, remain open to His direction, and do today the good He has already shown us to do.

Goals – By the end of the session, participants should:

- Understand what James is—and is not—criticizing about planning.
- Reflect on the brevity and uncertainty of life without becoming fearful or fatalistic.
- Consider what it means practically to seek God's will.
- Recognize the importance of flexibility and wise Christian counsel.
- Identify something good God is calling them to stop postponing.

Welcome and Prayer Requests

Opening Question – What's something you once had carefully planned that didn't turn out anything like you expected?

Did the change turn out worse, better, or simply different from what you had planned?
(career, vacation, marriage or family plans, retirement, finances, moving, a project, yesterday!)

James reminds us that there's a big difference between making plans and believing we're actually in control of the future.

Why are we so quick to form conclusions about people when we usually know only part of their story?

Read James 4:13-17

What does this passage mean to you?

If James says, "You don't know what will happen tomorrow," is it wrong for Christians to plan for the future?

Proverbs 16:9 says, "We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps."

Can you identify a time when God redirected your plans?

Could you see God's hand in it at the time, or only afterward?

What does it actually mean to plan with the attitude stated in verse 15, "If it is the Lord's will"?

- I acknowledge that God is sovereign.
- I pray before making important decisions.
- I ask what God wants rather than merely asking Him to bless what I want.
- I remain open to redirection.
- I don't fall apart when plans change.
- I seek wisdom from other Christians.

How do you discern God's will when you're making an important decision?
(Principles: pray, trust God's sovereignty, remain flexible, seek wise counsel from other believers)

Can we really say we're seeking God's will if we've already decided what answer we're willing to accept?

Why are we sometimes reluctant to seek advice when making major decisions?

Who are the people in your life who have earned the right to tell you something you don't want to hear?

Verse 14 says: "What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."

Does thinking about how short life is make you uncomfortable? Why?

Do you think we actually live as though life is short?

The saying goes: *We don't know what tomorrow holds, but we know who holds the future.*

How does trusting God change the way we face the uncertainty of tomorrow?

"Someday" Can Be Dangerous. We assume we'll have tomorrow. So we postpone obedience until tomorrow. But James has just told us: **Tomorrow isn't promised.**

Why do we postpone things we already know God wants us to do?

Do you have any other questions or thoughts to share?

Closing Prayer

Week 11 – A Warning to the Rich

Copyright July 8, 2024 by Chris Mullis

James 5:1-6

Listen:



Introduction

We are now in the last chapter of the Epistle of James. Lord willing, we will spend 4 more weeks studying this letter that was written by Jesus' half-brother. The message today might make you feel uncomfortable. I want you to know it makes me feel uncomfortable too. Why? Because James gives a stern warning to rich people. And although I don't consider myself a rich man,

I do realize I live in one of the most prosperous nations on the planet.

According to zippia.com, the USA has the 7th highest avg annual income in the world - \$70,930/year. Now the average income of the whole world is \$9,733/year. The average annual income in Afghanistan is only \$390/year. So maybe that puts some things in perspective for us. And God's Word to us today in James is challenging.

James 5:1-6

¹ Look here, you rich people: Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. ² Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. ³ Your gold and silver are corroded. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fire. This corroded treasure you have hoarded will testify against you on the day of judgment. ⁴ For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The cries of those who harvest your fields have reached the ears of the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

⁵ You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every desire. You have fattened yourselves for the day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned and killed innocent people,^[a] who do not resist you.

A Warning to the Rich

James speaks to his 1st century Jewish Christian readers to remind them not to become like the rich and powerful who persecuted them. Many of his readers may have been wealthy. Many of them had suffered and lost much wealth at the hands of non-Christians who persecuted them. And as always, James is very blunt. He warns the wicked rich using terribly vivid imagery of the troubles the wicked rich will endure. Your wealth will rot away. Your fine cloths will be moth eaten rags. Your silver and gold will corrode. The wealth you counted in will eat your flesh like fire. And all your wealth will testify against you in court on Judgment Day. That makes you squirm in your seat a little bit—if not for yourself, then for anyone who faces it.

Money IS NOT the Root of All Evil

1 Timothy 6:10

“For the love of money is the
root of all kinds of evil.”

Money IS NOT the Root of All Evil

It's important for me to *correct* an often-misunderstood statement in the Bible. Contrary to popular belief. The Bible never says money is the root of all evil.

The verse people misquote to proof-text this is 1 Timothy 6:10, which says, “For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.” It is the love of money that is the root

of all kinds of evil. That's an important distinction.

If you know your Bible, you will realize there were many godly rich people who were part of God's story. Abraham is revered as a holy man by three world religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Yet Father Abraham was a wealthy nomad who had large flocks of livestock and the large household of a wealthy man by the standards of his day. One of Abraham's descendants, Joseph, was part of that wealthy household. Joseph lost it all when he was sold into slavery by his treacherous brothers, but he eventually rose to power as second in command to Egypt's Pharaoh (who was arguably the wealthiest and most powerful man in the world at that time). David started out as a lowly shepherd, but then became King of Israel and lived in a palace with the wealth and power of the nation at his disposal. Then the Bible says David's son, Solomon, was the wealthiest person in the world. There were also several wealthy people who supported Jesus' ministry and the Christian church in the New Testament – Joseph of Arimathea was a wealthy man who donated a tomb for Christ burial.

There is nothing wrong with having wealth. It's how you get your wealth and what you do with it and your attitude about it that matters most. James warns the rich who got their wealth by unjust means. Verse 4 says, “Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay.” These were people who had little power. The landowner could promise to pay them a certain wage, but if he decided to cheat them, what recourse did they have? (There weren't even any labor unions back then.) And these were also people who lived hand to mouth, so if the landowner didn't pay them on time, they would certainly go hungry. James says when rich people act like this, God hear the complaints of the people they cheat and He see the rich people's wickedness and He will judge them.

1 Peter 1:15

But now you must be **holy** in
everything you do, just as
God who chose you is holy.

As God's people, we are to be holy as the Lord is Holy. What does it mean to be Holy? It means to be set apart, to be different from the sinful world. It means to be like God.

God is righteous. He does not cheat and steal. He does not mistreat and use people. Therefore, we must not cheat, steal, and mistreat people either. We must be kind

and generous and gracious, just as God is kind and generous and gracious. We must be fair, just as God is fair.

My daughter is a waitress. She usually makes a decent wage, but a good portion of her income comes from tips. When people don't tip the customary amount, she suffers. And I know many people say they are good tippers *if the wait staff does a good job*. I understand your sentiment. But what if God treated you the way you treat your waiter or waitress? What if God was watching over you looking for any mistake you made as an excuse to withhold blessings from you. We would all starve to death because we make so many mistakes. But that's not how God is. God is gracious with us and blesses us even when we fail. We ought to be the same with people in our dealings. We should seek to be holy as God is holy.

If you read about the heroes of the Bible, the holy ones who had great wealth, you will find that they were kind and generous and fair. They also did not put their trust in their wealth; they depended on the Lord. King David, who was a powerful king who wrote so many of the Psalms, wrote in Psalm 20:7, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God." And Solomon, who the Bible says was the richest man who ever lived, wrote in Proverbs 11:28, "Trust in your money and down you go! But the godly flourish like leaves in spring."

David and Solomon were wealthy men, but they didn't trust in the riches to keep them safe. They knew the Lord was their strength and their shield. As Americans who live in one of the most prosperous nations in the world, we also must hear and heed James' warning. Don't trust in your wealth to keep you safe. Put your trust in God. And be very careful not to cheat and steal to gain or increase your wealth. Be honest. Be fair. Be gracious. And don't hoard your wealth. Be generous. Don't waste your money in careless living, but also be careful that you aren't stingy.

Salary Comparison	
Chick-fil-A	McDonald's
\$13.09/hour	\$12.54/hour

Chick-fil-A vs. McDonald's

Have you ever noticed the difference in quality between Chick-fil-A and McDonalds. Chick-fil-A just seems to have better quality food and service. Chick-fil-A is a company that operates on Christian values. They make a bold statement about their Christian identity by closing on Sunday. That means they potentially earn 1/7th less than McDonalds (who is open

seven days a week). But Chick-fil-A still manages to pay their employees an average of \$0.50 more per hour than McDonalds. Christian values lead Chick-fil-A to care more about their employees and treat them better.

It's not so much about our wealth, but our attitudes and values surrounding wealth. As Christians, we must understand we are blessed so that we can be a blessing. Our blessings are not just for our own selfish gratification. Christians are blessed so we can be a blessing.



Hard Times

There is a saying going around that I think makes a lot of sense. It says that hard times create strong people. Strong people create good times. Good times create weak people. And weak people create hard times. That seems to be true in my experience. (And when I say strong or weak people, I'm not talking about physical strength; I'm referring to the strength of a

person's character.) When times are hard, people have to buckle down and live right and work hard to survive. It builds strong character that improves society and leads to good times. But when times are good and easy, people tend to get lazy. And lazy people tend to develop weak character. They live too high on the hog and their entitlement attitudes lead to hard times. It's a cycle I see play out in society and in families.

Where is our nation in this cycle right now? It would seem to me that we have been living through some very good times. We are the 7th most prosperous nation in the world. But we are also seeing increasing inflation and times are harder in the past couple years than they have been before. Perhaps it is because we are getting lazy and are living too high on the hog. It's leading to hard times. I certainly can see in my personal dealings with people in our town that we have too many weak characters who feel too entitled to blessings without having to work for them. It does not bode well for our community or our nation.

But maybe there is hope! As Christians we are called to be different, to be holy as God is holy. We are to be the salt of the earth. We are to be people of good, strong character and values. Pray that you are being part of the solution and not living in ways that lead to hard times.



Conclusion

Remember Jesus Christ, who is the King of kings and Lord of lords. If anyone was entitled to take it easy and live well, it was Jesus. Yet Christ left the glory of heaven and humbled himself as a slave and even laid down His sacred life for us. He came not to be served, but to serve. And we who follow Him as Lord are called to do the same—to live selflessly, to give sacrificially, to be a

gracious blessing to people (not because they deserve it, but simple out of an abundance of grace).

Every time we celebrate Holy Communion, it is a reminder of how Christ laid down His life for us. His sacrifice gives us life and strength. Let's remember to live for Him because He died for us. It will make our lives and the lives of everyone around us better.

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. What does the way I spend, save, and give my money reveal about what I truly value and trust?
2. Where might comfort, possessions, or financial security be competing with my dependence on God?
3. God has blessed me in many ways—not only financially. How can I intentionally use what He has given me to bless someone else this week?

Week 11 Leader's Guide – A Warning to the Rich

Text: James 5:1-6

Main Idea – James' warning is not simply that having wealth is wrong. His warning concerns what we trust, how we obtain what we have, and what we do with what God has entrusted to us. The Christian response to God's blessings should be honesty, justice, generosity, gratitude, and a willingness to bless others.

Goals – By the end of the session, participants should be able to recognize the difference between having wealth and trusting wealth, consider what their use of money reveals about their hearts, see generosity as part of Christian discipleship, and identify a practical way to use something God has given them to bless another person.

Welcome and Prayer Requests

Opening Questions: If someone could see your bank statement—but knew absolutely nothing else about you—what might they conclude is important to you?

Do you think the way we use our money actually reveals something about what we value? Why or why not?

Read James 5:1–6

What specific things these wealthy people have done wrong?

(Don't just notice that they're rich—what exactly does James condemn?)

[hoarding wealth, withholding wages, living in self-indulgence, and mistreating innocent people]

The sermon we read for today points out an important misconception: Scripture does not say *money* is the root of all evil. The warning is against the **love of money**. The sermon also points to biblical people such as Abraham, Joseph, David, Solomon, and Joseph of Arimathea who possessed substantial resources.

That reinforces an important distinction: **The question isn't simply, "How much do I have?" The deeper question is, "What does what I have mean to me?"**

Discuss:

At what point can something good—money, a home, retirement savings, possessions, financial security—begin taking a place in our lives that belongs to God?

How would I know if I were trusting my money rather than trusting God?

James specifically condemns wealthy landowners for withholding wages from workers. His concern isn't only what they possess but **how they treated people in acquiring and protecting it**. That connects with the sermon's emphasis that holiness should affect the way Christians conduct themselves: honestly, fairly, graciously, and generously.

Discuss:

Why do you think God cares so much about how we conduct our financial dealings with other people?

What might financial integrity look like in ordinary life for us—at work, in business, paying bills, tipping, buying and selling things, or dealing with someone who owes us money?

James says the wealthy have “**hoarded wealth in the last days.**”

This is interesting because prudent saving and hoarding aren't necessarily the same thing.

What's the difference between wisely saving for the future and hoarding?

Wise Stewardship

Prepares responsibly

Holds possessions as God's gifts

Remains willing to give

Trusts God for the future

Asks, “How can this be used?”

Hoarding

Seeks ultimate security

Treats possessions as “mine”

Has difficulty letting go

Trusts accumulated resources

Asks, “How can I keep this?”

God's blessings aren't intended merely for our own comfort. We receive so that we can also give. And **wealth isn't only money**. It might include: time, health, experience, property, tools, skills, knowledge, relationships, influence, a vehicle, a home, and spiritual gifts.

What changes when I begin thinking, “God entrusted this to me,” instead of simply, “This belongs to me”?

Can you think of something you own or possess that God has allowed you to use to bless somebody else?

James' language about luxury and self-indulgence is intentionally uncomfortable. But the danger isn't necessarily enjoying something good. The deeper danger is allowing **comfort to become the organizing principle of our lives**.

What's the difference between enjoying God's blessings with gratitude and living primarily for our own comfort?

Why can prosperity sometimes make dependence on God more difficult?

Who is the most generous person you've personally known? What made you think of that person?

Closing Prayer

Week 12 – Patience and Endurance

Copyright July 15, 2024 by Chris Mullis

James 5:7-12

Listen:



Introduction

This 12th message in a sermon series on the Epistle of James is about patience and endurance. I suspect we've all had to practice patience at some point in our lives. And I'm sure we've all had to endure something. (Some of you are probably thinking every Sunday you have to listen to one of my sermons is a act of patience and endurance.)

James shares his wisdom about patience and endurance by introducing two ideas—one very earthly and practical and the other heavenly and spiritual. The heavenly/spiritual one is about Jesus second coming. The earthly/practical one is an illustration of a farmer. Listen to the Word of God in James.

James 5:7-8

⁷ Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen. ⁸ You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near.

James 5:7-8

⁸ You, too, must be patient.
Take courage, for the
coming of the Lord is near.



Jesus and the Farmer

One of the foundational teachings of the Christian Church is that Christ will return again. The first time He came, Jesus was born in a manger as a helpless infant baby. The second time He comes, He will come as a conquering King. Here is one thing I can guarantee you: Jesus will come back in *your* lifetime. Does that seem too bold a claim? Either Jesus will come back for us all, all at once *or* He will come for you individually when you draw your last breath. Either way, you will see Him in *your* lifetime.

James reminds us. And he says, be patient while you wait. Farmers understand patience. They see patience for what it really is. Good farmers are not lazy. They are some of the hardest workers you will ever find. And yet, a good farmer realizes there are some things they can control and some things they absolutely cannot control. A farmer decides what seeds to plant. That's within their control.

They can control how they prepare the soil. They can control the fertilizer they put down. They decide how long to let the crop grow and how and when to harvest it. But there are many things they cannot control. A farmer cannot control the rain. And as much as farming has become a

science, there is still something very mysterious about it. The farmer sees—perhaps more than anyone else—there is a Higher Power at work beyond themselves controlling how their fields grow. And so a farmer learns to be patient. They know when it is time to work, you work hard and you work smart. And when it is time to wait, you are patient and you wait. And waiting is not lazy, it often means preparing so you are ready to work when the harvest comes.

And a good farmer demonstrates great faith. They trust that the harvest will come. Otherwise, why would they bother with all the hard work of planting and tending their fields?

The Word of God says: Jesus is coming. You will see Him in *your* lifetime. Either He will come for us all at once *or* He will come for you personally when you take your final breath. James says, “Be patient.” It doesn’t mean, “Be lazy.” There are things we must do. Like a farmer tending his fields, you need to tend the business of your life. But be wise. Tend the things that matter—the things that lead to a fruitful harvest in your life.

And don’t be discouraged by the troubles you must endure. Christ will come and He will make everything that is wrong right again. On the final day, His Kingdom will come on earth and His will will be done here too. Remember, James wrote these words to Christians who had been chased out of their homes, run out of town because they believed and proclaimed Jesus was the Lord and Messiah.

Some of them had lost everything—their homes, their jobs, their businesses. Some had even lost loved one who had been jailed or murdered. But the Word of God to them is the same as it is to us: Be patient. Trust the Lord. Jesus is coming.

And James goes on to say:

James 5:9

⁹ Don’t grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. For look—the Judge is standing at the door!

In our patience, we remember, Jesus is watching. So we don’t just grit and bear it. No, we live with Joy. In the midst of trials and suffering, we know that Jesus has already won! We live lives of love and joy. We can sing and celebrate! We can be like the disciples who, one month after seeing their Lord Jesus brutally executed and buried in a borrowed tomb, boldly preached His resurrection in the Temple courtyard, right in front of the ones who ordered Christ’s crucifixion. And their joy and excitement was so authentic that hundreds and thousands believed their message.

Are you being joyful in your patient endurance? I want you to hear me today (whatever you are facing): God is doing something in your life. Your waiting is not in vain. The fact that you are waiting means God is doing something. And if you are puzzled because your waiting makes no sense, then maybe it confirms even more the fact that your waiting will end with a tremendous,

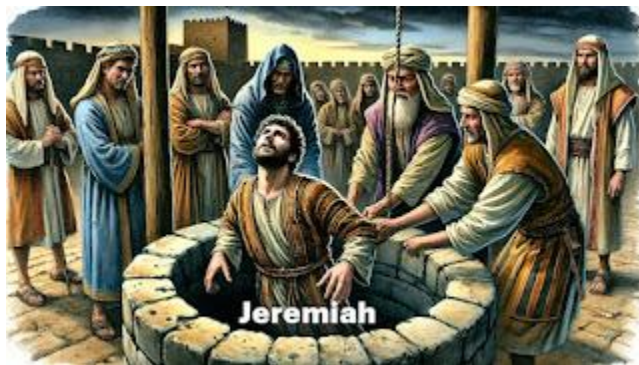
James 5:9

⁹ Don’t grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. For look—the Judge is standing at the door!

miraculous moving of God. So don't lose heart. And don't grumble. Be patient. Rest in the joy of the Lord. Celebrate His goodness in anticipation of what He will reveal to you.

James 5:10-12

¹⁰ For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy.



Jeremiah Being Thrown Into a Well

James' words here remind us that we are not alone when we must wait or suffer or endure. For the prophets of the Bible who came before us also suffered. They were righteous, faithful people. But they were rejected by the world and suffered. Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet. For not only did his own people throw him into a well simply for saying the

Truth God told him to speak, he also had to endure watching his own people conquered by the Babylonians and dragged away into exile.

So if you are suffering, don't jump to the conclusion that God is angry at you. If you are living the way God wants you to live, be encouraged. Sometimes God's people suffer. But God will make it all right one day. So trust in Him. Trust. In. Him. And be patient.

James 5:12

¹² But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned.

These words of James echo Jesus' words (and remember, Jesus was James' brother who grew up in his same household).

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:34, 39), "Do not make any vows!" "Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will,' or 'No, I won't.' Anything beyond this is from the evil one.

James 5:12

¹² But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned.

I could preach a whole sermon just on this. But for today, let me just keep it simple so we can finish up.

The point is we need to live our lives with authenticity and integrity so our word is our bond. What's the point in saying things like: "I swear to God" or "I swear on my mother's grave." Why should we need these useless expressions to prove we're speaking the truth? If you live a life of integrity, people who know you they can trust you. And they will see your life and they will trust your word. So live with integrity and let your yes be yes and your no be no.

Conclusion

As we close, I want to invite you to reflect on God's word to you today. What has God said to you in this Scripture and this message? Take a moment to consider how you can apply this teaching on patience and endurance in your own life. Is there a situation where you need to trust God more, to wait patiently, or to act with faith like the farmer tending his fields?

Perhaps you feel called to let go of something you can't control, or to work diligently in the areas where you can make a difference. Maybe you need to find joy in the waiting, trusting that God is at work even when you cannot see it.

As we bow our heads and pray, I encourage you to respond to what God has spoken to you today. Whether it's a renewed commitment to trust Him, an action step you need to take, or a prayer for strength in your current situation, lift it up to the Lord.

Serenity Prayer

*God, grant us the serenity to accept the things that we cannot change,
the courage to change the things that we can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.
Amen.*

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. What am I waiting on God for right now, and how well am I trusting Him while I wait?
2. In my current circumstances, what do I need to patiently entrust to God—and what is within my control that I need to faithfully do?
3. How might God be calling me to replace frustration, complaining, or discouragement with joy and faithful endurance during this season?

Week 12 Leader's Guide – Patience and Endurance

Text: James 5:7-12

Main Idea – Christian patience is not passive. Like a farmer, we faithfully do what is ours to do while trusting God with what only He can do. As we wait, James calls us to courage, joy rather than grumbling, endurance through suffering, and integrity in the way we live.

Goals for the Discussion – Help participants understand biblical patience as active faith rather than simply “putting up with things,” identify what is and is not within their control, consider how waiting affects their attitudes toward God and others, and discover practical ways to remain faithful while they wait.

Welcome and Prayer Requests

Opening Questions: What is something you are really bad at waiting for?

Read James 5:7-12

What did you hear?

What is hardest part about waiting when life isn't going the way you want?

James tells his readers to consider the farmer. The reading emphasizes that a farmer understands there are things he **can control** and **things he cannot**. He can prepare, plant, cultivate, and tend his fields. But he cannot command the rain or force the crop to grow. Waiting therefore doesn't mean inactivity. The farmer works while he waits.

Why do we spend so much energy worrying about or trying to control things that aren't actually within our control?

And what's the opposite problem? Can we ever say, “I'm just trusting God,” when we're actually avoiding something God expects us to do?

Let's do something a little different. This is a question for private reflection. Think about something you're waiting on right now. What part of that situation is yours to do, and what part do you need to entrust to God? [take some time to reflect in silence...]

How does believing that Christ ultimately makes all things right change the way a Christian faces something that may not be made right today?

James says in verse 9, “Don't grumble about each other, brothers and sisters...”
Why do you think he says that?

When you're stressed, discouraged, or tired of waiting, who is most likely to feel the effects of it? What might it look like to endure something difficult without allowing it to make us difficult people?

We are sometimes tempted to interpret hardship as evidence that God is displeased with us. What can we learn from Job, Jeremiah, and the other prophets about faithfulness when obedience doesn't immediately make life easier?

Is it possible to have joy while you are going through something painful?

What might Christian joy actually look like in a season that is genuinely painful?

Have you ever experienced genuine joy during a season when your circumstances weren't joyful?

Where did that joy come from?

In verse 12, James seems to suddenly switch subjects. He talks about not using oaths, just say simply yes or no. What is that all about?

Is it easier or harder to keep your word when life is difficult? Why?

Where does our culture encourage us to make promises casually?

Closing Prayer – The Serenity Prayer

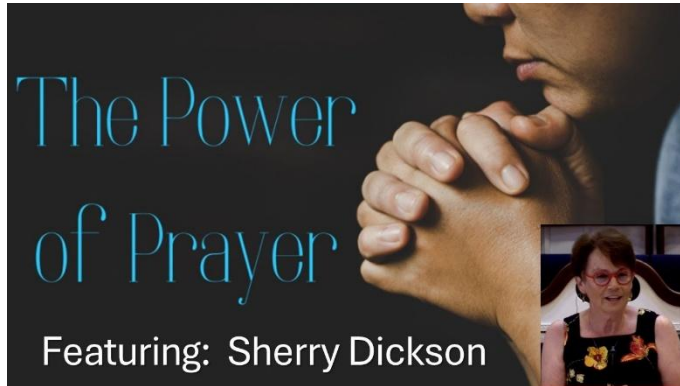
God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Week 13 – The Power of Prayer

Copyright July 21, 2024 by Sherry Dickson

James 5:7-12

Listen:



The following reading is the *transcript* of a sermon preached by a lay speaker and friend of Pastor Chris Mullis, Sherry Dickson. Sherry preached this message at Pleasant Grove Methodist Church on July 21, 2024.

Prayer is powerful. So let's discover how our prayers are powerful—your prayers in particular, individually and personally, are powerful.

Prayer is the breath of our relationship with our Lord. And prayer can be as normal as breathing. Breathing is ongoing, and prayer can be an ongoing conversation with the Lord that we have with God throughout the day. Prayer as breath is to have an ongoing awareness of His presence—an ongoing awareness of His presence, kind of like abiding in His presence.

My own journey with prayer, I guess, truly began in early adulthood, even though I'd been taught in childhood and as I was growing up. But it really began in early adulthood, and it wasn't something that I consciously set out to do—to be a prayer. It began with a need. It was born out of a need for guidance.

As a young adult, I needed direction because I realized that leaning on my own effort was going to be fruitless. So, with a sincere heart, I asked, and I was willing to receive the answer. And God's training program for me for prayer began at that time.

I guess I really didn't know it, but I just knew I had a need and I wanted—I wanted His answers. I really wanted to know. And it began with, "I need help, and I'm ready to listen."

And so my prayers not only were for myself, but I began to pray for my family and my friends. Out of concern and compassion for others, I prayed for them.

And as time went on, I continued to want to pray prayers that were effective. And I found a little book—or maybe the little book found me—called *Prayers That Avail Much*. And it's a little thin book that has printed prayers for many different subjects, and they're prayers that are based on Scripture.

So I began to read these prayers, believing what I was saying. Even though I was reading them from rote, I believed the words. And I used that book—I used this book until the pages have come out. And in some of these prayers, there's blanks where you can write in people's names.

Or if you don't write them in, because I had so many, I would just, when I read them, say the people's names and list the names on another piece of paper.

But I used this book to learn how to pray God's will because I knew that if I was praying His will, that there would be answers and that my prayers would be effective.

I don't use this book anymore. It's, you know, it's falling apart. But that was—I guess you could say that was my primer for prayer.

And there's two things in my prayer now: I want to pray Scripture, and I want to abide and be open in listening to what He was saying. That's the way I want to breathe with God—learning about His heart, learning about His will and His purpose, and believing in His promises.

I have experienced big, big miracles in my life, and I've seen big miracles. And I've also seen minute, detailed miracles. And I've been surprised by some of the answers that have come about. And, you know, there are many, many prayers that I prayed that have not been answered in the way that I expected or even wanted it to be. But I know that there are blessings from prayers—my prayers—that I won't realize until my eyes are fully open when I get to heaven.

And so, so I want to continue to breathe the prayers with God, praying and abiding.

And I have the same trouble as most people do when I'm praying. I get distracted or I fall off to sleep. But I've noticed that if I pray when I'm driving, I pray when I'm mowing, I pray when I'm walking, that helps, rather than if you just sit down and start to pray. That makes it much easier to get distracted from what you're doing. But if you're doing it as you go, you're breathing those prayers as you walk through your day.

What a privilege. The God of the universe has made Himself available to us—not only to our words, but even to our groans and our tears. He longs for us to ask Him. He longs for us to come to Him and ask, and He aches to be close to us.

Well, our text is in James 5. And Pastor Chris has been preaching through James for the last several weeks. So we know that James was the half-brother of Jesus, and he was a leader in the Christian church in Jerusalem. And he wrote a letter to the Christians who had left Jerusalem because they—because of the persecution, they had gone to other places and established groups and churches where they were.

So he wanted to write them letters to encourage them. But these Christians were people who were like-minded in their commitment to Christ and also in their bond of love with each other. So they were much like our congregation here at Pleasant Grove in our commitment to our Lord Jesus and in our bond of love together.

The beauty is that these words were more than just a heartfelt letter. These verses were God-breathed, and they became Scripture. And that Scripture has been proclaimed through the generations for 2,000 years. And not only that, as we know that they are now Scripture, they are going to be eternal—this letter that James penned.

Isn't it magnificent how the Lord used those words in such a mighty, far-reaching, powerful way? I wonder—I wonder when James took that pen to parchment if he had any idea that his words were God-breathed.

So James—James 5:13 says: “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.”

Well, that's real direct. It's very brief, and it's very straightforward. In fact, it's so brief that we would be tempted—we could just easily move on and keep on going. But the root here is very deep, and the context is very broad, even in these few words.

Everyone suffers. Christians are not exempt from distress and struggle and hardships of life. We all hurt, and we all suffer.

And suffering in this verse is referring to misfortunes rather than illness. It's those stresses of life—the pressures, the conflict, the fears, the financial needs, the burdens, the relational stress, the loss, the disappointments—just the stress of life.

And when we struggle, this verse says to cry out to God and trust Him. We're instructed in that very next breath to turn to God. God—put your focus on Him. Put your trust in Him. Depend on the Lord, who is bigger than us and knows us better.

Develop that habit. When you feel the pressure, when you feel the distress, when you don't know the answer, develop the habit of turning immediately to Him.

The normal response is to despair, and the natural reaction is to just grin and bear it. But the supernatural action is to turn to God in the next breath because we know He cares, and He listens, and He understands.

And every day—each day—is an opportunity to trust Him more. Run to Him. Take it to Him. Leave it with Him, knowing that He longs for you to depend upon Him.

The second part of this verse is, “Is anyone cheerful?” Well, let him sing psalms. Are you in good spirits? Is everything going pretty well right now? Then sing and praise God and give God the credit. Praise Him in everything when things go well, just as much as you would when you turn to Him and pray in the hard times. Praise Him. Acknowledging and praising God actually intensifies that life experience—the joy of the good life. But when we sit on it, it tends to fade. So when things are going well, when you have the joy of life, intensify that experience with praise.

Listen, there should be music coming out of our lives. We can breathe in His grace and breathe out His praise. Share it. Tell it. Write it. Post it. Text it. And repeat it every day.

Worship God with all of your heart, and this too will grow our dependence upon Him.

You know, Bob Forester is one who is ready to speak about God's goodness. Often when he is here, he wants to give God the praise. And Melissa Starling, our children's director, she posted a very—she shared her heart this week on social media that was so heartwarming. And Joanna

Scruggs posted a beautiful thought this week. And Pastor Chris is good about giving messages and posting God's Word through the week as we scroll through on our phones.

So let your praises be known. Don't just sit on them. As we praise Him, we'll discover even more ways that God decorates our life with beauty—the beauty of creation that fills up our senses and deepens our heart with gratitude.

The next verse says: “Is anyone among you sick? Then let them call the elders—call the elders of the church to pray over them, anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.”

So this is the third group that James is talking about. First are those who are distressed and suffering. Second are those of us who are cheerful. And this third group are those who are sick. The raw edge of human need is when we're sick. The raw edge of human need is when our health is failing. And for that, James gives a specific prescription and treatment plan.

He says the sick person is to call for the elders of the church. And the picture here is of a person who is seriously ill and is not able to get up and go meet with the other members of the group. This is when the diseases are so grave and painful.

And the directive is to call on those leaders that you know and trust to do these things for them—to be there for them, to pray for them, to be anointed with oil in the name of Jesus, with the stamp of Jesus' name on that.

So the instruction is to be with them, pray over them, anoint them with oil, and the authority of Jesus. Oil then and now was used for medicinal purposes, but oil is also a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Oil soothes and it cleanses the body. And when you apply it to the body, it carries a benefit to our hearts—to our minds and to our hearts. It's good to have an action in order to signify the moment, to help people focus on the healing.

So James says take the oil and apply it. An example of this was when Jesus healed the blind man. He used a mixture of His saliva with the dust, and He applied the clay to the man's eyes. Now, the clay did not have medicinal effect, but the clay was a helping symbol of God's healing power—of Christ.

So the oil, applying the oil, is a visible sign of the power of prayer. I can remember when my Sunday school class—it's been years and years ago—when I was diagnosed with lymphoma, the class decided to gather around me and to put their hands on me and to pray for my health. And the application of the presence there around me with the touch made that a symbol that I remember like it was yesterday. And thankfully, God healed me of that lymphoma. Praise the Lord.

No power resides in the oil or the clay because all power belongs to God. But when we apply the oil, it activates believing prayer of faithful people.

So there's the presence of godly people that you know and trust. There's the ministry of touch as you apply the oil. And then there's the hearts of faith that pray for healing in the authority of God's name.

Verse 15: “And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. And if they have sinned, they will be forgiven.”

There’s no qualification for God’s healing included here. Here again, James—James’s words are brief and very direct. It’s short and to the point, and it says the prayer of faith will heal the sick. Yet we know that earthly healing every time is not guaranteed. God does not grant immediate physical healing for every prayer prayed in faith.

Physical healing is not only about God’s power, but it’s about His purpose. And the broader view of healing is that God purposes those things that come to us. He gives them meaning.

And healing can take place on different levels. It can take place on the emotional level, where we are comforted and we have peace. It can take place at the mental level, where our thoughts can be made clearer, where our distorted thoughts can become changed so that we’re thinking true thoughts. That’s a level of healing in our thought process.

Healing can take place relationally among people, among families. And healing can take place in our spirits, when we know that we’re forgiven, when we know that we’re secure, when we know that we have assurance.

So it can take place on multiple levels. But it can also take place across time. It might not happen today. It might not happen tomorrow. But it could happen next week, next month, in two years. It could happen.

And it could also—healing can also happen in different realms. It can happen on the earthly realm, and it can also happen in the heavenly realm.

The Bible says that He collects our tears because God never wastes our sorrows. Like I said, our suffering and our sicknesses, He purposes them. And there are so many different facets of God’s blessing in sicknesses.

You know, Tom has been diagnosed with cancer this year, and he went through 45 radiation treatments. And I think that he would be able to tell you that there were many blessings that came out of that procedure. There were blessings of relationship. There were blessings of sharing faith. And thankfully, there was the blessing of healing.

Healing is an amazing thing. So the blessings are, in our healing, is that we get to the point where we have to depend upon Him because it’s outside of our control. Second of all, it brings us to a place where we relinquish our desire and we give it to Him. Another blessing is that we grow. We—we grow in character. We grow in perseverance. Another blessing is that it binds us together. When I’m praying for you, I’m invested in you. When you’re praying for me, you’re invested in me. And that binds us together in love.

Another blessing is that it equips us to minister to others, because now that Tom has been through what he’s been through, when someone else has a similar problem, he can walk along beside them and say, “This is how it was for me. I know what you’re going through.”

Another blessing is that it gives us a story to tell so that God's goodness and His miracles are made visible.

Verse 16 says: "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."

So what James is talking about here is that it is so important for us, when we confess our weaknesses to each other. It—it freshens our heart when we confess our weaknesses. It strengthens us when we can share our fears.

And God wants us to be authentic and humble in our relationships with others. People respect us when we are humble and authentic, and it deepens our relationships, and it clears the air, and it strengthens us when we—when we confess to each other. And it keeps our hearts clean and fresh. It unburdens our emotions, and it vitalizes our relationships.

Do you remember the last year, 2023, at Asbury College? There was an outpouring at that college, that Methodist college in Kentucky. Revival broke out. It's called an awakening or an outpouring. And it lasted, I think, for 18 days. And there were 1,500 people that attended those worship and praise services every day for over two weeks.

And since then, 50 to 70,000—well, 50 to 70,000 people participated in that outpouring. Do you remember that? It all began with confession—confession and worshipping God.

So our prayers are powerful. Your prayers are effective. When we breathe the Spirit and the Word of God into our lives and into the lives of others, we are always heard. God's Word has the power to heal our body, our soul, and our spirit, and it gives us a story to tell.

I want to end with a true story. You remember in the Bible Mary and Martha were sisters, and they had a brother whose name was Lazarus. They were dear, dear friends of Jesus. And I'm not sure, but I'm—I just assume that Mary and Martha and Lazarus were about the same age as Jesus. They might not have been, but I assume that they might have been, which was early 30s, early-mid 30s. They were in the prime of life.

And Mary and Martha sent an urgent prayer request to Jesus when their brother was seriously ill. It was an emergency. Lazarus was in critical condition, and he needed help immediately. And Jesus got the word. He got the message. And He delayed. He delayed intentionally.

We ask why in our minds, but then we find out. Two days later, after He got that message, Jesus traveled to their home. And even before He arrived at their home, Martha could see Him coming, and Martha ran to meet Him in her grief.

And she exclaimed, "Jesus, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that God will give You whatever You ask."

And Jesus absorbed her emotion. He was present with her. And I'm sure He looked deeply into her eyes, and He said, "Your brother will rise again."

He said, "I am the resurrection and the life, and the one who believes in Me will live even though he dies. And whoever lives by believing in Me will never die."

He assured her of the truth. He loved her.

And then Mary, the one who bathed Jesus's feet with her tears, when she heard that Jesus was on His way to the house, she got up, and she too ran out to Jesus. And she said, "If You had been here, my brother would not have died."

Deep, deep sadness. Jesus was so moved by their loss and all the others who were around, who loved him and were mourning over Lazarus. And the Bible says Jesus, knowing the truth, was deeply moved. His spirit was troubled.

See how Jesus was in their pain with them? He felt their grief and their sorrow, and He wept. And He continued to be deeply moved as He made His way to the tomb.

And Jesus told them to take away the stone. And Jesus prayed to the Father. And part of what He prayed was, "I know You are always—I know that You always hear Me." That's what He prayed to the Father.

And then He called out loudly for Lazarus to come out. And Lazarus did. The prayer of Martha and Mary was heard. Our prayers are heard. The answer did—did not happen in the way that they wanted and expected. Our prayers aren't always what we expect. However, the answer that happened was far more than they ever could have imagined, more than their mind could conceive, because it demonstrated right there in front of them the power of the resurrection. The answer God gives us glorified Jesus and the Father there. It showed how deeply Jesus feels for us.

Today, in this place and in this moment, we can follow this prescription of prayer right where we are, in the presence of God, along with the compassionate family and friends that we have here. If you want to express your prayer of praise, I invite you to come to do that down here at the altar.

If you're struggling this morning with life circumstances, come to the altar. You can even bring a friend with you to pray with you. If you are enjoying the good life of Jesus today, you can come down here to give a short word of gratitude for Jesus.

If you are sick, you can come to the altar, and you can bring a friend or family member with you. There's oil here at the altar that can be applied. And if you want to receive Christ's ultimate healing in your soul, that your sins would be forgiven and that you could have new life, I will meet you down here.

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. When I face stress, uncertainty, or suffering, is prayer my first response—or something I turn to only after I’ve tried everything else?
2. How could I make prayer more like “breathing”—an ongoing conversation with God throughout my ordinary day?
3. Who in my life needs my prayers right now, and what would it look like for me to faithfully and intentionally pray for them this week?

Week 13 Leader's Guide – The Power of Prayer

Text: James 5:13-18

Main Idea – Prayer is not merely something Christians do in emergencies; it is the ongoing response of a life lived in relationship with God. James calls us to pray when we suffer, praise when we rejoice, seek the prayers of others when we are weak, confess our sins, and faithfully pray for one another.

Goals for the Discussion – Help participants see prayer as a normal rhythm of Christian life, explore what James teaches about prayer and healing, understand why prayer is communal as well as personal, wrestle honestly with unanswered prayer, and identify ways to deepen their own practice of prayer.

Welcome and Prayer Requests

Opening Questions: When are you most likely to pray?

What tends to make prayer difficult for you?

In her sermon, Sherry admitted that distraction is part of her own prayer life. One thing she discovered was that praying while driving, mowing, or walking helped prayer become part of the rhythm of her day.

Read James 5:13-18

Who does James say should pray, and under what circumstances?

Suffering → Pray

Cheerful → Praise

Sick → Call others to pray

Sin → Confess and pray

Others in need → Pray for them

The list suggest James thinks almost everyone should pray about almost everything!

“Is Anyone Among You Suffering? Let Him Pray.” *James begins with suffering.*

Sherry points out that the word here isn't limited to physical sickness. It includes the pressures and hardships of life—conflict, fear, financial burdens, relational problems, loss and disappointment. Her emphasis was that our learned response should become turning to God immediately rather than only after exhausting our own resources.

1. When trouble comes, what are some things we instinctively do *before* we pray?
2. Why do you think prayer so easily becomes our last resort instead of our first response?
3. What actually changes when we pray about a problem—even if the problem itself doesn't immediately change?

“Is Anyone Cheerful? Let Him Sing Praise.” *Sherry put this memorably: “Breathe in His grace and breathe out His praise.”*

1. What's the difference between simply enjoying something good and receiving it with gratitude toward God?
2. What's something good in your life right now that you could easily take for granted?

“Is Anyone Among You Sick?” *Sherry describes the oil as a visible sign pointing toward God's healing power rather than something possessing power in itself. She recalls her own Sunday school class surrounding her, laying hands on her, and praying when she had lymphoma.*

1. Why do you think James tells the sick person to involve other Christians rather than simply pray alone?
2. Why can asking other people to pray for us sometimes be difficult?

What About Healing? *James says: “The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up.” Yet Christians know from experience that faithful believers sometimes pray earnestly and physical healing doesn't occur.*

Sherry addresses that tension directly. She doesn't dismiss physical healing—she testifies to it—but she also says that immediate earthly healing isn't guaranteed every time someone faithfully prays. She broadens the discussion to ways God's healing may be physical, emotional, relational, mental, or spiritual, and may unfold differently in time or ultimately in eternity.

1. What do you think it means to pray “in faith”?

It is not: “God will do exactly what I'm asking,”

but rather: “God can do this, so I will ask boldly and trust Him with the answer.”

James connects confession, prayer, and healing: “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”

1. Why is confessing our sins to God easier than admitting our failures to another person? What kind of Christian community would have to exist for people to feel safe enough to be honest about their struggles?
2. What responsibilities come with someone trusting you enough to confess a struggle to you? *[Confidentiality. Grace. Prayer. Humility. No gossip. No superiority. Perhaps loving accountability.]*

“The Prayer of a Righteous Person Is Powerful and Effective”

James chooses Elijah as the example of a “righteous person. But notice how he introduces him: “Elijah was a human being, even as we are.”

1. Why do you think James deliberately reminds us that Elijah was an ordinary human being like us before telling us about his extraordinary prayers?
Your prayers—individually and personally—are powerful.

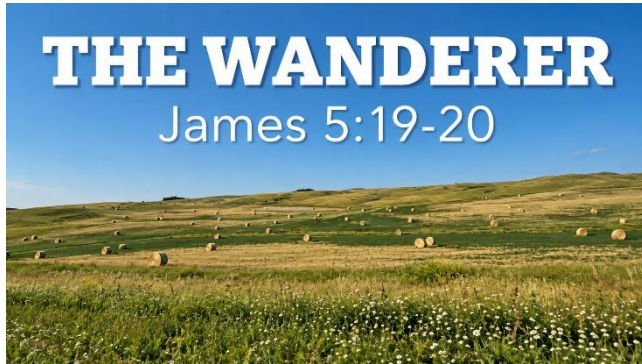
Closing Prayer

Week 14 – The Wanderer

Copyright July 31, 2024 by Chris Mullis

James 5:19-20

Listen:



Introduction

Last weekend, my son and I took a road trip to wander through North and South Dakota. Through the magic of the internet, I was able to worship with my church online as the gifted Sherry Dickson shared about the power of prayer. It will forever be one of my most cherished memories to worship with my church family at the online service while I was driving through some of God's

grandest creation while crossing the border from North to South Dakota. Pictures like the one posted here just do not do it justice. I guess you have to see it for yourself. I encourage everyone to take advantage of an online service whenever you need it.

After my wanderings, it was good to be back this past Sunday in person. Here is the final message in our series on the Epistle of James from the final verses in this powerful letter.

James 5:19-20

¹⁹ My dear brothers and sisters, if someone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back, ²⁰ you can be sure that whoever brings the sinner back from wandering will save that person from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.

Christmas in July

Every year, we do something special. We celebrate Christmas in July, because December is such a busy month and the message of Christmas can get lost in it. So, we sing Christmas songs and remember the Christmas story in the middle of the summer. It's a cherished tradition of our congregation. It is fitting for Christmas in July to read James' final verses; they are a message of hope, redemption, and love. They align beautifully with the heart of the Christmas story. For God's love was shown in the birth of Jesus Christ, the ultimate bringer-back of wanderers.



Two Important Truths

This passage reveals two truths. First, Christians sometimes wander from the truth. James says: "If someone *among you* wanders away from the truth..." Remember, James is writing to Christians. So, James is implying that Christians sometimes wander away. Nothing can steal your salvation or ever make God stop loving you; however, you can walk away from it by your

own choice. God still allows us free-will, even after we are saved. And unfortunately, some

Christians choose to walk away from God. So, the first thing James reveals is Christians sometimes walk away from God's salvation.

The second truth is this: we should seek to bring people back when they wander. James' concluding words remind us of the importance of community and the responsibility we have for one another. When someone wanders from the truth, it's our duty to guide them back with love and compassion. This isn't about judgment or condemnation, but about saving someone from spiritual death and covering their sins with grace.

It's important to remember that the early Christians, to whom James wrote, faced severe persecution for their faith. Many of them remained steadfast despite immense suffering. This dedication could understandably lead to feelings of anger or resentment toward those who abandoned their faith under pressure. Yet, James urges them—and us—not to let these emotions prevent us from reaching out in love. Instead of holding on to bitterness, we are called to welcome back those who have strayed, recognizing the grace and forgiveness that God extends to all of us.

The Christmas story ought to be a perfect reminder that none of us deserves God's grace. Jesus left the glory of Heaven to be born as a helpless infant and ultimately gave His life for us on the cross of Calvary *not* because we were such good people who deserved it. No. Romans 5:8 tells us, "God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." We ought to extend the same grace to everyone else—including Christians who backslide or wander away from the faith.

In our church family, we are called to look out for each other. The journey of faith is not walked alone. We need each other's support, accountability, and encouragement. We are indeed to "be our brother's keeper." The act of bringing someone back should be done with the same love and grace that Christ showed us. It's a call to love in action, to reach out with compassion and understanding.



The Christmas Connection

Christmas is the celebration of God's great rescue mission for humanity. Jesus came into the world to bring back all of us who have wandered from the truth. Just as we are called to pursue those who wander, God pursued us through Jesus. The birth of Christ is God reaching out to bring us back into a relationship with Him.

In John 8:12, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Christmas celebrates that light coming into our dark world to guide us back to the path of truth.

Consider John Newton, the author of "Amazing Grace" (perhaps one of the best known and loved Christian hymns). John Newton was raised in a Christian household. John's dad was a pastor and John became a Christian at an early age, but he abandoned his faith and led a life far from Christian values. He became involved in the slave trade, living a life of moral and spiritual bankruptcy. However, during a life-threatening storm at sea, Newton experienced what he described as a profound spiritual awakening. This event marked the beginning of his return to faith. Newton was assisted in his return to the Christian faith by several Christian friends like Thomas Scott and Thomas Howeis (pronounced How-ess) who helped mentor Newton as he returned to Christian faith. Newton eventually left the slave trade and became an Anglican priest. Newton's journey from wandering to restoration deeply influenced his writing of "Amazing Grace," a song that has touched countless lives with its message of forgiveness and redemption.



The Gift of Redemption

Bringing back a wanderer is a gift of redemption. It's a theme echoed every Christmas. The ultimate gift given to us is the gift of Jesus, who redeems us from our sins. Just as there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7), there is great joy in seeing a brother or sister restored to the faith. It's a moment of celebration, much like the joy we experience and celebrate at

Christmas.

Conclusion

As we conclude our journey through the Epistle of James, we are reminded our faith is not just personal; it is communal. We have a role in each other's spiritual journeys. Therefore, let us be inspired by the greatest act of love—the birth of Jesus Christ—who was born to reach out to all who have wandered from the truth.

May we carry the spirit of Christmas in our hearts all year round, actively seeking to bring back the wanderers with love, grace, and compassion. In doing so, we not only save them from death but also celebrate the true essence of Christmas—God's redemptive love for all.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who came to bring us back to You. Help us to carry this message of love and redemption in our hearts and to reach out to those who have wandered from the truth. Fill us with compassion, grace, and the courage to bring them back into Your loving arms. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. Is there someone I know who seems to be drifting away from God, and have I responded with concern and compassion—or with distance, frustration, or judgment?

2. What would it look like for me to gently and lovingly reach out to someone who has wandered, without trying to control or condemn them?
3. How does remembering the grace Christ has shown me change the way I respond to someone who has fallen away or made serious mistakes?

Week 14 Leader's Guide – The Wanderer

Text: James 5:19-20

Main Idea – Christians sometimes wander from the truth. When they do, the church's response should not be condemnation, gossip, or abandonment, but loving pursuit with the hope of restoration. We go after wanderers because Christ first came after us.

Goals for the Discussion – Help participants recognize that faithful Christians can drift spiritually, understand our responsibility toward one another, distinguish loving restoration from judgment or control, consider how grace should shape our response to someone who has wandered, and identify someone they may need to encourage or reach out to.

Welcome and Prayer Requests

- Read letter from Pastor Chris.
- Gather prayer request from the group, update the prayer list, (and give it to Brandy after class), and pray for the needs of the group.

Opening Questions:

1. Have you ever gotten physically lost because you made one small wrong turn and just kept going? What happened?
2. Do people usually wander spiritually all at once, or does it happen a little at a time?

Read James 5:19-20

“If Someone Among You Wanders...” Those words **“among you”** matter. James isn't merely talking about reaching unbelievers. He is talking about someone who has been part of the *Christian community* and has wandered from the truth. Pastor Chris' sermon emphasizes that Christians are not incapable of wandering. God loves us, but we still have choices, and believers can drift away from faithful relationship with Him.

1. What does “wandering from the truth” look like?
2. What are some warning signs that someone may be spiritually drifting?
3. What are warning signs in *your own* life that tell you you're beginning to drift?

Why do you think people who once seemed committed to Christ sometimes drift away?

Knowing *why* someone wandered could affect how we should approach them.

Someone who wandered because of temptation may need one kind of care.

Someone wounded by another Christian may need another.

Someone overwhelmed by grief may need another.

Someone with intellectual doubts may need another.

Someone who simply got distracted may need another.

How might you approach someone in these various situations?

“Whoever Brings the Sinner Back...” Pastor Chris’ sermon emphasizes that faith is communal—we have a responsibility for one another through support, accountability and encouragement.

1. How responsible are we for one another's spiritual well-being?
2. What's the difference between caring about someone's spiritual life and trying to control someone's spiritual life?

Loving Restoration

Listens

Invites

Speaks truth

Prays

Walks alongside

Seeks restoration

Control

Lectures

Demands

Uses truth as a weapon

Pressures

Looks down

Seeks to win

What About Someone Who Hurt Us When They Wandered?

The Christians James addressed had endured persecution. Some remained faithful under tremendous pressure while others may have fallen away. Pastor Chris’ sermon raises the possibility that faithful Christians could naturally feel resentment toward those who abandoned the faith when things got tough.

1. Why might we secretly prefer judgment over restoration when someone has really hurt us?
2. Does welcoming someone back mean pretending the damage they caused doesn't matter? Why?

Who did Jesus pursue or welcome who had wandered?

- Peter after denying Him
- Zacchaeus
- the woman caught in adultery
- the Samaritan woman
- the lost sheep
- the prodigal son

Romans 5:8 reminds us that Christ didn't come because we had finally gotten ourselves together. Christ came for us while we were sinners. How does remembering that we had to be rescued change the way we approach someone else who needs rescuing?

1. Is there someone I know who seems to be drifting away from God, and have I responded with concern and compassion—or with distance, frustration, or judgment?
2. What would it look like for me to gently and lovingly reach out to someone who has wandered, without trying to control or condemn them?

Closing Prayer

