

James:

The Cure for Cultural Christianity

A Five-Week Study from the Letter of James

Study Course Introduction

Traveling around the world, you find religions of almost every stripe and variety. People marking their faces and bodies, others inhaling smoke from pipes, others bowing before shrines, offering food and money to ancestors for safe travel in the afterlife. In the world today, there are about 4,200 known and active religions. That does not count the millions of people who are atheist or agnostic. Nations are even known for their religions: United States is known as a "Christian" nation (not as much now as during the 20th century), India is known as a Hindu nation, Middle East and North African nations as Muslim, Asian nations as Buddhists, and many of the European and Asian nations as Atheistic. However, if you travel to these nations what you will find mixed in with a devoutness to the religion are millions who do not practice the religion or even believe that it is real. They simply fall into the cultural fabric of the nation's religious reputation. These people are what you would call cultural believers. They are identified with the religion but they are not convicted to follow its tenets.

In reality, the same is true for those who claim to follow Christ, may be indeed born again believers, but they have fallen into the prevailing winds of the culture. They have adopted cultural values, morals and ethics. Cultural Christians believe the Bible, but their lives often contradict a biblical worldview. In many ways, this was the driving purpose behind The Letter of James.

As many of the churches Paul planted came out of pagan ideas and practices, the believers James addressed had to confront issues in their life which needed the transformative work of the Spirit. The early church could not afford to simply mix into the culture of the world around them and the myriad religious movements of their day, because the Gospel of Jesus Christ had called them out of the darkness of this world and into the light of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:9-12). Christ did not come to add another religious sect to an already oversaturated religious society. He came to deliver the life-changing Gospel that reconciled man to God through Christ's finished work on the cross and His resurrection. Jesus had changed everything...Now, their lives had to reflect it.

**The question James asked in his letter was straightforward and pointed:
Is Your Faith Authentic or Simply a Brand Name?**

In other words, James was witness to those who were playing both sides. In his audience are authentic, sold-out followers of Jesus, believers who are still grappling with living full out for Christ and others who claim to follow Jesus, but they are only pretenders. James is looking for the believers to not just say they are believers but live like it consistently. He is tired of seeing the religiosity of believers who love to attend on Sundays but do not live it out the rest of the week. Pastor Tony Evans wrote in his book, *The Perfect Christian*:

"Think about the unsaved world for a minute. Many lost people are fine, upstanding citizens and all of that - but they leave God out of their lives.

They are worldly people. Their hearts are tied to this world. We would expect that of the lost world. But when we as Christians begin to live as if God did not matter, we start looking just like the unsaved world. We become worldly Christians, and that's definitely a contradiction in terms."

The title to this study series is "The Cure for Cultural Christianity". Cultural Christianity is a contradiction in terms to biblical Christianity. People might say, "I'm Christian because I grew up in a Christian home" or "I'm Christian because my grandfather was a Baptist preacher" or "I'm Christian because I go to church some, pray and read 'my' Bible." Cultural Christianity is like a brand in our culture. To call yourself a Christian in our culture is like saying, "I'm a Republican!" Or "I'm a Democrat!" Or, "I'm a Bulldog...Yellow Jacket or War Eagle." Christianity has become more like a brand name, a subculture. People wear it on t-shirts, hats, signs...they fill church buildings, coliseums, concert halls...radio, TV and internet churches fill the airwaves across the world, but with all that, we still see a Church struggling to engage the culture authentically with lives that reflect the values of Jesus Christ and His Word.

Cultural Christianity is religion that superficially identifies itself as 'Christianity' but does not truly adhere to the faith. A "cultural Christian" is a nominal believer—he wears the label "Christian," but the label has more to do with his family background and upbringing than any personal conviction that Jesus is Lord. Cultural Christianity is more social than spiritual. A cultural Christian identifies with certain aspects of Christianity, such as the good works of Jesus, but rejects the spiritual aspects required to be a biblically defined Christian. Some people consider themselves "Christians" because of family background, personal experience, country of residence, or social environment. Others identify as "Christian" as a way of declaring a religious affiliation, as opposed to being "Muslim" or "Buddhist." Famed scientist and atheist Richard Dawkins refers to himself as a "cultural Christian" because he admires some of the ceremonial and philanthropic aspects of Christianity. Dawkins is not born again; he simply sees "Christianity" as a label to use."

There is certainly a difference between authentic followers of Jesus Christ and those who pretend (Matthew 7:15-27; John 6:60-69; 1 John 2:19). There is also

a difference between those who are steadily maturing in their faith through the application of their faith and those who continue to allow the enemy influence through the lack of application of truth in their lives (Heb. 5:11-14). Being birthed into God's family, "we are to grow up in every way into Him...into Christ" (Eph. 4:15). Believers must be secure in their identity in Christ, but they must also abide in Christ with the goal of consistent, Christlike living that is not a cultural brand but their whole-life, changing how they make decisions, what they value and how they interact with the world.

So, can you, by the power of the Holy Spirit, live a more more consistent, culture-impacting, radical, difference-making life that resists the lure of cultural Christianity? If you lean hard into the writing of James, you will find the cure that will lead you to victory and a life that exemplifies Biblical Christianity as Jesus intended for everyone of those who follow Him. That cure is found in an authentic faith. The study is divided into five sessions dealing with the type of faith that cures cultural Christianity. Those five sessions include: Strong Faith, Active Faith, Wise Faith, Humble Faith and Enduring Faith.

The five sessions will not cover everything that could be covered in this wonderfully challenging letter, but it will give you enough that if you live it out, you and others will never be the same. Here is a suggested reading plan for The Letter of James: Monday - Thursday, read the chapter to be discussed at Life Group and then on Friday, read all five chapters in one sitting. By the end of the five weeks, you will know this letter and its insights thoroughly!

The Study Course Outline

Chapter One - Strong Faith (1:1-25)

How do Christians exemplify a victoriously strong faith in the midst of trials and temptations?

Chapter Two - Active Faith (1:26-2:26)

What does an active, authentic faith look like when faced with your own personal struggles and prejudices?

Chapter Three - Wise Faith (3:1-18)

How can you tame the one thing that often destroys a Christian's character and keeps you from experiencing the wisdom of God?

Chapter Four - Humble Faith (4:1-16)

How can a humble faith be used to separate yourself from a world intent on their own self-rule and self-destruction?

Chapter Five - Enduring Faith (5:1-20)

How can an enduring faith persevere through suffering to live selflessly, victoriously and boldly for Jesus Christ?

Chapter One

Strong Faith

How do Christians exemplify a victoriously strong faith in the midst of trials and temptations?

James 1:1-25

Introduction: The Letter of James was written by the half brother of Jesus. He was the leader of the Jerusalem Church and led them through many difficult days of famine and persecution, along with challenges that were birthed from the initial growth of Christianity after Pentecost. James was written to the Jewish Christians scattered around the world by persecution. This period of time was extremely difficult for Jews and Christians because of the tyrannical domination of the Roman Empire. Rome became a major thorn to Christians, sweeping them away to the Coliseums and making life hard for them in every way. He uses this letter to both encourage and warn them to persevere with a pure faith. As time would go on and as pressures would mount, the temptation would be to let their faith become marginalized and folded into the culture. If this were to happen, Christians would continue to live with one foot in the world's values and one foot into the kingdom of God. The Church could not afford for this happen, because God has no rivals. The faith God gives is not to be shared with worldly values, but must be pure. We must stay true to Christ in both word and deed. We cannot succumb to a faith driven by the culture, but must be people who are culture-changers, and that by the power and influence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For Christians to be culture-changers for Christ, they must have a strong faith. James outlines for us in chapter one how a person develops a strong faith.

- Read the passage several times and with several translations
- Circle or underline one or more verses that stand out.

- Pray through the passage: as you read it through again, read it prayerfully, asking God for ways to apply His truth in your life or confess areas where you need more grace.
- Write down initial insights into the verses that stand out.

Read It!

James 1:2-25

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, 10 and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. 18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of

liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Initial Insights and

Application: _____

Question:

What was going on in the Church then that also applies to what the Church needs to address today? _____

Study It!

David Nystrom puts it this way: "These problems included divisiveness, intolerance, favoritism, and the overpowering desire for wealth and status. Giving shape to and electrifying these problems were the presence and popularity within the community of errant teaching that was vibrant enough to question the great commandment as expressed by Jesus and yet to maintain an influential place in the community. It was a teaching tailor made for the time, for it allowed its followers to understand the church as one among many opportunities for social climbing and the exhibition of social snobbery."

James recognizes some in the church who were striving to live radically and authentically. He begins with an encouragement to them as they face trials and then moves to warning them about the fiery darts of the enemy. Finally, he challenges them to use the implanted word of God to build their character and conduct as doers of the Word. James gives us two situations or realities where strong faith is needed and witnessed by a watching world.

I. Trials

"By trials God is shaping us for higher things." - Jeremy Taylor

A. The Certainty of Trials

The thing about trials or hardships is that they just keep coming. James said, "Count it all joy when you meet trials of every kind." Without a doubt, everyone faces difficult times in their life. Every follower of Jesus also experiences hardship. No one is immune to the trails of life. The Bible tells us in Job 5:7 "A man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." Jesus reminded us in John 16:33 "I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In this world, you will have tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world." Jesus made it clear, that even in Him...in a relationship with the Creator of the Universe, we would have tribulation. The by-product of living in a fallen world is that bad things happen, even to "good" people. Things will go wrong, and as we will see, God intentionally allows His children to go through trials, some of their own making but others to produce a needed result.

James described these trials as coming in various shapes and sizes. Hence, his words, "trials of various kinds." The word various means that trials are diverse or multi-colored. Some trials are Emotional, Physical, Spiritual, Financial, Marital, Relational, or Parental...).

Question:

What emotions do you feel knowing that trials are certainties in your life?

B. The Cause for Trials

"Trials come to prove us and improve us." ~ Augustine

God uses trials in our life to test our faith. Anything that is worth anything goes through testing, especially if it has a great responsibility. For example, when a car manufacturer produces a car for public use, that car goes through very stringent testing. Why? The law states that the car must be safe. Therefore, before any car comes off the line for the public, the manufacturer puts the car through various trials to test for weaknesses, places of danger, all sorts of things to help them see how the car would perform under pressure. In the same way, God allows trials in our life to test our faith, point out weaknesses and strengthen it before you go public. The Lord wants His children to shore up weaknesses and get strong so that when the fiery darts of the enemy come and persecution or temptation come, the believer will stand strong!

Reference: 1 Pet. 1:2-7

God also uses trials to increase our endurance (v. 3). He says, "for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness". That word means patience under prolonged pressure or to remain under. It carries the idea of staying calm under a prolonged and intense situation. Think of it like being in surgery. The reason the doctors put you "under" is because your body will be under extreme pressure and you will need to remain calm. In the midst of a trial, you may wish that God would put you under, right? However, trials help us build endurance like a runner who runs frequently, so that as the pressure mounts, you will be able to continue, get stronger and being able to stay under the pressure longer without flinching.

Finally, God uses trials to move us toward maturity (v. 4). The more we endure trials, the greater our level of expertise. You may not want a trial

to have its full effect, which may be painful, be the lose of something or someone close to you or a financial or family trial that must run its course, but when you remain under the pressure, it strengthens your attitude, resolve and FAITH. The goal of trials is the maturing of your faith in Christ. God has greater work for you to do and higher mountains for you to climb, deeper truths for you to understand, but in your current condition, you are not ready. He sees what you cannot see. Every trial you face prepares you for what you cannot see sop that when you see it you will have no fear.

B. The Consideration of the Trial (v. 2, 5-8)

James encouraged the church to **consider it all joy** when they faced trials of various kinds. James used a word that means to evaluate, make sense of, or think deeply upon. When trials or hardship comes into our life, we are think deeply, evaluate and consider the meaning. Sometimes we do not know the meaning, but one thing we know is that God is in control and He loves us! When we consider the trial JOY, we turn the page of our attitude to praise for God's work in our lives. Pastor and Author, Tony Evans writes, "Your outlook determines your outcome. Your attitude determines your actions. When you're in a trial, you don't want your emotions to dictate your actions for the same reason a truck driver on the highway doesn't want his cargo to dictate the ride." Just like loads shift, feelings shift, too. Don't let shifting feelings steal your joy, because the ride under the load could be long.

James also encouraged the church to **consider God's wisdom**. God's wisdom was designed to strengthen their faith in the midst of the trial (5-8). For you, the key to attaining this wisdom is prayer and faith. James told the church, "If anyone lacks wisdom (the right perspective in a trial),

let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach (grinding His teeth). God wants to lavish this on His children, but they must believe without doubting. Wisdom from God through prayer is the key to a strong faith. Then, God will do through His child a work of grace when times get very hard. After losing his son in a car accident and feeling like his world had imploded on him, pastor Greg Laurie wrote these words in his book, *Hope*:

"God has His purposes in the storms of life. Remember this: No matter what, God is in control and has a plan. So we look to the Lord in our crisis, recognizing that He can accomplish great things in and through our hardships, disappointments, and setbacks. Why? Because God knows all things, past, present, and future, He is uniquely qualified to know when to ordain or permit evil and suffering, and when not to. Therefore, if the Lord allows something to enter your life, He has a plan in mind for dealing with it."

Tony Evans continued that thought, when he wrote, "Go to God in prayer, "Lord, make sense of this for me. I know You have something good in this for me. Help me to see Your plan and Your hand in the trial. Show me how to respond, to get the most out of what You want for me right now."

James gave us a third consideration: to **consider how you will give God glory** in the midst of the trial (9-11). James used an analogy between a poor man and a rich man. He said that the poor man knew he had nothing, and in that poverty discovered that he had all he needed in Christ. The rich man also recognized that with all his riches, he could not stop the trials of life from coming and changing his world. Riches come and go, they fade into oblivion, so if the rich man trusts in anyone or anything, He must put his trust in the Lord who exists above the corruption.

C. The Compensation for the Trial (v. 12)

James concluded his thought on trials by encouraging the church with the truth that the Lord compensates those who endure the trial well. James said, "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial...". The word James used for steadfast meant faithful. God blesses the one who remains **faithful under the trial** - Think about a situation where remaining faithful under a trial brings reward. You are blessed to have a surgeon who remained under the pressure of his or her education to be a doctor. You are blessed to have a lawyer who remained faithful under the pressure of knowing the laws of the land. You are blessed to live in a country freely while soldiers remain faithful under the pressure of threats on every hand. You are blessed to have firefighters and police officers who remain faithful under the pressure of training that assists you in times of need. The same goes for all those who remain faithful under pressure. They are blessed and able to be a blessing in many situations.

Ultimately, when we stand the test of various trials, we receive the crown of life. When life is complete and we have finished well, God promises us that we will lay down our trials and find our rest eternally. James says that the Lord **compensates us out of His deep love for us!** We can love Him, without getting bitter and hard, because we know He loves us, no matter what!

II. Temptations

James adjusted his comments from encouraging to warning the church because he understood the pull of temptation. The interesting thing about the

word James used was that he was the same as the word for Trial. However, the difference came in how the trial was experienced.

What is temptation? Temptation is an invitation or enticement to do or think evil. While God allows trials to grow you, Satan offers temptations to destroy you. It's how you handle the tests that will either grow your faith or weaken it.

A. The Core of Temptation - Who is Responsible?

God is not at the core of any temptation. People love to blame God for the mess they get in, but James makes it clear that God does not entice you to do evil (v. 13). James did not want the church to blame God for the consequences of their own sinful choices. In fact, he made it abundantly clear that a "person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire" (v. 14). As a believer, you wrestle with the flesh that exists in contrast to the Spirit of God living within you. Paul mentions this in Romans 7:16-25. Even the ancient philosopher Homer expresses this, having Zeus complain: "It is incredible how easily human beings blame the gods and believe us to be the source of their troubles, when it is their own wickedness and stupidity that brings upon them sorrows more severe than any which Destiny would assign." The Bible narrows this down to the heart of man. In Proverbs 19:3 says, "A man's folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord." WOW!

B. The Course of Temptation - How does it happen?

James gave the church an analogy that would bring fishing to mind. He said that there is an allurements process where a person is lured and enticed by their own desires or their own lusts. Allurements in our world come in all types visually and audibly. From advertisements to billboard signs to Internet flash screens, our world is filled with allurements that entice our sinful nature.

James took the process further by saying that when the “desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (v. 15).

Questions:

What is the difference between trials and temptation? _____

According to James, how does sin mature (develop)? _____

How are some safeguards for believers to resist yielding to temptation?

C. The Cure of Temptation - What can be done?

James told the church not to be deceived (v. 16), but to remember that God’s character leads to good things (v. 17). That is, God is always good! God never moves away from us and there is no variance with Him. He is faithful! Therefore, even when we face trials and temptations, He is there to guide our steps.

1 Corinthians 10:13 “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide a way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

Obviously, Christians must rely on the word of truth to guide their steps (v. 18)! God gave His word for believers to use it like a sword or weapon of warfare (Eph. 6:17). Then, they must couple this with prayer (Eph. 6:18).

“The reason why many fail in battle is because they wait until the hour of battle. The reason why other succeed is because they have gained their victory on their knees long before battle...Anticipate your battles; fight them on your knees before temptation comes, and you will always have victory.”

~ R.A. Torrey

When you fight your battles with His word and on your knees, then you will resolve to live out who God made you to be! James said that you would be the first fruits of his creatures. That means you will live out the special creation God designed you to be, but when you live below that standard, yielding to temptation, then you live below the standard of God's perfect design!

Questions:

How do you think that you would handle a trial or temptation if you entered the battle in prayer before the battle started? _____

Knowing the advantage, when should you be in God's word and in prayer? _____

Conclusion:

James used the two major realities of Trials and Temptations to encourage and warn the believers so that their faith would be strong and enduring. In 1:19-25, James gave instructions about their conduct. This set of instructions came on the heels of his warning to not be enticed by evil. When a believer is enticed to evil, anger, speaking hurtful words, it does not produce the righteousness of God. We are to put all of that away. So, as James concluded this part of the letter, he encouraged them to be doers of the Word and not hearers only (1:19-25).

In truth, this is the key to successfully navigating the waters of trials and temptations. They may be turbulent and engulfing, but when we begin to apply God's truth to every situation, marry that with prayer, then God is able to lead us through the hardest of times with a resilient, enduring and strong faith.

Strong faith is a cure for cultural Christianity.

Questions:

- In what ways do you need God to strengthen your faith? _____

- What trial or test are you currently facing? _____

- Who do you have in your life that is walking with you during this trial or temptation? _____

Chapter Two

Active Faith

What does an active, authentic faith look like when faced with your own personal struggles and prejudices?

James 2 contains the passage for which The Letter of James is best known. When people quote a verse from James, most of the time it is, "Faith without works is dead" (2:17). One could argue, that this statement is the heartbeat behind James' entire argument. He wanted the church to know that faith is critical, but one cannot possess faith without faith possessing them. That possession would naturally result in a life of action, because their faith would motivate them to do something.

Here is where being and doing find its proper balance. Your identity in Christ means you are His child apart from any works and only by His grace. You have entered that relationship by faith, graciously given to you by God. Knowing Christ and being in Christ, you are in the process of being changed, maturing in your faith. That maturity results in your vision being made clearer to the concerns of others, the purpose of God and the compelling desire to serve the Lord wherever He leads. Therefore, as James points out in this chapter, faith cannot be real faith unless that faith is active, working and serving at the pleasure of the Lord.

Before James jumps into this argument (2:14-26), he opens with an illustration. This illustration could have been a real-life story, much like Jesus' parables. The point he is going to make is that if we say that we have faith in Christ, that our faith in Jesus has changed us, then it will come out in our conduct. If our conduct does not reflect that of Christ's, then how can we say our faith is real? To drive this point home, James gave his readers an example of what he saw in

the church, and unfortunately, what continues to happen today. James raised the issue of partiality or favoritism and called it sinful. To James, favoritism was the enemy to an authentic, effective and active faith. He could not imagine faith not working its way out in genuine love for people.

In this chapter, we explore how favoritism is a barrier to active faith, and how an inactive faith plays right into the hands of cultural Christianity.

Read It!

James 2:1-13

1 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. 2 For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, 3 and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," 4 have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. 11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Study it!

I. Favoritism: The Barrier to Active Faith (2:1-13)

Favoritism goes by other names: Racism(skin color), Classism(Economic status), Culturalism (social status - how they dress, associate with, etc.) -- it is a determination to treat people in a certain way based on the color of their skin or their financial status or their social status. James spoke plainly to the church about this problem:

“But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (2:9).

Someone said, “The way we behave toward people indicates what we really believe about God.”

Question: What would people say about your belief in God, based on how you treat people? _____

The issue in the churches during that time was that so many people from different backgrounds, races, social backgrounds, financial levels and the like were coming into the life of the church. Businessmen, farmers, lawyers, day-laborers, religious officials, prostitutes, teachers, drunkards, and everyone in between were coming to Christ. They stood shoulder-to-shoulder with each other. However, in society, they were not even close to being equal. Those of higher social standing would use those lower as servants and slaves. People of a lower class were more like dogs than anything else. So, when they came into the church, it really took a work of God to change the hearts of people. They

now had to love each other and treat each other with respect, but not only during worship behind closed doors, but also in public. This was a game changer!

James noticed that rather than treating each other as equals, people were playing favorites, disdaining those of lower status and marring the name of Jesus with their sinful attitudes and action. The Lord had made this clear through Peter, who said, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him"(Acts 10:34). Paul said in Galatians 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." - This was the result of the Gospel coming alive in a person's heart. So anything that ran counter to this was in reality going AGAINST the Gospel!

How can believers avoid it today?

1. Model Jesus' Approach to People

Jesus condemned favoritism (Luke 14:12-14). He was not swayed by people's appearances. The Pharisees could even see it in Jesus: "Teacher, we know that you are true and You teach the way of God truthfully, and You do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances." Jesus was not impressed by riches, status, or position (not that they can't be used by God). Jesus saw people, whom others had discarded, as having potential and promise (ref. John 4 - Jesus with the Samaritan woman and Luke 19 with Zacchaeus, the tax collector).

Question:

Why are we prone to judge people by their past or present and not their future? _____

Jesus didn't have a kind of people. He simply loved them all and was aggravated by those who treated people with bias. Jesus said in John 7:24 "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

Discussion:

Which of these statements do you see in the church today and why:

- (1) "I give a lot of money to this church. I should get more out of it than I'm getting."
- (2) "The reason why poor people are poor is that they are always making bad decisions. Probably a character issue."
- (3) "It's fine for a few ethnic groups to come to our church, but they need to stay out of leadership positions."

Think About This...

Jesus saw people through eyes of love and compassion. Even though He WAS "better" than anyone else, He still didn't treat people as if He was better than them.

Question:

How do you respond to that statement? _____

How does this contrast to the prevailing views of our culture or churches today?

2. Love Jesus More than Anything or Anyone Else in the World (5-7)

When we show favoritism, we play right into the hands of the enemy by living up to the standards of the world's system. James pointed out to the church, that to honor the rich man over the poor man made no sense since the rich were the ones who mistreated them the most.

Why is that people play favorites? We know it originates in man's sinful nature, but could there be another reason? Could it be that the reason so many people play favorites and oppose other people is that they love their Race, their Money and their Status more than they love Jesus? When you love

anything or anyone more than you love Jesus, you fall to the deception of Favoritism.

Here's what Favoritism does in your life:

A. Favoritism ignores how God works among people - v. 5

Who did Jesus work with the most? He worked with those who were not eaten up with self-sufficiency, but poor in spirit (Mt. 5:3). What confounded the world the most was that Jesus went to those who were not the social elite or religious elite, but those who were weak and disdained—

1 Cor. 1:26-29 "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to world standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God."

You cannot ignore the ways of God or how God works. His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9).

B. Favoritism does not appreciate the richness of faith in Christ - v. 5

James said that those who are poor in the world are RICH in faith. You see it everyday. When you had nothing, you prayed, you sought God for everything you needed, but, then when things started going well, you didn't have time for God. Favoritism does not value the richness of faith in others, because all it sees is the perceived value or devalue of people around them. They see with eyes of carnality and not eyes of equality in Christ.

C. Favoritism plays into the hands of those who are enemies of God (6-7) ---

James was astounded that believers would be so apt to choosing the rich over the poor, when the rich were the ones who mistreated them the most. Why did the rich do such things? Because they did not love people with the love of Christ. They were consumed with the world and its pleasures. James warns them later, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

3. Love People as Christ Loves You (8-11)

Simply put, if you are obedient to God's word, then you will love people just as Christ loves you. Look at 2:8 "If you really fulfill the royal law (that is the highest expression of God's Word) according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well." How do people try to get around this? What excuses do they make?

- "But I was raised in a time or with certain values or ways of looking at people".
- "There are certain people who have unfair advantages and take advantage of the system."
- "I just think people who have made stupid choices ought to not be given the same privilege as those of us who have made better choices."

Question: What are your thoughts about these statements people have made or opinions people carry? Have you had any of these yourself?

Biblical love is not necessarily related to how you feel about someone at any given moment. Biblical love can say to a person of another race, class or culture, 'I am going to treat you right even if I have to work through how I was raised'.- God is not after how you feel about someone. He is after how you will act toward someone. Obedience to God's word is all about the Will of a person, not how you feel.

Study 2:9-11 *"But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. 11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law."*

That's calling Favoritism what it is...Sin! - James laid the seriousness of playing favorites or treating people differently because of the color of their skin or social status or economic status or anything external. -
Perhaps the greatest sin the Church has failed to fully repent of and seek total repentance that could be holding the Church back from its fullest and purest influence is the sin of favoritism!!

Question: Where do we see this lived out in the Church? _____

What is the cure? _____

4. Show Mercy at All Times (v. 12-13)

Here is the key to avoiding the Sin of Favoritism, that we show mercy. As James said, "Mercy triumphs over judgment." The problem with favoritism is that it is saturated with judgmentalism. Every time you play favorites, mistreat people of different skin colors, talk down to people who do not have as much as you do or treat harshly those whom you deem as unworthy of your value, then God's character is called into question. Why? As a known follower of Jesus, how you

conduct yourself is a reflection of Christ. Just the time, every time you treat people of a different race with Christlike love and every time you share what you have with those in need without complaining or belittling them, and every time you lift someone up with your speech without patronizing them, then you show mercy and therefore, the character of Christ. When this happens, God will in turn give you mercy!!

Question: What are some practical ways you can show God's mercy when you are tempted to play favorites? _____

Consider this...James warned the church not to use their words in such a way as to demean others. He pointed to two areas they struggled: Valuing orphans and widows, while at the same time disregarding how corrupt values stained them as followers of Christ (1:26-27). Think and pray about how showing favoritism impacts the way you treat others and how you can show greater value to those who are undervalued in the church body (and culture).

II. Faith and Works: The Balance for an Active Faith (2:14-26)

James used the illustration of favoritism to illustrate the important principle that if you simply say you believe or have faith in Christ but your conduct does not bear witness, then your faith is meaningless. There may not be a more recognizable portion of this letter than this section. James did not want the church to simply believe that they could present themselves as believers and there be no evidence. He knew that if the church fell prey to this critical error, then they would fall into the trap of cultural Christianity - a faith that looked more like the world, than that of Christ. So, his argument was clear:

Faith without works is dead!

James 2:14-26

14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? **15** If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good[a] is that? **17** So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

18 But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. **19** You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! **20** Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? **21** Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? **22** You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; **23** and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. **24** You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. **25** And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? **26** For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Insights: Write down any insights or key verses from this passage - _____

James' argument was straightforward and clear: "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?"

Active faith is the kind of faith that works. There is no such faith that is real but yet does not stretch its legs and do something about it. Active faith is serving,

doing something about the convictions you possess and living radically the call of God.

"Unless our belief in God causes us to help our fellow man, our faith stands condemned."
~ Billy Graham

There are four types of faith that lead a person to having an active faith.

1. Faith that Relies on Works - 2:14

Perhaps the hardest pill to swallow in this entire letter is the one that works are a part of your faith. This is why Martin Luther called this letter, "A strawy gospel." Luther did not want to mix faith alone with any impression that our salvation was works based. That impression has certainly been taught down through the years. However, this was not James' argument at all.

Scripture clearly teaches that faith only saves apart from the works of the Law (Galatians 2:15-3:14). In fact, if you get more specific, it is grace through faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9). Paul reminds us in Romans 3 that the righteousness of God comes through faith.

~ Romans 3:21-26

21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— **22** the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: **23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24** and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, **25** whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. **26** It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Now that you know your salvation is not based on your works but on faith in Christ (which is a gift of God in itself), you have to see how faith and works work together. James asked the question: Can that faith save him?

James asked this question because the kind of faith that God gave for salvation did not result in dead works but in active faith. Your works prove your faith.

Take John the Baptist as an example **(Luke 3:7-14)**.

7 "He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. 9 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."10 And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" 11 And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics[a] is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise." 12 Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" 13 And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." 14 Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

John simply gave his listeners a recipe for active faith. Jesus did the same in Matthew 7:15-23 when he said that you would know a person by the fruit they would bear. The most telling and convicting statement Jesus gave was when He said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven" (7:23).

As Norman Whan stated: "God can't steer a parked car."

Faith and works work together. In fact, James goes on to speak about the needs that are met through active faith.

2. Faith that Responds to Needs (2:15-16)

Words have very little meaning if they are not backed up with actions. Empty words do not meet needs (Matthew 23:23). Empty words lack compassion and do not model a Christ-centered faith. Ask the Jewish man beaten and left to die on the Jericho Road that Jesus described in Luke 10:25-37. Two religious leaders heading home from their religious duty in Jerusalem, saw the man but did not want to get involved. Rather, a Samaritan man, hated by the Jews, stopped and went overboard to help this man whom he did not know. That man showed active faith. You see throughout the Gospels how Jesus did not only teach about faith, He demonstrated it and taught them that their faith must be proved through their compassion for others, through their effort of extending love to one another.

Consider 1 John 3:16-17

16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?"

What are the ramifications of these verses? _____

In what situation could you apply this verse right now? _____

3. Faith that Reaches Beyond Simple Belief (2:18-19)

James gave them a thought that must have blown them away - that the demons even believed and trembled. How true this was for Jesus who often confronted demon possession. They often cried out in acknowledgment of the

true reality of Jesus Christ. What the Church must understand is that simple faith is good, but simply believing does not give the true picture of a believer. Genuine faith is active and even supports the faith claim. However, it goes even deeper, to the point of a person's righteousness.

4. Faith that Results in Righteousness (20-26)

James recalled for the Church Abraham's faith in taking his son, Isaac, in obedience to God's command, to Mt. Moriah (Genesis 22:1-18). There Abraham was commanded to sacrifice Isaac. James pointed out that Abraham's faith and obedience proved a vital connection between faith and works. Now, you have to understand that Abraham's works did not declare him righteous. He had already been declared righteous by God long before this (Genesis 15:6). Tony Evans, pastor and author writes:

"The sacrifice of Isaac was not about Abraham's salvation for eternity but instead was about his sanctification, his experience of God in history. God sent Abraham the greatest test of his life in order to take him to a level of faith he had never before reached."

What was this level of faith? It was his spiritual maturity. James 2:22 says, "You see that **faith was active** along with works and faith was completed by his works." The word complete means mature or perfect. God is in the process of maturing his children, growing them up to be more and more like Him, and to reproduce so that others may know Christ. Notice what the Scriptures teach about this lesson in Abraham's life. In verse 23, James recalled Genesis 15:6 "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Then he said, "And he (Abraham) was called a friend of God." What an incredible statement! Every believer would love to hear this from the Lord! Tony Evans continues, "Intimacy with God takes the kind of working faith that will lead us to do whatever God asks us to do, even if it makes no sense to us."

James mentioned Rahab the prostitute who believed God and hid the men spying out the land. Her faith was justified (or made complete) through the outworking of her faith. That is, she gave evidence that she truly believed by literally doing something with her faith. Therefore, James ended his argument with these words:

“For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead” (2:26).

What more could be said?

Questions:

1. Why did James use the illustrations of pure religion (1:26-27) and favoritism (2:1-13) as a launching pad for his argument against a faith without works?

2. What about your faith needs a greater expression to be considered active faith? _____

3. How do you personally show that your faith is active and real?

Chapter Three

Wise Faith

How can you tame the one thing that often destroys a Christian's character and keeps you from experiencing the wisdom of God?

Introduction: Charles Swindoll once wrote: "Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men who a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom."

The value of wisdom is immeasurable in the life of the believer. James asks an important and probing question in chapter 3: "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good conduct his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom" (3:13). This question comes in the context of James discussing the dangers of using words inappropriately and hurtfully (3:1-12). If you cannot control your tongue, then you have gone off track in how you think and that will come through with how you speak.

Therefore, James gives a lengthy illustration and teaching on the power of the tongue, and then uses this teaching to drive home the lesson that the believer must pursue wisdom if they are going to effectively live in peace among those around them (3:18).

This is one of the cures to cultural Christianity. Among followers of Christ, there can be a lack of wisdom toward insiders (those who are fellow believers) and a lack of wisdom toward outsiders (those who are not believers), and the lack of wisdom comes through inconsistent speech. James writes, "With it (our speech) we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so" (3:9-10). What James is after is a faith that wisely knows how to navigate the treacherous waters of relationships, both with believers (whom we should respect and love) and unbelievers (who

need grace and truth). If believers have any chance at impacting the culture, then they must appropriate wise faith.

In this study, you will learn the concept of biblical wisdom, the competing realities surrounding biblical wisdom, the barrier to biblical wisdom and how to cultivate biblical wisdom. All of this with the goal of learning how to develop wise faith.

Read It!

James 3:1-18

1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. **2** For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. **3** If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. **4** Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. **5** So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! **6** And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life,^[a] and set on fire by hell.^[b] **7** For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, **8** but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. **9** With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. **10** From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers,^[c] these things ought not to be so. **11** Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? **12** Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

Wisdom from Above

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. **14** But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. **15** This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. **16** For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. **17** But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. **18** And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Study it!

I. The Concept of Biblical Wisdom

Without a doubt, you want to be considered wise in the eyes of God. No one wants to live in such a way where they make decisions that are not wise. So, James asks, "Who among you is wise?" The bible does a pretty good job answering how a person becomes wise.

"The beginning of wisdom is: Get wisdom, and wherever you get, get insight. Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a graceful garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown" (Proverbs 4:7-9).

Before we get anything else, we need to get wisdom. Why? Because wisdom is what drives every aspect of life. For believers to trade cultural Christianity for authentic Christianity, one that moves them toward maturity, then they must pursue wisdom that comes from God. Wisdom calls to every believer for them to listen to God's word. Proverbs 1:20-21, 23 "Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: If you turn to my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you."

Here is where wisdom is found, at the words of God. What a disaster to miss God's wisdom, reject God's counsel and fall prey to the whims of an ungodly world (Proverbs 1:24-32). For this person, there can only be calamity and hardship. They may be able to cover it up for a while, but in the end, their life will uncover heartbreak and heart ache as they have endeavored to live life without God. How many Christians, live like this? They believe that seeking out God's wisdom can be done on whim, in a moment. Rather than pursuing God's wisdom, they live without it until there is an emergency.

Now, let's look at the concept of wisdom from the two aspects of knowledge and understanding.

A. Knowledge

Tony Evans writes, "The Bible makes it clear that wisdom is not a philosophical system that is unrelated to life. At its heart, godly wisdom is the skill of righteous living."

Knowledge is what we apply that demonstrates the skill of righteous living. Where does this knowledge originate? Obviously, it originates from a healthy knowledge of Scripture. The culture pushes against this with relativism, saying that truth is whatever you want to make it. However, Christians are convicted that truth comes from God and that through the Word of God. Christians do not go around that but through it.

B. Understanding

What happens to some people is that they gain much knowledge from God's word but fail to see how it should be understood for life. Their lives are filled with facts but their heart is not impacted. Understanding means that you take the knowledge learned and apply it rightly and consistently.

So James is asking if there are people in the church who have knowledge of God's truth but also knows how to apply it. Those people are the ones who will react to situations with wisdom and before any reaction, they will put themselves in positions where their wisdom will be clearly evidenced.

II. The Competing Realities of Biblical Wisdom

As James asks this question, he is thinking of two types of wisdom: one which comes from above (v. 17) and that which is earthly, unspiritual and demonic (v. 15). This way of thinking is rampant in our culture today. In truth, cultural Christianity is the product of earthly, worldly, unspiritual and demonic thinking. How unfortunate that so many Christians live more by human wisdom than

divine wisdom. As a follower of Jesus Christ, you must decide which source you will follow. How can a Christian draw truth and wisdom from sources that are clearly not of Him or pursuing His heart. However, many Christians turn to TV personalities, philosophers and writers to get their ideas or direction.

Now, this competing source of wisdom that is not pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere, presents itself within relationships as bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. This type of wisdom boasts (or is pride-filled) and lies, rather than living in the truth (v. 14). Boasting and lying are products of words that damage the body of Christ. James says that this person thinks he is religious, but "if anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless" (1:26).

This teaching that James gives in 3:13-18 is given in the context of James 3:1-12, the teaching of the tongue. Why? Because the tongue can curb biblical wisdom.

III. The Constraint to Biblical Wisdom

JUST as James warns the church of the dangerous sin of Favoritism, he points us to an equally and perhaps more destructive and divisive sin of VERBAL ATTACKS! - *Here's where Faith without Works is evidenced the clearest!!!*
This Passage is all about POWER! Power of the teachers, leaders and every person who opens their mouth.

An anonymous writer said, "When we advance a little into life, we find that the tongue of man creates nearly all the mischief in the world." Gossip, Bullying, Shaming, Criticizing, Comparing, Tearing down are all examples of using the tongue in a way that curbs biblical wisdom. The reason it curbs wisdom is that it uses a source of wisdom that is unspiritual and demonic.

Words are serious. Once they are said they are out for all to hear. In the book, *Through the Looking Glass*, Lewis Carroll has the Red Queen say, "When once you've said a thing, that fixes it and you must take the consequences."

James provides three responses so the tongue does not become a constraint to God's wisdom.

1. Get Serious About God's Judgment Concerning Your Words (3:1)

James begins this section of the letter with a reference to the seriousness of teaching. He is getting to conduct that may not be wise and flat-out abusive language that does not lead to biblical wisdom. No one knows, but there could have been a run on teachers so that James warns them that not everyone should sign up for teaching to prove their "faith-works", or it could be that James was simply using the task of teaching as an introduction to the problem of their venomous words. Regardless, James makes his point clear that our words are serious and for them, we must give account. Jesus said, "I tell you, on the day of judgment, people will give account for every careless word they speak" (Matthew 12:36-27). If your words are so serious to God as to be recollected on the Day of Judgement, then it stands to reason that our words must be guarded every day and in every situation. This take self-control, accountability and taking serious the power of the tongue.

2. Get Realistic About the Power of Your Words (3:2-8)

Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits." Similarly, Proverbs 12:18 says, "There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." Proverbs 13:3 says, "Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin." --- Here's the real kicker...Your words have the power to reveal who you really are!! Matthew 12:33-37 says, "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The

good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil."

Now, James gives us some vivid illustrations that should be easy enough to understand. He says that "we all stumble in many ways" (v. 2), and the way we stumble the most is with our words! A person who can control their words is successful in controlling the whole of their life.

James uses a horse's bit to illustrate that such power does not have to come in large quantities. Horse's bits are 4"-6" but the horse can weigh 900-1,100 lbs. However, that little bit controls the horse. The same with a ship's rudder. It is nothing compared to the ship, but it can move the ship all over the ocean.

What is the dangerous about this little instrument is the destruction it can cause. James points out that your words have the power to destroy the lives of others (3:5b-8). The Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts sing this song: "One dark night when we were all in bed, old lady O'Leary lit a lantern in her shed. And when the cow kicked it over, she winked her eye and said, "It'll be a hot time in the ole town tonight." And everyone yells, "Fire-Fire-Fire." It wasn't til years later that I learned that the song was based on fact. It may not have been a cow, but the great fire of Chicago began at 8:30pm, Oct. 8, 1871 by a small blaze in the barn of Patrick and Catherine O'Leary. It left over 80,000 people homeless, 17,500 buildings were destroyed and 300 people killed. James says that the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The power of your words can destroy your children, your spouse, your family, your neighbors, or your church leaders (or fellow believers). James calls the tongue a FIRE and POISON! WOW!! How many times have we set a blaze of destruction with our words, poured poison down the throats of people who "are made in the likeness of God" (3:9). No matter what you think of them, if you agree with them, if they have wounded you, hurt you in some way, how do you have the right to tear them down with your words?

People are so good at hiding their hurtful words in words that seem to be helpful critique. They feel justified in what they have said, because they feel

that they are somehow helping them get better. We are helping the person get better!

The third response to the tongue is this...

3. Get Right About How You Use Your Words (3:9-12)

Does the way you use your words contradict what you really need to say (3:9-10)? The key is the image of God. When you abuse people (no matter who they are), you are abusing God! How easily this can happen when we lose our tempers in our marriage or with our kids or on the job or with our neighbors.

God has designed your words to be refreshing and not repelling (3:11-12). James uses two figures for this thought: Salt water and a Fig tree. Obviously, salt water is NOT refreshing. How upset would you be if you were parched and someone handed you an Aquafina only to realize upon your first drink that they had switched it out with salt water?! The same is true with a fig tree. You do not expect a fruit tree to give you anything other than what it was designed to produce. Therefore, as follows of Christ, you need to give to others what you have been designed to produce and that is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, flowing through your words.

How do we become fountains of life and health with our words?

1. Give God control of your words
2. Think about **Ephesians 4:29**...Memorize it!
3. Ask God if what you're about to say will bless Him and be the kind of witness that brings glory to the name of the Lord.

IV. The Cultivation of Biblical Wisdom

Finally, James urges his readers to cultivate biblical wisdom so they can exhibit wise faith by sowing peace (3:17). James describes this peace as a harvest of peace being sown by those who make peace. Here is the crux of the Gospel. Through the Gospel, a person has peace with God (Rom. 5:1), but they also have peace with their fellowman. God creates peace in their hearts, which in turn, allows them to be in control of their emotions.

Hence, those who can cultivate peace in their hearts with God is successful in cultivating wisdom in their interactions with others. James is most concerned about the spiritual conduct of his brothers, telling them that “wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, and good fruits, impartial and sincere” (3:16). Making peace is the exhibition of wisdom that is from above, and a witness of their love for one another.

How do you cultivate biblical wisdom?

1. Ask the Lord to control your tongue.
2. Ask others to hold you accountable for your words.
3. Seek peace with others rather than retribution.
4. Measure your words carefully before you speak, knowing that what you say reflects on Christ.

Discussion:

1. Why is controlling your tongue tied to the issue of cultural Christianity?
2. Why are misused or abusive words more dangerous than any other form of violence?
3. Do you allow for times when you do need to rebuke or say things not easily heard but needed to be said for a person's spiritual or personal growth?
4. What will you do this week as a result of this teaching?

Chapter Four

Humble Faith

How can a humble faith be used to separate yourself from a world intent on their own self-rule and self-destruction?

James comes right out of his last sentence on sowing peace, peace that is interrupted by the misuse of words, to address the destruction caused by fighting, evil desires, coveting and corrupt passions. He calls out the church in a way that one would if speaking to unbelievers. James calls out those in the church who are pursuing a worldly lifestyle, adulterous people (4:4). Like the prophets who called out Israel when they were half-hearted for God, James calls out those in the church who are half-hearted for Christ. His point is to draw a clear distinction between those whose faith is humble before the Lord and those whose faith has been contaminated by the lures of cultural Christianity.

James' argument is built on the character of God. In verse 5, James asks, "Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, 'He yearns jealously over the spirit that He has made to dwell in us?'" God is a jealous God. In the Law, the Lord made His will clear: "for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Exodus 34:14). Any worship that is not worship of Almighty God is idolatry, and God will not tolerate idolatry in the life of His children. Why? Idolatry not only betrays God's position as Creator and Lord, but it also puts humankind in a higher position than he can sustain. In other words, idolatry positions humanity in a place where they have no power, because when you take God out of the equation, then you take everything that God created out of the equation. What do you have left? Nothing!

Therefore, James confronts the church about any attitude or desire that moves them away from humble submission to Christ to one that puts them at odds with God (4:4). The cure to this type of corruption in the believers life is a humble faith made possible through submission, resistance of the devil, drawing near to God, cleansing the hands of sin, purifying the heart and mind of worldly thinking and being humble before the Lord (4:7-10). When this happens, the believer knows how to properly relate to his brother in Christ (4:11-12), and places the priorities of life in the proper perspective for effective living (4:13-17).

Read It!

James 4:1-17

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions[a] are at war within you?[b] 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 4 You adulterous people![c] Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? 6 But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers.[d] The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

12 There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— **14** yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. **15** Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." **16** As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. **17** So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Write down insights from any one or two verses you read: _____

Study It!

How can you cultivate a faith that is humble before the Lord and resists the lure of a culture that does not reflect the values and heart of Christ? James shapes this section of the letter by pointing out four relationships that we must get right as we draw near to God with a humble faith.

1. Deal with Your Relationship with the World (4:1-6)

There is an Old West African proverb which says, "The man who tries to walk two roads will split his pants." James is very clear in this section of the letter that Christians are not to try and live as friends of both God and the world. This world's values are in opposition to those of the Lord. The issues going on in the church were in direct alignment to their adoption of worldly perspectives.

James points out that they were playing favorites, abusing one another with their words and creating disorder with every vile practice (4:2-3).

The Apostle Paul mentions things like this about the Corinthians who were suing each other (1 Cor. 6:1-8) and leaders overlooking sin among its members (1 Cor. 5:1-2). James attributes the issues going on as a problem from within. He mentions their passions at war within them. Hedonism is the word most closely used to describe this kind of emotion. Hedonism is a desire to satisfy our internal lusts with self-satisfying pleasure alone, and fulfill the lusts of the flesh without regard to decency or accountability. Often, when a person is confronted, they get angry because they don't want anyone to get in the way of them fulfilling their own lustful desires! Tony Evans writes, "Worldliness is that attitude of a Christian's heart that reflects the spirit of this age, the attitudes and values of a system that is spearheaded by Satan. This system is characterized by thoughts and actions that exclude God."

Consider - 2 Tim. 3:1-5 "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵ having a form of godliness...".

How can this kind of living creep into the life of believers? _____

C.S. Lewis asks why are we so easily enamored and fulfilled by this world when we have Christ? In his work, *The Weight of Glory*, Lewis writes:

"If you asked twenty good men to-day what they thought the highest of the virtues, nineteen of them would reply, Unselfishness. But if you asked almost any of the great Christians of old he would have replied, Love - You see what has happened? A negative term has been substituted for a positive, and this is of more than philological importance. The negative ideal of Unselfishness carries with it the suggestion not primarily of securing good things for others, but of going without them ourselves, as if our abstinence and not their happiness was the important point. I do not think this is the Christian virtue of love.

If there lurks in most modern minds to desire our own good and earnestly hope for the enjoyment of it, is a bad thing, I submit that this notion is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of those promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

Blaise Pascal said it best: "There once was in man a true happiness of which now remain to him only the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present. But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself."

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you believe Christians are so easily enamored by the world's values?
2. What are the effects of worldliness creeping into marriages, families, and churches?
3. How can you love the people in the world but not adopt the values of the world?

II. Deal with Your Relationship with Yourself (4:7-10)

James uses seven imperatives from verse 7 to 10 as a way to jump right to the point of their need. These imperatives were personal and directed. James argues that their issues could be solved if they dealt with their heart. Too often, people blame their issues going on in their homes, communities and churches on externals that are situational and out of their control. However, the reality is that most of their problems come from their own making. The evil passions of their heart, desires for sinful pleasures, greed, pride and the like, all are tied to divisions, disputes and disasters that come from their own hand. Therefore,

James sees it as imperative to give the church these seven commands so that they can deal with their own hearts and pursue a humble faith. They come in rapid fire succession, almost proverbial in nature.

1. **Submit to God** (4:7)

The word submission is a military term and means to place yourself in your proper rank or to come under the command of someone. The command to submit comes on the heels of verse six, "God gives grace to the humble".

Author and pastor A.W. Tozer writes, "The reason why many are still troubled, still seeking, still making little forward progress is because they haven't yet come to the end of themselves. We're still trying to give orders, and interfering with God's work within us. " How true this is for believers who continue to struggle with Christ's Lordship over their lives.

To submit to God takes an **unreserved commitment to God's will**.

Psalm 27:8 says, "You have said, 'Seek My face.' My hearts says to You, 'Your face, Lord, I will seek.'" There it is - a commitment to the will of God without reservation. ---- There is no more my way, but only His way! This total submission to the will of God is best seen when Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane, and in a moment of declaration, cries out , "Not My will but Yours be done!"

Question: What areas of your life are you struggling to fully surrender to the Lord? _____

2. **Resist the Devil** (4:7)

To submit to God takes a determined resistance to pride. Therefore, James warns believers to "Resist the devil". The promise and result of resisting the devil is that he will flee. This is what Jesus did when tempted by Satan in Matthew 4. How did Jesus do this? With the Word of God,

and by knowing that He did not have to submit to one who was not His superior. Satan's pride so dominated him, that he believed the One who created him could be convinced to bow to him.

Christians have to understand that spiritual attacks come from a well-educated and well-informed enemy. In sports, teams film get game film on their upcoming opponents to study their strengths and weaknesses. Based on what they see, they put together their strategy for how to attack them and defeat them. Satan has watched your game film. He knows your weaknesses and how to attack them most strategically. The same is true with advertising. **Facebook uses pop-up ads** for products you've searched. You may Google something or purchase something on Amazon and that information is sent to Facebook where they give you suggestion for other purchases. Satan and the forces of darkness use the things you think about or things you do to make further suggestions to you. They may come in the form of pop-up memories, pop-up regrets, pop-up shame, pop-up thoughts that lead to defeat! James tells us that we must resist the devil to he will flee from our thoughts of condemnation. You must remind the enemy that you are in Christ, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit until the Day of redemption and your identity is not your past but what God has made you today.

3. Draw Near to God (4:8)

James encourages the church to come close to the heart of God, to draw near to the Lord. This is the key to developing a strong and humble faith. What must first happen if a person is to draw near to God? Hebrews 11:6 says it plainly, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that he rewards those who seek Him." The obvious first step to drawing close to the Lord is our belief in Him. For a Christian, this goes beyond mere

intellectual knowledge to a deep trust in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. The result of this saving faith puts the believer in a position to draw closer to God in knowledge and understanding. As a Christian matures in this manner, their life is stronger and less prone to wander.

With that said, the heart wanders. James comes right off the heels of this radical imperative to confront wanderers with language that could easily be used with unbelievers. In fact, many believe that James is confronting unbelievers mixed into the congregation of the church.

4. Cleanse Your Hands (4:8)

Reminiscent of Joel 2:12-16, where the prophet confronts sinning Israel, James uses similar language to command the attention of the people in the church who are taking lightly the seriousness of sin. He uses the strong imperative, catharsis, to relate the idea of getting completely clean. Interestingly, he says that the hands need to be cleansed. While most sin happens through our mind, the action of sin happens through our hands. James use this term because hands made the action of sin real and visual. It brought home the reality of what needed to happen, and that was, to stop the sin altogether.

5. Purify Your Hearts (4:8)

James goes further into his discussion about the seriousness of sin by addressing the heart. The heart was the seat of emotions for the Jew and Gentile alike. Sin that dwells in the heart is corrosive and effects the entire body. Again, James uses the strong word of purification to call Christians to come away from being double-minded, and to make a firm decision to follow Christ. There is no room for indecision. Every believer must realize that indecision about following Christ is deadly. One writer said it well, "We don't really want to plunge into the dirtiness of sin. We

just want to collect some of sin's souvenirs so we can put them in the attic and get them out every once in a while."

Consider some of these references to seeking the heart of God:

- Jeremiah 29:13
- 1 Chronicles 28:9
- 2 Chr. 7:14
- Ps. 119:10
- Prov. 8:17
- Isaiah 55:6
- Matthew 6:33
- Col. 3:1

Question: In what ways are you currently seeking the heart of God? How is your life reflecting His heart? What needs to change for you to pursue His heart? _____

6. Be Wretched and Mourn and Weep (4:9)

This kind of language is not in our vocabulary like it used to be. In today's world, everyone wants to feel positive about themselves. Teachers do not use red markers to correct students because the colors are too harsh. Every gets a trophy. Everyone is a winner. Losing or facing failure is simply not an option for people. Therefore, the language James uses seems abrupt, even harsh. Wretched is the most descriptive word in the

three. It means to twisted or wrenched by the weight of sin. The word carries the idea of total despair. James does not give these words to the church to simply make them feel bad, but to call them to look at their sin in a way that they may not otherwise. If sin, the sin of faithlessness, the sin of favoritism, the sin of false truth, the sin of jealousy, selfish ambition and pride (that James has mentioned up to this point) is allowed to be seen as not all that bad, then the church will be in grave danger of becoming cultural Christians. (Reference Judges 1 & 2 and the phrase "they did not drive out completely" to see the seriousness of not dealing directly with sin.)

7. Humble Yourself (4:10)

James gets the church to the point of all his talk about dealing with sin. If you were to wrap every command into one phrase or identify one action point that would describe what is needed from every believer (and for that matter, every non-believer if they are to know God), it would be to humble yourself. Humbling yourself before the Lord is the key to worship. Humility is the recognition that Jesus is Lord. In fact, James uses the word Lord for whom we are to humble ourselves. To acknowledge Jesus as Lord is to say that He has rulership and authority over every aspect of our lives. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." Lordship is about ownership, but not from the perspective of a harsh master over a slave, but one of a loving Master who willingly, lovingly and intentionally leads the slave. When believers humble themselves before the Lord, there is a promise from the Lord attached to that action. James says, "Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will exalt you." In this one phrase is the consistent promise of God to bless His children when they stay close to His heart. When His

children choose to oppose Him, reject Him or go after other false gods, then He cannot and will not bless them. That is why James is calling for the church to not get caught up in the sins of the culture and become cultural Christians. Cultural Christianity does not lead to righteousness but to compromise. Compromise will never lead a believer to a passionate, Spirit-filled walk with Christ that is willing to abandon all for the cause of Christ. This is where genuine Christianity calls out anything that may not be genuine, and calls for believers to come clean!

Questions:

1. Of the seven commands James gives the church, which command is the hardest for you to obey and why? _____

2. How do we see cultural Christianity making greater headway into our churches and personal lives, and what can be done if the we take the commands seriously? _____

III. Deal with Your Relationship with Fellow Believers (4:11-12)

James moves the conversation from the personal to the corporate as he commands the church to guard how they speak to one another. Any time the Bible uses the phrase, "one another", it refers to believers in Christ.

James has just pointed out that humility must be the believer's manner of living. Humbling yourself before God means that you recognize your own sinfulness. That recognition should keep believers from spiritual pride, and hence, speaking against one another. The best guard to a wagging, hurtful tongue is a humble spirit. Pride causes people to lift up themselves and see others as inferior. When this happens, words are used to push people down, demean them and discredit them.

What the church must realize is that humility is not only commanded of us, but also expected of us to be lived out before others. It influences the way you treat God's people. James gives an illustration or example of how we demonstrate our humility in the way we treat others (especially with our words)! He asks the question, "But who are you to judge your neighbor?" How can we stand in judgment against another believer or speak despairingly thinking that we are so great, if we ourselves can't stand before God? We love to shoot down another person that we think does not measure up, and we don't mind destroying their reputation, when we have our own shortcomings!

Christ calls His people to a greater way of living. Ephesians 4:29 says, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only

what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

Do you use your words to tear people down or to lift them up? When you are in a pressure-packed situation, are you more apt to speak angrily or are you able to control your words for the right tone and right outcome?

What must govern your words? Love must govern your words. James uses the Law as the bases for how we measure our words. He says, “The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law” (4:11). The Ten Commandments may seem like only a set of rules, but they are the measurements of our love for God and others. Here is an explanation:

1. The first commandment forbids another God: Our love can't be fickle or divided.
2. The second commandment forbids idols: Love must be loyal.
3. The third commandment forbids taking God's name in vain: Love must be respectful.
4. The fourth commandment says remember the Sabbath and keep it holy: Love must be focused in its affections.
5. The fifth commandment commands us to honor our father and mother: Love must be submissive to legitimate authority.
6. The sixth commandment forbids murder: Love values other people.
7. The seventh commandment rules out adultery: Marital love is to be pure, undefiled, and loyal.
8. The eighth commandment says do not steal: Love is not to be selfish and take from others what belongs to them.
9. The ninth commandment tells us not to bear false witness: Love must be truthful.

10. The tenth commandment forbids coveting: Love must be content and thankful.¹

Love is built into the Ten Commandments. Love, then, governs your words, but also how you judge. God does not want his people judging with a wrong motivation or with evil intent. When your motivations are evil, then God brings that back on you. He will protect His children from harm. Paul's words to the Philippians is a good word to shape your thinking on this subject:

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than ourselves.” - Philippians 2:3

IV. Deal with Your Relationship with God (4:13-16)

Interestingly, James does not come right out and talk about the believer's relationship with God in familiar terms, but he gives the reader a scenario that points to evidence of a person's relationship with God.

“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit’ - yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that’. As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing too do and fails to do it, for him it is sin” (4:13-16).

¹ Evans, Tony. *The Perfect Christian*, pages 167-168.

James is dealing with the worldly mind that presumes on God, they profess God's rule in their life but their practice says otherwise. What happens when this becomes the habit of believers? R.C. Sproul writes:

"What is deadly to the church is when the external forms of religion are maintained while their substance is discarded. This we call practical atheism. Practical atheism appears when we live as if there were no God. The externals continue, but man becomes the central thrust of devotion as the attention of religious concern shifts away from man's devotion to God to man's devotion to man, bypassing God. The "ethic" of Christ continues in a superficial way, having been ripped from its supernatural, transcendent, and divine foundation."

Sproul's words are perfect descriptors of cultural Christianity. Christians who have adopted the values of this world do not have a desperate dependence on God. While they have the promises of God, and while they have the assurances of His grace, they live in such a way that they no longer need to include God on anything in their life. The presumption has become their gospel.

James confronts this kind of conduct among believers and challenges them to make Christ the center of their life. Only then, can a believer have humble faith that will lead to an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ.

What does he tell them that can help you as well?

1. Include God in Your Daily Plans (4:13)

James is disturbed that merchants within the church would live their lives with little regard for God, only for their profits. How easy it is for us to get distracted by our pursuit for riches, security and a better lifestyle that we focus all our energy, talents, time and money on these things with no regard for God's will

or plans. It goes back to a mind dominated by the world. You see, a worldly mindset operates arrogantly (4:13) "We will...go, spend, trade, make a profit." Our minds betray us when our faith is crowded out by our desires. Worldly hearts are all for worldly projects. Thoughts are the purest offspring of the soul...People are what their desires are. It's true, that your plans reveal your priorities and your priorities reveal your passion and worship.

What is also true is that a worldly mindset operates erroneously (4:3) - Life becomes all about us with God left on outside. Jesus told a story of a rich farmer that had this very mindset. The story comes from Luke 12:

"Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

The mindset used by this man was not pleasing to God because it assumed on God's goodness and made the person the center of life. There was no thought of God in his daily plans or a desire to be generous. This rich farmer made his plans and lived his life without God. One writer pointed out the implications for this kind of thinking: "Making plans without God is like hacking through a jungle without a map or being at sea without a compass. You'll wind up lost. It's

like sewing with a needle but no thread or using a pen without ink. Without God, your plans will fall apart; you'll have nothing to show for your efforts."

Question: In what area of your life do you have the most difficult time including God? _____

2. Admit that God is a Whole Lot Smarter than You! (4:14)

You are limited...Get Over It! You are limited in what you know. God is the Only One who knows our future and guides us through everyday. We Need God in the center of our plans because, we don't know what tomorrow holds! Psalm 27:1 says, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring." We need God in the center of our plans because God made us to look to Him. Jer. 10:23 says, "I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps."

You are limited by the frailty of your life (4:14b). Do you remember what we used to say on long trips: "Are we there yet?" - Why? When we were young, time seemed slow, but then, wow did it ever speed up. Consider these verses:

- Psalm 39:4 "LORD, make me to know my end And what is the extent of my days; Let me know how transient I am."
- Job 7:6 "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle...".
- 1 Chr. 29:15 "For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow...".

God has infinite knowledge and sees things you cannot. That's why we need to make God the center of our day and include Him in every detail of our life. In Atlanta, as in most major cities, there is a helicopter that flies over the city and reports on the traffic situations from one road to the next. Commuters are able to adjust their routes or prepare to slow down by listening to these reports. What the commuter in his car cannot see, the helicopter can see. How? Perspective. Altitude. The higher up you go, the better you can see things. You see, God has the best perspective on your life. He can see things that you cannot see. He gives you reports on what is ahead so that you can adjust your life accordingly. That is why we must trust God for every moment of our life. He sees what you cannot see.

3. Live in Submission to the Will of God (4:15-17)

James gives the church the proverbial, "Instead, you ought to...". This is like a father correcting his children, and rather than waiting for them to decide, knows that the circumstances are dire enough that action must be taken. James tells his readers, the Lord's will is best for you. His will keeps you from creating a mess living out your own will. His will directs you away from pride to making the right choices throughout your day! (4:16-17)

Jesus gives us the central teaching on the matter:

Mt. 6:33 "But seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you."

When you make God the center of your life, it gives God the freedom to bless you and direct your steps. Otherwise, you are forced to live in the haze of indecision, doubt, selfishness and pride. That is not a place you will enjoy long term.

Years ago, Jenny and I were driving to Florida for a wedding. During the trip, my windshield wipers started moving and was stuck in high speed. I pulled off the highway and disconnected the wires so that the wipers would stop.

However, about an hour later, we could see that the highway was leading us straight into a thunderstorm. Jenny said, "We need some Rain X." At the time, I didn't even know about Rain X, but being a smart husband, I pulled off at the first Walmart we could find and bought some Rain X. After I applied it, the rains came and came hard. You wouldn't believe it! The Rain X was so effective that it cleared up the windshield immediately. The harder the rain, the better the Rain X performed. Who needed windshield wipers?

You see, God is like that Rain X. Without applying it, we would have not been able to see the road (even with high speed windshield wipers - ever been in a Florida rain storm?) When you apply the Word of God, the presence of God, the sovereignty of God to any situation, then God gives clarity amid the haze of confusion. Do you want to plan your life in the haze of rain without clear visibility or put God in the center of your life who gives you His Spirit to guide you clearly through life? Let your confidence be in Christ, put all your trust in Him and He will make your path straight (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Question: In what area of your life do you need to apply spiritual Rain X?

What are some take aways from this lesson that you have discovered?

What will you do with what you have learned? _____

Chapter Five

Enduring Faith

How can an enduring faith persevere through suffering to live selflessly, victoriously and boldly for Jesus Christ?

Cultural Christianity, at its core, professes to know Christ but does not possess Christ. Like the athlete who dresses the part but does not know how to play the game, Christians who look the part but do not live the reality of being in Christ are simply going through the motions. Cultural Christianity is rampant in our day, and it is the most dangerous barrier to the Gospel.

In the previous chapter, James mentions a life that professes to know Christ but does not plan their life as if God exists (4:13-17). This disconnect comes from a life that is consumed by something other than Christ. Their attention is taken away by something more attractive or desirable. If one of the Old Testament prophets could weigh in on this, they would call it idolatry. Idolatry is that which competes for the glory of God; God will have no competition, for He has no rival. God commands His people to have no other god before Him (Exodus 20:3-5), nor to make any image that would represent a god, even one that would represent Him. God is above all things!

For James, this topic was critical to the church's understanding of what was going on around them. They were under heavy persecution, and that tested their faith daily. With people around them losing their livelihood, losing their families, and losing their own lives, the testing of their faith in Christ was bent against the pull of a life which offered them ease and comfort. Following Jesus in that day was not easy. The pull of society

which dove deep into the pools of pagan practices, also offered a variant route to life satisfaction through materialism - the worship of material things. This life direction played well into the hands of those who planned their life independently from God. The problem for the church was that the people were seeing this lived out before them, and they were confused, tempted and left with a feeling of perhaps being left out. James reminds them to consider the plight of the rich, be patient in their suffering and pray with strengthened faith. This is how James wraps up his letter. He confronts cultural Christianity once more with the call for Enduring Faith - the kind of faith in Christ that resists the pull of materialism, is patient in suffering and lives out the power of passionate prayer.

The church needed enduring faith as they grew up into Christ. The church today needs enduring faith as it faces the challenges of materialism, tolerance to sin, compromise of every kind, indifference to the cause of Christ and a growing apathy by the church to the needs of a society without hope and without God in this world. Never before have we had more access to the Gospel, and never before have we had the indifference to seeing the nations come to know Christ. This is not a time to relax and remember the victories of yesterday. There are battles to be fought, not for victory, but from victory. There are spiritual battles to be fought against the forces of wickedness who desire to crush the testimony and witness of churches in every community. There are spiritual battles to be fought against the forces of darkness trying to divide families and bring ruin to lives across our land. There are spiritual battles to be fought against the enemy who desires to squelch the voice and passion of millions of believers who would rise up and proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord. What today's church needs to combat these attacks is Enduring Faith.

Read It!

James 5:1-20

1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.

2 Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. **3** Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. **4** Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. **5** You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. **6** You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. **8** You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. **9** Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. **10** As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. **11** Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

12 But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. **14** Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. **15** And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. **16** Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. **17** Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. **18** Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

19 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, **20** let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Study It!

What does Enduring Faith look like for every child of God?

I. Enduring Faith Does Not Get Caught in the Trap of Materialism (5:1-6)

People love to brag about what they possess, don't they? A man was bragging to his neighbor one day about an expensive hearing aid he had recently purchased. He said, "I just bought a new hearing aid. It cost me four thousand dollars, but it's state of the art. It's perfect." The neighbor looked impressed and replied, "Really? What kind is it?" The man responded, "Twelve thirty."

What is Materialism?

It's the sinful attitude toward the stuff you have; the attitude that elevates the craving for more over a craving for God. Materialism is not about how much or how little you have, but about your attitude and the position stuff takes in your life. The reason materialism should not be bondage in a Christian's life is that their life has been changed by Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 6:9-10 says, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy...will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Being redeemed by Jesus Christ gives the believer the power over sin, that it is not to master us (Romans 6:12-14). Only when believers see God's provision in the wrong light, do they get off track and begin seeing possessions as the culture around them sees them. Author and pastor, Tony Evans, writes in his book, *The Perfect Christian*:

"We are headed toward the sin of materialism when we start looking at God's blessings as an end in themselves instead of as a God-given opportunity to serve His eternal purposes. The materialist expects gold to do what only God can do." Not only that, but Christians grow callous to the needs around them. Author David Nystrom writes, "Money has the potential to cause us to ignore God and to become callous to the needs of our brothers and sisters, and it will result in judgment if we have used wealth selfishly. The love of money has this power because we are so easily blinded to the strength of its allure, and we ignore it to our peril."

So, how do you handle materialism so that it does not handle you?

A. You Have to See Materialism the Way God Sees It

1. Materialism is Corrosive.

James 5:3 "Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire."

James calls out the temporary and destructive nature of gold and silver (riches). Jesus said it like this in Mt. 6:20 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal."

God never intended the things He made to be a substitute for Him.

The problem is that possessions eat away a proper perspective of how things really are - "You have laid up treasure in the last days." Thinking that life goes on forever, people lay up treasure for that "rainy day" or just hoard it thinking that someday they might need it, when in reality, money is temporary and meant to not only provide but to share.

Remember the Rich and Foolish Farmer (Luke 12:13-21)? When the rich farmer could think of nothing more to do with his possessions than store them up for himself, God called him - "Fool!" He went on to say in the parable, "This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." Listen, you will never see a U-Haul hitched to a hearse. The problem comes, not, when we provide an inheritance for our family, but when we hoard everything for ourselves. We are to care for our families (1 Timothy 5:8), and the Bible teaches that we should be good managers of our money for our children's sake (Proverbs 13:22). However, when we hoard what we have selfishly, everything we have falls apart, disintegrates, and corrodes into nothing.

a. It Eats at You

James goes even deeper. He says that materialism eats away at your life (5:3) like the flesh eating disease, Necrotizing Fasciitis. It consumes you... your thinking, your time, your relationships, your security, & your finances. Materialism eats away at your life while you ignore the bites. We think that nothing is wrong, but fail to see that life as Jesus lived and commands is foreign to our tradition, understanding or willingness to live out.

In his book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, Ronald Snider, writes:

“Most Christians in the Northern Hemisphere simply do not believe Jesus’ teaching about the deadly danger of possessions. We all know that Jesus warned that possessions are highly dangerous - so dangerous in fact that it is extremely difficult for a rich person to be a Christian at all. Christians in the US live in the richest society in the history of the world surrounded by a billion hungry neighbors. Yet...we insist on more and more. If Jesus was so un-American that he considered riches dangerous, then we must ignore or reinterpret His message....I used to think, when I was a child, that Christ might have been exaggerating when he warned about the dangers of wealth. Today I know better. I know how hard it is to be rich and still keep the milk of human kindness. Money has a dangerous way of putting scales on one’s eyes, a dangerous way of freezing people’s hands, eyes, lips and hearts.”

b. It leads to abuse and ignores other’s needs (4-6)

James points out to the church that those who are caught up in materialism are those who have abused those working for them, lived in luxury and self-indulgence and fattened their hearts in a day of slaughter. They have condemned and murdered the righteous person. James says this because he knows that when a person has wealth it tends to change their character and conduct. It certainly does not have to and one could point to a multitude of examples where wealthy believers generously lead their lives impacting thousands with the Gospel. Truett Cathy, founder of Chick-fil-a, is an example of one man who developed a billion dollar business but sought God to use his money and influence in a way that would expand the kingdom of God. When commenting on his decision to close on Sunday and allow that day to be for faith and family,

Truett Cathy said, "I was not so committed to financial success that I was willing to abandon my principles and priorities. One of the most visible examples of this is our decision to close on Sunday." What an example and witness to the world of God's favor on those who live by biblical principles. Mr. Cathy used his wealth and influence in the right way. When God blesses His people, they cannot allow their wealth and influence to be used in an abusive manner.

Question: How have you seen materialism impact the way people view or treat others? _____

How can people in the church who are wealthier than others use their influence corruptively? _____

2. Materialism is Costly (1-2)

Not only does James point to the corrosive nature of materialism, but he also speaks of the cost. He says in 5:1 "Come now, you rich, weep and howl, for the miseries that are coming upon you." Materialism costs you joy & peace. James calls the effects of materialism, "miseries". The bible uses that word here and in Romans 3:16 talking about the ungodly "whose feet are swift to shed blood and the way of peace they have not known." James warns the rich of the impending judgment to come where their heart is exposed! Strong words to those consumed by materialism. In essence, James is saying to the rich, "You had so much of this world's possessions but you failed to possess the treasure of your redemption from sin!"

Question: Why do people struggle with contentment? _____

What is your greatest struggle when it comes to material things? _____

To combat the pull of materialism, believers have to view it like God does, but also...

B. You Have to See God's Blessings the Way God Intends Them

God intends His blessings to lead us to a more thankful heart. Nothing you possess do you possess because you are worthy of them. Anything you have earned has come from the hands of the One who gave you the ability to earn it. God reminded His people of this principle in Deuteronomy 8:17-18 when He said, "Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth...".

God intends His blessings to be reciprocated on others. God blessed you, now you give back! The more blessings you have, the more God expects from you! Luke 12:48 says, "When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required." Furthermore, think about this, when we give, God gives back to us! Luke 6:38 says, "Give away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back--given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity" God's blessings must flow outward, not inward!

"We must rapidly begin the shift from a "thing-oriented" society to a "person-oriented" society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered." ~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

Above all of this, you must know that God intends His blessings to remind you that HE is the source of everything you have! This is GREAT news because God is in control of all your stuff - if it burns up in a fire or is stolen, God is also responsible for helping you get back what you need. God's responsibility as your provider is to supply for your needs (not your wants), and He has never failed in doing. As King David said in Psalm 37:25 "I've been young and now I am old, but I have never seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread."

Let your attitude be that whatever you have, it is all God's and if it is all God's then it is not yours. Nothing should possess your heart but God! Follow the Word given to you in Psalm 62:10, which says, "If riches increase, do not set your heart on them."

James make the shift from materialism, in confronting the rich who live outside of their own dependence and integrity before God, to the people who are watching the rich get richer and under their abuse. James starts by saying, "Therefore...". He refers to what he has been saying about the conduct of the rich and their fate by calling the believers to patience, which is a key to enduring faith.

Questions:

1. What about materialism entices people to forsake the blessings of God?

2. How has materialism shaped our culture and infiltrated the church?

3. How has materialism influenced and impacted your life and faith?

II. Enduring Faith Remains Steadfast in the Midst of Suffering (5:7-12)

James encourages the believers to be patient until the coming of the Lord (5:7). He refers them to a time when the Lord will return, when justice will reign and life will be as the Lord intended. Patience is hard when difficulties are pressing against you. Patience is hard enough in a culture where you expect everything right away. Life has become so fast with Internet speeds, fast-food service, and instant everything dominates the world. Along with that, people cannot sit in a mode of silence or rest for more than a moment. Everywhere you turn, people are on their mobile phones. Just watch when people sit down for their meal, wait to board a plane or sit down for a meeting, the first thing they do is check their phone. People complain if their service at a restaurant takes more than five minutes. People struggle with waiting in lines, waiting for their packages to be delivered, even struggle if an injury takes too long to heal.

Insurance companies want patients in and out of the hospital, so the doctors have to move fast. Patience, even though it is a virtue, is not seen as a virtue to most people.

Don't you love hanging around someone who just grumbles about everything? Nothing seems to satisfy, except to grumble about something. A lady was complaining about the music being too modern. The worship pastor responded, "That is simply a song David sang to Saul while playing his harp." The lady responded, "Well, now I understand why Saul threw his spear at David, trying to kill him while he sang."

Christians have adopted this attitude and incorporated it into their spiritual walk. They want instant revelation, instant spiritual wisdom, instant spiritual growth, instant answers to their deepest concerns, instant sermons, instant worship and instant healing from their pain and suffering.

Now, in James' day they did have all the technological advances that make patience a challenge, and yet, they knew about it. Strange, isn't it? It would seem that everyone in every culture and in every time period has struggled with patience. James encourages the believers to be patient and wait on the Lord.

Consider a Few Instructions About Waiting...

"Wait for the LORD; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the LORD." - Psalm 27:14

"Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes." - Psalm 37:7

"Are there any among the idols of the nations who give rain? Or can the heavens grant showers? Is it not You, O LORD our God? Therefore we wait for You, For You are the one who has done all these things." - Jeremiah 14:22

James uses the very familiar analogy of the farmer.

"See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and late rains" (5:7).

The obvious encouragement is for believers to see that in their patience there is great reward. He mentions precious fruit. Fruit was for the people their life source, their source of nourishment and livelihood. James urges the church to consider the farmer's resolve and expectation for the fruit. The rains in the early and late seasons represented God's blessings that were right on time and in the right proportions. As most of them knew, farming did not always yield an abundant crop. Patience and hard work was needed, and even then, there would be lean years with abundant years. If the farmer did not have patience, then the crops would not have time to germinate and bring forth fruit. As someone once said, "Blessings come to those who wait."

A. Your conduct while you wait

In the same way, James encourages the church to also be patient. "You also, be patient" (5:8). He follows this command with another strong word, "Establish". James says, "Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand." Again, James refers to the coming of the Lord and reminds them that the Lord's coming is close. As a result of the pressure from the outside temptations (of riches), they were also to resist the pressures from within. James outlines that pressure in verse 9:

"Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door."

James reminds the church that the Lord is watching their behavior. Therefore, the church must not give in to the temptation for grumbling against one another. How easy is it, when you have to wait for something or someone, to start grumbling? How easy is it, when a trial hits us to take it out on the people around us? Things are not changing as quick as we want them. The pastor is not growing the church as fast we think it should. The staff seem to be dragging their feet to get the service the way we like it. People grumble about everything, but God has called us to wait on Him, to be patient.

B. Your encouragement while you wait

In James' day, the church was experiencing suffering at the hands of unbelievers. Persecution was overwhelming the young church, and they needed to know the Lord had not abandoned them. So James reminded them of the prophets who had suffered but remained steadfast (5:10-11). The people considered the Old Testament prophets as revered men and women who had faced unspeakable hardship but remained faithful (men like Moses, Joshua, Jeremiah, Elijah and Elisha...Women like Deborah, Ruth and Hannah).

James mentions Job by name. Everyone listening in the church would have known of Job. His story, while very real, was legendary to the people. They had heard of Job's tremendous trials: losing his children, his livestock and his health. However, the greater story was the compassion and mercy of Almighty God. The purpose of the Lord was for Job and all those watching or hearing his story to know that no matter what Job lost the Lord was his greatest provider.

With that encouragement, James reminds them that their conduct is still important. He urges them to make sure not to swear falsely in the heat of an impatient moment. The crux of James' words deal with self-control so that they will not fall into condemnation (or as we might say, "Conviction").

Think about it:

Describe a time when you struggled with patience. How did you handle the situation? _____

The final section to James' letter dealt with prayer and the purity of the believer's lives. James used this time to remind the church that enduring faith does not happen alone, but through fervent prayer.

**III. Enduring Faith Prays Fervently as Life Gets More Difficult
(5:13-20)**

James calls the believers to prayer. What a source of encouragement! He urges them to not give up or give in, but to rise up in prayer together. He includes the elders (the pastoral leaders of the church - 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1) to join

them in prayer. James mentions suffering, sickness and cheerfulness as emotions and conditions they experience, but in all them, they are not alone. This principle was critical for them to know in light of the struggles they were having with outside influences. James outlined four principles of prayer that the church should incorporate.

A. Prayer Must Be Your Top Priority (v. 13)

The reason prayer must be your top priority is that ***you need God's grace***. When Jesus went to the cross, He afforded you access to His grace. Hebrews 4:14-16 says, "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Another reason prayer must be your top priority is that ***you need continuous communion with the Father***. James mentioned both suffering and praise. Only when you are in Christ and in fellowship with Him can you experience the dynamic of praise in the midst of problems. In Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas are imprisoned for their faith, but rather than pout about their circumstances, they praised the Lord. Their fellowship with Christ gave them the strength and resolve to not turn inward but outward as they were used by the Lord to win a jailer to Christ for eternity!

A third reason prayer is to be your top priority is that ***prayer is a strategic weapon in spiritual warfare*** (Ephesians 6:10-18). Discouragement comes most easily during times of difficulty. Just ask Elijah (1 Kings 19). Elijah had seen God do a great miracle. It was a major victory in Elijah's life, but right after

that the enemy attacked. Jezebel, the king's wife, declared that she would kill Elijah the way he had killed her pagan priests. In fear, Elijah fled and ask God to take his life. What a pathetic scene? It would be really pathetic if it did not hit so close to home! We need prayer to help us realize that all we need, we have in Christ. Prayer is that weapon we use to push back the darkness of satanic influence and call on the forces of heaven to reign down blessing! God loves to hear His people pray when they are under pressure (refer to 2 Chronicles 20 and the story of King Jehosophat - study the power of prayer under pressure).

B. Prayer Must Incorporate Spiritual Believers (5:14)

James mentioned a second principle that involved more than just one person praying. He mentioned the sick, the people who were weak, physically ill or beaten down by illness and the elders, the spiritual leaders in the church. The sick were to call on the elders when they could not pray effectively on their own or just needed encouragement from others. They were to pray over them recognizing that all healing came from the Lord. In the process of their prayer, the elders were instructed to anoint them with oil. The word anoint meant to massage. The oil was used medicinally and for grooming purposes. You may remember the Good Samaritan story in Luke 10 where the Samaritan traveler used oil for the wounds. The use of oil had the purpose of encouragement as the elders prayed for their strength, offered them encouragement and as a conduit of prayer for the physical healing of the sick. One writer said, "It was a symbol of the church coming alongside to bear up a member who was weak, providing whatever practical assistance needed."

C. Prayer Must Depend on the Promises of God (5:15-16)

James mentioned the purpose of prayer being the realization of God's precious promises. Two promises are given in the passage: the promise of restoration and the promise forgiveness. James says, "And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up" (5:15).

The expression “prayer of faith” has been turned into almost magical words or a wand waved over a person as a measuring stick of a person’s faith. The freedom Christians have in prayer is also tempered by the pursuance of God’s will. John tells us in 1 John 5:14-15 “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.” When you pray for God’s will to be done, then you will not get bitter if your trial goes past what you hoped because your hope is in the will of God to be accomplished in your life. God’s will can either be a joy to you or a source of temptation (James 1:2-4, 12). What will it be?

James told the church that the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick. The word save did not refer to salvation, in the sense of the Gospel’s power to save, but to restore or strengthen the weak. Prayer would also raise them up. That means that the Lord who is the source of healing will be the one who will heal them or provide His power to raise them up under the burden of the sickness. God’s will is not always for our physical healing. Sometimes His healing comes in the form of strength to bear the illness or through His eternal healing. Either way, God gets glorified. As we have seen in James, God gets the glory through our faithfulness to how we endure trials.

Question: How have you seen God glorified through the trials of people close to you? _____

The second promise James mentioned was that of forgiveness. Sometimes sickness is due to sin. Sometimes God is bringing a person under conviction and the only way that can happen is through getting their attention the hard

way. God promises to discipline those He loves (Hebrews 12:5-6; 1 Corinthians 11:30). Prayer is the key to finding the grace of God's forgiveness within the security of a certain relationship with Jesus Christ (1 John 1:9).

D. Prayer Must Flow from a Fervent Heart (5:16-18)

James mentioned another major prophet to the church, one they would certainly recognize. He mentioned Elijah, a man with a nature like ours (referring to his impatience) and a man who prayer fervently, as an example of the kind of praying needed among believers. The word fervent meant one who had energy, passion, one who would roll up their sleeves and get down in the trenches, putting it all on the line. That is the kind of praying James talked about. If you read the story of Elijah (1 Kings 17-18), five ways of praying come to light:

- (1) He prayed scripturally (Elijah knew God from His law)
- (2) He prayed specifically (We need to be specific with God)
- (3) He prayed expectantly (He knew God would provide)
- (4) He prayed humbly (He bowed to the ground in reverence)
- (5) He prayed persistently (He stayed with it)

James' final word to the church was one of restoration. He called on the church to look out for believers who might be in trouble and wandering. The same is true and necessary for the church today. We live in such a "I don't want to offend them" kind of culture that even in the church and among believers we are unwilling to come to the rescue of fellow believers in sin. This has to be the reason the church is so unhealthy and irrelevant to most of the world. Jesus gave us a prescription for how to make judgments (Matthew 6:1-5; Matthew 18:15-20). Believers must look out for one another. No one is immune to trouble and we must be diligent to call one another to holiness. What a great way to end this letter for James and this church!

Questions:

1. Who do you need to pray for today? _____

2. How does your prayer life need to change for you to have the fervency that Elijah displayed? _____

3. What have you learned from the Letter of James that you will implement immediately in your life? _____

4. As you consider how you will apply this teaching, what are five things you will commit to do as a result? (Share these with another believer who will hold you accountable)

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

Concluding Word to Our Study:

The Letter of James to the church has been disputed and regarded as second class by many theologians. However, an honest study of this letter reveals the connection between both faith and works that go hand in hand. James is not a hard book to understand, but can be very hard to obey. God uses James to write a letter to the church, and to us today, that gets to the heart of living. Every paragraph and every topic is filled with truth that confronts our bent toward sin. We realize that when trials come our joy must be found in the One who walks with us through hard times to provide wisdom for life. We realize that we can be tempted and lured to sin when we handle temptations and trials inappropriately.

We realize that hearing the word of God is good but not good enough. We must be doers of the Word for our true testimony to be seen and experienced by others. We realize that pure and undefiled religion is so simple as we minister to widows and orphans; those who are the most vulnerable. We realize that God has no patience for favoritism and that the believer's life must be free from picking and choosing the ones they will love and show kindness. We realize that true wisdom which is free from jealousy, selfish ambition and disunity comes from a person who has learned to control their words. We learned that our words are so powerful and can be be deadly. We must guard our words so that we exhibit the wisdom from above. We realize that humility comes from a heart abandoned to Christ and resistant to the world's pleasures. We realize that God is in control of our life and every plan we make must be taken before Him. We also realize that while the rich can take advantage of the poor, that believers must remain patient and prayerful when sufferings come. Suffering and pain are a part of life, but when we pray, God brings patience, healing and perspective.

From the start of this study, we looked at how this letter would be the cure to cultural Christianity. Without a doubt, believers who radically and faithfully obey the teachings found in this letter would make a major impression on the world. Living out the faith of Christ consistently and without apology is almost unheard of today. However, when a person is sold out for Jesus, lives out their identity in Christ, and simply lives to bring glory to the Lord, their Christianity shatters the world's expectations. This is NORMAL Christianity. Your prayer should be to make you a normal Christian, because when you live out the word of God you will live a radical, wonderful, counter-cultural life that points people to Jesus and whets their appetite to know more.

"The Christian way is different: harder, and easier. Christ says, "Give me All. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours." ~ C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity