



JAMES



## BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

(reprinted from the ESV Study Bible)

### Author and Title

The title of this book derives from the name of its author, James the Just (as he was called), the brother of Jesus (*Matt. 13:55*) and leader of the Jerusalem church (*Acts 15*). There is general consensus regarding his authorship, though some have challenged this on the grounds that: (1) the Greek is too polished and the rhetoric too Hellenistic for someone who never left Palestine; (2) the author never calls himself Jesus' brother; and (3) the author seems to be interacting with Pauline issues on faith and works, justification, and liberty and so had to write much later than James could have written, since he was executed in a.d. 62.

There is no good reason, however, to deny that James the Just is the author. As scholars now recognize, there was substantial contact between Jews and Gentiles, especially in Galilee where James grew up. Moreover, James is not reacting to Pauline issues but rather addressing similar themes in his own church; it is possible he is addressing a misunderstanding of Paul's teaching, but that could have been quite early since Paul wrote Galatians in a.d. 48. It is also possible that James is writing so early that he has no knowledge of any of Paul's letters.

The historicity of James the Just is well confirmed in historical literature (e.g., Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.200–201; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.23).

## Date

Since James died in a.d. 62, the letter had to precede that date. Further, if this had been written after the apostolic council in Jerusalem (a.d. 48–49), it surely would have mentioned the issues from that momentous occasion. Thus the letter was most likely written in the early to mid-40s.

## Theme

James's primary theme is living out one's faith, being a doer and not just a hearer of the word. This theme is developed in view of the social conflict between rich and poor and the spiritual conflict between factions in the church. James rebukes his readers for their worldliness and challenges them to seek divine wisdom in working out these problems and getting right with God.

## Purpose, Occasion, and Background

The audience for James's letter is almost certainly Jewish Christians, as evidenced by the designations "*the twelve tribes in the Dispersion*" (1:1) and "*assembly*" (Gk. *synagg*, 2:2), the Jewish reasoning throughout, and James's frequent reflection on the Torah (*Mosaic law*). If "*Dispersion*" is literal as well as metaphorical (see note on 1:1; cf. Acts 2:9–11), then these are a group of Jewish Christian house churches outside Palestine, which fits the situation of persecution and poverty in the letter. More than that cannot be said, but the social situation can be gleaned from the letter. As a result of the troubles, conflict has entered the churches, and they have splintered into fighting factions. Moreover, some have fallen into a worldly lifestyle (James 1:27; 4:4) and have failed to put their faith into practice (1:19–26), with the result that they have become "double-minded," wavering between God and the world (1:8; 4:8).

## Key Themes

1. God is seen as a gracious giver, the unchanging Creator, merciful and compassionate, a Judge, the one and only God, a jealous God, a gracious God, and a healing God. 1:5, 17-18; 2:5, 13, 19; 4:5-6; 5:1-3, 9, 15
2. Wisdom comes *“from above”* and enables one both to withstand trials and to bring peace rather than discord. 1:5; 3:13, 17
3. God allows tests and trials (1:2-4), but temptation comes not from God but from self and Satan. The required response is patient endurance. 1:3, 13-14; 4:7; 5:7-8
4. The primary trial is poverty and oppression from the rich. The poor are the special focus of God’s care and must be cared for by his people and not shown prejudice or ignored. The wealthy are condemned for presumptuous pride and for stealing from the poor. 1:9, 27; 2:1-5, 15-16; 4:13-17; 5:1-6
5. Apocalyptic themes are prevalent in terms of both future judgment and reward. 1:12; 2:5, 12-13; 3:1; 4:12; 5:1-7, 9, 20
6. The power of the tongue to destroy or to bring peace dominates the middle section. 3:1-4:12
7. The ethical mandate to go beyond hearing the word to living it out in daily conduct is made explicit early on and is implicit throughout the letter. 1:19-27; 2:14-26
8. Prayer is the proper response to trials, but it must not be self-seeking. It is to be central in life not only when afflicted or sick but also when cheerful. God has great power to heal, both physically and spiritually. 1:5-7; 4:2-3; 5:13-18
9. Faith, in its relationship to both works and justification, does not contradict but supplements Paul’s teaching. James and Paul are united in teaching that justification comes only by the grace of God through faith but will of necessity result in works. If there are no resultant works, there was no justification in the first place. 2:14-26

## Literary Features

Even though James begins with an epistolary salutation, the rest of the book does not have the format of an epistle but rather is a collection of wisdom sayings, much like the genre of wisdom literature as seen in the OT. The generic format of that wisdom literature is the collection of proverbs. Additionally, the book of James belongs to an ancient Greek form of satire known as the diatribe, the traits of which include: imaginary dialogues (including question and answer constructions); apostrophe (direct address to absent people or things as though they are present and can hear); metaphors taken from nature and everyday life; allusions to famous people from the past (stock instances, or well-known representations of the qualities that are under discussion); harsh addresses to readers; and heightened contrasts.

The most pervasive technique in the book of James is the proverb or aphorism, in the mode of ancient wisdom teachers. Next in frequency is the rhetorical device of direct command, expressed in the imperative mood of the verb (e.g., “be doers of the word, and not hearers only,” 1:22). In fact, there are over 50 imperatives in the book’s 108 verses. This abundance of commands is a signal that the writer has a practical bent and is interested in action rather than mere belief as the distinguishing characteristic of Christians. There is also a strongly persuasive stance as the author seeks to move his readers to action. The tone is continuously energetic, and satire is never far from the surface, sometimes couched in a somewhat scolding manner.

## WEEK ONE: THE ERRORS IN TRAILS

### Introduction:

Read: James 1:1-4

*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:*

### Greetings

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

All of us hate tests. Sure, there are a select few who relish in receiving a scantron and a #2 pencil, but for the most part, tests bring us a certain sense of anxiety. Worse than tests are the struggles we endure in our relationships, jobs, and day-to-day living. And once in a while, we must bear the burden of a tragedy—something that totally destroys the pattern of our daily lives. With all three, tests, struggles, and tragedies, we search for the slow-motion switch, the reset key, the redo button...anything to get us out of where we are.

Occasionally, during our time of trial, someone will kindly admonish our pain by reminding us that James calls us to “*Count it all joy*” in these hardships; that we should not only grin and bear whatever harm has come but also exalt in the opportunity to endure this season. No matter how strong our faith is, “*counting it all joy*” when sorrows come seems not only contradictory to what we should feel but also hearing someone plop that verse in our pain may conjure a visceral anger—regardless of good intentions.

Does God enjoy our pain? Does he take pleasure in seeing us in hardships?

No. Our God is a God of love, mercy, and above all a God of redemption and salvation. He intended for us to live without fear, pain, or tears. But the curse and nature of our sin often leads us through places we weren't intended to be and struggles weren't intended to bear. God understands that our souls need reshaping and that sometimes it's only through the darkest, most difficult seasons that we can learn to lean wholly on him. Malachi 3:2 describes our God as “a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap” leading and protecting us through these trials, pouring out his grace, love, and wisdom as he shapes us to be perfect, complete, and lacking in nothing.

The Christian life isn't easy. Scripture makes no apologies about the struggles we'll face individually and corporately in this very real, very spiritual battle we endure daily to learn and grow closer to him. No, pain doesn't conjure up joy, but the faith that God is with us, the knowledge that his word is a lamp unto our feet, and the fact that this too shall pass brings us a hope and a joy, that we can find nowhere else.

## Discussion

- What is your instinctual reaction to devastating news?  
Is your typical reaction appropriate and Biblical?  
When in pain and suffering, where is the first place you turn to?
- Describe a trial that you endured where you didn't lean on the Lord and attempted to attack it alone.
- Describe a trial that you endured where you leaned wholly on the Lord and depended on his power to endure it. Describe the difference between your experience in your own strength and your experience leaning on Christ.
- How would you/do you react when someone quotes James 1:1-4 during a time of hardship? When do you think it's appropriate to use this verse with someone in pain?

## Explanation

*Break down the verse and analyze its components:*

- Count it all joy – what does it mean to count something joy?  
To count it all joy?
- Trials of various kinds – what could these trials include?
- Steadfastness – why is steadfastness important to our faith?  
How, according to this verse can we achieve and learn it?
- What does it mean to be:
  - *Perfect*
  - *Complete*
  - *Lacking in nothing*

Are these qualities that we can achieve? Why or why not?

## Application

- What struggle are you going through right now? What sin are you fighting? Do you find it difficult to see God's plan in this? Why or why not?
- How can you help those around you in need and in pain endure their hardships? How can you be a servant to God's providence?
- At the core of our pain is the lack of control we feel. How can you give God glory during your struggles? How can your pain be part of his plan? How can you give him complete control?

## Devotions:

### Monday: Brother to Slave

*James 1:1:*

*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,*

Many theories exist on the author's identity yet most scholars agree that this James is Jesus' half-brother. This fact creates an incredible dichotomy because scripture is clear that Jesus' family often rejected him and was embarrassed of what he was doing ([Mathew 12:46-50](#), [John 7:5](#)). As the brother of Jesus, you might expect James to ride the coat tails of Jesus' recent popularity and success, possibly boasting about his close familial relationship. Yet, we see James refer to himself as a servant or slave (Greek = *doulos*) of Jesus Christ. Slavery has harsh connotations in our culture, and rightfully so. Yet, this title of undying devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ requires us to consider who should truly be in command of our lives. Today, consider how you follow Jesus. Do you see him simply as your example? Simply as your boss? Simply as your buddy? Or do you also see him as the all-powerful King, ruler of all, including the totality of your life?

### Tuesday: Absolute Obedience

*James 1:1*

*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,*

*Genesis 22:1-8*

*After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his*

donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

James is in good company as there are many Biblical figures that were granted the title of slave to Jesus Christ. Here we see the patriarch of our faith, Abraham, as one who served the Lord with absolute obedience regardless of the outlandish requests he was given. It was only when Abraham swerved away from this devotion that he got himself into the most serious and dangerous of trails. When we don't follow God's commands, we often don't have God's blessing in our path. Today, evaluate your devotion and obedience to the Lord. Do you follow Jesus always, or do you only follow him when it's convenient? Are you his devoted servant, or do you just follow the commands that are conducive to your lifestyle? How does your level of devotion hurt or help you during your trials?

### **Wednesday: Absolute Humility**

*James 1:1*

*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,*

*Philippians 3:2-11*

*Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

Paul, also one who refers to himself as a slave to Jesus, here shows us the value in our accomplishments. Of the Jewish leaders, Paul was top dog. You couldn't find a better, more devoted, and accomplished Israelite. Yet, he reminds us that these titles and trophies are trash compared to following Christ. Our trials are usually a lot more difficult than they should be because we don't humble ourselves to be subject of his eternal plan for us, wrongfully assuming that we can get through this on our own. Today, evaluate your humility. Are you more likely to rely on your own efforts, or are you willing to pause long enough and humble yourself to your creator?

### **Thursday: Absolute Loyalty**

*James 1:1*

*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,*

*John 19:25-27*

*but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.*

Our Lord Jesus, at his darkest hour, was abandoned by most of his friends and family. One who did come to the crucifixion was the apostle John. Today's passage reminds us that we are to be with God, even when our hour is the darkest, even when it seems like God can't possibly pull us out of this situation. It's easy to be convinced by the waves of hardships that we aren't where we should be. But God is loyal to us as we should be loyal to him. Today, evaluate your loyalty as God's servant: Do you come to him daily? Do you stand up for your beliefs? Do you speak his name often, and do you share with others the source of your joy?

### **Friday**

*James 1:1*

*To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:*

This section of James's greeting seems a bit out of place, doesn't it? James, just having referenced the fully resurrected Jesus, refers to the various sects of God's people who are scattered amongst the lands. Why would he need to address the fact that God's people are separated from one another? We have learned this week that sorrows are inevitable, and when they come, as Shakespeare states, "*They come not single spied, but in battalions.*" Flat out, we need help. Some burdens are too heavy to carry on our own, and one of God's graces, one of his beautiful life savers is the people he places in our lives to serve as comfort. Today, evaluate your community. Do you have solid Christian community you can call upon and count on? If not,

pray that the Lord soon provide the path to end this dispersion—that he unites his people for his glory.

## **Saturday**

*Matthew 5:11-12*

*Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were born before you.*

Our God does not call us to an easy life. Becoming and being a Christian doesn't mean coasting through life untested or undisturbed. This week, we've not only been reminded of what it means when we go through trials and tribulations, but what it means to stay obedient, humble, and loyal to the one who continually saves us. As such, we keep our eyes focused on heaven—on the day where our persecution, pain, and hardships will one day end, when we will be nearer to him than we could imagine. Today, thank God for shaping you and molding you into who you are today, and ask him to help you maintain your servanthood and to be strong in the face of inevitable trials.



# JAMES

## WEEK TWO: THE WEAPON OF WISDOM

### Introduction

*Read: James 1:5-12*

*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 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. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. 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. 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.*

We love experts. We love to watch and read the “*experts*” deliberating their verdict on a topic of our interest. Craving that type of authority, and clamoring for others to see us as wise, most people claim some sort of expertise in something. Yet, such experts have often led us astray. Either their knowledge is incorrect or insufficient, or their demeanor about the subject makes us so self-conscious to speak that we don’t dare make an observations that may very well be just as legitimate and just as insightful as the alleged specialist’s.

The pursuit of knowledge and wisdom is a good and healthy one, if put in the proper context. Very rarely, however, do facts or statistical data save us from our darkest hour. Moreover, we often lack the confidence to ask for help from those who best know how to help us. James teaches us that in order to endure our trials we must ask God to guide us. Let's take a look at how God bestows his wisdom:

**Gives.** God is the ultimate source of wisdom. The creator of the universe and the author of our faith knows more than we could possibly fathom. Yet, how often do we trust our own thought process without first carefully considering how God can lead us?

**Generously.** We don't like being a burden or a nuisance to others. Thus, we often avoid coming back to the same person for help more than once. But God has no shortage of wisdom and insight. He doesn't just give once; he, as our loving Father, is willing and wanting to help us every time we need it.

**Without reproach.** Others may see our cry for help as a weakness. Yet God already understands that we are weak without him. Our request for help and guidance isn't something he holds against us, but rather something that he greatly desires from us. In our trials and in our sin, we are bound to fail and falter. But God, as a wonderful Father, will guide us if we are willing to take the time to listen, ask, and learn.

## Discussion

- What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?
- Where do you get most of your knowledge? Where do you get most of your wisdom? Who do you trust to help you gain wisdom and knowledge? Who are you less likely to listen to?
- When are you most likely to ask for God for wisdom? What does it look like for you to receive that wisdom? How do you hear his voice and his words?

## Explanation

- How does James command us to ask God for wisdom? Why is this significant?
- How do you think verse 9-11 fits into the discussion about wisdom? Why would James link this with our need to seek God for wisdom?

- Why does James bring back the concept of trials?  
Why did he rabbit trail in a discussion about wisdom and wealth before bookending his thoughts on what we go through?
- What do you think it means to have “the crown of life”?

## Application

- With which struggles or situations do you think you need to go to God? Where do you need the most wisdom? Remember that nothing is too small or too big for which God to help you.
- What do you fill your mind and your heart with? Evaluate this week where you get your information and how that influences the way you think and act. Are you getting knowledge and wisdom from the right types of places?
- When do you feel the most doubt that God will help you?  
Why do you think that doubt creeps in?  
What else, other than God, do you turn to when you’re in need?

## Monday

*James 1:6a*

*But let him ask in faith, with no doubting,*

Unfortunately, we are so used to cause-effect communication that our prayer doesn’t always translate to talking to the creator of the universe. Sometimes we ask and we don’t get an answer in the lightning speed we require; thus, we doubt he heard us and doubt he is even there. Even the most faithful, most learned of godly men and women have their questions and their moments of doubt, but what God requires of us is to know that he can and will come to us and save us from our worries. The answers and solutions may not always come the way we want, but he always is faithful and always is true. Today, no matter how long you have prayed for something, no matter how many times you have asked God for wisdom and insight, remember that God comes. Fill your heart with faith, and know he is near.

## Tuesday

James 1:6b

*For the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.*

There is a danger when we don't follow God filled with faith. If he doesn't come on command, we are often likely to look to other sources of wisdom and solutions—whatever works best to fix our current dilemma. God reminds us that looking to other idols will result in calamity; we'll simply be tossed by whatever force seems to be the fiercest at the time. We are to be deeply rooted and built up high in God's word, his commands, and his love. What, other than God, do you rely on? What lures you away from him?

## Wednesday

James 9-11

*Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. 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.*

At first, this may seem like an odd diversion from the current discussion. Why would James link wisdom and doubt with wealth? God understands too well that what lures and tempts us most is the feeling of security that money brings. When our bank accounts are well padded, our faith is strong. When our wallets are wailing, our faith falters. To gain wisdom from God is to understand that everything we have comes from him and him alone. Today, evaluate where your heart lies? Does it lie in God or in your riches?

## Thursday

Mark 9: 14-29

*And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able." And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me." And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"*

We all, like the father in this story, believe but need help with our unbelief. If we're not careful, the ways of the world and the ways of the flesh can easily entrap us to think of and search for that which is not eternal and not of God's kingdom. Today, pray that the Lord helps your unbelief and that he gives you the hope and the faith necessary to live out a life glorifying to him.

## **Friday**

*Genesis 16:1-4*

*Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress*

This is not a passage you would typically expect to be a part of a devotional; this is one of the greatest Bible figures' greatest blunders. But scripture can often teach us the path to go down when we see the alternative path set before us. Abraham, a member of the Hall of Faith (Hebrews 11) becomes impatient with God's promise to bear him a son and decides it's a great idea to take matters into his own hands. Unfortunately, this plan ended in deep bitterness and divide. When do you become impatient with God? When do you try to fix what God has already fixed? Today, pray that you let go of your need for instant closure and your need for instant solutions, and allow God to work with you and through you in his own time.

## **Saturday**

*Psalm 73*

*Truly God is good to Israel,  
to those who are pure in heart.  
But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,  
my steps had nearly slipped.  
For I was envious of the arrogant  
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

*For they have no pangs until death;  
their bodies are fat and sleek.  
They are not in trouble as others are;  
they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.*

*Therefore pride is their necklace;  
violence covers them as a garment.  
Their eyes swell out through fatness;  
their hearts overflow with follies.  
They scoff and speak with malice;  
loftily they threaten oppression.  
They set their mouths against the heavens,  
and their tongue struts through the earth.  
Therefore his people turn back to them,  
and find no fault in them.  
And they say, "How can God know?  
Is there knowledge in the Most High?"*

*Behold, these are the wicked;  
always at ease, they increase in riches.  
All in vain have I kept my heart clean  
and washed my hands in innocence.  
For all the day long I have been stricken  
and rebuked every morning.  
If I had said, "I will speak thus,"  
I would have betrayed the generation of your children.  
But when I thought how to understand this,  
it seemed to me a wearisome task,  
until I went into the sanctuary of God;  
then I discerned their end.  
Truly you set them in slippery places;  
you make them fall to ruin.  
How they are destroyed in a moment,  
swept away utterly by terrors!  
Like a dream when one awakes,  
O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.  
When my soul was embittered,  
when I was pricked in heart,  
I was brutish and ignorant;  
I was like a beast toward you.  
Nevertheless, I am continually with you;  
you hold my right hand.  
You guide me with your counsel,  
and afterward you will receive me to glory.  
Whom have I in heaven but you?  
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.  
My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.  
For behold, those who are far from you shall perish;  
you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.*

*But for me it is good to be near God;  
I have made the Lord God my refuge,  
that I may tell of all your works.*

If ever you are in a time of deep despair, confusion, joy, or praise, look no further than the Psalms. These lyrical poems and songs cut deep into raw emotions that we've all felt at one time or another. Often when we're at our lowest, we wonder if we're the only ones that feel this way. This Psalm in particular addresses a critical question—why do the people who don't put their faith in God and who don't believe in God prosper? Why are they so confident in their facts and their way of life, and why is it working so well for them? Read this psalm out loud, especially if you're struggling with unbelief. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide your words and your thoughts and to comfort you, knowing that the creator of heaven and earth is not far from your heart or your mind.

## WEEK 3: SIN WITHOUT EXCUSE

### Introduction

Read: James 1:13-18

*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. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 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. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

If watching television crime dramas is one of your habits, then you have seen it so much you almost expect it: a defendant using his or her circumstances to justify their actions. While there may certainly be legal grounds for this type of defense, today's passage reminds us that no matter what trials God is allowing us to go through, no matter what the situation maybe, sin is never justified.

Unfortunately, too many of us excuse our sinful behavior and even worse—continue in our sinful behavior—because we feel that it's God who has put this option in our lives or we feel that our sin is God's reprieve for our current storm. Too many of us ignore the very real, very difficult, very deadly, spiritual battle that we are engaged in every single day.

God may test us, but he never tempts us. It's against his nature to allow, encourage, or propose sin. These temptations and pitfalls come straight from the enemy, his effects and principalities, and it's usually during our darkest hours, when we are the most vulnerable, that the fiercest attacks come.

Sounds ominous doesn't it? Especially for those of us who recoil at confrontation, or are simply opposed to battle, hearing and understanding that we are in a daily war is not something that sits well with us. But as Paul reminds us in Philippians 4, we must equip ourselves daily with what God brings to combat the attacks that come from Satan:

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*

## Discussion:

- What are some sins you see easily justified?
  - How are they justified?
  - Do you think there is a valid argument in these reasons?
  - Why or why not?
- What is the difference between a trial and a temptation? Does God allow both to occur? Why or why not?
- Name temptations that we encounter both individually and corporately.
- Name gifts that we are given both individually and corporately.

## Explanation

- What, according to this passage, is the real root of temptations?
- Outline the path of sin within the birth metaphor. How do you see this played out in your own life?
- Why would James admonish his readers not to be deceived? What is he addressing?
- Why is it important that this scripture remind us that God has no variation?
- What does it mean to be a *“firstfruit of his creatures”*? What implications does that have for us?

## Application

- We all have our favorite bait. There is a particular sinful temptation that seems to get us every time. Identify and reflect on what most lures you into temptation.
- How do you fight temptation? Do you white-knuckle it? Do you pray? Do you give in? Reflect on when you have approached temptation in each of those three ways. What prompted you to approach the situation that way? What was the outcome?

- Have you ever blamed God for your sin? Have you ever justified your sin to God based off of your circumstances? Reevaluate the scenarios in which you have done so—why does this reasoning fall short of who God is? How can you avoid this in the future?
- We all fight sin on a daily basis. Some battles are won easier than others. Spend some time in prayer this week to have the Lord protect you against temptation and equip you against the attacks you will face.

## **Monday**

*James 1:13*

*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*

We deal in dualities. Understanding that there can be someone totally holy, totally good, is often beyond our comprehension. Our family, our co-workers, our closest friends, no matter how godly and rooted in God’s word and love eventually let us down. Yet, God exists in purity, completely separated from sin. Today, spend some time reflecting on God’s holiness. If he is so far removed from sin, what implications does that have? What does that mean for your relationship with him? What does it mean for him to love you?

Remember the price that God had to pay on the cross in order to reconcile us to him and praise him that he is a God of redemption.

## **Tuesday**

*James 1:14*

*But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.*

This fishing metaphor aptly describes our submission to sin. We see the bait, and although we know that the result will not be something sustaining, we give into the temptation. There are two key elements to this passage. First, is that temptation lures and entices us. Sin is not something passive, something that just accidentally happens—it’s a powerful force. Second, it’s our desires that often lead to our downfall. What do we worship? What pleasures or profits do we put above God? What are those desires leading us to? Today, pray that the Lord makes himself the only object of your desire and that the Holy Spirit opens up your mind and heart to see the bait that so often leads us to death.

## **Wednesday**

*James 1:15*

*Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

Temptation itself is not sinful. Even Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. The lure to break God's commands is a choice and something that we do intentionally, not accidentally. Today's passage reminds us that our desires are what lead us to our ungodly decisions...and those decisions usually breed more ungodly decisions. Soon enough we have drifted, slowly but steadily, away from God. Have you encountered these seasons? Seasons in your life where one little sin gave way to another and then to another and suddenly you were in murky waters, confused as to where you were and where God was. Today, pray that the Lord gives you protection against all sin and that he helps you guard your desires to maintain a consistent love and passion for him alone.

## **Thursday**

*James 1:16*

*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.*

Miracles get a lot of attention. We study Jesus' miraculous healings, demon casting, and food multiplication with great detail and awe. However, we often forget all the little miracles, the little protections that we don't always notice or give thanks for. How many times have you avoided an accident? Or a situation went your way? Or you had an incredible feast put before you? It's important to recognize the enemy's attacks, but it's equally important to recognize God's provision in our daily lives. Today—spend some time in rejoicing and praise. Keep close watch on the little things in our day that probably require great effort, the little blessings that we sometimes take for granted. Identify the good gifts that your Heavenly Father freely gives to you.

## **Friday**

*James 1:17*

*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.*

Our culture likes to keep things exciting. We're people who are easily bored. Entertainment has developed into an unbelievable industry of special tricks and effects to keep us in (or on the edge of) our seats. Yet, if we're honest, there's a comfort in consistency simply because of its rarity. We sometimes yearn for the routine, for the break in variables, for the

predictable. While there is nothing routine or predictable about God, he is certainly consistent. God is, always has been, and always will be the same. This is an unbelievably comforting fact—he gives us grace, wisdom, love, protection, and provision always. Today, thank God for his consistency and relish in the fact that he will always be the perfect Father to provide.

## **Saturday**

*James 1:18*

*Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

The concept of firstfruits is one that is often lost on our culture. Firstfruits were the best, the finest, the top of the flock or harvest. We, as Christians, are called to give our firstfruits back to God in our tithes and offerings as a gesture of faith—that our best comes only from God and thus we give it back to God knowing that he will continue to provide the best. Understanding that life itself is a gift and that he treasures us, despite our flawed, sinful nature, should remind us that we obey him, that we avoid temptation, that we credit him with the glory of all that is good, not because we have to, but because we want to. Today, spend some time in humbled prayer: God loves you, cares for you, and wants the best for you. Praise him for creating a venue in Jesus' sacrifice for us, as his firstfruits, to connect back with him.

### Introduction

*Read James 1:19-27*

*Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*

*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 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. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 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.*

*If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*

The Christian conversion has often been describes as a race. Many are called to the race, registration takes place, the gun sounds, yet suddenly, many cross the starting line and claim victory as “racers” even though they only took a few steps. What do you think? Do you think these “racers” are Christians?

If we fully understand the power, majesty, sacrifice, and severity of the Gospel then there should be a progressive, significant change within us. We can't just claim to be Christian but not follow God. We can't just claim to be Christian but look no different than those that don't know the Gospel.

Today's passage also questions whether or not these “racers” are Christians and calls us to repent of our empty faith. This, along with the rest of the book will remind us that to be a Christian is show through our thoughts, words, and actions that we have been forgiven and redeemed by unbelievable grace and must practice what we preach, and act on what we learn.

## Discussion

- What does it mean to be a Christian? Do you think it is possible for there to be non-Christians that attend church? Why or why not?
- How have you “forgotten” what it means to be a Christian? Has there been a time in your life where you have walked away from what God calls you to be?
- Brainstorm and list the qualities of Christian action. What are the opposites of those actions?

## Explanation

- James calls us to specific behaviors and calls us away from specific behaviors. Why is this bright line necessary to the Christian faith?
- What do you think it means to “*look into the perfect law*”? As Christians, what laws do we follow?
- What do you think it means to have a religion that is “*pure and undefiled*” before God? What does that look like?

## Application

- There are sins of commission (doing something you shouldn’t) and omission (not doing that which you should do). Sins of commission are usually very obvious and clear, but sins of omission are not. Evaluate your sins of omission—are there elements to the Christian faith that God has called you to that you are ignoring?
- How are you a hearer of the word? How do you study? How do you listen to sermons? How do you apply what you have learned? Evaluate your study habits and how you can better absorb God’s word and commands.
- Bless someone this week. Show someone the love of Christ by going out of your way to help him or her, lift him or her up, or simply let him or her know you are praying.

## **Monday**

*James 1:19*

*Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;*

Our culture moves at a pace too fast for prayer. Deadlines, results, and pride have trained us that when in conflict respond with your first instinct. Too often we only hear a portion of what another person says and then jump for the attack. Today, make a conscious effort to practice the discipline of listening. Be slow to speak—process the information, pray about what you have heard, and respond in a way that is not necessarily conducive to your needs, but glorifying to your God.

## **Tuesday**

*James 1:20*

*For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*

Anger itself isn't a sin. Jesus was so angry at the commercialism of the God's Temple that he took the time to make whips and properly admonish those who were disrespecting God's house. Righteous anger against atrocities, crimes, and persecution should lead us to appropriate action. Yet, when we separate God from our emotions we're trying to control that which we can't. Today, identify the time and reasons when your anger flares up the most; why do you get angry in those situations? How can you give the control over to God?

## **Wednesday**

*James 1:21*

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

Humility is at the core of Christianity. Our sinful nature rebels against rules, regulations, and commands. We want to do what we want to do, and we don't want anyone interfering with our wants and needs. However, James calls us to submit to the authority of scripture, which calls us to much greater desires. Today, evaluate what it means to have filthiness and rampant wickedness in your life—do you let the world seep in you and out of you? Pray that the Lord root in your heart his word and his commands.

## **Thursday**

*James 1:22–25*

*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.*

We are saved by grace—a free gift of forgiveness—not because of anything we have done or will do, but because God in his infinite love bestowed it upon us. However, that doesn't exclude us from action. Today, look in the mirror (not literally, unless you want to). Do you see a Christian? Do you see one who demonstrates the love, grace, forgiveness, and action that Jesus gave?

## **Friday**

*James 1:26*

*If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.*

We don't often consider our speech as we should. What we say and how we say it can significantly impact someone's moment, day, or life—positively and negatively. James here foreshadows his later warnings to keep our speech aligned with our faith. Today, consider when you have let your speech impede your demonstration of the Gospel. How do you monitor what you say? How does it line up with what you do? Ask God to give you the wisdom and the words to act according to his will.

## **Saturday**

*James 1:27*

*Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*

James' commands to have a pure and undefiled religion (faith) before God pose two important questions. Visit orphans and widows in their affliction. How do you reach out to those in need? Do you give offerings above and beyond your weekly tithes? *Keep oneself unstained from the world.* What is the difference between being in this world but not being of this world? What do you let influence you more—the world or the word? End this week, once again, evaluating how you act and respond to the Gospel—in your thoughts, words, and actions.

### Introduction

*Read: James 2:1-13*

*My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. 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, 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," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 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? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?*

*If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. 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. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

It's inherently human to judge—our natural reaction when we see someone dressed a certain way or behaving a certain way is to presuppose particular attributes to that person. Yet, the Gospel demands much more of us. Understanding that God's love and forgiveness extends to anyone who will put their faith in him, we see in him the true example of what it means to be impartial to others.

We can easily give favoritism to those whom we think can help us advance our lives, and we can easily shun those who give us no particular advantage towards our goals. We are drawn to those with influence, and repelled by those without it. This week's scripture breaks down the correlation between the Gospel and partiality, and highlights how we can very easily ignore the call that God has put in our hearts—that we are to interact with all of God's people with the same love and grace as he sees us.

## Discussion

- What are some situations where you have shown partiality to others? Why did your actions gravitate to help those who could help you?
- Are there situations where showing partiality or prejudging others is appropriate? Explain your answer.
- Why do you think this is a common mistake, even amongst Christians? What do you think prevents us from treating others as ourselves?

## Explanation

- Why is it wrong to make “distinctions among yourselves” and why does that lead to “becom[ing] judges with evil thoughts”? Why is it that when we are making distinctions our thoughts are evil?
- James alludes to the fact that the Bible gives great examples of those who are poor rising to places of authority. Identify some of those stories.
- Why do you think God chooses the poor and lowly to reward?
- James’ discussion of partiality quickly turns to a discussion about following the totality of the law. What do these two concepts have to do with one another?
- What is James’ stern warning about those who show no mercy? How does this line up with what we know about the Gospel?

## Application

- This week, evaluate your prejudices. What experiences have led you to give partiality to certain people and not to others?
- How do you uphold God’s law? What elements of God’s commands do you sometimes intentionally or unintentionally ignore?

## **Monday**

*James 2:1*

*My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.*

Today's passage gives us an incredible insight into the leadership and servanthood exemplified by Christ. Jesus, the Lord of glory, who was the creator and sustainer of all, who will come to judge the living and the dead, humbled himself to become a human and to die in the most painful and humiliating way that humanity has conceived. While he, as fully God, had the right and the power to show partiality and to demand partiality of others, he became a servant to those he loved, sacrificing his own life so that we may be reconciled to him. Today, thank God for his sacrifice and ask that he gives you the mind and heart of Jesus to love others in the same sacrificial fashion.

## **Tuesday**

*James 2:8*

*If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.*

We've all heard the golden rule, the great command: Love others as yourself. Rarely, however, do we truly evaluate the great implications of what that means. Our narcissistic demeanor has taught us that we look out for #1 first and foremost, and everyone else can come next. Today, evaluate how you love yourself—how do you care for yourself, prepare for your future, and even treat yourself? What would it look like for you to put that much attention into others? Pray that the Lord give you the mind and heart to be able to bless others the way that you care for yourself.

## **Wednesday**

*James 2:9*

*But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*

Why is partiality a sin? Our culture is not exclusive in our habitual partiality of those who have influence. Yet, if it is a sin, why is it still so wildly practiced? Why are we so prone to try and advance our careers, our relationships, and our power instead of looking the core of the Gospel? Today, evaluate when you have shunned those around you simply because they couldn't add anything to your well-being. Evaluate why you fall into this sin and pray that the Lord helps you overcome this mentality and sin.

## **Thursday**

*James 2:10*

*For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.*

We like to play the variable scales game. If we do very well in our holy life in one area, we believe we're allotted a certain amount of leeway in sinful behavior in another area. As long as we are not committing any of the "great" sins, we should be in great standing with God. However, this is an incredibly dangerous and incorrect view of God's love and of the Gospel. God calls us to live perfectly holy, abiding by the totality of his commands. Knowing full well that we would always fall short, God sacrificed himself on the cross in order to be fully reconciled. Today's scripture reminds us that we can't play the scales game and that we're accountable for all of God's laws and commandments. Thank the Lord that he gave us the gift of grace and ask him to help you understand and follow the commands with which you struggle most.

## **Friday**

*James 2:11-12*

*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.*

Our Christianity sometimes becomes lackadaisical. Comfortable with our old routine, we become complacent or, even worse, apathetic to the dangerous battles that we and others around us face. As such, we're to behave as those "*who are to be judged under the law of liberty.*" While language like this usually repels (we don't like to be judged), we need to be firmly reminded that we will be held accountable for all of our actions. Today, evaluate your passion for God and his laws. Do you act like one who has been forgiven? Thank the Lord today for his incredible grace.

## **Saturday**

*James 2:13*

*For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

This week we've been reminded of why we mustn't show partiality: the heart of the Gospel calls us to recall those things for which we've been forgiven and extend the same grace and mercy unto others. James sternly warns us again that not following and not acting upon that which we believe is incredibly dangerous and detrimental to our faith and our eternal life. Once again, reflect upon how you've been forgiven and think of those to whom you haven't shown the grace and mercy that you've been

called to give. Ask that the Lord continually brings you to the Gospel and allows you to lean on his love.

### Introduction

Read James 2:14–26

*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 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 is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead.*

*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. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith completed by his works; and Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 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? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.*

Christianity is offensive to many. Google anti-religious movements, and more specifically anti-Christian movements, and you’ll find more articles, books, and blogs than you care to examine. One such uplifting anti-Christian message read “*You know it is just a myth, so live your life and be happy.*” Opponents of the Christian faith argue that the faith binds you, and prevents you from “being really happy” and from doing what it is that you actually want to do.

To a certain extent, those critics are correct. Once you profess a faith in Jesus you are called to do specific actions and to stop doing others. The Christian faith is not one to be lived passively, apathetically, or second-rate. Passages like this one from James make Christians and non-Christians alike uncomfortable. In order to truly be a Christian, you must act on what you believe. Yet, our idols of pride and comfort oppose this decree. Why can’t we make church our hobby? Why can’t we study theology without application? Why can’t we make Christianity fit into our lives?

This week will be very convicting for many. Our gut reaction often is to convince ourselves that we’re doing enough—that God doesn’t care about our actions and that we don’t need to prove ourselves to God, only rely on

him in faith. While that's true, the totality of scripture calls us to something much more uncomfortable, and sometimes offensive: how do you profess your faith in Christ? What does the Gospel move you to do? How do you care for those around you? How do you help fulfill the Great Commission to spread the Gospel?

## Discussion

- How do we reconcile James 2:14-26 and passages in Paul's epistles that argue that we are only saved and justified by faith?
- Examine the following passages.
  - *Matthew 3:8, Luke 3:8*
  - *Matthew 5:16*
  - *Matthew 7:15-21*
  - *Romans 2:6*
  - *Romans 14:12*
  - *1 Corinthians 3:8*
  - *2 Corinthians 5:10*
  - *Colossians 3:9*

What do these passages have to say about faith and works?

- What do you feel called to do in response to the Gospel? What are some projects, service areas, giving that you have a burdened for but have not yet put into action? What do you think is stopping you?

## Explanation

- Christianity calls us to help those less fortunate than others. Very rarely will you find opposition in a church service projects. Unfortunately, very rarely will you also find volunteers to help make those service projects a reality. Do you see people (including yourself) exemplify James' hypothetical example—that of “blessing” the poor, but not really providing for their needs?
- James establishes a counter argument to his decree—some may argue that they work out their faith in their theological study, in learning the Greek, and in attending every possible Bible study they can find. Why is this not a true outpouring of Christian “works” in faith?

- Re-read the account of Abraham and Isaac and of Rahab. Why do you think James uses these two as examples of those who put their faith into action? What are the differences in the two?

## Application

- Make a list of service projects, blessings, tithes and offerings that you may have felt called to give but have not put into action. Establish a plan where you can give of your time, money, and talents in order to help bless others.
- Read the Gospel of Mark this week and be reminded of the power of the Gospel—you have been saved, not of your own doing, but because of God’s love and power. How should you respond to this? What is the appropriate action?

## Monday

*Matthew 3:8-9*

*Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume 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.*

John the Baptizer was not one to mince his words. Addressing the Pharisees, he flat out tells them that they can’t rely on their Jewish heritage in order to be close to God. Too often, we make the same mistake in judgment—we rely on our “Christian” label as an insurance policy instead of recognizing it as an undeserved gift. John rails on the Pharisees for studying the scriptures but not allowing God’s word to spill out into their active faith. What do you rely on more than God’s call on your life? What Christian idols do you use to justify your continued membership in God’s family? Evaluate your crutches and determine whether or not you are taking true, appropriate actions to respond to the Gospel.

## Tuesday

*Matthew 7:15-21*

*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.*

James often gets a bad rap for being the guy that calls us to works. However, no one was more direct than Jesus himself. Today's passage is just one example of Jesus teaching us that without fruit, without proper results of our faith, our faith is not only dead, but could be dangerous to others. What does it mean to have good Christian fruit? What fruit are you producing? How are you striving to build up the kingdom of God? Pray that the Lord reveals your role in the kingdom and that he demonstrates to you how to best harvest for his glory.

## Wednesday

*Romans 2:6-8*

*He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.*

Many Christians have erroneously pitted James and Paul as bitter rivals—one stressing faith, one stressing works. However, not only do both key in on various requirements for the faith, but both compliment each other often. Here, we see Paul reminding us that it's not enough for us to simply profess our faith—that we will be judged by the works of our faith. He also elaborates that there are some who profess the faith, but continue to follow that of worldly idols. Today, evaluate how well you live by patience, well-doing, and how you seek his glory and honor—how are you living out your Christian faith?

## Thursday

*1 Corinthians 3:8-9*

*He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.*

Here we return to agricultural metaphor. Although most of us are quite unfamiliar with farming, we do know and understand that isn't an overnight occurrence—reaping a harvest takes a lot of time and patience. Many of us get discouraged when we share the Gospel, build a friendship, or do a service project only to see our efforts rejected again and again. However, we must have faith that God is in control of our works. We are God's fellow workers in this mission, and he will always take a great and powerful lead. Just because we don't see fruit and results right away doesn't mean that we shouldn't be always planting. Today, share with God your frustrations in evangelism and mission, and ask him to help you endure through these obstacles and help you to know that your work is important to bring him glory.

## **Friday**

*2 Corinthians 5:10*

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*

Yes, it's true that Jesus' death on the cross did cover all of our sins—past, present, and future. And we can't fool ourselves into thinking that we won't fall and falter again and again in the future. Yet, one day we will have to appear before Christ and talk to him directly about how we used the life we were given. Were we selfish? Lazy? Apathetic? How will you respond when you see him face to face? Today, pray to him to help you evaluate your faith and your works—how can you better have faith in him and how can you pour out the love and grace to others that you have been given by Christ? Pray that you live a life wholly glorifying to him so that when you do see him face to face, you can give a fruitful account on what you have been given.

## **Saturday**

*Colossians 3:9*

*Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in the knowledge after the image of its creator.*

As we studied faith and works this week, perhaps you felt convicted, even guilty. It's a delicate line we must toe. We must be able to know and understand the severity and the necessity of living out our faith in works while not being guilted or shamed into what we know we must do. True works come out of a genuinely grateful heart for the work Jesus has done in our lives, not as a result of guilt. What we must not forget is that we will sometimes fall short, fail, and even sin in our efforts to work out our faith. However, this progressive sanctification, this continual shaping and molding is one that God rejoices in and one in which God is with us wholly. Today, praise him that he is helping you moment to moment to become the missionary, the evangelist, the Christian that he wants you to become.

### Introduction

*Read: James 3:1-12*

*Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. 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. If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 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. 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! 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, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it 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. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.*

We live in a culture that not only values but also requires quick wit. Pundits on the news blast their opinions, squelching any chance their opponents could have a shred of truth, and we follow suit. We wouldn't dare let anyone get a verbal one up on us, and we wouldn't dare allow for any sort of debate loss.

This habitual wordplay creates in us an un-Christian carelessness with our words. We wrongfully assume that what we say has little or no negative impact and that it's simply part of the spoken sparring of our everyday life. Yet, James reminds us that our thoughtless banter can be as dangerous as setting fire to a flammable forest or pouring deadly poison in someone's glass.

Our words are difficult to control. As Christians, our speech should always be seasoned with love and grace, always be positive, encouraging, and glorifying to the one who brings us the wisdom to call people to love and repentance. This week, we must evaluate how we treat each other with our words and how God calls us to tame our tongues.

## Discussion

- How often is sarcasm and playful mocking a part of your friendly conversations? Do you think there is any danger in that sort of banter?
- Recall and discuss a time when you have been hurt by someone else's words either intentionally or unintentionally. Why were those words so powerful? Why did they have such a profound effect on you?
- Do you think you need to control your tongue more? How do you think you and your community can hold each other accountable for the way that you speak to one another and the way you speak to those you are trying to reach?

## Explanation

- This section begins with James' warning that not many people should be teachers. Although a teacher (preacher) may get the most attention in a ministry setting, they will be judged more strictly by what they say and how they say it. Is this a just judgment? Why or why not?
- James uses metaphors of bits or rudders. Both guide very large vessels, but both are very small in comparison. How does your small bit or rudder guide you?
- James argues that no human being can tame the tongue. Why do you think he makes such a statement? Is there hope for us to try? Why or why not?
- James returns to the impossible duality of harvesting both good and evil and points out the hypocrisy amongst us when we curse with the same tongue with which we try to bless. What are you more likely to do—curse or bless? How can you rid yourself of hurtful, evil speech?

## Application

- Spend some time this week evaluating your speech.
  - *First, simply observe your natural instincts for what you say and how you say it. What are your tendencies and your habits? Where did you formulate those?*
  - *Next, spend a day focusing on listening to others instead of having your own opinion, thoughts, or banter be heard. How do those around you speak? How do you usually respond?*
  - *Finally, make a conscious effort to only bless with your speech and for it to be seasoned with the love and grace of the Gospel.*

### Monday

*Proverbs 15:1*

*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

Speaking like a Christian doesn't mean that you don't sometimes have to say no, criticize, or downright rebuke. Yet, Proverbs reminds us that there is a way to our reprimand that must be consistent with the Gospel and must, above all, bring forth solutions and reconciliations. Today, think about a time you've had to be firm and direct with someone—did you give them a soft answer or did you combat them with harsh words? Ask the Lord to guide you in those difficult conversations.

### Tuesday

*Proverbs 15:2*

*The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly.*

The image of a fool's mouth pouring out folly is a significant one. Usually foolish talk doesn't come in drips, it comes in gallons. We all know (and have been) that person who seems to always have a joke, always have a piece of advice, or always have a comment for everything that is discussed. Today, evaluate how you respond in discussions—are you more likely to commend knowledge or to pour out folly. Today, ask the Holy Spirit for a gentle and calm spirit during discussions and that you may be able to see and hear yourself for who you really are.

## Wednesday

*Proverbs 15:4*

*A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.*

There are people in our life that are encouraging without words. They are those people who, walking away from a conversation with them, you feel rejuvenated and loved. These are people filled with the Holy Spirit, listening to his advice and his careful counseling of words. These are people with gentle speech who grant us such wonderful encouragement. Today, thank the Lord for someone in your life who helps you to feel this way, and ask God that you may be such a blessing to someone else.

## Thursday

*Proverbs 16:27*

*A worthless man plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire.*

Later in James we will learn and discuss what it means to plan without God's wisdom or approval. Here we see a glimpse of the wicked and worthless man whose plans are always scheming against that which the Gospel opposes—primarily self-serving, selfish gains. Their speech is like scorching fire because their primary focus relies on getting everyone else out of their way. How are you planning and preparing? Are you trying to create paths without God's hand? How do you treat others while you are trying to achieve your goals? Today, pray that the Holy Spirit guides you in your plans and convict you if you have treated others unkindly in your pursuit of happiness.

## Friday

*Psalms 73:4-9*

*For they have no pangs until death;  
their bodies are fat and sleek.  
They are not in trouble as others are;  
they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.  
Therefore pride is their necklace;  
violence covers them as a garment.  
Their eyes swell out through fatness;  
their hearts overflow with follies.  
They scoff and speak with malice;  
loftily they threaten oppression.  
They set their mouths against the heavens,  
and their tongue struts through the earth.*

Sometimes we encounter human bulldozers. These people are blessed with entrepreneurship, administration, business, and organization. They sill stop at nothing to achieve whatever it is they have their heart set on

achieving. While you admire (perhaps even envy) their success, these are not people you want to be around very often as their speech is filled with malice, selfishness, or feigned interest in whatever may get them ahead. Relying on their own talents, they forget the God who gave them the talents to be successful, they forget the grace they have been given. Today, evaluate whether or not you are a human bulldozer—do you plow people down with your speech? Or do you have the Holy Spirit guide your every word?

## **Saturday**

*Proverbs 25:12*

*Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold  
is a wise reprovee to a listening ear.*

Most people wrongfully assume that to be a good counselor or friend, you need to have the right answers. Many shy away from authentic community simply because they are intimidated by having others rely on their wisdom or knowledge. However, a good counselor and a good friend is mostly a good listener. This week we have talked a lot about our speech, but a critical part of the communication process is being able to listen. Today, spend some time listening: listen to your friends, your family, and above all listen to God. Take a break from speaking and having to watch what you say and instead take in what others say.

### Introduction

*Read: James 3:13–18*

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

Earlier in this series we discussed our need for wisdom, our need to properly, prayerfully consider our path and speak to our Lord to guide us. However, looking for wisdom isn't always as easy as it sounds. Sometimes right decisions can be made for the wrong reasons.

James turns to one of his core arguments: whatever you reap, that is what you will sow. Putting ourselves in dangerous, sinful situations will only result in incorrect, ungodly wisdom, no matter how logical it may be. This week we'll delve into the various qualities of wisdom that come from God, the qualities that come from our own flawed understanding, and even worse, the qualities that come from the enemy. As we walk through these qualities, evaluate your decision making process—how do you make decisions? What are your emotional levels like when you finally execute on an important decision? How are those decisions reflecting your faith? How are they glorifying God? These are questions we must ask ourselves to discern who lights our path.

### Discussion:

- How do you make life-changing decisions? Who do you talk to get advice? How do you use scripture to evaluate your options and to guide your choices?
- When have you made a decision away from God and godly wisdom? What was the outcome? How did the situation turn out?
- When have you made a decision that you felt was truly led by God? What was the process in making that decision? How did that situation turn out?

## Explanation

- Evaluate the qualities of ungodly wisdom that James lists. How easy or difficult is it to have these qualities. How are these qualities built up or grown in you?
- Evaluate the qualities of godly wisdom that James lists. How easy or difficult is it to have these qualities. How are these qualities built up or grown in you?

## Application

- Consider the list of qualities you just outlined and how easily you let those seep into your decision making process.
- What can you do to eliminate the qualities that lead to *“disorder and every vile practice”*?
- What can you do to nurture those qualities that lead to godly wisdom?

## Monday

*James 3:13*

*Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.*

Sometimes those blessed with incredible wisdom or knowledge can often flaunt that gift inappropriately. We all know the person (or may be the person) who seems to have an answer or a piece of advice for everything. Getting wisdom from God is a powerful, important tool in our lives, but it's critical that we maintain the first step in keeping that wisdom and keeping our humility about us. Knowing that any bit of true wisdom comes from him keeps us from becoming prideful and eventually subtracting him from our decision making process. Today, pray that the Lord continues to give you wisdom and that he keeps you humble in that process.

## Tuesday

*James 3:14*

*But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.*

If we're not humble, we're likely to fall into the trap of asking for wisdom simply for our own selfish gain, which is simply counterproductive to God's purpose in our lives. We're trained to be reactors. If something goes wrong in our life, our first step is to plot our response and even revenge.

Today, evaluate your recent actions and decisions—were they made as a result of bitterness, jealousy, or selfish ambition? Today, ask the Holy Spirit to convict you if this has been the case and to help you make better decisions that are led by him alone.

### **Wednesday**

*James 3:15*

*This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.*

Many Christians are in denial when it comes to spiritual attack. Unwilling to delve into the complexities of our sinful world and the spiritual world, most of us ignore the fact that we're fighting a daily battle against sin and against Satan, his works and effects. James reminds us that bitterness, jealousy, and selfish ambition is one way that the enemy gets a foothold on us and gets us thinking like him, which leads us away from God. Today, pray for spiritual protection against the enemy and against temptation. Ask the Lord to show you what true wisdom is.

### **Thursday**

*James 3:16*

*For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.*

The results of becoming trapped by Satan's lies are clearly stated here: disorder and every vile practice. If we're honest with ourselves, we can see this in the decisions we have made away from God. When our choices are motivated by wisdom that is not from God, we're simply putting ourselves in danger and turmoil. Today, repent of any decisions you may have made as a result of poor choices. Ask the Lord to redeem your situations and that he guides you back to godly wisdom.

### **Friday**

*James 3:17*

*But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.*

This verse, thick with traits, outlines what true, godly wisdom looks like. Walk through the eight attributes of godly wisdom and evaluate how you cultivate these virtues in your life. When are you most likely to have these? When are you least likely to have these? Ask the Lord to sow these qualities in your heart and to consistently hear his voice guiding you.

## **Saturday**

*James 3:18*

*And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

Godly wisdom isn't just for us. James, returning to the harvest and the fruit we produce, reminds us that our decisions aren't our own. They are to the glory of God. If we're following God rightly and following him with all of our heart and our mind, then we're building up the Kingdom in many ways. Today, pray that God gives you wisdom to produce such a harvest of righteousness and that he allows you to be a servant to his will.

## WEEK NINE: WARNING AGAINST WORLDLINESS

### Introduction

Read: James 4:1-2

*What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 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. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! 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. 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"? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

*Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. 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. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?*

We all have our lottery dream—that elaborate fantasy of what we'd buy if we just had millions of dollars. Our yearning to be generous comes only after we retire early, fix up our house (or get a new one), fix up our car (or get a new one), and purchase tickets to travel the world. We all war against the temptations of worldly idols, the need for the comfort and pleasures that are offered everywhere we turn.

As Christians, we toe a tight line between being in this world but not of it. Understanding that a Christian's ultimate loyalty is to God, we're called to store up our treasures in heaven where our true citizenship lies. Sometimes even the most God-adjacent things (church, missions, community groups) can become worldly idols that take our eyes off of the true center of our faith. This week will challenge us to differentiate between our needs and our desires, between what God wants for us and what we want for us. God calls us to a greater yearning, a greater calling, one that is much more important and more lasting than the temptations we face.

## Discussion:

- Describe your lottery fantasy. Be honest.  
Why do you think this would greatly improve your life?
- What worldly possessions, events, or experiences are you most drawn to? Are these inherently wrong or sinful?  
Why or why not?
- How do you think Christians should interact with culture?  
Are there specific bright lines we can't cross?  
If so, what are they?

## Explanation

- What do you think James means when he says,  
*"passions are at war within you"*?  
What contradicting passions do you think you face?
- What does it mean to have friendship with the world?  
Why is having that friendship with the world so dangerous to our relationship with God?
- Why do you think James continues to remind us to humble ourselves to God? Why is it important in this context?
- Why does James follow a section about worldliness with an explanation about conflicts between believers?  
What is the link there?

## Application

- Evaluate your *"friendship with the world"*.  
Where do you see yourself being more materialistic?
- Where do you see your possessions getting in the way of your relationship with God?
- Practice the discipline of simplicity this week: clean out your living space and throw out what is no longer of use, give away that which you do not need, and simplify what is complicating your life.

## **Monday**

*James 4:1*

*What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?*

We know what's best for us. Most of us, if we had to take a Christian ethics exam, would pass easily. Yet, when faced with daily temptations and passions, we often fail and fall because we are conflicted between what we should do and what we want to do. Today, ask the Holy Spirit to bring you wisdom in your choices and to really show you what is of this world and what is of his will.

## **Tuesday**

*James 4:2-3*

*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. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*

Our worldly choices have extreme consequences. Sure, most of us aren't guilty of what we consider extreme sins like murder, but we certainly do create fights and quarrels because our worldly passions and desires aren't adequately satisfied. We become arrogant in our thinking and unwilling to ask God for his help, or we ask God's help in areas that aren't wise and according to his will. Today, pray that the Holy Spirit convicts you of the sins you've committed against others based off of your worldly passions. Ask him to help you reconcile with those whom you've harmed and ask that he guides your prayers and requests to his will.

## **Wednesday**

*James 4:4*

*You adulterous people! 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.*

Today's blunt passage is often quite intimidating. We are all guilty of having friendship with the world, putting our desires and our wants above that which God commands us to do. Satan would love nothing more than for us to put our worldly idols above God, who's the only one who can truly satisfy. Today, repent of any worldliness you may have and pray that you only look to him for your wants and needs.

## **Thursday**

*James 4:5-6*

*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”? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*

God knows what is best for us. That statement may seem a bit overly simplistic, but it's often the overly simplistic points of theology that we ignore the most. We're so demanding and so controlling that it's almost automatic for us to try to take the reigns away from God. Today, humble yourself before him. Ask him to convict you of trying to control too much and ask him to show you his ways.

## **Friday**

*James 4:7-8*

*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

Progressive sanctification is a fancy theological term referring to our consistent growing and shaping in God. If you're the same Christian you were a year ago, then you aren't drawing near to God enough. We spend countless hours and resources trying to catch up with our favorite fashions or sports teams, wanting our friends to see how knowledgeable we are in various subjects. Yet, when it comes time for study and prayer, we usually give God our leftover time. Today, ask God to help you find the first fruits of your time—that he shows you how to draw near to him daily and make spending time with him a top priority.

## **Saturday**

*James 4:9-10*

*Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

This passage is not commanding us to walk around gloomy all the time. What it is commanding us to do is to remind ourselves of the Gospel on a daily basis. We have sinned and offended God consistently and in the most horrific ways possible. He died the most brutal death imaginable simply to reconcile us to him, even though we didn't deserve it. This basic but incredibly important fact should humble us daily and help keep our focus, not on the worldly, but on the heavenly. Today, thank the Lord for his unmatched grace and ask him to help you to day-by-day live a life that glorifies him and gives justice to the new life he's given you.

### Introduction

Read James 4:13-17

*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 to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.*

We take ourselves too seriously. Delusions of grandeur often lure us into plotting our climb to the top of our professions, leaning back on the lazy-boy of leadership. We assume that being the top-dog doesn't come with its own burden of responsibilities, and we struggle to get away from our mundane, from our routine, from our rut-filled existence, dreaming of something more.

Now, please don't hear incorrectly. It's not wrong or sinful to plan. It's not even wrong or sinful to strive for the greatest possible achievement. What jolts us off task and what breaks us away from our priorities is not looking to God for our path but, again, looking to ourselves for the wisdom of where we should go. This passage further warns for us not to vociferously claim our future as fact, that we are to tread lightly and carefully, day-by-day relying on God alone to take us to where we need to be.

Have you talked to God about your plans before you have talked to others? Have you gathered wisdom from the Word, from the Spirit, and from others who hear his voice?

Today's scripture reminds us that without these steps, our plans are useless and hopeless and it's only God's guidance and hand that can move our lives.

## Discussion

- What are you currently working towards?  
What goals do you have for your profession?  
For your spiritual life? For your family?  
Share these with those around you?
- How have you included God into your plans?  
What role does he play in their actualization?
- Discuss a time where you have had plans that fell through.  
How did you feel? Was it for better or for worse that they did fall through? Did you/do you see God's hand in it?

## Explanation

- Why is it foolish to make yearly plans when we *“do not know what tomorrow will bring”*? What is James trying to point out to us here?
- *“For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.”* Given the brevity of our time on Earth, how should we view our life and our plans? What should be our priority?
- Is attaching *“if the Lord wills”* to your plans enough?  
Why or why not?
- *“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”* This verse almost seems out of place, out of context. Why would James place this here?  
How does this fit into the discussion of planning?

## Application

- Set daily goals for yourself. What habits do you wish to develop?
- Set monthly goals for yourself.  
What do you want to accomplish this month?
- Set yearly goals for yourself. Where do you see yourself in a year?

- Take these goals to the Father. Ask him to give you the wisdom to see if these goals are under his will and are for his glory. Ask him this week to bless your plans and goals by opening doors of opportunity, or to give you a very clear negative answer and redirect your path.

## Monday

*Psalm 90:10-12*

*The years of our life are seventy,  
or even by reason of strength eighty;  
yet their span is but toil and trouble;  
they are soon gone and we fly away.  
Who considers the power of your anger,  
And your wrath according to the fear of you?  
So teach us to number our days  
That we may get a heart of wisdom.*

The years go faster than we feel. We impatiently wait for the next stage of our lives overlooking the fact that so many opportunities fly right by us. Wrongfully assuming that we are eternal on this Earth, we procrastinate and put off that which should be our top priority. Today, humble yourself before the Lord and remind yourself that your time here is very limited but your decisions here are very eternal. Ask that the Lord “teach us to number our days” and that he fill them with wisdom and God-glorifying decisions.

## Tuesday

*Ephesians 5:15-16*

*Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*

Paul, in very blunt terms, reminds us that to not understand God’s will is to be foolish. Considering the way we walk, the way we live our lives, filling ourselves with the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit is the only way to make the best use of our time. “The days are evil” because this world is filled with dark, sinful tendencies that we are tempted by and susceptible to. Today, ask God for protection against the enemy and pray that the Lord fill your days with his wisdom, making the best use of the time he has given you here on Earth.

## Wednesday

*Matthew 23:11-12*

*The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*

Many of us are guilty of the dangerous sin of boasting. We like to boast about everything: our accomplishments, our promotions, or sports teams, our kid's accomplishments, and even our faith and how "good" we are at being a Christian. One of the Bible's re-occurring motifs is having those who are the most prideful, the most dependant on themselves and their abilities, fall—sometimes from great heights. Today, evaluate your servanthood—are you leading with humility or are you leading with your boastfulness? Ask the Lord to convict you of times you have exalted yourself and to help you be humble in your planning and work.

## **Thursday**

*1 Thessalonians 4:11*

*But we urge you brothers, to do this more and more and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependant on no one.*

The command to live quietly can be quite convicting. This doesn't mean we move to the outskirts of society, close our blinds, unplug our phones, and seclude ourselves from society. What it does mean is that we're not to cause such a ruckus with our plans that it interferes with the path God sets for us and also interferes with others being able to identify us with Christ. Sometimes, working hard at your job (no matter how unglamorous it may be) is the most glorifying thing you can do for your true boss in heaven. Today, ask the Lord how you can be a good, quiet worker and make daily choices to make him proud of you for your diligent commitment to him.

## **Friday**

*Matthew 23:5-7*

*They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.*

We are all called to ministry. Sure, not all of us are paid church employees, but as a Christian you are commanded to adhere to the Great Commission and to use the gifts, talents, time, and resources that God has given to you to proclaim his name. Unfortunately, our faith and our ministry can sometimes become idolatrous and completely counterproductive to his name. Are you boastful of your faith to build yourself up? Do you preach his name and his good word for his glory—or for yours? Naturally, we should all be making plans to spread the Gospel, but we must reflect his character as well as his truth when we do. Today, pray that the Lord convicts you of any religious idolatry and that he shows you the proper way to plan for your ministry.

## Saturday

*Philippians 4:8-9*

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*

Planning is inherently self-centered. While it's certainly not wrong to better ourselves and to strive for excellence, the focus is certainly on us and how we will improve. Because selfishness is the root of most sin, we must be very careful when we plan. This week we've seen various elements and dangers of planning without God's help. Today, reflect on the scripture—that we search out for the qualities in us, in others, in our plans, and in our relationship with God that the Lord has decreed as good. Let God be the focus of your future and these qualities guide your path.



## WEEK ELEVEN: WARNING TO THE RICH

### Introduction

*Read: James 5:1-6*

*Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. 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. 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. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.*

Most of us don't consider ourselves rich. That label is for the "other" people, those that truly have more than enough, those that have an true abundance of wealth that they can do what they want with...those that can truly be happy. Although we're consistently plotting and planning our next promotion and looking forward to our next step on the pay scale, the reality is that most of us are rich and in abundance.

Knowing that, today's passage is not one we can simply look over or direct to someone else this is a message for us. Are we working our jobs and gaining profits in a way that is glorifying to God? Are we working with integrity? How are we using the gifts, talents, resources and time that God has given us? Are we hoarding them all to ourselves and to our individual glory? Or are we appropriately recognizing that everything in this world belongs to him and him alone.

We live in a culture of demanded abundance. If we don't have more than enough, we assume that we don't have enough. Yet, today's passage reminds us that we are to ask God for only our daily bread—that we are to look to him for what we need, not necessarily for what we want. This week, reflect upon the luxuries that you live in and work through this passage and others in our devotionals to determine whether or not you are using your wealth in a God-glorifying way.

## Discussion

- Do you consider yourself to be rich? Why or why not?
- Describe a time when you struggled financially. How did it feel? How did you get out of it?
- Do you give out of other's need or your abundance? How do you determine who to be generous to?

## Explanation

- If you consider yourself rich (or in even the least bit of abundance), why do you think James calls us to weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon us?
- Verse two reminds us that our wealth is temporary. Do you view your riches as such? Why or why not? What does it look like to approach your finances as temporary?
- If you are a leader or a boss, do you pay your workers well? Even if you are not, do you take care of those around you who are in great need? What hesitations do we have in helping others?

## Application

- Evaluate your budget this week. How much do you spend on:
  - Bills (*housing, phone, utilities*)
  - Entertainment (*cable, movies, dinners*)
  - Tithes and offerings

Which is your greatest category? Why?

- Write a list of all of your financial desires. In other words—if you had unlimited resources, what would you purchase? Now go back to the list and identify each item as a need and a want. What did you find in evaluating the list?
- Find a way this week to be financially generous to someone in need. Share your experience with your Redemption Community the following week. What did you learn? Did you have hesitations or concerns?

## Monday

*Mark 4:18-19*

*And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.*

This portion of the parable of the sower gives great insight as to how worldliness and our desire for riches can prevent us from what we most need. We can study God’s word daily, go to church every Sunday, and be very active in our communities. However, if we choose to live a life prioritizing our financial gain above our spiritual gain, nothing on that “church checklist” matters, and we will be quickly choked out of truly being near God and his instruction. Today, evaluate how much time you spend on financial gain and how much time you spend on spiritual gain. What do you notice? What needs to change in stewarding your time? Ask the Lord to help you provide the time to root yourself in Scripture and his love above all else.

## Tuesday

*1 Timothy 6:9-10*

*But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*

This often erroneously quoted verse points out that our desire to be rich can lead us to sinful behavior that we wouldn’t have normally considered, but given the circumstances, we justify it as acceptable for the greater good. So many people make awful, ignorant, and sinful financial decisions all in the name of “building up the kingdom”, fooling themselves and others that if they were more financially secure that they would be able to tithe more, give more, and support more ministries. Today, evaluate your heart and your desire for riches. Why do you want more money? Are your

reasons Biblically justified? Are you including God in your financial decisions? Talk to God today about how he can be a greater part of how you deal with your money.

## **Wednesday**

*1 Timothy 6:17-19*

*As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.*

Paul here echoes what we learned in James this week—those with abundance should treat each financial blessing with great care and be humbled by the fact that God has provided so much for us. He also reminds us that all that we have is God’s and as such, we must be generous with our resources to those who are in much greater need than we are. Today, praise God for what he has given you and ask him to help you be generous with all that he gives you.

## **Thursday**

*Proverbs 27:23-27*

*Know well the condition of your flocks,  
and give attention to your herds,  
for riches do not last forever;  
and does a crown endure to all generations?  
When the grass is gone and the new growth appears  
and the vegetation of the mountains is gathered,  
the lambs will provide your clothing,  
and the goats the price of a field.  
There will be enough goats’ milk for your food,  
for the food of your household  
and maintenance for your girls.*

Some Christians take their financial stances to the other extreme making the mistake in thinking that God wants us to live a life of poverty and self-denial. While God certainly does call some to a vow of simplicity and poverty, God’s Word is filled with practical advice on how we should deal with our finances. Today’s passage reminds us that we are to be cognizant of what we have and tend to it well. Today, evaluate your budget and pray through it. After all, prayer-life doesn’t always have to be sitting in solemn silence but can also be rather practical. Look at your accounts, your debts, your needs, and your wants and talk with God about each line item in the budget.

## **Friday**

*Luke 16:13*

*No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*

Sometimes Jesus' answers in parables and metaphors can be confusing and require us to delve much deeper into the scriptures than we are used to. Here, however, is an occasion where Jesus is very blunt and reminds us that if we worship money, if we pour our time, life, thoughts, and resources into financial gain, we can't properly follow him. Today, ask the Holy Spirit to help you evaluate whom you serve more—the god and idol of money, or the God of the Bible. Ask him to help you put him as a priority and to use money to glorify him rather than to worship it.

## **Saturday**

*Philippians 4:11-12*

*Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.*

This can be a very biting verse if quoted at an inopportune time. Many have quoted this to a suffering soul who has just suffered great financial loss only pouring more salt on a fresh wound. Getting that unexpected bill, struggling to find a job to provide, or even worse, loosing a job, can significantly impact a person's well being. However, we shouldn't hear this verse from some ill-informed counselor in our time of greatest need. This is something that should be so deeply rooted in us that the foundation of our faith is unstirred. Understanding that God, our loving Father, will always provide for our needs is a fact we must always carry with us and one that will help us to avoid the pitfalls of riches. Today, spend some time reflecting and memorizing this verse, establishing your top security in him alone.

### Introduction

*Read: James 5:7–12*

*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. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 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.*

*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.*

The book of James has been incredibly convicting for many of us because it calls us to incredible action and incredible patience, both of which our culture hardwires us to fight against. Laziness and instant gratification are so pervasive in our realities that a reality other than our self-paced, self-centered world is often times beyond our comprehension or even worse, a bit offensive.

As he wraps up his letter, James reminds us that our hard work will not always see instant fruit or reward. That our perseverance to God’s law, that our helping of the poor, and that the training of our spirit to be closer to him will not always produce the ideal results. Yet, we are called to maintain in our perseverance, understanding that such perseverance through every and any trail helps us to get closer and closer to him who guides us.

We are to stay the path, no matter what, keeping our eyes and affections on Jesus Christ, wanting, waiting, and preparing for him to return once again to make his kingdom complete.

## Discussion

- When do you find yourself the most impatient with your day-to-day activities?
- When do you find yourself the most impatient in prayer?
- Discuss a time where you prayed for something and God took much longer than you expected (or wanted) to answer the prayer? Why do you think God delayed his response?
- Do you consider yourself as someone who is suffering? Why or why not?

## Explanation:

- James once again turns to agricultural metaphors, explaining to us that what we plant we may not always see right away. When have you planted something and not seen the effects until much later?
- Impatience usually breeds hostility. Most of us become very irritable when we lack patience. Why is James' warning significant to our relationship with others?
- If you haven't read through the prophetic books, read through the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel. These men were asked to do much with little reward or results, and they suffered great persecution as a result of their faith and action. How can we learn from them in our patience in suffering?
- Why does James end this section by imploring us to be straightforward with what we say?

## Application

- When have you endured prolonged suffering (*emotional, physical, spiritual*)? How did you cope?
- What is hardest about being patient to let God take you through a season of trials?
- Reflect on whether or not your impatience has hurt or offended

someone. Think of ways that you can reconcile with the person and ask God to help you to not let your trials get in the way of your relationships.

- Think about the way that you speak to others. Are you direct? Do you let your yes be your yes and your no be your no, or are you neutral or hesitant in your responses. This week try to be much more direct and honest in your responses.

## **Monday**

*James 5:7*

*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.*

A good farmer understands the need for patience and the nature of seasons. We don't always get instant results when we decide to change our attitudes, behaviors, or prayer life. But the seeds have been planted and we must have faith that God is helping us grow in him. Today, pray that the Lord gives you enduring patience and pray that he helps you build up his Kingdom here on Earth.

## **Tuesday**

*James 5:8*

*You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.*

We often forget that the Lord has a much bigger, greater, more beautiful plan for redemption and salvation than just us as individuals. The end of God's will has not yet been reached as he will back someday to judge, to eliminate pain, death, and tears, and to establish everything as new. Today, pray as the John the apostle did in Revelation 22:20: "Come, Lord Jesus." Ask that he shows you your role in this process of redemption and that he gives you the strength and patience to endure until his coming.

## **Wednesday**

*James 5:9*

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

When we're stressed, sleep-deprived, or overwhelmed, we tend to toss Christian qualities out the window. It's much easier to be grace-filled, slow to anger, and patient with others when your life is going smoothly. Yet, when trials come, our instinctively sinful selfish nature often takes over and we tend to lash out to others regardless of whether or not they are a part of our pain. Today, evaluate whether or not in your impatience you've

maintained good Christian behavior in the relationships that you keep. Ask the Lord to help you be deeply rooted in his habits so that you may endure this season of trials.

## **Thursday**

*James 5:10*

*As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.*

If you're looking for incredible success stories, the Bible has less of them than you think. Most people in the Bible, while they are trying to do God's will, are persecuted verbally, emotionally, and physically. Yet, most persevere in their dedication to the tasks the Lord has bestowed upon them. Using the prophets as an example, ask the Lord how you can better endure the trials that he has allowed in order to best shape you.

Ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate your time of study in the Scriptures and to help you learn from the great Biblical examples that we have.

## **Friday**

*James 5:11*

*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.*

The book of Job is one that is filled with great sorrows and great tribulations. Yet, James alludes to it here as a prime example of one whose hardships were well beyond our own and one that continued to bless and praise his name because of his compassion and mercy. Despite the trials you have endured, do you continue to praise and adore him? Today, thank God that he is all wise and all-powerful and that he can give you the strength to endure.

## **Saturday**

*James 5:12*

*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.*

We're often wishy-washy. Not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings, we often commit to things we don't want to do or don't commit to the things we should (but feel guilty about doing both). How direct are you with others? How direct are you with yourself. James again reminds us to be sober-minded and to be deeply rooted in God and his word. Today, evaluate how rooted you are and how direct you are with yourself, with others, and with God. Ask him to continue to help you plan for the future under his will alone.

### Introduction:

*Read James 5:13–20*

*Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. 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. 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. 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. 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. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.*

*My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, 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.*

We may struggle with prayer more than any other point of theology. When we don't immerse ourselves in prayer, we feel guilty. When we do immerse ourselves in prayer, we feel unproductive and guilty that we aren't doing more. Moreover, we wonder why it is that the great and all-powerful God wants to hear our needs. Why can't he simply put in our path all that we require without us coming to him? Even when we do pray, if our prayers are not immediately answered, we question their effectiveness, hardly ever evaluating our motives for the prayer.

James ends his epistle by calling us to prayer, understanding that it's only when we have deep, intimate, loving, and open communication and relationship with the Lord that we can be truly satisfied and truly content. Summarizing many of his arguments, James implores us to call upon our God with a deep yearning for all of our needs.

As we end this time of study in James, let us devote ourselves to prayer. Let's ask the Holy Spirit, not just this week, but for the entirety of our lives, to bless us, protect us, and guide us as we continue to preach his word to the ends of the Earth

## Discussion

- How often do you pray? What are your prayer habits (*journal, prayer walks, etc.*)?
- When do you find you struggle most to pray? Why do you struggle during those times? How do you overcome struggles to pray?
- Share stories with one another about how and when God answered your prayers.

## Explanation

- James asks us to pray in both suffering and in praise. How often do you pray in either of these situations?
- The elders are called to pray for their people. How often do you go up for prayer at the end of service and share your requests? How often do you pray for our elders and leaders?
- James again calls us to have faith in our prayers. What does it mean to pray with faith?
- Why do you think James uses Elijah as an example for our prayer life?
- James ends his letter with an abrupt, somewhat random statement about bringing people back to the congregation. What do you think the connection is?

## Application

- Spend some time in silent prayer. If you are already in this habit, break your routine and have your time with God be longer, at a different time, or at a different place.
- Find a group of people this week with whom to pray. Take requests, spend some time in prayer, and make sure you follow up with them.

- Spend some time in prayer before service next week. Ask the Lord to bless and protect the worship leaders, preachers, and congregation.

## **Monday**

*James 5:13*

*Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.*

God most often associates himself as a Father. While fatherhood may hold a deep negative connotation to us, our Lord presents himself as the ideal father—one who is always there, always provides, and is always interested and wanting to hear about what is going on in our lives. James reminds us that we should be in constant prayer and praise. If our prayers only come in our darkest hour then we are simply using God, not connecting with him. Today, talk to God about your ups and downs. Reflect on the blessings he has given you and come to him with your concerns, asking him to help you make a habit of prayer and praise.

## **Tuesday**

*James 5:14*

*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.*

We don't like to ask for help. Sure, we may find solace in our silent prayer times with God, but we very rarely have the humility to openly come to someone and tell them our hardest struggles. The pastors of Redemption Church are here to help you and here to pray for you in whatever situation or trial you may be going through. This week, connect with one of your pastors. Talk to them before or after service. Pray that the Lord guide our pastors and leaders well and that they help you in your journey to know Christ more.

## **Wednesday**

*James 5:15*

*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.*

James once again returns to the prayer of faith. It's easy to make requests, but it's much harder to bring them with a heart filled with faith. The answer to our prayers won't always be what we wanted, but if our faith is deeply rooted in his word and love, we understand that God has what is best in mind for us. Today, ask the Lord to help build up your faith in him, and bring your prayers and requests humbly before the one who can truly answer to our needs.

## **Thursday**

*James 5:16*

*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.*

Confession may be one of the most difficult and least practiced spiritual disciplines. We struggle to talk to others about our needs and thus most wouldn't even dare actually reveal some of our darkest mistakes. Feeling the need to put on a good "Christian" image, we fail to recognize the urgent need to confess our sins to those we have harmed and to those we are accountable to. If we have a full understanding of the Gospel, we understand that Jesus has covered all our sins and we are to show grace as grace has been poured on us. Today, ask the Holy Spirit to convict you of unconfessed sin and ask him to help you gather the courage to confront those you have wronged.

## **Friday**

*James 5:17-18*

*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. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.*

Elijah is just one of many great examples in the Bible of those who had faith-filled, fervent prayer lives. He truly believed that God would provide exactly what was needed to glorify the Lord's name. Study Elijah, Moses, David, Abraham, and of course, Jesus, and see how they called upon the Lord. What can you learn from their example? How can you pray with more faith? Ask the Lord to illuminate the lessons of Scripture and to help you believe in the great power of prayer.

## **Saturday**

*James 5:19-20*

*My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, 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.*

This abrupt ending to the book seems a bit out of place. Why would James follow a section on prayer with a command to bring those who have walked away back to the faith? He understood, as he articulated earlier that we are in a fierce spiritual battle that requires us to fight with all of the weapons entrusted to us, the most powerful of which is prayer. Today, think of someone whom you think has wandered from the truth. Spend some time in prayer for them to see God's grace and for the Holy Spirit to convict them, protect them, and bring them back to the love of God and the love of the church.

THE BOOK OF JAMES

