

James Devotionals

ILLUSTRATIONS AND DEVOTIONALS

Epistle of James

James 1

James 1:2

Temptations and trials are two different experiences. Though they often occur at the same time, there is a fine line between them. In the New Testament a single Greek word covers both situations. James 1:2 tells us to rejoice when we fall into various trials, but in Matthew 26:41 Jesus tells His disciples to pray that they enter not into temptation. The first is an occasion for good, the second a danger to avoid.

In a sermon entitled "Faith Tested and Crowned," Alexander Maclaren distinguished between being tempted and being tested or tried. He said that "the former word conveys the idea of appealing to the worst part of man, with the wish that he may yield and do the wrong. The latter means an appeal to the better part of man, with the desire that he should stand. Temptation says, 'Do this pleasant thing; do not be hindered by the fact that it is wrong.' Trial or proving says, 'Do this right and noble thing; do not be hindered by the fact that it is painful.' The one is a sweet, beguiling melody, breathing soft indulgence and relaxation over the soul; the other is a pealing trumpet-call to high achievements."

Every hardship holds the potential to be a temptation and a trial. By resisting all suggestions we know are wrong and accepting all circumstances as opportunities for growth, we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in His sanctifying work in us. We move toward that desired goal of being "perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:4). —Dennis De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Satan tempts us to bring out the worst in us; God tests us to bring out the best in us. .

James 1:2 "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials."

JOY IN CALAMITY - Celebrate bankruptcy? How foolish that seems to us! Yet author Leo Buscaglia's mother did just that.

Her husband came home one evening and sadly told the family that his business partner had stolen the assets of the firm. Bankruptcy was unavoidable.

Instead of despairing, Leo's mother went out, pawned some jewelry, and prepared a delectable dinner. When family members protested, she replied, "The time for joy is now when we need it most, not next week."

Mrs. Buscaglia's response to her family's financial crisis reminds me of a New Testament directive: "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials" (James 1:2).

Have you run into difficult circumstances recently? Has some calamity gripped your heart with fear and sorrow? God doesn't want you to wear a hypocritical, smiling face. But He does want you to trust Him through all your circumstances -- including calamities! He wants you to accept failure, sickness, and loss as opportunities for growth in faith and obedience.

Our wise and loving heavenly Father longs for us to submit to His sovereign control. Only as we do that can we agree with James and rejoice even in calamity. - Vernon Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Though times be dark, the struggles grim,
And cares rise like a flood,
This sweet assurance holds to Him:
My God is near and good.-- Hager

Life's trials should make us better - not bitter.

James 1:2

Faith Tested - Alexander Maclaren, in a sermon entitled "Faith Tested and Crowned," distinguished between being tempted and being tested or tried. He said that "the former word conveys the idea of appealing to the worst part of man, with the wish that he may yield and do the wrong. The latter means an appeal to the better part of man, with the desire that he should stand. Temptation says, 'Do this pleasant thing; do not be hindered by the fact that it is wrong.' Trial or proving says, 'Do this right and noble thing; do not be hindered by the fact that it is painful.' The one is a sweet, beguiling melody, breathing soft indulgence and relaxation over the soul; the other is a pealing trumpet-call to high achievements." Every hardship of life holds the possibility of being a temptation and a trial. By resisting all suggestions we know are wrong and accepting all circumstances as opportunities for growth, we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in His sanctifying work in us. We move toward that desired goal of being "perfect and entire, lacking nothing" (James 1:4).
- Dennis De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Count your blessings instead of your crosses;
Count your gains instead of your losses.
Count your joys instead of your woes;
Count your friends instead of your foes.
Count your smiles instead of your tears;
Count your courage instead of your fears.
Count your full years instead of your lean;
Count your kind deeds instead of your mean.
Count your health instead of your wealth;
Count on God instead of yourself.

James 1:2-3

Amy Carmichael wrote that "The best training is to learn to accept everything as it comes, as from Him whom our soul loves. The tests are always unexpected things, not great things that can be written up, but the common little rubs of life, silly little nothings, things you are ashamed of minding (at all). Yet they can knock a strong man over and lay him very low. (Candles in the Dark)

James 1:2 Fiery Trials

Read: James 1:2–12

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds. James 1:2

Fire can be one of the worst enemies of trees. But it can also be helpful. Experts say that small, frequent fires called "cool" fires clean the forest floor of dead leaves and branches but don't destroy the trees. They leave behind ashes, which are perfect for seeds to grow in. Surprisingly, low-intensity fires are necessary for healthy growth of trees.

Similarly, trials—pictured as fire in the Bible—are necessary for our spiritual health and growth (1 Peter 1:7; 4:12). James wrote, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2–4).

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds. James 1:2

It is in the season of trial that God's purposes are often realized, for there the conditions are right for us to grow into spiritual maturity. This growth not only equips us for living, but it also enables us to more accurately reflect Jesus to a world that desperately needs Him.

In the hands of our Father, our trials can achieve His purposes for our good and for His honor. They can shape us into the likeness of His Son.

Father, teach me to trust You for the strength to endure difficulties and the faith to wait for Your good purposes to be accomplished in me.

Encourage others! Go to [odb.org](#) and share what God taught you through a challenging time. By Bill Crowder

Faith is seeing God in the dark and in the light.

INSIGHT - James, the half-brother of Jesus, believed that Christ was the Messiah after witnessing His resurrection from the dead. James led the early church as a "Messianic Jew," a term referring to someone who has been reared in the traditions of Judaism and who acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah. In today's reading, James says that a positive attitude toward trials—"consider it pure joy . . . whenever you face trials of many kinds" (1:2)—is central to the Christian life. Trials are beneficial because they produce positive character change through the power of God.

James 1:2-3 "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience."

HIGHER MATH - Mathematical formulas work well with numbers, but not with people. That's why this equation in James 1 sounds unworkable:

FAITH + TRIALS = PATIENCE

One might better try to mix oil and water. But what makes this formula work is confidence in God's unfailing love, which allows for all the human emotions that come with life's trials.

Shirley and her husband Roy proved that this equation is still up-to-date. Here's their story: Roy was told that in 6 months the plant where he worked would close but he would receive severance pay.

Shirley wrote, "Praise the Lord for that -- but also praise the Lord that He loves us so much He's given us yet another trial in our lives. (This will be the fourth time we're starting over in the 13 years we've been married.) At first I panicked and questioned God's love. But I kept reading my Bible, stopped feeling sorry for myself, and started to pray for others. As long as God gives us this roof over our heads (and even if we lost it), I'll thank Him."

So when you face trials, you can "count it all joy" if you add faith, knowing that God's love will never fail. As you do, you will develop an attitude of patient expectation, confident that God will do what is best.-- Dennis De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Afflictions may test me,
They cannot destroy;
One glimpse of Thy love
Turns them all into joy.- Willett

The first lesson in patience is learning to count our trials as joy.

James 1:3 The testing of your faith produces patience

One of the delights of my carefree days of childhood was flying a kite. What happy, peaceful hours I enjoyed with that soaring paper bird tugging on the string anchored to my finger! But if that kite could have talked, it might have said, "Look how high I'm flying and how gracefully I'm floating through the sky. And I'm doing all this in spite of that aggravating boy down there hanging onto the end of the string. I don't need that. Look, I have a tail and broad wings, but that pesky kid is hanging onto that cord as if he expects me to lift him into the wind. Why, if I didn't have the handicap of this string he is holding, I could fly up and reach the moon. If only I were not tied down in this irritating way."

Sometimes when flying my kite I would be distracted and I'd let go of the string. The kite would go wobbling down and become tangled in the branches of a tree. What might that proud paper bird have said then? If it had been an honest kite, it would have admitted, "The very thing I thought was tying me down was holding me up."

Likewise, much of our Christian growth and spiritual progress can be credited to our trials and testings, which so often make us fret. If God were to remove the restrictions that go with these difficult experiences, our lives would be wobbly and weak like that wandering kite. "The testing of your faith produces patience," James said. These testings are the rewarding restraints of One who desires to see His children soar to spiritual heights. —Paul R VanGorder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Adversity is only sand on your track to prevent you from skidding.

James 1:1-18

While visiting an inlet of the sea that reached deep into land, leaving a sheltered bay, I noticed that the pebbles on that protected

beach were rough and jagged—not smooth and polished. But out on the open shore where fierce waves break over the rocks, the pebbles were sleek and round.

The same is true of Christian character. Just as the harsh treatment of the ocean waves makes the rough stones smooth, our trials, difficulties, and testings can produce in us the luster of Christian maturity. When circumstances become difficult, we can rest assured that God has only one design in view—the perfection of our character. That's why the psalmist could testify, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes" (Ps. 119:71). Echoing that statement, Scottish pastor Samuel Rutherford declared that he "got a new Bible" through the furnace of adversity. The Scriptures took on fresh meaning for him when his faith had been tested and his character enriched.

The popular idea that bad things happen because we are being punished is contrary to what God says. The Word of God indicates that troubles can be a badge of honor for the Christian. Through them we can see that God is at work in us to produce the patience that James said would help us become mature, lacking nothing (James 1:4). Through the rough seas of trouble, God "rounds" the stone of our character and conforms us to the likeness of His Son. —Paul R VanGorder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

God sends trials not to impair us but to improve us.

James 1:1-4

A University of Michigan microbiologist tells his students that the human body is made up of ten trillion cells, which are home to some 100 trillion bacteria. He supports this claim by citing studies conducted by University of Pennsylvania researchers who once estimated that a dime-sized patch of skin may hold up to two million bacteria.

The presence of all those little critters might seem to be an overwhelming threat to our health. But scientists who have come to understand and appreciate the role of bacteria say that we would actually be sicker without them than we are with them. They apparently help ward off other bacteria that cause diseases.

This is not an argument for careless personal hygiene. But it is an interesting parallel to the setting in which Christians are called to live. Contrary to what we might think, we can actually benefit from a hostile environment.

God calls His children to show patience, love, and faith in a world polluted by sin and opposed to righteousness. Many of the troubles we encounter can help us avoid greater problems of independence, self-sufficiency, and pride that set in so quickly when all goes smoothly. The problems in our lives can help us to realize the need for dependence on the Lord and faith in His Word. Obstacles can contribute to our health if we'll see them as tests of our faith and as opportunities to develop endurance. Until Jesus comes, we can be healthier with them than without them. —M R De Haan II ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The difficulties of life are intended to make us better—not bitter.

James 1:4

C H Spurgeon writes: If his dark nights are as bright as the world's days, what will his days be? If even his starlight is more splendid than the sun, what must his sunlight be? If he can praise the Lord in the fires, how will he extol Him before the eternal throne! If evil is good to him now, what will the overflowing goodness of God be to him then? Oh, blessed "afterward"! Who would not be a Christian? Who would not bear the present cross for the crown which comes afterwards? But herein is work for patience, for the rest is not for today, nor the triumph for the present, but "afterward." Wait, soul, and "let patience have her perfect work" (James 1:4). (Daily Help)

James 1:5

"If any of you lack wisdom let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and uphraideth not, and it shall be given him."

Wisdom for the Asking - IF any of you lack wisdom. There is no "if" in the matter, for I am sure I lack it. What do I know? How can I guide my own way? How can I direct others? Lord, I am a mass of folly, and wisdom I have none. Thou sayest, "Let him ask of God." Lord, I now ask. Here at thy footstool, I ask to be furnished with heavenly wisdom for this day's perplexities and for this day's simplicities; for I know I may do very stupid things even in plain matters, unless thou dost keep me out of mischief. I thank thee that all I have to do is to ask. What grace is this on thy part, that I have only to pray in faith, and thou wilt give me wisdom! Thou dost here promise me a liberal education, and that, too, without an angry tutor or a scolding usher. This, too, thou wilt bestow without a fee—bestow it on a fool who lacks wisdom. O Lord, I thank thee for that positive and expressive word, "It shall be given him." I

believe it. Thou wilt this day make thy babe to know the hidden wisdom which the carnally prudent never learn. Thou wilt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory. (Spurgeon, C. Faith's Checkbook)

James 1:6 ... He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

"Nothing Doubting"

1. We are to believe without doubting "If ye have faith, and doubt not ... " (Mt 21:21). We may be tempted to doubt. We may have to pray, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief " But we can take sides with our faith and by the exercise of it give doubt no chance to grow. Such faith moves mountains.

2. We are to pray without doubting. I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (1 Tim. 2:8). The man who lacks wisdom must ask of God "but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering" (James 1:6). The doubting man, says James, is like a storm-driven wave of the sea and he need not expect anything of the Lord.

3. We are to obey without doubting. Peter was told to go with the men from the house of Cornelius "nothing doubting" (Acts 10:20; 11:12). When the Holy Spirit sends us on a mission we are to ask no questions. Peter had his scruples on this occasion and sometimes we have to give up well-established objections if we are to help Cornelius.

Doubting means wavering, double-mindedness. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). A man displeases God to the extent of his doubts. Doubt may assail you but do not pray, "Lord, I doubt; increase my faith"; pray, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." (**Vance Havner**)

The field mouse who illustrated James "Double-minded man" - Driving in country at night when headlights showed up a field mouse dead ahead. He first started toward the left, then right, then left, and finally stood still as the car passed over him.

James 1:14 Lured Away

Read: James 1:5–6, 12–15

Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. James 1:14

In the summer of 2016, my niece convinced me to play Pokémon Go—a game played on a smartphone, using the phone's camera. The object of the game is to capture little creatures called Pokémon. When one appears in the game, a red and white ball also appears on the phone's screen. To capture a Pokémon, the player has to flick the ball toward it with the movement of a finger. Pokémon are more easily caught, however, by using a lure to attract them. Pokémon characters aren't the only ones who can be lured away. In his New Testament letter to believers, James, the brother of Jesus, reminds us that we "are dragged away by [our] own evil desire" (1:14, emphasis added). In other words, our desires work with temptation to lure us down a wrong path. Though we may be tempted to blame God or even Satan for our problems, our real danger lies within.

We can escape the lure of temptation by talking to God about the things that tempt us.

But there is good news. We can escape the lure of temptation by talking to God about the things that tempt us. Though "God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone," as James explains in 1:13, He understands our human desire to do what's wrong. We have only to ask for the wisdom God promised to provide (1:1–6).

Lord, when I'm tempted, show me the door of escape. By Linda Washington

Pray your way past the urge to do wrong.

INSIGHT The word translated "tempted" or "tempting" (used four times in James 1:13) comes from the Greek word *peirasmos*, which has two basic meanings. The first is to test the genuineness of one's faith. This is the meaning in verses 2–4 when James encourages believers who are tempted to rejoice because "the testing of your faith" brings maturity. The second meaning, "to entice to sin or to do evil," is intended in verses 13–15. God will not tempt or entice us to sin. His perfect holiness, purity, and goodness ensure this. Instead, the enticement to sin comes from our own sinful desires. This is the meaning of *peirasmos* in Matthew 26:38–41. In the garden of Gethsemane, as Christ was struggling with the necessity of going to the cross, He asked His disciples to pray with Him; instead, they slept. Jesus cautioned, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation" (v. 41). As we turn our temptations over to God in prayer, He will "provide a way out so that [we] can endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13). For further study on this subject, reflect on Psalm 119:9–11. What do these verses say will help us overcome temptation? Sim Kay Tee

James 1:12

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”

Mark of Divine Approval - YES, he is blessed while he is enduring the trial. No eye can see this till he has been anointed with heavenly eye salve. But he must endure it, and neither rebel against God, nor turn aside from his integrity. He is blessed who has gone through the fire and has not been consumed as a counterfeit. When the test is over, then comes the hallmark of divine approval, “the crown of life.” As if the Lord said, “Let him live; he has been weighed in the balances, and he is not found wanting.” Life is the reward: not mere being—but holy, happy, true existence—the realization of the divine purpose concerning us. Already a higher form of spiritual life and enjoyment crowns those who have safely passed through fiercest trials of faith and love. The Lord hath promised the crown of life to those who love Him. Only lovers of the Lord will hold out in the hour of trial; the rest will either sink or sulk, or slink back to the world. Come, my heart, dost thou love thy Lord? Truly? Deeply? Wholly? Then that love will be tried, but many waters will not quench it, neither will the floods drown it. Lord, let thy love nourish mine to the end. (Spurgeon, C. Faith's Checkbook)

James 1:1-12

Trial By Fire - F. B. Meyer explained it this way: “A bar of iron worth \$2.50, when wrought into horseshoes is worth \$5. If made into needles it is worth \$175. If into penknife blades it is worth \$1,625. If made into springs for watches it is worth \$125,000. What a ‘trial by fire’ that bar must undergo to be worth this! But the more it is manipulated, and the more it is hammered and passed through the heat, beaten, pounded, and polished, the greater its value.” Christian, are you wondering about the trials through which you are passing? With impatient heart are you saying, “How long, O Lord?” The heat of the flame and the blows of the hammer are necessary if you are to be more than an unpolished, rough bar of iron. God’s all-wise plan, though it calls for the fire, produces the valuable watch spring of maturity. His very best for your life has behind it His perfect timing. - Paul R VanGorder ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

James 1:13–15

George Keenan served as adviser to U.S. diplomats and ambassadors to Russia from the 1930s to the 1950s, then as ambassador to Russia in the 1950s. His writings on Soviet aims and ideals were widely accepted. He became noted for advocating containment of Communism, meaning that wherever it appeared, the democracies would counteract it. Containment didn’t work well against communism; it died under the weight of its own inadequacies. Containment never works in the spiritual life. Either we conquer Satan or he conquers us. If we attempt accommodation, Satan wins. We fail to understand that he has more willpower than we, and that he has far more openings into our lives to develop than he ever exploits. The only answer to evil is annihilation. It must be obliterated, because the alternative is its horrendous growth, our gradual acceptance of its presence, and our eventual downfall. The best time to get rid of sin is now.

James 1:13

Alexander Maclaren, in a sermon entitled “Faith Tested and Crowned,” distinguished between being tempted and being tested or tried. He said that “the former word conveys the idea of appealing to the worst part of man, with the wish that he may yield and do the wrong. The latter means an appeal to the better part of man, with the desire that he should stand. Temptation says, ‘Do this pleasant thing; do not be hindered by the fact that it is wrong.’ Trial or proving says, ‘Do this right and noble thing; do not be hindered by the fact that it is painful.’ The one is a sweet, beguiling melody, breathing soft indulgence and relaxation over the soul; the other is a pealing trumpet-call to high achievements.” Every hardship of life holds the possibility of being a temptation and a trial. By resisting all suggestions we know are wrong and accepting all circumstances as opportunities for growth, we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in His sanctifying work in us. We move toward that desired goal of being “perfect and entire, lacking nothing” (James 1:4). - Dennis De Haan ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

James 1:13

“What is temptation? Seduction to evil, solicitation to wrong. It stands distinguished from trial thus: trial tests, seeks to discover the man’s moral qualities or character; but temptation persuades to evil, deludes, that it may ruin. The one means to undeceive, the other to deceive. The one aims at the man’s good, making him conscious of his true moral self; but the other at his evil, leading him more or less unconsciously into sin. God tries; Satan tempts.” (D. Pentecost, J D: The Words and Works of Jesus Christ)

James 1:14. The Trojan horse (Thomas Watson, "The Lord's Prayer") "Deliver us from evil." Matthew 6:13 In this petition, we pray to be delivered from the evil of our heart, that it may not entice us to sin. The heart is the poisoned fountain, from whence all

actual sins flow. "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness." Mark 7:21-22. The cause of all evil lies in a man's own bosom—all sin begins at the heart. Lust is first conceived in the heart—and then it is midwived into the world. Whence comes rash anger? The heart sets the tongue on fire. The heart is the shop where all sin is contrived and hammered out. The heart is the greatest seducer "Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust." James 1:14. The devil could not hurt us—if our own hearts did not give consent. All that he can do is to lay the bait—but it is our fault to swallow it! How needful, therefore, is this prayer, "Deliver us from the evil of our hearts!" It was Augustine's prayer, "Lord, deliver me from that evil man—myself!" Beware of the bosom traitor—the flesh. The heart of a man is the Trojan horse—out of which comes a whole army of lusts! O let us pray to be delivered from the lusts and deceits of our own heart!

James 1:14

Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

IT'S MY FAULT! - The first step in overcoming sin is to admit that we are the ones who are responsible. To look for someone else to blame is to evade the real issue.

A man in a parking lot backed into another car. He simply didn't look to see if the way was clear, and he was obviously at fault. But he jumped out of his car, yelled furiously at the woman driving the car he hit, and told her it was her fault for getting in his way. I learned later that he continued to blame her when he spoke to his insurance agent. Eventually she was cleared, but only after going through tremendous anguish.

This is similar to what happened in the Garden of Eden. After Adam ate the forbidden fruit, he said he wasn't to blame. It was the fault of the woman God had made.

Sometimes we respond like that. When we do something wrong, we immediately look for someone to blame, even if it's God. But James says we sin because we listen to our own selfish desires.

Troubled by a sin that won't go away? Maybe you're not overcoming it because you are blaming someone else. You might even be blaming God because He didn't stop you from doing it. Nonsense! You'll never conquer your sin until you're willing to say, "It's my fault!" - Dennis Egnor ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

God cannot prosper those who try
To cover sin and wrong deny;
But all who humbly will confess,
The Savior with His love will bless. -Dennis De Haan

You can never conquer sin with an excuse.

Knowing how much an acquaintance despises his wife's parakeet, I was surprised one day to hear him coaxing it to speak. Upon listening more closely, however, I nearly choked holding back my laughter. Now, along with its constant, annoying jabbering, the bird also calls out a suicidal, "Here kitty, kitty, kitty." (**Reader's Digest**)

James 1:15 Desire ... gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. --

My Sin - The woman explained the rules to the Tempter. She and her husband could eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, except for the special one in the middle. Just touching it, she said, would bring death.

I can imagine Satan throwing back his head and with mocking laughter saying, "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). He then suggested that God was holding back something good from her (v.5).

For thousands of years the Enemy has repeated that strategy. He doesn't care if you believe in the authority of the Bible as a whole, as long as he can get you to disbelieve at the one sin standing between you and God.

"You will not surely die," we are told. That is the theme of so many modern novels. The hero and heroine live in disobedience to God but suffer no consequences. In TV shows and movies the characters rebel against the moral laws of God but live happily ever after.

There is even a perfume called "My Sin." It's a fragrance "so alluring, so charming, so exciting," the ads tell us, "we could only call it 'My Sin.'" You would never guess that sin is a stench in the nostrils of God.

In the temptation you face today, will you choose to believe Satan's lie, or will you obey God's warning? --Haddon W Robinson [Our](#)

Personal Reflection

How has sin damaged the lives of people I know?
How has disobedience to God harmed me?
Have I experienced God's forgiveness? (1 Jn. 1:9-10).

A bite of sin leaves a bitter aftertaste

James 1:17

The conclusion is unavoidable: self-salvation simply does not work. Man has no way to save himself. But Paul announces that God has a way. Where man fails God excels. Salvation comes from heaven downward, not earth upward. "Every good action and every perfect gift is from God" (James 1:17). Please note: Salvation is God-given, God-driven, God-empowered, and God-originated. The gift is not from man to God. It is from God to man. (Lucado, Max: In the Grip of Grace)

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.

DOUBTING GOD- When Satan tempted Eve, he did so by enticing her to doubt God's character. He told Eve, "God knows that in the day you eat of (the forbidden fruit) your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5).

Satan was implying, "God has a hidden agenda, and it is an evil one." The devil knew that once Eve doubted the goodness of God, the temptation would work.

We may not think we doubt God. But when events happen in our lives that make us question Him, that's exactly what we do. We seldom stop believing in Him, but we do stop believing in His goodness. And that is a faith-poisoning idea!

John Greenleaf Whittier knew that at the center of trust is a confidence in God's goodness. He wrote:

I see the wrong that round me lies,
I feel the guilt within,
I hear, with groan and travail cries,
The world confess its sin.

Yet, in the maddening maze of things,
And tossed by storm and flood,
To one fixed trust my spirit clings:
I know that God is good!

Never doubt God's goodness. Even when our trials seem beyond our understanding, we can trust God to give us perfect gifts (Jas. 1:17). - Haddon W Robinson

Don't put a question mark where God has put a period.

James 1:19 "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath."

JUMPING TO ILLUSIONS - How frustrating to have someone interrupt you, thinking he knows what you're about to say and then jumping to a conclusion! We've all done that. We've jumped to "illusions" about what the person was actually saying. We've heard the words that were spoken, but we didn't really listen to what was being said. And what mis-understanding has resulted!

Recently I "sat on the sidelines" as a husband and wife argued, firing volley after volley of accusations at each other, both talking at the same time, and constantly interrupting each other. Each word drove the wedge of misunderstanding deeper and deeper into their relationship. I could hardly call for a ceasefire above the din of their verbal warfare.

I can't imagine that Jesus ever engaged in discourteous conversation. People listened to Him, and He listened to them. James, in his letter to the early church, wrote, "Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (1:19). I'm sure he saw this modeled in Jesus many times over.

Respectful listening keeps anger under control and promotes righteousness. Let's listen carefully and avoid jumping to illusions. Dennis De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

It's easy to listen to words that are said

And not hear the facts at all;
But listening for truth, and not just to words,
Will save you from many a fall.-- Hess

You can win more friends with your ears than with your mouth.

James 1:19 Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak.

GOOD LISTENERS - In his book "Life Together", Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening to them. Just as love for God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brothers is learning to listen to them. It is [because of] God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear."

Listening was a key element in solving a problem between two ethnic groups in the infant church in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-7). One group felt that their widows were being discriminated against in the distribution of food. So the apostles wisely listened to their complaint, worked out an acceptable solution, and settled the dispute.

Listening to others is also important today because our churches are becoming increasingly diverse. We come from broad ethnic and racial backgrounds and are at different levels of maturity. But if we show our love by listening, our common faith in Christ can bind us together.

Are we so driven to express our views or vent our feelings that we don't really hear what others have to say?

Lord, teach us how to love. Make us good listeners to others, as You are to us. -Dennis Egner ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Be this our common enterprise:
That truth be preached and prayer arise,
That each may seek the other's good,
And live and love as Jesus would. - Brewster

Listening may be the most important thing you do today.

My Problem Tongue: Various passages in James

The average person speaks 18,000 words a day, and the Bible warns, "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking" (Prov. 10:19). This theme is woven throughout the little Book of James, who warns us of:

1. The Hasty Tongue—James 1:19 and 26
2. The Haughty Tongue—James 2:2-4
3. The Hellish Tongue—James 3:2-12
4. The Hateful Tongue—James 4:11
5. The Heathen Tongue—James 5:12

Conclusion: If your problem is your tongue, spend some time reading through the Book of James, underlining his references to the tongue and memorizing some of these verses. Ask God to help you restrain your tongue and give you the tongue of the wise. (Morgan, R. J. Nelson's Annual Preacher's Sourcebook : 2003 edition. Page 77. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers)

James 1.22 Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only.

This letter of James is pre-eminently ethical, practical, forceful. In it there are more references to sayings in the Sermon on the Mount than in all the other letters of the New Testament. All this is of great interest when we accept the view, which is almost beyond dispute, that the man who wrote the letter was a brother of the Lord. He had lived with Jesus in all the early years in Nazareth. While it would seem that he did not join himself outwardly to the disciples till after the Resurrection, there are evidences that in the company of Mary, these brethren were much with Jesus in the central period of His ministry. All this would suggest that looking back, and thinking of all those years, this man was impressed with the harmony there had ever been in the Lord, between His teaching and His life. Thus he argued, and rightly, that a faith which was not expressed in deeds was of no value at all. This does not mean that he was in any way ignorant of the deep spiritual mysteries of Christian life. If in these words he urges us to be doers of the Word, we must remember that the Word he refers to is that which he has just described as "the inborn word" (James 1:21, marg.).

He was referring, not merely to any written Word, nor to his Lord as the Word incarnate alone; but to the Word of God received into the soul through the written Word, and by the Word incarnate. That Word is only of real value as it is obeyed, as what it enjoins is done. There is no profit, but rather the reverse, in hearing, if there be no doing. (Morgan, G. C. Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible).

James 1:22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves

"Take Heed How Ye Hear" It is important that we hear. It is important what we hear. It is important how we hear what we hear.

1. Consider the privilege of hearing the Word of God We take it for granted in America. Few people would want to live where there are no churches but millions live as though there were no churches. Multitudes the world around cannot hear the truth of God for various reasons. As lightly as we regard it now, this privilege cost aplenty in days gone by. And how grateful we ought to be that God has spoken both in His Book and in His Son! What if He had remained silent and there were no word from heaven!

2. Along with privilege goes responsibility. Where much is given, much shall be required. Today sees a famine of the hearing of God's Word, not because we cannot hear it, but because we do not listen to it. Moreover, as the text declares, there is the duty of doing it when we hear it. Throughout the Bible runs the note, "My commandments to do them"; "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

3. Often overlooked in our text and almost never quoted is the penalty for not doing the Word we hear, "Deceiving your own selves." Away with the notion that it does not matter much how we hear! The man who hears and refuses to obey walks out of church having betrayed himself into deception. One cannot hear the truth and remain the same. (Vance Havner)

James 1:21-27 - Excuses

Unbelief, indifference, busyness, and laziness are some of the excuses people give for not reading the Bible. Gamaliel

Bradford, a renowned American biographer who explored the lives and motives of famous individuals, candidly admitted, "I do not read the New Testament for fear of its awakening a storm of anxiety and self-reproach and doubt and dread of having taken the wrong path, of having been traitor to the plain and simple God."

Fear of facing up to failure, guilt and sin is not a very reasonable reason to avoid reading the Bible! It's about as irrational as refusing to see a doctor because there's a suspicion that cancer has started to develop in one's body.

Yes, the Bible does indeed compel us to face ourselves. It is like an x-ray machine that penetrates below the facade of goodness and shows up any spiritual malignancy. It enables us to see how God views all the worst diseases of the soul. But the Bible does more than expose a fatal condition. It introduces us to the Great Physician, who can cure our sin and bring spiritual healing.

If you read the Bible with a willingness to obey the truth, you will find life's greatest cure. - Vernon Grounds [Our Daily Bread](#). Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

Instill within our hearts, dear Lord,
A deep desire to know Your voice;
We need to learn to hear
Your Word That we may make
Your will our choice. -Dennis De Haan

Many people criticize the Bible because the bible criticizes them.

James 1:22

I read about a man in New York City who died at the age of 63 without ever having had a job. He spent his entire adult life in college. During those years he acquired so many academic degrees that they "looked like the alphabet" behind his name. Why did this man spend his entire life in college? When he was a child, a wealthy relative died who had named him as a beneficiary in his will. It stated that he was to be given enough money to support him every year as long as he stayed in school. And it was to be discontinued when he had completed his education. The man met the terms of the will, but by remaining in school indefinitely he turned a technicality into a steady income for life—something his benefactor never intended. Unfortunately, he spent thousands of hours listening to professors and reading books but never "doing." He acquired more and more knowledge but didn't put it into practice. This reminds me of what James said: "Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only" (1:22). If we read the Bible or listen as it is taught but fail to put to work what we have learned, we are as bad as that man with his string of degrees. His education was of no

James 1:22: "Be doers of the Word... "

An unknown author captured eloquently the way in which we so practice religion but fall short of truly being "doers of the Word"...

I was hungry and you formed a humanities club and discussed my hunger.

I was imprisoned and you crept off quietly to your chapel and prayed for my release.

I was naked and in your mind you debated the morality of my appearance.

I was sick and you knelt and thanked God for your health.

I was homeless and you preached to me of the spiritual shelter of the love of God. I was lonely and you left me alone to pray for me. You seem so holy, so close to God.

But I'm still very hungry and lonely and cold.

James 1:22

Many Christians have allowed their knowledge of the truth to outdistance their practice. They remind me of a story in Glad Tidings by James Kallam. He tells of a young book salesman who was assigned to a rural area. Seeing a former seated in a rocking chair on his front porch, the young man approached him with all the zeal of a newly trained salesman. "Sir," he said, "I have here a book that will tell you how to farm 10 times better than you are doing it now." The farmer continued to rock. After a few seconds he stopped, looked at the young fellow and said, "Son, I don't need your book. I already know how to farm 10 times better than I'm doing it now." - Paul R VanGorder

The story is told of King Edward VI of England who attended worship service and stood while the Word of God was read taking notes which he later studied with great care. Throughout the week King Edward earnestly tried to apply them to his life. That's the kind of serious-minded response to truth the James means when he says "Be doers of the Word... ". A single revealed fact cherished in the heart and acted upon is more vital to our growth than a head filled with lofty ideas about God.

Martin Luther wrote...

"The world does not need a definition of religion as much as it needs a demonstration."

Andrew Murray wrote...

What a terrible delusion to be content with, to delight in hearing the word, and yet not do it. And how prevalent the sight of multitudes of Christians listening to the Word of God most regularly and earnestly, and yet not doing it! If a servant were to hear but not do, how quickly the judgment would be given. And yet, so complete is the delusion, that Christians never realize they are not living good Christian lives. Why are we deluded in this way? For one thing people mistake the pleasure they have in hearing the Word of God for Christianity and worship. The mind delights in having the truth presented clearly; the imagination is gratified by its illustration; the feelings are stirred by its application. To an active mind knowledge gives pleasure. A person may study some branch of science—say electricity—for the enjoyment the knowledge gives him, without the least intention of applying it practically. So people go to church, and enjoy the preaching, and yet do not do what God asks.

Oswald Chambers adds that

"One step forward in obedience is worth years of study about it."

John Calvin adds that...

"We must observe that the knowledge of God which we are invited to cultivate is not that which, resting satisfied with empty speculation, only flutters in the brain, but a knowledge which will prove substantial and fruitful whenever it is duly perceived and rooted in the heart."

James 1:27 Unspotted from the world.

"The white flower of a blameless life!" The view of pure and undefiled religion presented in this definition was characteristic of James, surnamed the Just, who was revered even by the Jews for his austere piety, and whose vesture of simple white was

emblematic of his stainless character. Whatever may be our views about the doctrines of Christianity, we must see to it that their outcome be in pure and holy living. Orthodoxy of view is utterly worthless unless it be combined with orthodoxy of life. This was the side of truth on which James insisted.

What a beautiful conception is here! The unspotted life! No book is like the Bible in its conceptions of sin; indeed, we owe to it the thought of sin, and its evil in the sight of God. But there is no book with so lofty an ideal of what life may become when it is yielded to the grace of Christ. A cleansed heart, and an unspotted robe; no sin allowed and permitted in the soul, and no evil habit allowed to dominate and enthrall the life.

But how is it to be ours? (1) Put the grave of Christ between you and your former life, and so reckon that you are dead to all solicitations that would induce you to live according to the lusts and passions that dominate the rest of the Gentiles, (2) Seek by use to exercise your spiritual senses, that you may be quick to discern the first and most distant approach of temptation, that so it may find you hidden in the risen living Savior. (3) Let the blood of Jesus be instantly applied, so that you may be immediately cleansed from the least spot that may have defiled your dress. (4) Keep away your eyes, and speech, and feet, from all scenes and society that have a defiling influence. (Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily)

From an Unknown Source

Two theological students were walking along a street in the Whitechapel district of London, a section where old and used clothing is sold. "What a fitting illustration all this makes!" said one of the students as he pointed to a suit of clothes hanging on a rack by a window. A sign on it read: SLIGHTLY SOILED—GREATLY REDUCED IN PRICE. "That's it exactly," he continued. "We get soiled by gazing at a vulgar picture, reading a course book, or allowing ourselves a little indulgence in dishonest or lustful thoughts; and so when the time comes for our character to be appraised, we are greatly reduced in value. Our purity, our strength is gone. We are just part and parcel of the general, shopworn stock of the world." Yes, continual slight deviations from the path of right may greatly reduce our usefulness to God and to our fellowman. In fact, these little secret sins can weaken our character so that when we face a moral crisis, we cannot stand the test. As a result, we go down in spiritual defeat because we have been careless about little sins. (Source unknown)

James 1:27 Keep oneself unstained by the world.

After a violent storm one night, a large tree, which over the years had become a stately giant, was found lying across the pathway in a park. Nothing but a splintered stump was left. Closer examination showed that it was rotten at the core because thousands of tiny insects had eaten away at its heart. The weakness of that tree was not brought on by the sudden storm; it began the very moment the first insect nested within its bark. With the Holy Spirit's help, let's be very careful to guard our purity. ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Robert Murray McCheyne wrote to Dan Edwards after the latter's ordination as a missionary, "In great measure, according to the purity and perfections of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God". (Paul Borthwick, *Leading the Way*, Navpress, 1989, pp. 65)

Paul Borthwick writes...

We can supplement our accountability to others by reading slowly through literature designed to challenge our Christian maturity. Consider, as an example, these questions related to sexual purity that I had to read carefully as I read Kent Hughes' *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome*:

1. Are we being desensitized by the present evil world? Do things that once shocked us now pass us by with little notice? Have our sexual ethics slackened?
2. Where do our minds wander when we have no duties to perform?
3. What are we reading? Are there books or magazines or files in our libraries that we want no one else to see?
4. What are we renting at the local video stores? How many hours do we spend watching TV? How many adulteries did we watch last week? How many murders? How many did we watch with our children?
5. How many chapters of the Bible did we read last week? (*Leading the Way*, Navpress, 1989, pp. 120-121)

James 1:27 "Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to

keep himself unspotted from the world."-- (R.V.).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER - IT IS the experiences of life that reveal us to ourselves. They cannot put into us qualities that are not there, but can develop them. The whole of this wonderful chapter is filled with the diverse discipline of life. "Manifold trials" (Jam1:2), which probably refer to the persecutions and losses of the early Christians., "Temptations" (Jam1:12) which refer to the solicitation of evil from without and within. The burning heat of the fire of prosperity (Jam1:11). The "good gifts" which are strewn around our pathway by the Father of lights--home, parents, friendship, love!

The greatest training-ground for us all is the Word of God (Jam1:21-25). It is here compared to a mirror which reflects us to ourselves, but alas, too often we go our way and forget what manner of men we are. The human soul has a wonderful habit of forgetting any statements that seem to reflect on itself, and to contradict its own notions of its pride and respectability. If, however, we avoid this mistake, and set ourselves to doing, and not hearing only, then we shall grow into strong, brave, and beautiful souls, and shall be blessed in our deed.

Do not stand gazing at the imperfections which the Word of God reveals but having learnt where you come short, dare to believe that Jesus Christ is the true counterpart of your need; that He is strong where you are weak, and full where you are empty.

"Keep himself unspotted from the world." We love the dimpled innocence and purity of a sweet child. But there is something nobler--the face of man or woman who has fought and suffered in the great battle against corruption that is in the world through lust. To keep oneself unspotted from the evil of the world, though perpetually accosted and surrounded by it, is a greater thing than to live in a glass-house, where the blight and dust cannot enter. What a training for character is this daily warfare!

To visit those in affliction. We are related to the world of pain and sorrow by the troubles which are constantly overtaking those with whom we come in contact in dally life. Where the conditions of life are hard, we obtain our best perfecting in Christian character.

PRAYER Make our life deeper, stronger, richer, more Christlike, more full of the spirit of heaven, more devoted to Thy service and glory. AMEN. (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk, July 7)

James 2

James 2:1

In his Prison Fellowship newsletter, Chuck Colson tells of a pastor who was putting the final touches on his sermon early one Sunday morning when he heard a knock on his study door. There stood three ragged boys who had received gifts from church members. Their home was ravaged by drugs and prostitution. They had never been in a church before and wanted to look around. So the pastor gave them a quick "tour."

Fifteen minutes later they were back, asking what time the service started. "Can people come to your church if their socks don't match?" asked the oldest. The pastor assured them they could. "What if they don't have any socks?" Again, the pastor reassured them. "That's good," said the boy, "because my socks don't match, and my little brother hasn't any." That morning those boys came to church and were warmly welcomed. Since then the church has helped the entire family.

Just as the gospel is open to everyone, everyone should feel welcome in our churches. Wealthy and poor, child and aged, police officer and ex-con, handicapped and athlete are all objects of Christ's love. They are all potential members of His body. May there be no barriers in our churches nor in our hearts toward anyone! Dennis Egner ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries. Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, may some weary souls find rest
Because Your people took them in
And helped them see the love of Christ
That frees us from our guilt and sin.--Dennis De Haan

Poor is the church that values programs more than people.

James 2:1

Many years ago, when my father, Dr. M. R. De Haan, was president of Radio Bible Class, a well-known minister came to our office. Initially I was awed by the presence of this distinguished visitor.

My impression soon began to change, however, as I listened to him talk about himself. He seemed to exemplify what the apostle Paul said a Christian should NOT do, that is, "to think of himself more highly than he ought to think" (Rom. 12:3).

When my father asked the noted pulpiteer about another preacher in the same town, he ridiculed the man's ministry to those who lived "on the other side of the tracks." I've never forgotten that incident.

What about our attitudes? Is there favoritism in our churches? Are we as interested in the "down and outer" as much as the "up and outer"? Do we greet those on the bottom rung of the social ladder with the same enthusiasm we show to those who have riches and enjoy worldly prestige?

Christians should never neglect a needy soul. The Lord is not pleased when we show undue favoritism to some and snub others.

Is the word "welcome" printed on your church bulletin? Does it apply to everyone? - R W De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

No one is excluded from the circle of God's grace,
We cannot get beyond His love and care;
Why then do we close our minds and turn away our face
From all who in the gospel have a share?-- Hess

A heart that is open to Christ will be open to those He loves.

James 2:1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

Million Dollar Mistake - Elisa Tinsley, in USA Today, described how a Spokane, Washington bank lost one of its best customers, a construction company owner named John Barrier. John Barrier had just come from a construction site and his clothes were dirty. He went to the bank to cash a \$100 check. When he tried to get his parking slip validated, the teller refused, saying he hadn't conducted a transaction. "You have to make a deposit to get your parking slip validated," she insisted. John Barrier told the teller he was a substantial depositor but she was obviously doubtful. He asked to see the manager, who also refused to validate the parking slip. The next day, John Barrier went back to the bank and withdrew a rather large sum of money, one million dollars to be exact.

Wrong Motives - Someone once penned a clever rhyme to illustrate the problem of favoritism:

... many people go to church,
As everyone knows;
Some go to close their eyes,
And some to eye their clothes.

Favoritism Challenged -

Muretus, a wandering scholar in the Middle Ages was very learned but very poor. In his wanderings he fell ill, and he was taken to the place where the destitute were kept. The people who cared for him did not know that he was a scholar and that he understood Latin. The doctors were discussing his case in Latin, saying that he was a poor creature of value to no one and that it was hopeless and unnecessary to expend care and money on attention to such a worthless individual. Muretus looked up and answered in their own Latin, "Call no man worthless for whom Christ died."

The King of Sweden -

I remember reading a story about a plainly dressed man who entered a church in the Netherlands and took a seat near the front. A few minutes later a woman walked down the aisle, saw the stranger in the place she always sat, and curtly asked him to leave. He quietly got up and moved to a section reserved for the poor.

When the meeting was over, a friend of the woman asked her if she knew the man she had ordered out of her seat. "No," she replied. Her friend then informed her, "The man you ordered out of your seat was King Oscar of Sweden! He is here visiting the Queen."

James 2:5 Hath not God chosen the poor of this world?

There is nothing that men dread more than poverty. They will break every commandment in the Decalogue rather than be poor. But it

is God's chosen lot. He had one opportunity only of living our life, and He chose to be born of parents too poor to present more than two doves at his presentation in the temple. All his life was spent among the poor. His chosen apostles and friends were, with few exceptions, poor. He lived on charity, rode in triumph on a borrowed steed, ate his last meal in a borrowed room, and lay in a borrowed grave. "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world?" Why is poverty so dear to God?

It is in harmony with the spirit of the Gospel. — The world-spirit aggrandizes itself with the abundance of its possessions. Its children vie with each other in luxury and display. The spirit of Christ, on the other hand, chooses obscurity, lowliness, humility; and with these poverty is close akin.

It compels to simpler faith in God. — The rich man may trust Him; but the poor man must. There is so much temptation to the well-to-do classes to interpose their wealth between themselves and the pressure of daily need; but the poor man has no fortress in which to hide, except the two strong arms of God. He waits on Him for his daily bread, and gathers the manna falling straight from the sky.

It gives more opportunities of service. — The rich are waited on, and pay for servants to wait on those they love. The poor, on the contrary, are called to minister to one another, at every meal, and in all the daily round of life. Herein they become like Him who was, and is, as one that serveth, and who became poor, that through his poverty we might be rich. (Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily)

James 2:9 If you show partiality, you commit sin.

A PREJUDICED USHER - In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi wrote that during his student days he read the Gospels seriously and considered converting to Christianity. He believed that in the teachings of Jesus he could find the solution to the caste system that was dividing the people of India.

So one Sunday he decided to attend services at a nearby church and talk to the minister about becoming a Christian. When he entered the sanctuary, however, the usher refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go worship with his own people. Gandhi left the church and never returned.

"If Christians have caste differences also," he said, "I might as well remain a Hindu."

That usher's prejudice not only betrayed Jesus but also turned a person away from trusting Him as Savior.

The "prejudiced usher" described in today's Bible passage welcomed a wealthy visitor but insulted a poor one. Perhaps he felt he was doing his job and only carrying out the wishes of the members in the church. But he displayed bad manners, and he was guilty of a sin as serious as murder and adultery (James 2:9-11).

When people visit your church, do you warmly welcome them regardless of their race or social status? -Haddon W Robinson [Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)

God's love that drew salvation's plan
Embraces every class of man;
It breaks the toughest racial wall
Because it offers Christ to all.--Dennis De Haan

Prejudice distorts what it sees, deceives when it talks, and destroys when it acts.

James 2:10 "Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty in all."

GOD'S MERCY SYSTEM - In the United States justice system, it's important that jurors have an open mind. They can't have their minds made up before they get into the courtroom. They must always remember that a person is considered innocent until proven guilty.

Even for those who never expect to find themselves on the wrong side of the law, it's a comfort to know that guilt is not assumed, but has to be proven.

Yet, this system of justice is not like the one God has devised for mankind. We are declared guilty before we even enter His courtroom! And though that may not sound fair, it is. God's perfect holiness demands it.

In a courtroom, when a person is found guilty, he or she faces punishment. But the wonderful thing about God's courtroom is that when we admit our guilt, we are offered mercy! We are all guilty and face an eternal life-sentence of death. Yet the penalty for sin is meted out only to those who refuse to acknowledge their sin, and who reject God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Guilty -- that's our status. But we can be granted forgiveness and be pardoned from our sin through the blood of Jesus Christ. That's

God's mercy system! -- J D Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

God's pardon is so full and free,
For Jesus died on Calvary;
It's granted to each sinful soul
Who truly longs to be made whole. -- Dennis De Haan

God's justice condemns us -- but His mercy redeems us

James 2.12. So speak ye, and so do, as men that are to be judged by a law of liberty.

Again the purpose of James is practical, but the arresting word here is the description of the standard of speech and action as "a law of liberty." The phrase had already been used, as a definition of "the perfect law" (r. 25). Its repetition shows that it suggests an aspect of law which impressed the writer, and it is interesting to remember that the phrase is peculiar to James. He had referred a little before to the "royal law"—"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"—words taken from the law of Moses, and emphasized in the teaching of Jesus. Was it not the sum-total of the conception of life as implicated in that "royal law" that he described as a "law of liberty"? To keep that law is only possible when that which the Lord had connected with it is obeyed: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." When that law is kept, the soul is set free from all the bondage which results from the breaking of any of the enactments of the moral law. The law of liberty is the law which defines our relationship to God and man as love-mastered. To speak and do under that impulse, is to be free indeed. If that law be disobeyed, if no mercy be shown, then judgment based upon that law will show no mercy. Love is the most vigilant and severe sentinel that watches words and works. If it be obeyed, then is life a life of liberty. If it be disobeyed, then are we in bondage every way. (Morgan, G. C. Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible).

James 2:14

The well-known apparent "conflict" between James and Paul focuses especially on this verse. The Apostle Paul says emphatically: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Yet James, also an apostle, insists: "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:20) There is no real conflict, of course. In our text verse, there is a definite article before the word "faith." That is, James' question is, literally, "Can that faith save him?" This is obviously intended as a rhetorical question, with a negative answer. In the context, James is saying that a "profession of faith" is not enough to produce salvation, if that faith "have not works." Since that kind of faith does not save, then what kind of faith does save? The answer is given by Paul, in the very verses quoted above. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that—i.e., that faith (which is the inference in the original)—is not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." In other words, true saving faith is not a man-generated faith of some kind; it is a supernatural gift of God! And that faith does save, because it is part of the new nature implanted by the Holy Spirit when a new believer is born again. Furthermore, this faith does inevitably produce good works, for the verse following says that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Faith must be faith in something, of course, and true saving faith must have its proper object. It must be centered in the saving gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in His inerrant Word. Such faith will inevitably result in a changed life and good works, as well as a sound and growing confidence in the deity of Christ, His substitutionary death and bodily resurrection, the full authority of Scripture and the assurance of one's personal salvation. That is the faith that saves. - HMM

See Related Resources:

Gil Rugh

- [James 2:14-17: The Role of Faith and Works](#)

Alexander Maclaren

- James 2:14-23: Faith Without Works

John F. Hart

- [James 2:14-26: How To Energize Our Faith: Reconsidering The Meaning Of James 2:14-26](#)

John Piper

- [James 2:14-16: Does James Contradict Paul?](#)

Robert V Rakestraw

- [James 2:14-26: Does James Contradict the Pauline Soteriology](#)

Dave Roper

- [James 2:14-26: A Faith That Works](#)

John MacArthur

- [James 2:14-20: Dead Faith](#)

Steven Cole

- [James 2:14-19 Saving Faith: Genuine or False?](#)

Rich Cathers

- [James 2:14-26 - Sermon with illustrations](#)

E P Barrows

- [James 2 - The Alleged Disagreement Between Paul and James](#)

James 2:14 What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

Kent Hughes writes about a cartoon in The New Yorker that showed a large sign out in front of a church which read:

“The Lite Church: 24% Fewer Commitments, Home of the 7.5% tithe, fifteen-minute sermons, forty-five-minute worship services. We have only eight commandments—your choice. We use just three spiritual laws. Everything you’ve wanted in a church ... and less!”

Unfortunately that cartoon paints an accurate picture. Many people today are looking for a “lite church,” a “lite faith,” and a “lite commitment.” In the passage we’re studying today, James asks each of us a question, “Is your faith genuine?” How can we know if we have real faith or “lite faith?”...

Belief and Behavior—If you don’t live it, you don’t believe it.

Faith in many ways is like a wheelbarrow. You have to put some real push behind it to make it work

A line from a Rich Mullins song says,

“Faith without works is like a screen door on a submarine.”

It’s worthless and it sinks. Do you claim to have faith? Does your life really show it? A workless faith is a worthless faith. We must ask ourselves, “If I were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict me?”

From the Peanut Gallery: The Peanuts comic strip written by Charles Schulz once featured a brilliant illustration of faith without works: Charlie Brown and Linus come across Snoopy shivering in the snow. Charlie says, “Snoopy looks kind of cold, doesn’t he?” Linus replies, “I’ll say. Maybe we’d better go over and comfort him.” They walk over to the dog, pat his head, and Charlie Brown says, “Be of good cheer, Snoopy.” Linus adds, “Yes, be of good cheer.” In the final frame, the boys are walking away, still bundled up in their winter coats. Snoopy is still shivering, and over his head is a big “?”.

Faith without Works: “No man can come to Christ by faith and remain the same anymore than he can come into contact with a 220-volt wire and remain the same.”—Warren Wiersbe

“A person who professes Christ but who does not live a Christ-honoring, Christ-obeying life is a fraud.”—John MacArthur

“Faith alone justifies, but the faith that justifies is never alone.” — John Calvin

A Story of Fruitful Faith - In the late '60s and early '70s, Keith Green was highly influenced by his culture. As an aspiring and incredibly talented musician on the rise, he experimented with eastern religions and drugs. In 1975, however, he gave his life to Jesus Christ and his music changed to reflect an energetic faith. While inspirational or worshipful, it was also exhortative, asking questions like, “How can you be so dead, when you’ve been so well fed?” And, “How can you be so numb, not to care if they come? You close your eyes and pretend the job’s done; don’t close your eyes and pretend the job’s done!” His life reflected his faith: he took in the homeless, the drunks, the drug abusers, and anyone else. His Spirit-filled music and ministry to the needy yielded much fruit. (all the above from Morgan, R. J. Nelson's Annual Preacher's Sourcebook : 2004 Edition. Page 218. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers)

An old boatman painted the word “faith” on one oar of his boat and “works” on the other. He was asked his reason for this. In answer, he slipped the oar with “faith” into the water and rowed. The boat, of course, made a very tight circle. Returning to the dock, the boatman then said, “Now, let’s try ‘works’ without ‘faith’ and see what happens. The oar marked “works” was put in place and the boatman began rowing with just the “works” oar. Again the boat went into a tight circle but in the opposite direction. When the boatman again returned to the wharf, he interpreted his experiment in these strong and convincing words, “You see, to make a passage across the lake, one needs both oars working simultaneously in order to keep the boat in a straight and narrow way. If one does not have the use of both oars, he makes no progress either across the lake nor as a Christian. ([10,000 sermon illustrations](#), Dallas: Biblical Studies Press)

Another version - Two Oars - A familiar story tells of an old Scotsman who operated a rowboat to transport passengers. On one oar he had written the word Faith, while the other bore the word Works. The point of the story, of course, is that pulling on either oar alone would simply make one go around and around in circles. Both oars must be used to make any progress at all.

James 2:17

When we believe in Christ as Savior and Lord, we long to express our faith through some act of love. The apostle Paul spoke of “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:16). We demonstrate what we believe, not only by what we say but also by what we do. The genuineness of our faith, therefore, is proven by our works. An incident in the life of John Wesley illustrates this truth. An associate of Wesley, Samuel Bradburn, was highly respected by his friends and used by God as an effective preacher. On one occasion he was in rather desperate financial need. When Wesley learned of his circumstances, he sent him a five-pound note (then worth about \$10) with the following letter:

“Dear Sammy: ‘Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.’
Yours affectionately, John Wesley.”

Bradburn’s reply was prompt.

“Rev. and Dear Sir: I have often been struck with the beauty of the passage of Scripture quoted in your letter, but I must confess that I never saw such a useful expository note on it before.”

Someone has said,

“Pious talk cannot take the place of downright helpfulness.”

This is especially true in the matter of both faith and love. To profess faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and ignore the needs of fellow believers is incongruous, for “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Ro 5:5). Let’s learn from John Wesley and from James by giving a practical exposition of our faith every day. - Paul R VanGorder

There are two parts to the Gospel. The first part is believing it, and the second part is behaving it. The hearer only is the one who is satisfied with just believing without behaving.

James 2:19 "The devils also believe, and tremble."

If there be a faith (and there is) which leaves a man just what he was, and permits him to indulge in sin, it is the faith of devils. Perhaps not so good as that, for "the devils believe and tremble," whereas these hypocrites profess to believe and yet dare to defy God and seem to have no fear of him whatsoever. (C H Spurgeon)

James 2:20

In nature, lightning and thunder present a striking illustration of the relationship between faith and works. When lightning flashes across the sky, we know that the roar of thunder will follow. Without lightning, there would be no thunder, because the one is the cause of the other. Likewise, good works always accompany saving faith, because one causes the other.

We must keep before us the clear truth that we are saved by grace and grace alone. Ephesians 2:8-9 says,

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

But many believers who glibly quote this passage ignore the verse that follows: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (v. 10).

In the same manner that thunder contributes nothing to lightning, good works add nothing to our salvation. Rather, they are the "sound" of faith and will follow every genuine conversion experience. The one without the other is not the real thing.

Genuine faith is always evident by what follows—a life of good works. —R W De Haan. [Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Faith without works is presumptuous; faith with works is precious.

James 2:23 [Abraham] was called the friend of God.

Our Unfailing Friend: As a young man, Joseph Scriven had been engaged to a woman he deeply love. But tragedy struck the night before their wedding when the boat she was in capsized and she drowned. In the hope of forgetting the shock, which he never did, Joseph left his home in Ireland and went to Canada.

There he taught school and served as a tutor. He chose to live very simply, spending his money and strength in generously providing for destitute people. At times he even gave away his own clothing. He was considered an eccentric by some, yet all he tried to do was obey God's Word as best he could understand it.

In his loneliness, Joseph Scriven needed a steadfast friend. Having found that friend in Jesus Christ, he wrote these simple words, which movingly express his experience:

What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Even if we have been blessed with deeply enriching friendships, we all need Joseph Scriven's Friend. But before we can know Jesus as our Friend, we must know Him as our Savior. Then, through all of our changing circumstances, He will be the One we can depend on -- our unfailing Friend. -Vernon Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Christ's friendship prevails even when human friendship fails.

Salvation Army - William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, was brushing his mane-like white hair when his son Bramwell stepped into the room. "Bramwell!" he cried. "Did you know that men sleep out all night on the bridges?" "Well, yes," the son replied. "A lot of poor fellows I suppose do that." "Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself to have known it and to have done nothing for them!" his father retorted. And when the son began to talk about the Poor Law program, General Booth waved a hand and said, "Go and do something! We must do something!" "What can we do?" "Get them a shelter!" "That will cost money," replied Bramwell. "Well, that is your affair. Something must be done. Get hold of a warehouse and warm it, and find something to cover them. But mind, Bramwell, no coddling!" That was the beginning of Salvation Army shelters. (The Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching & Preachers, W. Wiersbe, p. 184)

True Faith = True Godliness - C H Spurgeon - You will never find true faith unattended by true godliness; nor will you ever discover a truly holy life which does not have at its root a living faith based upon the righteousness of Christ. Woe to those who seek one without the other! There are some who cultivate faith and forget holiness. These may be very high in orthodoxy, but they shall be very deep in condemnation, for they hold the truth in unrighteousness. There are others who have strained after holiness of life, but have denied the faith, like the Pharisees whom the Master said were 'whitewashed sepulchers.' We must have faith, for this is the foundation; we must have holiness of life, for this is the superstructure. We need the superstructure of spiritual life if we would

have comfort in the day of doubt. But do not seek a holy life without faith, for that would be to erect a house which can afford no permanent shelter, because it is not founded on a rock.

Martin Luther on the vital (crucial) relationship between Root and Fruit (cp Faith and Works) - Insist on it—inwardly, in the spirit, before God, man is justified by faith alone, without works; but outwardly and publicly, before the people and himself, he is justified through his works. That is, he thereby becomes known and certain himself that he honestly believes. Call the one a public justification, the other an inward justification, in this sense that the public justification is a fruit, a result, a proof of the justification in the heart. Accordingly, man is not justified by it before God, but must previously be justified before Him. In the same way, the fruits of the tree proclaim the obvious goodness of the tree, which follows and proves its inner, natural goodness. This is what James means in his epistle when he says: "Faith without works is dead." The fact that works do not follow is a certain sign that there is not faith, but only a dead thought and dream, which people falsely call faith.

R C Sproul writes - James argues straightforwardly that Abraham was justified by works. When was Abraham justified by works? When he offered Isaac on the altar. To understand this, we need to bear in mind that James is using the term 'justification' in a different sense, with a different nuance, than Paul does. Paul deals with the issue of how a sinner is reconciled to a just and holy God. He uses the term 'justification' in its supreme theological sense. James, however, is asking how a person is justified before men, not before God. His question is: How do we know that a person has authentic faith? Jesus said, "By their fruit you will recognize them" (Matthew 7:16). James labors in the second chapter of his epistle to show that a person's true faith is shown outwardly by acts of obedience or works of righteousness. He says, "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do" (James 2:18). Now, does God need to see your works to know if you have faith or not? Of course not. James is speaking of man's sight. Paul says that in God's sight, Abraham was justified by faith (Genesis 15). However, James says that in man's sight the most telling proof that Abraham was a justified man is that he was willing to obey God even to the point of offering up his only son on the altar. (Tabletalk, May, 1989)

James 3

James 3

Experts tell us that people often hide what they are trying to say behind a wall of words. This is a kind of doubletalk in which their words do not coincide with their feelings. Gerald Nierenberg, a New York lawyer, wrote a book about this problem called *Meta-Talk: Guide to Hidden Meanings in Conversation*. In it he gives 350 examples of verbal distortion.

A communication consultant who holds workshops on this subject says many people fear that honesty in speech will cost them friend-ships, love, or respect. So they either keep their lips zipped or say something other than what they mean. Shyness, lack of self-worth, fear of displaying ignorance, fear of criticism, and fear of hurting someone's feelings also may impede honest communication.

Christians are not immune to this problem. Trying to be both loving and truthful can be extremely difficult. The Bible, however, provides a balanced and optimistic approach to this dilemma. Being honest with people may hurt, but if we speak kindly and with compassion we give them the support they need to face reality.

The third chapter of James indicates that divine wisdom can help us talk effectively, for it is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (v. 17). Believers who let these characteristics govern their speech will not have to hide behind a wall of words. —M R De Haan II ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Gentle words fall lightly, but they have great weight. .

James 3

Author Mark Twain was often outspoken about his bitterness toward the things of God. Sadly, church leaders were largely to blame for his becoming hostile to the Bible and the Christian faith. As Twain grew up, he knew elders and deacons who owned slaves and abused them, and he knew ministers who used the Bible to justify slavery. He heard men use foul language and saw them practice dishonesty during the week after speaking piously in church on Sunday. Although he saw genuine love for the Lord Jesus in some people, including his mother and his wife, he was never able to understand the bad teaching and poor example of certain church leaders.

Leadership is a privilege, and with privilege comes responsibility. God holds teachers of His truth doubly responsible because they are in positions where they can either draw people toward Christ or drive them away from Him.

Serving as an elder, a deacon, a Sunday school teacher, or a Bible club leader is an awesome responsibility. Those who are called to these positions are responsible to lead people to the Savior rather than away from Him. According to James 3, they can do this by exemplifying true wisdom, which is "pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (v. 17). —H V Lugt. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The best kind of leadership produces fellowship.

James 3:2 If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.

Think of the sins of speech! How innumerable they are! When we see them in the light of this chapter, we can understand the holy Isaiah saying, "Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King."

The sins of speech about ourselves. — The tongue boasteth great things. We are all apt to be vain, boastful, exaggerated. We tell stories that redound to our own credit; contrive to focus attention on our own words and deeds; and even in delivering God's messages manage to let it be seen that we have a clearer insight into truth or a closer familiarity with God than our fellows.

The sins of speech about others. — "We break the law of courtesy, and become harsh, insolent, and uncivil; or the law of purity, and repeat stories that leave a stain; or the law of truth, and practise insincerity, equivocation, and dissimulation; or the law of kindness, and are harsh and implacable to those who are beneath us in station. Or in our desire to stand well with others we are guilty of flattery, servility, time-serving, and the like."

The sins of speech in connection with God's work. — We disparage other workers; compliment them to their faces on addresses they have delivered, and disparage them behind their backs; pass criticisms which take away the effect which their words had otherwise exercised over others; contrive to indicate one defect in which was otherwise a perfect achievement. Alas for us! How greatly we need to offer the prayer of the psalmist: Set a watch, O God, upon our lips! (Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily)

James 3:5 Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

Recently I came across an article which underscores in a most effective way the value and import of so-called "little things," and I want to share it with you today. J. Ellis tells us: "In the state of Ohio stands a courthouse which is uniquely constructed so that the raindrops which fall on the north side go into Lake Ontario and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, while those falling on the south side go into the Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico. At that point just a puff of wind can determine the destiny of a rain drop. It will make a difference of over 2,000 miles. What a suggestive thought that you and I may, in certain situations by the smallest deed or choice of words, also set in motion influences that shall not only change lives here and now, but also affect their final Home as well."

A sympathetic glance, a kind word, a helpful deed, a sincere testimony, a solemn warning, an invitation to church, yes, even a "pat on the back" — any one of these "little things" can become a big thing. It could be like that "puff of wind" on the raindrops. It could well help to determine the happiness, the direction, and even the destiny of an eternal soul. It is an old truth, but it still can stand underscoring, that "no one lives to himself, for no man is an island." Either by what he does, or does not do, every person has a positive or negative effect upon his "neighbor." We are either hindering or helping others.

So let us remember the story of "the wind and the raindrops," and that sometimes it doesn't take much to alter the course or affect the destiny of a friend's life. A small bit turns the horse, a little rudder guides the ship, on a long journey, and a spark can ignite a great fire. Be careful about those "little big things" in life!

No service in itself is small;
None great, though earth it fill;
But that is small that seeks its own,
And great that does God's will. —Anon.

God hangs the greatest weights upon the smallest wires.—Bacon

James 3:6 The Point of No Return

Read: James 3:1–12

The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body. James 3:6

It wasn't as simple as just crossing another river. By law, no Roman general could lead armed troops into Rome. So when Julius Caesar led his Thirteenth Legion across the Rubicon River and into Italy in 49 bc, it was an act of treason. The impact of Caesar's decision was irreversible, generating years of civil war before Rome's great general became absolute ruler. Still today, the phrase "crossing the Rubicon" is a metaphor for "passing the point of no return."

Sometimes we can cross a relational Rubicon with the words we say to others. Once spoken, words can't be taken back. They can either offer help and comfort or do damage that feels just as irreversible as Caesar's march on Rome. James gave us another word picture about words when he said, "The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell" (James 3:6).

When words become weapons, our relationships soon become casualties.

When we fear we have crossed a Rubicon with someone, we can seek their forgiveness—and God's (Matthew 5:23–24; 1 John 1:9). But even better is to daily rest in God's Spirit, hearing Paul's challenge, "Let your conversation be always full of grace" (Colossians 4:6), so that our words will not only honor our Lord, but lift up and encourage those around us.

Lord, please guard my heart and my words today. May I speak only words that please You and bring health and healing to others. By Bill Crowder

Read [What Do You Do with a Broken Relationship?](http://discoveryseries.org/q0703) at discoveryseries.org/q0703.

When words become weapons, our relationships soon become casualties.

INSIGHT The very practical book of James contains much instruction about the wise use of our words: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (James 1:19). "Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless" (James 1:26). "Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another" (James 4:11). Why is James's teaching to watch our words crucial for honoring God and people? Arthur Jackson

James 3:8 "No man can tame the tongue."

TAMING A TIGER - My granddaughter Bree loved the circus, but she was afraid of the tiger. She had no reason to be, however, because the huge old cat had been tamed and was caged. It was hopelessly overweight, and I suspect it no longer had any teeth. Along with its lion friends, the striped beauty went through its routine in meek subjection.

You can tame a tiger, a lion, a leopard, a cheetah, and other wild animals, especially if you work with them from birth. But according to the apostle James, you cannot tame the human tongue. He wrote, "It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (3:8).

James used other vivid analogies to illustrate the enormous power of this little member of the body. A bit in a horse's mouth can turn the animal to the right or to the left (v. 3). A ship's rudder can steer a huge vessel in a raging storm (v. 4). A single match or even a small spark can start a fire that can destroy an entire forest (v. 5). So too, though the tongue is a small organ, it can do great harm.

Even under the strictest self-discipline and constant monitoring, the tongue's unruly nature lurks dangerously below the surface. You can tame a tiger, but only by prayer and watchfulness can you control your tongue. -- Dennis Egnor ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, set a watch upon my lips,
My tongue control today;
Help me evaluate each thought
And guard each word I say.-- Hess

He cannot speak well who cannot hold his tongue.

A young lady once said to John Wesley, "I think I know what my talent is. It's to speak my mind."

He replied, "I don't think God would mind if you bury that talent."

James 3:10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. --

Olives On A Fig Tree - When I became a Christian as a young teenager, I remember watching closely the men of our church. Most of them lived solid, consistent lives. They were good examples to a young person saved out of a non-Christian environment, and I owe

them a debt of gratitude.

But one man in our church did not set a good Christian example, and he caused me great confusion. He was probably the most outspoken in expressing his commitment to the Lord. Not only did he give glowing testimonies, but he also collared people in the church and challenged them to a deeper spirituality and commitment.

Yet his speech was inconsistent. I remember that when he was a counselor at our youth camp he sometimes made off-color remarks. And on more than one occasion, as my Sunday school teacher, he made degrading comments about the pastor and others in the church. Once I even heard him use the Lord's name in vain.

The apostle James said that cursing is out of place in a Christian's life--like salt water in a freshwater spring or olives on a fig tree (Jas. 3:11-12). So let's control our tongues. Then we can be sure that what we say will be consistent and will bless others. --Dennis Egner ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

I do not ask for mighty words
To leave the crowd impressed,
But grant my life may ring so true
My neighbor may be blessed. --Anon.

Children of the King should use the language of the court.

James 3:11-18

The very nature of jealousy is to turn on those who harbor it; and it will ultimately destroy them. The Old Testament word for jealousy means "to burn or to inflame"—an apt description of what goes on inside the person who allows jealousy to smolder.

A legendary Burmese potter became jealous of the prosperity of a washerman. Determined to ruin him, the potter induced the king to issue an order requiring the man to wash one of his black elephants white. The washerman replied that according to the rules of his vocation he would need a vessel large enough to hold the elephant, where-upon the king commanded the jealous potter to provide one. Though carefully fashioned, it crumbled to pieces beneath the weight of the giant beast. He made many more vessels, but each was crushed in the same way. Eventually the potter was ruined by the very scheme he had devised to defame the man he envied.

In a similar way, Saul's jealousy eventually caused his own destruction.

In Proverbs 6:27 we read, "Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?" The coals of jealousy quickly become a raging fire that will burn us severely. Unless we douse it with confession and repentance, it will eventually consume us. —Paul R VanGorder ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

As a moth gnaws a garment, so jealousy consumes a man.

James 3:14

Inequality seems to cause jealousy. When we see someone with more wealth than we have or with qualities we lack, we become jealous.

While recording interviews for a radio program, I asked people on the street in New York City if they believed all men are created equal. Most of them answered no. They cited our differing abilities, appearances, and environments. One man complained that he had to eat hotdogs for lunch while others ate in fancy restaurants. Only one person showed a deeper understanding of the question. She said, "Under God we are all equally human."

The Bible teaches that all people are created in the image of God, that they are all accountable for what they do with whatever He has given them, and that someday they will all die. So, "under God" there is equality—but only under God. Apart from Him and His plan to bring about eventual justice, we see much in life that is not fair.

Christians are in the best position to keep the right perspective. They have all come to God as sinners and have found forgiveness in the cross of Christ. Therefore, the rich person and the poor person stand together on the common ground of Calvary. The rich rejoice that they have discovered the emptiness of material wealth, and the poor rejoice that they have discovered eternal riches. And according to James, this is the wisdom that enables us to avoid the pitfall of jealousy. —M R De Haan II ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

No one can take from us the gifts that God gives us.

James 3:16 Where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there.

In the summer of 1986, two ships collided in the Black Sea, causing a tragic loss of life. The news of the disaster was further darkened when an investigation revealed the cause of the accident that hurled hundreds of passengers into the icy waters. The blame did not belong to defective radar or thick fog but to human stubbornness. Both captains were aware of the other ship's presence and could have taken evasive action to avert the collision. But according to news reports, neither wanted to give way to the other. Each was too proud to yield the right-of-way.

Even greater havoc and loss can be created in human relationships for much the same reason—"envy and self-seeking." We prefer to blame the world's problems on religious or political differences, but James says that the root problem is pride and self-centeredness. It caused the archangel Lucifer to fall from the heavens (Isa. 14). And our first parents, Adam and Eve, lost their innocence for the same reason.

The only way to keep jealousy and envy from turning into major disasters is to draw on the wisdom that comes from above, wisdom that is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, and full of mercy and goodness. That will mark the beginning of harmony—not havoc. —M R De Haan II ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Some troubles come from wanting to have our own way; others come from being allowed to have it.

James 3:17 The wisdom that is from above is ... full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

Level Ground - Racial prejudice can take root early in human hearts. Children are colorblind until they hear adults making unfounded statements or see them shunning people of a different race. Prejudices soon become well-established weeds with deep taproots. Eradicating them isn't easy.

Laws can help to minimize discrimination in housing and the workplace. But no legislation eliminates prejudice in the heart. Its only sure killer is a long and hard look at what Jesus accomplished when He died on the cross. It's there that we can receive a wisdom "full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (Jas. 3:17).

It is said that after the Civil War, General Robert E. Lee, a devout Christian, visited a church in Washington, D.C. During the Communion service, he was seen kneeling beside a black man. Later, when someone asked how he could do that, Lee replied, "My friend, all ground is level at the foot of the cross."

What makes that ground so level? The awfulness of our sins, the terrible price Jesus paid to forgive them, and the love He has for all people. Prejudice cannot survive in soil from that ground.

We can all kneel together at the foot of the cross. --Dennis De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Forgive me, Lord, for prejudice,
Remove its subtle lie;
Remind me that for everyone
You sent Your Son to die! --Dennis De Haan

To keep from looking down on others, look up to the cross.

James 3:17 - The wisdom that is from above is... without hypocrisy.

SPEAK AND DO - In ancient Greek dramas, a person behind a curtain spoke the lines while the performer on stage acted out the role. We might refer to the speaker behind the scenes as the one who didn't "practice what he preached."

This person behind the curtain reminds me of a problem we as Christians experience today. Many of us are skilled at sounding religious, but we don't put our words into action. This is hypocrisy.

When there is a discrepancy between what we say and what we do, we create confusion in the minds of our "audience." That's why many nonbelievers do not take the gospel message seriously.

A Christian who makes the greatest impact on a watching world, and who furthers the cause of Christ, is one whose actions harmonize with his speech. When James spoke of the "wisdom that is from above," he described it as "pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (3:17).

Our role as Christians is vastly different from the ancient Greek actors. They had speakers who didn't do and doers who didn't speak. We are to be people who speak and do the truth! - R W De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

You're writing a "gospel," a chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do, by the words that you say;
Men read what you write, whether faithless or true -
Say, what is the "gospel" according to you? -Gilbert

When actions and words agree, the message is loud and clear.

James 3.18 The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for them that make peace.

The marginal reading of the Revised Version suggests the substitution of the word "by" for "for," and that would seem to be the real thought of the writer. He had been contrasting the wisdom from beneath with that from above. The first produces jealousy, faction, confusion. The second is first pure and then peaceable. Now carefully observe that he says much more than that peace is the fruit of righteousness. That is true, and it had already been said in the declaration that heavenly wisdom is first pure, then peaceable. But here the thought is that of the propagative power of life according to heavenly wisdom. Righteousness bears fruit after its kind, and that is peace. When this is sown, still in peace, it produces righteousness again, wherein is the further fruitage; and so ever on. Those who make peace had been declared by the Lord to be blessed, the sons of God. Here the blessedness is shown in its effect. The peacemakers are those who live by the heavenly wisdom, which is first pure and then peaceable, that is, by righteousness. These are the men who make peace. To compromise with wrong, to seek for quietness by the sacrifice of righteousness, is not to secure peace, but to make it impossible. On the other hand, to stand for righteousness, even though there must be conflict and suffering, is to sow the fruit wherefrom peace will come. The ways of - God are all severe, but they are the only ways of goodness. To do right at the cost of ease, is to make peace. To seek ease at the cost of righteousness, is to make peace for ever impossible. (Morgan, G. C. Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible).

James 4

James 4:4

Suppose that in a certain community lives a man and his wife who love each other very much. Across the street lives a man who develops a hatred for the woman's husband. One night he invades their home and kills him. Although he is arrested, a loophole in the law allows him to escape punishment, and he is released to return to the community. Now imagine that in a few short weeks you see the widow and her husband's murderer walking down the street together. Her hand is slipped into his arm and she looks smilingly into his face. She says to him, "I'm so happy." What would you say about a woman like that? Surely you would brand her as disloyal to her husband's memory and unworthy to bear his name. We must never forget that this godless world hated Jesus enough to kill Him. One who walks hand in hand with a system headed by our Lord's enemies and becomes friendly with them is disloyal to Jesus Christ. Only those who keep themselves "unspotted from the world" (James 1:27) have a right to bear the name Christian. Let's avoid all unholy alliances. -Paul R VanGorder

James 4:5

A very deep and remarkable verse! The apostle is contending against the worldliness which was so rife among the believers he was addressing. They were set on pleasure; they sought the friendship of the world, and became unfaithful to their divine Lover; they were proud and high-minded. He went so far as to speak of them as adulterers and adulteresses; and then adopting a gentler, pleading tone, he says, "You are grieving the gentle Holy Spirit who has come to dwell within you, who yearns with a jealous envy to possess your entire nature for Himself."

The Spirit of God dwells within thee, O believer in Jesus Christ. If a man have not the Spirit of God, he is none of his; and since thou art undoubtedly one of us, thou hast most certainly the Holy Spirit. But the mistake of thy life consists in this, that He hath not thee. Some part of thy heart is given, but not all; and this causes Him the most intense pain, resembling that which we suffer from jealousy.

No keener pain is possible to the heart of man than to have good reason for the belief that a loved one is not wholly true; that there has been an alienation of affection which was once whole and entire; that another is receiving a part at least of the heart's devotion.

The fire and screw are light in comparison with our anguish then; but, this is what the Spirit of God suffers when we share between Him and the world that love which should be all his own. "I, the Lord thy God am a jealous God," is as true as when first spoken from Sinai. The person of Jesus Christ must be the Sun of our system, though that system may include many planets beside. (Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily)

James 4:6 "He giveth grace unto the humble."—Grace for the Humble

HUMBLE hearts seek grace, and therefore they get it. Humble hearts yield to the sweet influences of grace, and so it is bestowed on them more and more largely. Humble hearts lie in the valleys where streams of grace are flowing, and hence they drink of them. Humble hearts are grateful for grace and give the Lord the glory of it, and hence it is consistent with His honor to give it to them. Come, dear reader, take a lowly place. Be little in thine own esteem, that the Lord may make much of thee. Perhaps the sigh breaks out, "I fear I am not humble." It may be that this is the language of true humility. Some are proud of being humble, and this is one of the very worst sorts of pride. We're needy, helpless, undeserving, hell deserving creatures; and if we are not humble, we ought to be. Let us humble ourselves because of our sins against humility, and then the Lord will give us to taste of His favor. It is grace which makes us humble, and grace which finds in this humility an opportunity for pouring in more grace. Let us go down that we may rise. Let us be poor in spirit that God may make us rich. Let us be humble that we may not need to be humbled, but may be exalted by the grace of God. (Spurgeon, C. Faith's Checkbook)

James 4:6 God is against the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.

A small cathedral outside Bethlehem marks the supposed birthplace of Jesus. Behind a high altar in the church is a cave, a little cavern lit by silver lamps. You can enter the main edifice and admire the ancient church. You can also enter the quiet cave where a star embedded in the floor recognizes the birth of the King. There is one stipulation, however. You have to stoop. The door is so low you can't go in standing up. The same is true of the Christ. You can see the world standing tall, but to witness the Savior, you have to get [down] on your knees. (Lucado, Max: The Applause of Heaven)

James 4:7

Just a Small Sin - Toddling about his grandparent's home, a small boy discovered a bottle of lye and swallowed a single mouthful. Nine years later, after numerous surgeries, his digestive tract could function once again. Nearly nine years of restorative and reconstructive surgery were necessary to compensate for a small mouthful of lye. And we think small sins are harmless? That no one needs to worry over "insignificant" wrongs? It was only a mouthful of lye! But it was enough to endanger his life and bring years of misery to him and his family. Even the smallest wrong can be destructive. (Hurley, V. Speaker's sourcebook of new illustrations. Dallas: Word Publishers)

James 4:8 "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you"

Drawing Near to God - THE nearer we come to God, the more graciously will He reveal Himself to us. When the prodigal comes to his father, his father runs to meet him. When the wandering dove returns to the ark, Noah puts out his hand to pull her in unto him. When the tender wife seeks her husband's society, he comes to her on wings of love. Come then, dear friend, let us draw nigh to God who so graciously awaits us, yea, comes to meet us. Did you ever notice that passage in Isaiah 58:9? There the Lord seems to put Himself at the disposal of His people, saying to them, "Here I am," as much as to say: "What have you to say to me? What can I do for you? I am waiting to bless you." How can we hesitate to draw near? God is nigh to forgive, to bless, to comfort, to help, to quicken, to deliver. Let it be the main point with us to get near to God. This done, all is done. If we draw near to others, they may before long grow weary of us and leave us; but if we seek the Lord alone, no change will come over His mind, but He will continue to come nearer and yet nearer to us by fuller and more joyful fellowship. (Spurgeon, C.. Faith's Checkbook)

James 4:8 Come near to God, and God will come near to you.

Some of us have tried to have a daily quiet time and have not been successful. Others of us have a hard time concentrating. And all of us are busy. So rather than spend time with God, listening for his voice, we'll let others spend time with him and then benefit from their experience. Let them tell us what God is saying. After all, isn't that why we pay preachers? ...If that is your approach, if your spiritual experiences are secondhand and not firsthand, I'd like to challenge you with this thought: Do you do that with others parts of your life? ...You don't do that with vacations... You don't do that with romance... You don't let someone eat on your behalf, do you? [There are] certain things no one can do for you. And one of those is spending time with God. (Lucado, M., & Gibbs, T. A. Grace for the moment : Inspirational thoughts for each day of the year. Nashville, Tenn.: J. Countryman)

James 4:1-12

A man who had just been elected to the British Parliament brought his family to London and was giving them a tour of the city. When they entered Westminster Abbey, his eight-year-old daughter seemed awe-struck by the size and beauty of that magnificent structure. Her proud father, curious about what was going on in her mind, asked, "And what, my child, are you thinking about?" She replied, "Daddy, I was just thinking about how big you are in our house, but how small you look here!"

Pride can creep into our lives without our awareness. From time to time it's good for us to be "cut down to size." We need to be reminded not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. It's easy to become proud when we stay in our own circles of life. But when we are thrust into larger situations, with increased demands, pressures, and competition, we come to the shocking realization that "big fish in small ponds" shrink quickly in a large ocean.

One thing that stands out in the Word of God is that the Lord despises the haughty. Under inspiration the psalmist said, "One who has a haughty look and a proud heart, him I will not endure" (Psalm 101:5) . And James said, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

If we ask the Holy Spirit to help us see ourselves as we really are, He will enable us to control our foolish pride. —R W De Haan [Our Daily Bread](#). Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

James 4:10

Phillip Brooks said "The true way to be humble, is not to stoop until you are smaller than yourself, but to stand at your real height against some higher nature."

James 4:11 "Do not speak evil of one another."

JUST ASKING A QUESTION? - Slanderers slaughter reputations. Sometimes they attack with the bold strokes of a butcher. At other times they do their evil work with the finesse of a surgeon.

Satan is an expert in subtle slander. Knowing the power of a well-placed question to destroy a reputation, he simply asked, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" (Job 1:9).

Satan's question is shrewd because it evades the dangers of an outright lie. An accusation flirts with the embarrassment of being proven wrong. But no one can call you a liar or a slanderer if you merely ask a question.

A question also avoids punishment. It's difficult for someone to attack you if you have simply asked a question. It's unlikely that you can be sued or pulled into court. Yet, Satan's query savaged a good man's motives by implying that all of the good Job did was a coverup for selfishness.

When we are inclined to ask a malicious question, let's stop and remind ourselves that we will be playing the devil's game. Our tongues were not given to us to rip people apart; they were given to us to build people up. We ought to speak well of others not only to their face but also behind their back. -- Haddon W Robinson ([Our Daily Bread](#). Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

The tongue can be a blessing
Or the tongue can be a curse;
Say, friend, how are you using yours:
For better or for worse?

Our words have the power to build up or to tear down.

James 4:12

There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

The seventeenth-century French churchman Fenelon said,

"It is often our own imperfection which makes us reprove the imperfection of others; a sharp-sighted self-love of our own which cannot pardon the self-love of others."

Sometimes our own faults and imperfections make us see faults in others that don't even exist. A woman complained that her neighbor's windows were always dirty. One day, after complaining about them to a friend, the visitor encouraged her to wash her

own windows. She followed the advice. The next time her friend visited, she exclaimed, "I can't believe it. As soon as I washed my windows, my neighbor must have cleaned hers too. Look at them shine."

Criticism also blinds us to the good that others accomplish. A man who built a large drinking fountain in a public square drew derogatory comments from an art critic about its design. Though somewhat hurt, the builder asked, "Is anyone drinking from it?" The builder was happy to learn that the fountain, even though the critic didn't like its design, was doing its job—and doing it well.

Instead of calling attention to others' imperfections, we should examine ourselves. What we don't like in someone else might be the same thing that's wrong with us. And instead of judging others, we should look for the good in them and love them in spite of their faults. —R W De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

When criticizing, don't forget: God is listening.

James 4.12.

One only is the Lawgiver and Judge, even He Who is able to save and to destroy.

These words were written in connection with a warning against speaking against or judging a brother. They are clear and sharp and incisive, as they show the wrong of all such action. It is impossible for any man to find a final verdict against his brother. One only is able to do that, and that is the One Who makes the laws for the government of human lives. This is so because He alone knows those whom He governs, and because His laws are the result of that perfect knowledge. Therefore His laws are just, and so will His judgments be also. He only, therefore, can pass sentence of salvation or destruction. If these words thus warn us off from all judgment of our brother, what a glorious truth they reveal as to the rights of the individual soul! Every man is to be governed and judged by God. Every man has the right of final appeal from all the findings of men to the just judgment of God. To recognize that just in all things, is to be lifted to the highest realm of life. If my judgment is to come from the Lord, then with what care I should live! But it is also true that I shall be judged with the strictest justice. Not by the seeing of the eyes, nor by the hearing of the ears, does He judge, but with righteous judgment. If that fact fills the soul with a perpetual sense of awe, it also gives it much comfort and courage; for righteous judgment passes beyond all the actions, to the underlying motives and aspirations. These can only be known to God, Who is the Lawgiver, and the Creator of that which He governs. (Morgan, G. C. Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible).

James 4:14

"What is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes."

WILL YOU LIVE TO BE 100? - Magazine publisher J. I. Rodale, a zealous advocate of health foods, claimed at the age of 72 that he would live to be 100. The same week that his prediction appeared in The New York Times, he was being interviewed for a television program, again claiming that his bones were as strong as ever. Moments after making his boast, he died of a heart attack.

Dr. Stuart Berger, a nutritionist, claimed that he had the formula for living past the century mark. Although he had supposedly found the secret of youthfulness and had convinced many to follow his advice, he died in his sleep at the age of 40, grossly overweight.

Then there was author Jim Fixx, who advocated running to prevent coronary trouble. Yet at the age of 52 he died of a heart attack -- yes, ironically, while running.

Common sense dictates that we ought to take every possible measure to keep ourselves healthy. But in the final analysis, each of us must pray, "I trust in You, O Lord... My times are in Your hand" (Ps. 31:14-15).

Because any day, even today, may be our final day on earth, we need to be sure that we are ready to depart. Are you? - Vernon Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Whether we're old or young, not one of us can say
Just when will come to each his final earthly day;
Thus while this life is ours, Lord, may we now prepare,
So death may never come and take us unaware.-- Anon

If we are prepared to die, we're prepared to live.

James 4:15 "if the Lord wills"

In earlier centuries, believers ended letters with "D.V."—an abbreviation of the Latin Deo Volente, meaning "God willing." The phrase, "if the Lord wills," whether stated verbally or believed quietly, helps maintain a trusting submission to God's will. The great Latin

phrase, Deo Volente should be our watchword as we live in dependence on the providence of a sovereign God.

James 4:15

Will You Be Around? - I read the following account in a medical magazine: When the physical examination of a 78-year-old man had been completed, the doctor recommended that he come back in 6 months for another checkup. At this suggestion the aged patient shook his head and said, "Doctor, I don't think I'll be around then."

"Nonsense!" replied the physician with a reassuring smile. "You'll be around for years yet."

The elderly man gave him an odd look, then explained, "I mean that I'll be in Florida. I go there every January."

The story may cause us to smile, but the question it raises is very sobering. Will you and I be around tomorrow, next month, next year? It surely is sensible to make plans for the future, but we must always do so with an awareness of life's uncertainty.

As James reminded us in the Bible reading for today, life is "a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." (James 4:14). Because of this we ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that" (James 4:15).

Will you be around in 6 months? Let this question prompt you to live faithfully for the Lord Jesus Christ today. - R W De Haan [Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The present only is our own,
Live and toil with a will;
Do not wait until tomorrow,
For life's clock may then be still.- McCartney

Settle all accounts today; you can't bank on tomorrow

James 5

James 5.7 Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.

These words follow a stern denunciation of those prosperous men who have gained their prosperity by wronging their fellows. The ultimate in all such action had been reached when such men had "killed the Righteous One." Thinking of the sufferings of many to whom he wrote, sufferings resulting from the oppression of such men as he had denounced—James first reminded them that this Righteous One did not resist, and then called them to be patient, that is, long-suffering, until the Coming of the Lord. In that word his outlook on life shines out. The day of redress, when all wrongs will be righted and all oppressions cease, will be the day when the Righteous One will come again. For that day His suffering ones are to wait, and in their waiting, to be long-suffering even towards those who oppress them. The word of exhortation he then enforces by declaring that this is the attitude of God Himself, and that the reason of His patience is that He is waiting for the precious fruit of the earth. Is not this injunction to patience much needed? Too often we are inclined to become impatient as we wait. Sometimes, indeed, the very hope of the coming of the Lord has seemed to increase impatience rather than patience. To the true child of God, the Coming of the Lord is always at hand, and the glory of it sheds unceasing light upon the way. The true way of walking in that glorious light is ever that of thanking God at every morning's dawn, and evening's shadows, that He has not come, because He is still waiting for the precious fruit of the earth. Oh, to be patient in fellowship with God! (Morgan, G. C. Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible).

James 5.7 Be patient

New England preacher Phillips Brooks was known for his poise under pressure, but close friends knew he struggled with impatience. One day a friend, seeing him pacing, asked, "What's the trouble, Dr. Brooks?" The great preacher replied: "The trouble is that I'm in a hurry, but God isn't!"

James 5:8

"Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

It Will Not Be Long- THE last word in the Canticle of love is, "Make haste, my beloved," and among the last words of the Apocalypse we read, "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come", to which the heavenly Bridegroom answers, "Surely I come quickly." Love longs for the glorious appearing of the Lord, and enjoys this sweet promise, "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh." This stays our minds as

to the future. We look out with hope through this window. This sacred "window of agate" lets in a flood of light upon the present and puts us into fine condition for immediate work or suffering. Are we tried? Then the nearness of our joy whispers patience. Are we growing weary because we do not see the harvest of our seed-sowing? Again this glorious truth cries to us, "Be patient." Do our multiplied temptations cause us in the least to waver? Then the assurance that before long the Lord will be here preaches to us from this text, "Establish your hearts." Be firm, be stable, be constant, "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Soon will you hear the silver trumpets which announce the coming of your King. Be not in the least afraid. Hold the fort, for He is coming; yea, He may appear this very day. (Spurgeon, C. Faith's Checkbook)

James 5:12 Do not swear

Someone suggested the top ten lies told in America: 10) Your table will be ready in a minute. 9) One size fits all. 8) This will hurt me more than it hurts you. 7) I'm sorry I'm late; I got stuck in traffic. 6) The check is in the mail. 5) This offer is limited to the first 50 callers. 4) It's not the money; it's the principle of the thing. 3) I need just five minutes of your time. 2) I'll start my diet tomorrow. 1) I'm from the IRS and I'm here to help you. Our culture doesn't place much value on integrity, but Scripture does. James helps us sort out what characterizes a life of integrity: "do not swear"

James 5:13

Anyone who is having troubles should pray. Anyone who is happy should sing praises.

Do you want to know how to deepen your prayer life? Pray. Don't prepare to pray. Just pray. Don't read about prayer. Just pray. Don't attend a lecture on prayer or engage in discussion about prayer. Just pray. Posture, tone, and place are personal matters. Select the form that works for you. But don't think about it too much. Don't be so concerned about wrapping the gift that you never give it. Better to pray awkwardly than not at all. And if you feel you should only pray when inspired, that's okay. Just see to it that you are inspired every day. (Lucado, Max: When God Whispers Your Name)

James 5:13-15

This familiar passage is a difficult passage. Many suffering Christians have tried in all sincerity to follow the instructions given here, yet have not been healed. This may be because the promise has a specific, rather than general, application.

First, "is anyone afflicted?" This word means "troubled," referring especially to persecution or deprivation. For such a person, the admonition is: "Let him pray." Assuming that he is right with God, and is praying in His will (1 John 5:14, 15), he can expect either the needed relief or the needed grace.

Secondly: "Is there one who is sick?" Here the Greek word actually refers to physical illness. However, the context shows that this particular sickness has come specifically "since (the true connotation of 'if') he have committed sins." There are "many weak and sickly" believers who have so persistently refused to judge and confess their sins (1 Corinthians 11:30-32) that the Lord finally has laid them aside with sickness or injury. The remedy is for such a person to call for the church elders (not the reverse), and "let them pray" (after he has first openly confessed and repented of his sins) in faith anointing him with oil. then the promise is that, if the elders themselves have faith and are right with God, the Lord will forgive his sins and raise him up.

Furthermore, their prayer of faith will "save the sick." The Greek word in this case means "wearied," rather than "ill," and it tells us that the sinner has been delivered from the heavy burden of guilt which had wearied his soul, as well as the illness which had weakened his body. There are other reasons for illness besides unrepented sin, when other courses of action are indicated, but this is a wonderful promise of both spiritual and physical healing when sin is the problem. - HMM

James 5:13-20

In his book *Helping Those Who Don't Want Help*, Marshall Shelley told of a pastor who was backing out of his garage when he heard a "snap." When he got out to look, he discovered his favorite fishing pole in two pieces. "Who was using my fishing pole?" he asked. "I was, Dad," said his five-year-old son. "I was playing with it and I forgot to put it away." The pastor wasn't pleased, but he said to his son, "Well, thank you for telling me," and said no more about it. Two days later, while shopping with his mother, the boy said, "Mom, I got to buy Dad a new fishing pole. I broke his other one. Here's my money." And he handed her his total life savings—two dollars. "You don't have to do that," said his mother. "But I want to, Mom," the boy said. "I found out that Dad loves me more than he loves his fishing pole."

Later, the pastor told his congregation about the incident. "When I heard what my son said, I felt great. I felt that for once I had done something right." After the service, several men told the pastor that they appreciated what he had said about doing something right

for once. They had the idea that pastors always did everything right.

This is a good lesson for other leaders also. We don't always have to appear to be "on top of it." We need to admit that we struggle some-times; we need to reveal some of our own faults and failures. When leaders are open and honest about their own lives, others will be helped and encouraged by what they say. —Dennis Egner ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

We should acknowledge our own sins—not our neighbor's.

James 5:16

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

It might be rendered literally: "Very strong is the supplication of a righteous man, energising." When a man is right with God, not regarding iniquity in his heart, nor seeking aught for his own pleasure, the energy of the Divine Spirit moves mightily within him, and his prayers become very strong. They recall the Master's, with their strong cryings and tears.

The righteous man finds relief for suffering in prayer. — "Is any among you suffering? let him pray." There are sorrows we cannot tell to our dearest. Surges of grief sweep over us for which we have no words. Life is a stern fight for us all; and each heart knows its own bitterness. But there is always one resort: we can pour out our sorrows into the ear of our compassionate and merciful High Priest.

The righteous man prays the prayer of faith. — The prayer of faith is that which is so sure of the Divine answer that it knows that it has received it, though there is no appearance of its having been granted to the sense. We can only pray that prayer when we have asked what is in God's will to bestow. But righteous men cannot always pray thus, because they do not know the Lord's will on matters not recorded in this book. There are some sicknesses which are „into death, and we cannot pray the prayer of faith for these. If you cannot pray the prayer of faith, take medicine, and use the best means in your reach.

The righteous man can affect the whole history of his fatherland by his prayers. — It was so with Elijah, as we learn here. It was so with John Knox, whose prayers were more dreaded by Mary of Scots than the armies of Philip. (Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily)

James 5:16

Too often our petitions fit the description of prayer given by Thomas Brooks, who said, "Cold prayers are as arrows without heads, as swords without edges, as birds without wings; they pierce not, they cut not, they fly not up to heaven. Cold prayers always freeze before they reach heaven." To become more effective in our praying, we should heed these words of Bishop Hall: "It is not the arithmetic of our prayers, how many they are; nor the rhetoric of our prayers, how eloquent they be; nor the geometry of our prayers, how long they be; nor the music of our prayers, how sweet our voice may be; nor the method of our prayers, how orderly they may be; nor even the theology of our prayers, how good the doctrine may be—which God cares for. Fervency of spirit is that which availeth much." James reminds us that Elijah "prayed earnestly." And what answers he received—the very forces of nature were changed! By contrast, indefinite praying by indifferent people brings little results. Fervent prayer, if it be for God's glory and presented in the name of His Son, will accomplish great things for time and eternity. - Paul R VanGorder

James 5:16 The Effective Prayer

D. L. Moody once wrote, "Though we may not live to see the answer to our prayers, if we cry mightily to God, the answer will come."

Rev. E. M. Bounds said: "Prayers are deathless. The lips that uttered them may be closed in death, the heart that felt them may have ceased to beat, but the prayers live before God, and God's heart is set on them and prayers outlive the lives of those who uttered them; outlive a generation, outlive an age, outlive a world ... Fortunate are they whose fathers and mothers have left them a wealthy patrimony of prayer."

Someone has summarized how God answers different prayers: If the request is wrong, God says no. If the timing is wrong, God says slow. If you are wrong, God says grow. When the request, the timing, and you are right, God says go!

Someone Once Said ... God sovereignly delights to answer the passionate prayers of his children. This is not to suggest that he delights in manufactured passion, nor that passion is a meritorious work. Nor are we suggesting that sweaty, frantic prayer is necessarily pleasing to God. But real passion, however it is expressed through the medium of one's personality, is a part of prayer that God is pleased to answer. (Kent Hughes)

James 5:16

Morning and Evening

"Pray one for another."

As an encouragement cheerfully to offer intercessory prayer, remember that such prayer is the sweetest God ever hears, for the prayer of Christ is of this character. In all the incense which our Great High Priest now puts into the golden censer, there is not a single grain for himself. His intercession must be the most acceptable of all supplications—and the more like our prayer is to Christ's, the sweeter it will be; thus while petitions for ourselves will be accepted, our pleadings for others, having in them more of the fruits of the Spirit, more love, more faith, more brotherly kindness, will be, through the precious merits of Jesus, the sweetest oblation that we can offer to God, the very fat of our sacrifice. Remember, again, that intercessory prayer is exceedingly prevalent. What wonders it has wrought! The Word of God teems with its marvellous deeds. Believer, thou hast a mighty engine in thy hand, use it well, use it constantly, use it with faith, and thou shalt surely be a benefactor to thy brethren. When thou hast the King's ear, speak to him for the suffering members of his body. When thou art favoured to draw very near to his throne, and the King saith to thee, "Ask, and I will give thee what thou wilt," let thy petitions be, not for thyself alone, but for the many who need his aid. If thou hast grace at all, and art not an intercessor, that grace must be small as a grain of mustard seed. Thou hast just enough grace to float thy soul clear from the quicksand, but thou hast no deep floods of grace, or else thou wouldst carry in thy joyous bark a weighty cargo of the wants of others, and thou wouldst bring back from thy Lord, for them, rich blessings which but for thee they might not have obtained:-

"Oh, let my hands forget their skill,
My tongue be silent, cold, and still,
This bounding heart forget to beat,
If I forget the mercy-seat!"

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONALS BOOK OF JAMES

JAMES 1

James 1:1-8

The one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. - James 1:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

The biggest wave ever recorded happened off the southern coast of Alaska in 1958. An earthquake shook the area, sending dirt and glacier into the bay. The debris created a massive 1,720-foot wave that washed over the land. Three fishing boats saw the wave. One boat lost two passengers, but amazingly the other two boats rode out the waves, and their occupants lived to tell the story.

Today we begin our study of our final book for this month, the book of James. The author, James, is generally thought to have been the half brother of Jesus. According to many scholars, James did not believe that his brother Jesus was the Savior and Messiah while He was on earth, but after the crucifixion and resurrection, James did believe and became a key leader in the early church. This letter from him is one of the earliest letters in the New Testament. It was addressed to Jewish Christians who had been scattered throughout the nations (v. 1).

Being a Christian in those first days of the church meant encountering strong opposition. James compares these opposing forces to Christianity to "waves" (v. 6). No doubt, early believers had to keep focused on their ultimate goal and not let the opposing voices cause them to be tossed about and waiver in the faith.

James speaks about "trials of many kinds" (v. 2). Instead of beating a hasty retreat from difficult circumstances, he urges a strange emotional response—to "consider it pure joy." Joy goes far beyond keeping a stiff upper lip during difficult times. Joy calls us to value the way that such trials shape our life and our faith. The reason "why" we are to count it joy comes after the word "because." He explains that when our faith is tested, it produces perseverance.

A tested faith is a mature faith. He also explains that we have a resource to turn to in times of trouble. We have a God who cares

and who gives “generously” to us in times of need (v. 5). We are to endure in times of trouble, counting it all joy, and turning to our God who will supply all our needs.

APPLY THE WORD

What do you consider a trial? Illness? Unemployment? A broken heart? Legal woes? Your answer may vary at different times in your life. Trials come in many forms, but they have a way of overwhelming us and causing us to give up hope. The verse here is worth committing to memory. During our time on earth, we are certain to encounter trials. Having this verse imprinted on your heart can help you respond with joy instead of despair.

James 1:9-12

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial. - James 1:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

Every year, Forbes releases a list of the world’s richest people. In 2011, Carlos Slim Helu from Mexico topped the list, a self-made billionaire who made his fortune in the telecom business. The second is Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft. Gates is no longer the richest man because he gave away nearly \$30 billion to charity. Gates has convinced other wealthy individuals to sign a giving pledge to donate the majority of their wealth, either before or following their deaths.

In today’s reading, James frames the discussion about generosity within the context of the fragility of life and the fleeting nature of wealth.

Many in the early church suffered from a distinct lack of material possessions. Part of the trials James speaks of here may have had to do with economic hardship. That message can and should comfort many today. God understands and sees the physical needs of His people. But James also offers wise counsel and urges believers to have a shift of perspective, to have even this part of life taken captive by God.

He reverses the natural order of things saying that the “humble” person should take “pride” (v. 9) in his high position. The “rich” should take pride in their “humiliation” (v. 10). This strange instruction makes more sense as the passage proceeds. James compares wealth to a wildflower that readily blooms and spreads, but its beauty can be quickly scorched and extinguished by the sun. So, too, James suggests is the temporary nature of earthly riches.

This lesson from James echoes the instruction from the Old Testament. Consider the message that Solomon, a wise and wealthy man, communicated in the book of Ecclesiastes about the temporal nature of life. “Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return” (3:19-20).

No matter what the trial, economic or otherwise, James assures us that those who persevere under difficult circumstances are “blessed.” We may not see reward in this lifetime, but we are guaranteed the “crown of life” in eternity (v. 12).

APPLY THE WORD

What is your net worth? If you have been blessed by God with earthly riches, consider how you can use your wealth to make an eternal difference. If you are in need of physical resources, ask God to help you trust in Him to supply your needs and to give you the perseverance to endure during trials. Whether wealthy or impoverished, ask the Lord to give you an eternal perspective on your earthly financial position.

James 1:13-15

God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. - James 1:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

Every year, many Americans cheat on their income tax. An article by MSNBC.com reports that 16 percent of federal income tax returns were either not filed or reported untruthfully. This discrepancy totals a whopping \$290 billion. Why do people cheat? Economist Dan Ariely says many people operate with “moral flexibility.” They have a sliding scale of what they feel is right and wrong. Cheating on taxes is a misdeed that many will overlook or excuse.

James speaks directly to believers about the topic of temptation. Be careful, says James, not to blame our temptations upon God (v. 13). We are tempted to do evil not by God, but by our own evil impulses (v. 14).

Like an unchecked cancer, sin metastasizes into something large and deadly. Even a small indiscretion can lead to a direr problem. “Desire,” here referring to the impulse to engage in evil, can lead to the actual sin or action itself. The consequences, however, do

not stop there. If left unchecked, says James, sin can lead to death (v. 15).

James seems to be speaking here of both physical and spiritual death. Many times sin can have physical consequences—consider those sins that lead to endangering our lives or the lives of others. If left to fester and grow, however, all sin will certainly lead to spiritual death or separation from God. Romans 5:12 elaborates on this truth, “Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all have sinned.” This warning reminds us that if we are not captive to Christ and a life of faith, we will be captive to sin and death.

David’s temptation to sin with Bathsheba resulted in action, and God’s chosen king became involved with a married woman (see 2 Samuel 11). As we know, the result of his sin was not just harm to himself and his relationship with God, but also resulted in the physical death of Bathsheba’s husband and their young child.

We must also accept responsibility for our own actions and not blame our evil intent on God or on others.

APPLY THE WORD

What tempts you? Consider a way you have been tempted to act or think that would not be honoring to God. What steps can you take to avoid that type of temptation? When you do face that temptation again, how can you resist? God does not promise to spare us from all temptation, but He does promise to make a way for us to escape (1 Cor. 10:13). Pray that God will give you strength to resist this temptation and make specific plans today to avoid its path.

James 1:16-18

Every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights. - James 1:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

Many tourists go to Alaska to glimpse the fluorescent ribbons of light that illuminate the dark night sky, but the Aurora Borealis, or Northern Lights, is difficult to see these days. Scientists say that we are in a low activity period, and the beautiful light display is hard to spot. The Northern Lights are actually caused by solar winds 50 to 200 miles above the Earth that hit molecules of gas, lighting them up like neon. What appear to be beautiful lights are actually cosmic explosions.

In today’s passage, James refers to our God as the Father of the heavenly lights. God is the Creator of light itself—He separated darkness from the light (Gen. 1:3). He is also the creator of spiritual light. Scripture tells us that God “is light; in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).

In this passage of James, these words about the character of God directly follow the leader’s warning about temptation and sin. Here, he advises believers not to be “deceived” (v. 16). While Satan is known as the father of darkness and deception, we serve a God of light and truth. While we are told not to attribute temptation to God, we are also reminded to attribute each “good and perfect gift” to our Creator.

These reminders are directly linked to the character of God. Within these verses, James develops a theology (or study of God) for the early church. He provides some solid and foundational truths here about God. God loves us. God does not tempt us with evil. God give us good gifts. God does not shift or change, nor does He deceive us (v. 17).

It is important to distinguish the truth about God from the lies many create to explain human behavior. God does not “change like shifting shadows” (v. 17). We are born with a divine purpose (v. 18). We are the firstfruits—or the finest example—of His divine creation.

Firstfruits are offered to God as the very best sacrifice (Rev. 14:4). We not only receive gifts from our heavenly Father, but are called to be firstfruits in return.

APPLY THE WORD

What gifts have you been given? So often we tend to focus on what we do not have. Today, we should focus on what we have been given by God. Try to jot down a list of the gifts God has blessed you with, both spiritual and physical. Or, as a family activity, go around the dinner table and name one of these divine gifts. These gifts show the divine nature of God who cares deeply about you, His divine creation.

James 1:19-24

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. - James 1:22

TODAY IN THE WORD

In Snow White and the Seven Dwarves, a beautiful but wicked queen possessed a magical mirror. Every evening she looked into her mirror and asked: "Mirror, Mirror on the wall, who in the land is the fairest of all?" The mirror faithfully replied, "You, my queen, are the fairest." All was well until one day the mirror gave a different answer and named Snow White. The queen was outraged, and her beauty was transformed into ugliness as she sought to eliminate her rival.

This passage in James asks us as followers of Christ to hold up a mirror to our lives, to see if our reflections correctly bear the image of our Savior. Based on what we know about the character of God from our study so far, we are given specific instructions to begin to mold our character into His likeness. As we begin to bear the reflection of Christ, our lives will show that we are truly taken captive by Him.

We are told to be good listeners, careful talkers, and slow to become angry (v. 19). These disciplines mark the ways we interact with others. The special injunction about anger should alert us that this is a characteristic that is especially displeasing to God.

We are also to get rid of all "moral filth" (v. 21). But James is careful to note that these changes are not to be undertaken alone. This is not a self-help effort, but one that relies directly upon God and His Word. God does not make demands on us without also making provision for us.

God's Word should be our mirror. As we delve into His Word, our own reflection will begin to reflect His (v. 25). We are to be doers of the Word and not just hearers. The study of Scripture is more than an intellectual exercise. It should shape our thinking and our actions. We are to live out what we believe.

James says a man who does not do what God's Word says is like the person who looks into a mirror, sees his reflection, and then immediately forgets what he looks like (v. 24). Instead, we are to look intently at God's "perfect law," which brings us freedom (v. 25).

APPLY THE WORD

How many times each day do you look into a mirror? We look at our mirrors to check our appearance, to brush our hair or our teeth, to see if we've lost or gained a few pounds. Remember that God's Word is compared to our moral mirror. It is by staring intently into the mirror of God's Word that our lives will truly be changed. Make it your goal to spend at least one time each day looking into this most important mirror.

James 1:25-27

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this. - James 1:27

TODAY IN THE WORD

Actor and film producer Mel Gibson made public headlines during a drunk driving arrest in July 2006. In addition to other inappropriate remarks, he unleashed an anti-Semitic tirade, confirming for some people what they had suspected about his personal beliefs and prejudice. Gibson later issued many apologies for what he called his "despicable behavior," but his remarks were not soon forgotten. The words that slipped so easily from his tongue were not so easily taken back.

James has plenty to say about the dangers of our tongue. Chapter 3 will expound further upon the tremendous power of this tiny part of our body, power that is both positive and negative. Our reading today begins to introduce this discussion. For believers, the tongue can provide an external clue to whether or not our internal beliefs about Christ have taken hold of our lives. The tongue can reveal whether we are truly captive in word and deed to life of faith.

James issues a stern warning about the consequences of a loose or unbridled tongue (v. 26). A person who says whatever he wants without regard to the effect of those words demonstrates that his religion is "worthless" or ineffective. Note that this repeats a theme that we saw earlier this month in the two letters from Paul. Our life of faith should make a difference, both in our lives and in the world around us. How we speak reveals whether we are effective ambassadors for the truth of the gospel.

Even someone who is truly committed to the Lord can damage his testimony with an uncontrolled tongue. Harsh or critical or sarcastic words can have a lasting and negative effect on our reputation, and on the witness of the power of faith in Jesus Christ.

James contrasts this warning with an example of what God considers "pure and faultless" religion (v. 27). He gives two examples: helping widows and orphans (or those who find it difficult to provide for themselves) and to keep oneself separate from the sinful nature of the world. Both are examples of a true inward commitment to Christ and His Word.

APPLY THE WORD

Sins of the tongue can easily creep into our everyday habits. They seem so harmless! What's so bad about a little gossip, sarcasm, or crude joking? Why bother over the put-down, the snide comment, or the complaining? But these can tarnish our Christian testimony, and they reveal that we still need the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Pray today for the Lord to show you any sins of the tongue in your life, and then meditate on Philippians 4:8 to change your speech habits.

JAMES 2

James 2:1-8

Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith? - James 2:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

The television show Secret Millionaire sent wealthy Americans into some of the nation's most impoverished neighborhoods. One millionaire spent a week in Los Angeles's Skid Row. He was horrified at the dirt and drugs. But he also met people working among the poor. One store owner set up a free "shop" to clothe the homeless. When he removed his own shoes and gave them to a homeless man, his generous action made the millionaire weep.

In our passage today, James calls us to act on behalf of the poor and to call our favoritism into check (v. 1). Why do we pay more attention to the rich than to the poor? Why do we, believers in Christ, allow ourselves to be influenced by people with money or by fame or other values the world holds in high regard? Aren't our values supposed to be different?

This scenario could take place in contemporary society. A wealthy man comes into a meeting dressed in his finest suit. Would we give such a person the very best table? What about a poor person who enters in dirty clothing? Would we turn him away or avoid him? Our reactions to welcome one and shun another are exposed. Just as Jesus declared in the Sermon on the Mount, in God's kingdom these values are reversed. The poor will be esteemed. The humble will be exalted.

Notice the focus on the words "rich" and "poor." While we can interpret these as indicators of our earthly financial status, Scripture also directs us to interpret these in terms of our spiritual status. Are we "rich" through an eternal lens? Regardless of the size of our bank account, do we have treasure in heaven? Are we "poor" in terms of our spirit? Do we properly view ourselves as the creatures and God as the Creator? These labels of wealth are transformed by Christ's emphasis on seeing life through an eternal lens.

The passage ends with a restatement of what Jesus called the second greatest commandment: "love your neighbor as yourself" (v. 8; cf. Lev. 19:18). Worldly wealth should not determine how people are treated in the family of God.

APPLY THE WORD

How can you help the poor? Most areas have food pantries and soup kitchens that need volunteers. Often rescue missions offer school supplies and clothing for at-risk children. Some job skills courses need people who are willing to teach computer or literacy skills. Others may not have access to transportation to go to church. Consider one practical way you can share your time or money with someone else, in the name of loving your neighbor.

James 2:9-13

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. - James 2:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

When a 75-year-old woman was digging in the ground, she made an enormous mistake. She was looking for copper in the country of Georgia, and as she was digging, her shovel pushed through and broke an underground cable. With that one small action, she took out Internet service to the entire country of Armenia. She now faced jail time for the costly and destructive consequences of her action.

It is hard to make just a little mistake. James reinforces this idea to the early Christians. Many had been raised to live within the guidelines of the Mosaic Law. Redemption in Christ brought new freedom, so did that make the Law irrelevant? We might ask the same question today. But, James answers a firm "no." Verse 10 is clear: "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."

A key part of the gospel message is that no sin is insignificant: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). A little sin makes you just as guilty as a bigger sin. We might be tempted to argue: How can cheating on my spouse be as bad as murder? But James notes that no sin gives us an exemption from the penalty and consequence (v. 11). The point is not to compare our sins

with sins that look worse. The point is to compare our sins with God's commands. Any sin will fail that test.

Although Christ has graciously granted us forgiveness and freedom, James notes that God's commandments still provide instruction for how to live (v. 12). When we realize the grace that we have received in order to have a relationship with God and live in a way that pleases Him, we should extend mercy and not judgment toward others (v. 13). This doesn't mean that we excuse their sin any more than our own sins are excused. We should, however, remember that acting like God acts means offering mercy to those who don't deserve it. We have been shown the ultimate act of mercy in the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Although we are guilty, we have been granted forgiveness.

APPLY THE WORD

One area of our prayer life that often gets overlooked is confession. If your life is taken captive by God, you will learn to recognize and ask forgiveness for your sins. Spend a bit of time in confession. Pray through Psalm 51, asking the Spirit to search your heart and reveal any sin harbored there that you need to confess. Rejoice in 1 John 1:9, that God has promised forgiveness and purification for those who confess.

James 2:14-17

Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. - James 2:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1964, a young woman was stabbed outside her New York City home. When Kitty Genovese cried for help, reporters said at least several neighbors heard the noise. At least one shouted to her attacker, but no one actually came to help. Her story became an example of the lack of action by bystanders. Psychologists have studied the instances of those who see the responsibility to help as someone else's problem. They call this the Genovese or "bystander's effect": where many people see a problem and very few, if any, take action.

In today's passage, James identifies this same attitude among early believers. They were good at declaring their faith, but often slow to let it manifest in their daily actions and responsibilities to those around them.

As a part of the Jewish faith, believers distinguished themselves by their ability to keep the Law and to do good deeds. These works were seen as an important part of their religious status. So, followers of Christ might have been tempted to swing the pendulum in the opposite direction—to put a heavy emphasis on faith alone and to neglect their Christian duties.

What good is your faith if you claim to believe, but do nothing to demonstrate those convictions (v. 14)? Is this an example of saving faith? The same could be said about an extensive knowledge of the Scriptures, without any life-changing result. Too much knowledge for its own sake, without demonstrable action, is a bad thing. Knowledge of Christ and His Word should be life-changing.

James gives a concrete example. Suppose you knew about someone in need, but did nothing to help that person (vv. 15-16). What if you walked by without stopping to give assistance, much like the first passersby in Jesus' story about the Good Samaritan? Would that be a demonstration of faith? Of course not! In fact, James pronounces such faith as "dead." James urges believers not to be mere bystanders, but to be actively involved in the living faith of Jesus Christ, taken captive by His truth and letting it change the way we act.

APPLY THE WORD

We might feel overwhelmed by all the needs in the world. We can't do everything, but we can do something. Perhaps you could sponsor a child through Compassion International, or you could treat your grouchy neighbor with kindness instead of scorn. You could volunteer for a church mission trip, or be gracious to someone who asks for a handout. If we have faith, James calls us to act like it.

James 2:18-26

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. - James 2:26

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 2007, a Polish man named Jan Grzebski awoke after being in a coma for nearly twenty years. Doctors had identified a brain tumor as the cause of his coma; as he aged, the tumor shrunk and he regained consciousness. Grzebski credits his wife, Gertrude, who prayed for him. When he fell "asleep" he had four children. When he awoke, he had eleven grandchildren. In addition, Poland no longer had a Communist government. He had missed many important events while unconscious.

It's important for us to understand the relationship between faith and works in Scripture. Which is more important? At the close of

chapter 2, James answers emphatically: both are important! Works “complete” our faith—they show that it is awake and alive. Faith and actions work “together” (v. 22). They are not in competition; they are both necessary in the Christian life.

James uses two examples from the Old Testament to illustrate the way that faith and belief lead to action. In fact, these actions were both dramatic and counterintuitive; they proved that these individuals had deep belief in God’s promises. What a contrasting pair of people! Abraham was the father of God’s people; and Rahab was a harlot from Jericho.

Abraham is identified because of the sacrifice of his son Isaac. He believed and acted, in what may seem like an outrageous act, to offer his only son to God. God honored that type of radical belief. It is given to us here as an example of “righteousness” (v. 23).

Rahab, at great risk to her own safety, harbored spies (v. 25). In Joshua 2, you can read the story of her daring act. Her bravery is recounted again in Hebrews 11:31, among other great examples of faith.

Christians sometimes wrestle with this relationship between faith and works, worried some might claim to achieve faith through their good works. But James doesn’t allow that reasoning. Verse 26 declares that vibrant, living faith in God will lead to dramatic works of obedience. These confirm the truth of our claims to believe in God.

APPLY THE WORD

Feel your pulse. That pounding on your wrist is indicative of life surging through your veins. Take a deep breath. Realize that you are fully and truly alive. Now, consider your “faith” pulse. What indicators do you have that show that your faith is alive and vital? How will others know that the Holy Spirit is indwelling you? Make it your prayer today to have a faith that exhibits itself in your daily life.

JAMES 3

James 3:1-4

We all stumble in many ways. - James 3:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

Bits have been used for thousands of years to guide the direction of horses and to make them easier to control. A bit is inserted into the mouth of a horse and is designed to work by causing pressure, not pain. If a bit is used incorrectly by the rider, even the mildest force can hurt the horse. With a trained rider, however, a strong bit can give clear signals while exerting no pain at all.

As believers, the controller of our “bit” is the Holy Spirit. As James discusses the problem of sin in our lives, he examines our struggle for perfection. The first warning is that “few” should be teachers. To be a teacher or example to others should not be taken lightly. James assures those who set themselves up in leadership roles that they will be judged “more strictly” (v. 1).

If that stern warning is a bit intimidating, the chapter continues to insist that we all struggle or “stumble” in regards to sin. If we did not struggle, we would be “perfect” (v. 2)—and no one can make that claim. We have all sinned (Rom. 3:23).

Two examples of how to combat sin follow. One is that of a horse, as noted above. The other is a ship. The horse is controlled by a bit (v. 3), which is inserted into the horse’s mouth. The pressure from the bit controls the head and direction of the horse. By controlling even the smallest part of the horse, the whole body will follow. In the same way, the rudder of a ship controls the direction of the whole vessel (v. 4).

These examples are placed in between the passages that examine how we use our tongues. The problem of sin includes what we say. Even if we have tremendous self-control over our actions, our speech will reveal the places in our heart that remain proud, wayward, or ungodly. The small matter of our tongue can derail our entire being from obedience to transgression in an instant (v. 2).

APPLY THE WORD

Weighing our words is an important step in our Christian growth. We should be slow to speak, as James mentioned earlier. Problems often begin when we react out of anger or self-defense. Pray that the Holy Spirit will act in your life today. Pray that God will control and guide your words and your actions so that they can more accurately reflect a life held captive by Him. Pray that your heart will be open to His leading.

James 3:5-12

No human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. - James 3:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

Some strange, wild pets have lived in the White House. John Quincy Adams reportedly kept an alligator in the bathroom. Martin Van Buren was given two tiger cubs that he later donated to a zoo. Calvin Coolidge had so many wild pets, including a wallaby, that he considered opening a presidential zoo. It is said that his wife, Grace, used to walk two raccoons on leashes on the White House lawn. But most people would agree that some animals are just not meant to be tamed.

In this portion of the letter, James focuses once again on the dangers of that “untamable” beast—the tongue. He has already reminded us that controlling a very small portion of the human anatomy can influence the entire person. Here, he takes this warning even further.

James contrasts the small physical dimensions of the tongue with its power to make “great boasts” (v. 5). Three stern consequences of uncontrolled speech follow: 1) It can corrupt the “whole person”; 2) It can influence the course of your life; 3) It is directly influenced by Satan’s power (v. 6). Stern warnings indeed.

The untamable tongue is compared to animals that might be considered “wild” by some. While many animals have for some time been tamed by humans, the tongue seems to refuse to be controlled. Again, it is considered “evil” and “deadly” (v. 8).

Why does James consider this worthy of such focus? Perhaps it is the double-sided ability of the tongue, as noted in verse 9. This inconsistency or waffling can mark instability of faith. How can we both praise God and curse Him? Shouldn’t our speech reflect what is in our hearts? This type of behavior in believers compromises our witness before others. Consider the shock of someone drinking fresh water from a fountain only to receive ill-tasting water from the same spigot a moment later. A believer who speaks both truth and corruption is much the same. Our hearts, and also our speech, must be consistent producers of truth.

APPLY THE WORD

Spend time today using your tongue to praise the Lord. Thank Him for what He’s done in your life, and share this testimony with others. Praise Him for who He is: you can sing a hymn like “Holy, Holy, Holy” or recite Psalm 150 aloud. Pray to Him and acknowledge your trust in His faithfulness. As we use our tongues to praise Him, we are orienting our entire being to giving Him glory.

James 3:13-18

For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. - James 3:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

William James Sidis was born in 1898 with an IQ of 250. He could read by the age of 2 and was composing original works in French by age 4. At age 12, he entered Harvard University in a program for gifted students. However, Sidis lived the remainder of his life quietly in a series of obscure mechanical jobs. Newspapers reported that the boy genius “did not want to think.” Some say Sidis’s retreat from public attention was intentional—he wanted to live a normal life.

James begins this section by asking a rhetorical question: “Who is wise and understanding among you?” (v. 13). The passage goes on to expound on this challenging question, for who among us would go so far as to label themselves as a “genius” like Sidis or “wise” according to James?

It is important to note, though, that James is distinguishing between two different types of wisdom: earthly and heavenly. Earthly wisdom is often associated with qualities like mental ability. In Scripture, the “wise” (from the Greek word *sophia*) were often teachers.

Intellectual ability, in and of itself, is of course not inherently evil. But relying on our own intelligence, uninformed by God, can lead to “selfish ambition” and “bitter envy” (v. 14). James warns that such so-called “wisdom” is not from God, but rather is earthly and unspiritual (v. 15).

Heavenly wisdom distinguishes itself by a discretion and sensitivity that comes from God. It is distinguished by a life well lived. It has an attitude of humility (v. 13). Such wise people will surely know how to control their tongue (as noted earlier in this chapter). They will not boast (v. 14).

A host of positive qualities follow true heavenly wisdom. It is pure. The word pure here denotes purity of heart and intent. It arises from the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. True wisdom loves peace. It is “considerate, submissive, full of mercy, and good fruit,

impartial and sincere" (v. 17). This wisdom does not require a high IQ or a great SAT score. It comes from a rebirth of our hearts and spirit to a life truly taken captive by God.

APPLY THE WORD

It is easy to turn to "smart" friends to solve problems or to rely on our own know-how. We have a tendency to solve our problems on our own. Today's passage encourages us to turn to the only source of true wisdom: God. On this day of Thanksgiving, pray to the God of all wisdom. Thank Him for His heavenly wisdom that seeks truth and promotes peace. Thank Him for His help in all times of need.

JAMES 4

James 4:1-6

Don't you know that friendship with the world is enmity against God? - James 4:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

A church gathering turned ugly in Lanham, Maryland, sending four parishioners to the hospital. About 300 people were attending a church crab bake, when about a dozen people began to fight. The argument turned physical and police officers were called. Four people suffered stab wounds, with one in critical condition. Reports said, "Police do not know what caused the fight to break out."

Today's passage begins with a question: "What causes fights and quarrels among you?" (v. 1). While fights, even in modern-day churches, are not always as physical, they can be just as ugly.

The quarrels and fights are outward signs of an internal heart problem. James points to the cause of our inner "desires" (v. 1). He describes a series of specific actions: you want something; you covet what someone else has; you quarrel and fight; you do not ask God (v. 3).

The last item is different. It is not describing an activity that we do, but what we do not do—or even what we do incorrectly. We ask God with the wrong motives (v. 3). Here is the internal problem. Rather than our lives and hearts being taken captive by God, we are becoming friends with the "world" (v. 4). This, James warns, is adultery.

A "friendship" with the world is not the same as living in and among the world. It also doesn't imply that we should not have friends who are unbelievers. Jesus Himself walked among sinful people. But Jesus also prayed that the world would not gain too great an influence on believers: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of it" (John 17:16).

If we are truly friends with the world, we are embracing values and habits that oppose our Savior. We are nurturing an affinity for practices and priorities that are not consistent with a life of obedience to the will of God. We are called to be a friend of God, a relationship far more valuable than anything the world can offer. Too much "friendship" with the world will lead to destructive behavior.

APPLY THE WORD

Do you have lingering grudges or arguments that need to be resolved? Are you involved in an actual disagreement with another believer? Have you allowed these areas of your life to truly be taken "captive" by the Holy Spirit? Pray today that God will soften your heart and allow healing and forgiveness to take place, even when emotions are involved. Ask God to make you a peacemaker and not a fighter, so that you will have a testimony to the power of His forgiveness.

James 4:7-10

Come near to God and he will come near to you. - James 4:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

In France, an elderly woman was locked in her bathroom for nearly three weeks. The woman became trapped in the windowless bathroom when the doorknob fell off while she was still inside. Although she banged on the door and cried repeatedly for help, neighbors thought the noise was coming from workers in the building. The woman survived the ordeal by drinking tap water from the sink. Finally, neighbors grew concerned after they had not seen her for several weeks, and they alerted authorities. Imagine how happy the woman was when at last firefighters came to her rescue!

James speaks today about our own cries for help and God's willingness to hear and to rescue us. Those of us whose lives are taken captive by God will find incredible safety by relinquishing ourselves to His hands. This passage ties closely to the one before. It

begins by telling us “Submit yourselves, then, to God” (v. 7). The word “then” indicates that we should submit ourselves based on the previous discussion. James had just written about God’s opposition to the proud and His warnings about friendship with the world. Following these admonitions will be submitting to God. Our lives will be in God’s control, taken captive by His Holy Spirit. Words of advice and comfort make this a passage worth memorizing. For each specific action, God offers a promise.

“Resist the devil” (v. 7) and he will flee! Believers empowered by God do not need to fear evil. The merest resistance, when in submission to God, will cause Satan’s retreat.

“Come near to God” (v. 8) and God will come near to us. While some may feel that God is far away, He has promised here to be present and active in our lives.

“Wash your hands” (v. 8) and God will cleanse us! Here the importance of confession is urged. We are to claim God’s promise of forgiveness and confess our sins.

“Humble yourselves” (v. 10) and God will lift us up. When we cry to God—when we mourn and wail—He hears our cries and promises to be near to us.

APPLY THE WORD

Today’s passage should comfort our heart—and those of others—in times of trouble and desperation. It is a reminder that we have a God who is very near and present, even in desperate times. He will be with us. He hears our cries. He will lift us up. If you are currently facing a time of sorrow or anxiety, you can be honest with God. You can pour out your heart with wailing if you want. He offers safety and hope in a time of storm.

James 4:11-17

You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. - James 4:14

TODAY IN THE WORD

Television viewers have tuned in to watch *The People’s Court* since 1981. The original real-life judge on the show was Judge Wapner. He would settle small civil disputes, patiently listening to both the complainant and the defendant, before handing down his decision. The highlight of the show came when the two people involved in the trial would try to argue with him. Slamming down his gavel, Judge Wapner would order, “Silence in the court!” The decision was his to make, as the judge, not theirs.

Today’s passage is a stern reminder that we are not in control. If our lives are truly held captive by Christ, we must reorder our thinking and move ourselves out of the judge’s seat. Two areas of life are examined. The first area is the way we judge others. The second is our habit of planning our future. Both are transformed by an understanding that our lives are held captive by Christ.

First, says James, we are to avoid slander (v. 11). When we speak against another person, specifically a fellow believer, we are setting ourselves up as the Judge. There is only one Judge, declares James, and you are not it: “Who are you to judge your neighbor?” (v. 12). These are humbling words. James reminds us that we all fall short of the Law (see Rom. 3:10). We are all saved by God’s grace alone. To judge another means that we are shifting our focus away from God and setting ourselves up as the perfect standard.

Second, we are to be cautious about planning our future. This section seems counter-cultural. How can you move forward and be a responsible adult without forward thinking or action? James’s warning must be read carefully. It does not say that we are not to make travel plans or invest money (v. 13). But Scripture does insist that we change our earthly mindset. We must be conscious of the fact that God holds our future in His hands and that His will is more important than our plans. “You are a mist” (v. 14), says James. We should not be deceived by any illusions of our control.

APPLY THE WORD

Have you ever prayed over your calendar or your Blackberry? As you plan your days, say a prayer that God will take control. Allow Him to take charge of your life, even down to the smallest detail. Realizing that God is in control of our days will take the burden off busy families. It radically changes our perspective. Whether your days are filled to capacity with stress or empty and lonely, give each moment to God

James 5:1-6

Your gold and your silver are corroded. - James 5:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

An article titled “The 18-Million Dollar Headache” examines the life of lottery-winner Alex Snelius, a semi-retired truck mechanic. Snelius won a \$64 million jackpot seven years ago but claims that his riches have brought nothing but misery. “When you do win it, you say, ‘Thank you God’—you know, you’re blessed,” said Snelius. “But you’re not blessed—you’re cursed. Money is not happiness.” Experts agree. One says, “As exciting as it is to win a lottery, it causes great discomfort and angst. Money brings envy, jealousy, sometimes disdain.”

The believers who received James’ letter were not burdened by wealth. The text tells us that they were oppressed by the rich. Here, James takes the wealthy to task. “Weep and wail,” he warns, “because of the misery that is coming upon you” (v. 1). While wealth often gives people temporal power, financial resources have no eternal value. James looks forward into the future of those whose wealth is merely material things. He speaks of the condition of earthly grandeur in light of eternity. It is “rotted” and “corroded” (vv. 2-3). It has no heavenly value.

In fact, James suggests that wealth can turn against the person to bring them down. The rich people addressed here kept their wealth for themselves and cheated those who worked for them. Their only reward is on this earth, where they satisfy themselves with “self indulgence” (v. 5). In Luke 6:24 Jesus warns, “Woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.”

By condemning this attitude of rich oppressors, James extends comfort to believers who may worry about their economic status, struggle to make ends meet, and feel at times that their earthly security is threatened by lack of resources. God has promised that He can and will provide for our physical needs. God also sees the inequity of this earthly world and will indeed one day call oppressors to account. The rich who put their energy into money will have their reward on this earth, but the poor will inherit eternal riches. “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20).

APPLY THE WORD

Your net worth may not be much, but your heavenly worth is immeasurable. God knows your economic situation. He also values those who set their eyes on Him and resist the impulse to view earthly riches as their goal in life. If you have been blessed financially, thank God for the earthly gifts He has given to you today and seek to use them for His glory. If you struggle, give Him your financial worries because He holds you and your well-being in His hands.

James 5:7-12

We count as blessed those who have persevered. - James 5:11

TODAY IN THE WORD

Farming takes patience and perseverance. Farmers have to wait for many things beyond their control. They wait long days for the winter to thaw to begin planting. They wait for the weather to shift and bring rain to offset droughts, or the sun to push away clouds. They wait for calves to be born and chickens to lay eggs. They wait on plants to grow and for the harvest to come. Meanwhile they persevere at the task, tilling the soil, feeding the animals, putting seed in the ground.

It is no wonder that James compares our lives as believers to farmers. Certainly his readers knew what it took to cultivate the land with hard work, patience, and perseverance. Those same qualities are integral to our lives as believers waiting for the Lord’s return.

This passage begins with a brief command: “Be patient” (v. 7). Being patient involves trust, knowing that the Lord is indeed coming and learning to wait with an attitude of contentment. He turns to the farmer as a key example. He is patient because he knows that it takes time for the land to do its job. He knows how valuable his crop is. We, too, must be patient as we keep the end in sight. We are involved in the process, but we must keep our minds focused on the end result: the Lord’s coming.

This future focus will change our immediate behavior. It changes the way we live. We are urged not to be grumblers. We are not to turn against one another, but to be mindful of the Lord, our Judge (v. 9).

James uses the examples of both the prophets and of Job. The prophets were asked to deliver difficult messages as they gave God’s Word to people who might not accept it. They were asked to act in the present with their mind and words focused on the future.

Job suffered in the present. His loss of his possessions, his health, and those he loved, should have turned him against God or against his friends. Job did neither. His eyes were on his God, and his patience was rewarded.

APPLY THE WORD

What are you impatient for? Do you find yourself discontented in your present life and longing for some distant event in the future? God encourages us to be patient in this very moment, knowing that our lives and future are in His ultimate control. Thank God for the day you have been given—the good and the bad. Ask Him to make today one of thankfulness and to focus your heart upon His coming.

James 5:13-20

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. - James 5:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

Author C. S. Lewis often explored the issue of prayer. When he was a young Christian, he was concerned about his brother Warren, who was overseas during Japan's attack on Shanghai. He wondered whether his prayer could or should make any difference in his brother's life. Why should God listen to the request of any one person? But then he pondered, "Why wash your hands? If God intends them to be clean, they'll come clean without your washing them. . . . God chose a different style of governing the world, a partnership which relies on human agency and choice."

James agrees. This closing passage insists that "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (5:16). Prayer, an integral part of any life held captive by God, can accomplish amazing things.

His words at the beginning of this passage paint a portrait of that type of God-breathed life. Whether our earthly life is beset by trouble or abundant with joy, we must express our thoughts and emotions to God. Our lives become a communion, each moment communicated to our Savior (v. 13).

This even applies to the most devastating part of the human condition: the frailty of our bodies. God our Creator has the ultimate power over our health. It is to Him that we should first turn when our bodies fail us. Both our physical health and our spiritual health are subject to His concern and power.

James uses the example of the prophet Elijah, who—while a noted man of God—was also a human like us. Elijah's prayer changed the course of natural events. His prayers made rains stop and then start them again. Together, Elijah and God the Creator exerted power over nature.

A life held captive by God sees the heavenly overshadowing all earthly matters. Whether it is illness or natural disaster, this man or woman of God sees Him as the controller of all. They turn to Him in times of need. They spend time sharing their faith and guiding others toward the truth (v. 20). A life held captive by God sets its eyes on eternity.

APPLY THE WORD

Though these letters were written to believers in the early church, they resonate with us today. As we close this month's study, it is fitting to end with this emphasis on prayer. Spend time today asking God to make you a person of prayer. Ask Him to focus your heart and mind on things above. Ask Him to take your life and radically change it, to take it captive for His glory.

THEODORE EPP DEVOTIONALS BOOK OF JAMES

James 1: 1-8 GETTING

The more often faith is tried, the easier it becomes to endure trials because they produce patience. And through trials, the believer becomes more steadfast in his faith.

Endurance is the ability to withstand hardship or stress. Patience is the ability to bear pain without complaint, evidencing self-control.

In a sense, both of these ideas are involved in the statement of James that "the trying of your faith worketh patience" (James 1:3). The Greek word translated "patience" is made up of two words that literally mean "to remain under." When a person remains under a testing, he endures that testing, and the testing itself produces patience as the believer remains under the burden.

Self-control, which is so closely related to patience, is part of the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22,23. Thus, if we wish to acquire more patience and self-control, it means we will have to endure more testings.

Even though the testings are severe, the Christian who has total confidence in Christ can have joy in the midst of the testings. And the patience we develop will enable us to wait until the Lord fulfills His promises to us.

Hebrews 10:36 says, "ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." Galatians 6:9 says, "Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer" (Rom. 12:12).

James 1:9-11 GOD IS NOT IMPRESSED

When James wrote concerning a brother of "low degree" (James 1:9), we must remember that he was writing from a human viewpoint. Only humans characterize one person as being of low degree and another as being of high degree, because God is not a respecter of persons.

James was writing about a "brother"; that is, one who has trusted Jesus Christ as Saviour. Within the family of God everyone is equal in God's eyes. The low are exalted, the high are brought low.

God calls for lowliness of heart as seen in the Person of Jesus Christ.

The reason we should not be overly impressed by whether a person is of low estate or high estate is that his earthly possessions have nothing to do with his relationship before God.

Jesus pointed out this truth by telling a parable about a rich man who said, "I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12:19,20).

Riches do not make a person better than anyone else, nor do riches prevent sickness or death.

Since Christ is meek and lowly in heart, those who know Him as Saviour and who allow Him to live out His life through them will exhibit the same characteristics.

"The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up" (1 Sam. 2:7).

James 1:12-15 THE BIRTH THAT BRINGS DEATH

When temptations to do evil come into our lives, let us never think that they have come from God; instead, God is doing what He can to prevent us from falling into sin. However, our flesh is so weak that we disregard Him occasionally and follow evil.

James said, "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (James 1:14). Notice especially the words "and enticed." Lust comes from the enemy within--the old nature; enticement comes from the Enemy without--the Devil.

James 1:15 not only tells us more about the source of sin but also its final result: "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

James personified lust and sin here and spoke of conception, birth and death.

Lust is personified as a harlot who conceives and then bears a child called "sin," whose father is the Devil. Then sin also conceives and brings forth a grandchild, who is known as "death."

When a sinful desire enters the mind, it will grow in the mind until the deed is executed if it is not checked at once. As a rule, the mind eventually acts out what it dwells on.

"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21).

James 1:16-18 GOD ENJOYS GIVING!

James left no doubt about the fact that God is the giver of all that is good. James cautioned, "Do not err" (James 1:16).

The Greek word translated "err" means "to go astray" or "to go off course." It was used to describe a ship that had been driven from its course and was in severe danger.

So James was not referring to making a minor mistake but to making a serious error in judgment that could have awesome and terrible results.

Notice that James did not say "every great gift" but "every good gift" (v. 17). It does not matter whether the gift is large or small, anything and everything that God gives is good.

Sometimes the one under severe trial might question whether everything that comes from the hand of God is good, but James assured such a person that he never needs to question this. Keep in mind that James was referring to gifts--things that are not obtained by merit but purely by God's grace.

James stressed that the kind of gift of which he was speaking "is from above" (v. 17). Here James contrasted the things of heaven with the things of earth.

We are so easily entangled in earthly affairs and so easily consumed with the desire for those things that do not last. We will not live on this earth forever, so even our trials should be viewed in the light of eternity.

"According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3).

James 1:19-21 OPEN EARS-CLOSED MOUTH

James wanted all believers to be alert to comprehend the Word of God. This is very important since "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). The Word of God gives us faith to believe, and when we believe, God creates new life within us.

Many people hear the Word of God, but to some of them it is only words; they do not accept it as the Word of God. What a paradox it is that all creation obeys His Word except we who are made in the image of God and have the ability to choose.

Many people have an extensive knowledge of the Word of God, but they do not really believe what it says, so they do not respond to it as His Word.

We should not be quick to retort when someone has spoken against us. To be quick with an answer can sometimes get us into much trouble.

Consider what the Word of God has to say about these matters. Proverbs 29:20 says, "Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him."

Proverbs 10:19 says, "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise."

A rule that should govern our lives is stated in Proverbs 15:1: "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger."

"The soul of the transgressors shall eat violence. He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life" (Prov. 13:2,3).

James 1:22-25 HAVE YOU LOOKED IN THE MIRROR?

Whereas James 1:22-24 view the person who does not act upon the basis of the Word, verse 25 looks at the person who does act on the basis of the Word of God.

He is like one who does something about what he sees in the mirror. His positive attitude is beautiful, as was David's when he said, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23,24).

David was asking God to x-ray his heart. The obvious implication of David's words is that no matter what God discovered, David was willing to correct. On another occasion, David told the Lord, "Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart" (26:2).

As James spoke of looking into the divine mirror, he referred to it as "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25). The word "law" generally connotes meanings of bondage, such as in the Old Testament Law. However, this is not the case when referring to the "law of Christ."

Galatians 6:2 refers to this law: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." The law of Christ is the "perfect law of liberty" spoken of in James 1:25.

We must never forget that freedom to sin is not liberty because "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). This is true of sin committed during any age, or dispensation. James was not referring to a license to sin when he spoke of the "perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25).

"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17).

James 1:26,27 THE RELIGION GOD WANTS

When Jesus Christ is really indwelling a person, it will result in true religion. The word "religion" as used in James 1:26,27 is not synonymous with the word "salvation." James used it in the sense of an outward expression of that which is inward.

The inner faith in Jesus Christ as one's personal Saviour results in salvation; expressing that faith outwardly is one's religion, according to the way James used the word.

When one has faith in Jesus Christ, it is only normal and natural for this faith to express itself outwardly. There will be a new motivating power within, and that new desire is an evidence that you are a child of God.

The manifestation of Christ's life through an individual is proof that that person is rightly related to Jesus Christ by faith. In other words, faith in Christ will result in love for others, and this is what James referred to as "pure religion."

The Lord Jesus Christ showered His love on those who could not help themselves and who could not, or would not, return His love at that time. When we know Him as personal Saviour, we will have this same kind of love. We will love those who are helpless and unable to return our expressions of love.

It is relatively easy to be friends with those who are friends in return or to give to those who give in return.

However, our Christianity is woefully deficient if we give in order to receive or if we give and expect an even larger gift in return. This is not pure religion.

So when a person is rightly related to Jesus Christ--when he has pure and undefiled religion--he will express the love of Christ to those who are in dire circumstances and unable to return similar expressions of love.

"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

James 2:1-13 GOD'S ROYAL LAW

James summed up man's responsibility to his neighbor by urging him to fulfill the "royal law" (James 2:8).

He who fulfills this law of Christ will love all men alike and will look with contempt on none. Because he will be concerned about the value of a human soul, he will see no distinction between the rich and the poor.

Observe how serious it is to show respect of persons: "But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors" (v. 9).

To respect one person above another is to violate the letter and the spirit of the law of Christ; thus, it is sin. To look with disdain on someone else is to oppose the indwelling Christ and the concern He has for everyone.

The poor become so very rich in Christ, whereas the rich (as the world considers them) have to humble themselves to realize that their riches offer them nothing of eternal value.

It is necessary for the rich to come empty-handed and receive salvation as a gift. The poor must come in the same way, but it seems exceedingly difficult for many rich people to humble themselves to this extent.

"He that oppreseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor" (Prov. 14:31).

James 2:14-26 NOT WORDS BUT WORKS

A cold, austere, intellectual faith that does not manifest itself by action is nothing more than a mental assent to the existence of God. James taught that this kind of faith is really no faith at all--it is a dead faith.

It is not enough just to believe that God exists or even to believe that He died on the cross for the sins of the world.

An individual must realize he will be eternally condemned apart from what Jesus Christ did for him personally on the cross, and he must place his faith in Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour.

Such a person who recognizes all that Jesus Christ has delivered him from will have an active, vibrant faith, evidenced by a change of behavior.

James was particularly concerned with the display of works before one's fellowman in order to be justified before others. The works proved that the act of salvation really had taken place. The context of James 2 indicates that James was talking about being justified before men.

James was concerned about looking beyond a person's words to see whether or not his life supported what he said.

In James 2:14 James did not say that the person had faith but that the person only said he had faith. James was really asking, "What use is the kind of faith that only talks and does not act?"

This is the same question raised in verse 16 where the person who claims to have faith does not demonstrate it by doing something for the needy. And James made the point in verse 20 that faith without works is useless, it "is dead."

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).

James 3:1-6 A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH!

Consider four parallels that a fire has with words spoken by the tongue: It hurts, it spreads, it consumes, but it can have a good use under control.

It only takes one false or bitter word to hurt deeply. In fact, the hurt may be so deep that recovery is impossible.

Just as fire spreads, so do spoken words. Some people are always willing to listen to destructive words about others, and they spread the words further so the damage becomes even more extensive.

Just as fire consumes, so do words spoken by a tongue that is out of control. Fire will destroy anything combustible that lies within its path. Words, too, have been known to destroy careers and lives. This is especially seen in the news media when political viewpoints are at stake.

We who know Jesus Christ as Saviour need to think solemnly about this matter so our tongues are not used to the disadvantage of others. Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit" (NASB).

Think of it! The power of death and life reside in the tongue. And the last phrase of this verse especially applies to those who spread gossip: "Those who love it will eat its fruit."

"Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles" (Prov. 21:23).

James 3:7-12 THE SECRET OF A CONTROLLED TONGUE

Is it not strange that the tongue can be praising God one moment and be slandering some person the next moment, often right in the church where the tongue had been used to praise God?

We may even hear the preacher talk about not slandering others, but before we leave we will say things concerning others that amount to slander.

Such inconsistencies are not found in nature, but out of the human being can come both bitter and sweet words. Remember that the tongue speaks only what is in the heart. Godly words can come only from a godly heart.

To have a godly heart we must follow the instructions found in Romans 6. We must know what our position is in Christ; we must reckon, or count, upon it as being true because it is true; and we must yield ourselves completely to Christ (see vv. 6,7,11-13). This involves our intellect, emotions and will.

Words come from our thoughts, and thoughts come from the mind; therefore, it is possible to control our words by controlling our minds.

We who know Jesus Christ as Saviour can have our minds controlled by "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). He alone is worthy and is able to give us victory.

"Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Ps. 141:3).

James 3:13-18 WISDOM FROM HEAVEN

It is significant that the characteristics James first listed for godly wisdom are purity and peaceableness. These two have an important relationship.

An individual is made pure through faith in Jesus Christ, and this establishes peace between God and himself. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Once this peace has been established through a vertical relationship between the believer and God, the believer will then have a basis on which to establish peaceful horizontal relationships with his fellowmen.

James also said that the wisdom that is from above is "gentle" (James 3:17), so each believer should reflect this gentleness in his life.

Paul told Timothy--and all believers "The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men" (2 Tim. 2:24). Titus 3:2 sounds a similar note: "To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men."

A wise person is tender and full of mercy and sympathy. Such a person shows compassion, or pity, for the less fortunate.

This was emphasized by James when he said, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" (James 1:27).

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever" (Ps. 111:10).

James 4:1-3 THE WAR WITHIN

James was well aware of the fact that conflict among believers comes from the personal war that goes on within each person.

This conflict within the believer is also referred to in Romans 7:23: "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

Also, Peter warned, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11).

James's reference to killing was not necessarily referring to taking a person's life but to destroying someone's character. Previously, James dealt with the viciousness of the tongue. When the tongue is out of control, it can be a lethal weapon used for character assassination.

These are sobering words from the Bible, and today more than ever we need to carefully examine our lives. Much bitterness is displayed not only among the unbelieving world but also among those who call themselves Christians.

Sometimes, in the name of Christ and in a desire to be separate from sin, Christians commit sin by bitterly attacking fellow believers.

We are to take a stand against sin, but we must guard our hearts so that the old nature does not take over, allowing the bitterness of hatred to grip us.

Even though we may totally disagree with what another person is doing, we are still commanded as believers to seek that person's highest good.

"He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool" (Prov. 10:18).

James 4:4-7 DON'T COURT THE WORLD

Consider the accusation of James concerning the illicit love affair with the world as stated in the following paraphrase: "You [are like] unfaithful wives [having illicit love affairs with the world and breaking your marriage vow to God]! Do you not know that being the world's friend is being God's enemy? So whoever chooses to be a friend of the world takes his stand as an enemy of God."(James 4:4, Amplified Bible).

Being a friend of the world indicates that the person agrees with the values of the world system. The Old Testament Prophet Amos asked, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

The believer who is able to be in agreement with this evil world system is woefully out of fellowship with Almighty God, who saved him from the penalty and power of sin.

If a person has a consistently worldly life-style, it is a clear signal that he has never trusted Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour.

On the other hand, there are believers who are out of fellowship with the Lord and who are worldly for a time. Perhaps this is because many want Christ as Saviour but not as Lord.

They want the assurance and peace of knowing that they are saved from eternal condemnation, but they also want to live to please themselves rather than letting Christ be the Master of their lives.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

James 4:8-12 YOU GET NEARER BY GETTING LOWER

Concerning James's command to "draw nigh to God" (James 4:8), we must remember that it takes time to be holy.

Although our position in Christ at the moment of salvation provides an absolute holiness, as we live the Christian life from day to day, it takes time to apply the principles that result in holy living.

But as we move toward God, we can count on God's moving toward us. However, we must remember that our moving is the result of His indwelling power (see Phil. 2:12,13).

James said, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:8). He added, "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded" (v. 8).

This injunction to cleanse oneself is most likely a reference to believers who have fallen into worldliness. God will not work through dirty hands that are contaminated by the value system and sins of the world.

Hebrews 10:22 tells us, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

The lesson for each believer is to humble himself, not to wait for the Lord to humble him. True humility is to comprehend our own utter unworthiness apart from Christ.

Of course, seeing ourselves as we really are is also impossible apart from the grace of God. As we appropriate all the grace that God has bestowed upon us, we will become humble before Him.

"By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honour, and life" (Prov. 22:4).

James 4:13-17 GOD WILL GUIDE YOU

We do not need to be in a state of unrest about the future. Some worry needlessly and wonder, "Why doesn't God let me know what He has in mind for me in the future?"

Some young people may be thinking about the mission field and wondering what God's will is for them five or ten years from now.

It is important, however, that we recognize that God knows everything about the future, even if we do not, so the important thing is to trust Him today with our lives and leave the future to Him.

If God is calling you today into some particular ministry, then obey Him, even though you do not know what the future holds. As we are sensitive to God, we can expect Him to guide us.

Psalms 32:8 says, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." I'm so glad He guides us with His eye because He can see far beyond anything we can see.

Because God knows the future completely, He will never be too late in telling us exactly what we need to know. Some things we need to plan for in the distant future, but most things are achieved simply by walking by faith today.

As we trust God to give us wisdom for today's decisions, He will lead us a step at a time into what He wants us to be doing in the future.

"The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way" (Ps. 25:9).

James 5:1-6 PRICES-OR VALUES?

Christians can become so addicted to money and to achieving a higher level of living that they lose all perspective and forget what they are really here on earth to accomplish.

Those who live only for the pleasures of the moment stand under the condemnation of Paul's words of 1 Timothy 5:6: "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth."

Many Christians have had the vitality taken from their spiritual life because of their great concern for the things of the world. They are saved, but their lives do not reflect the glorious difference that Christ can make when a believer focuses his attention on eternal values instead of temporal ones.

An important question that every family needs to face is, How much money do we need in order to live in the comfort we prescribe for ourselves? We also need to ask, Have we set our standard of comfort too high?

Regrettably, many people have set their standard so high that they have to spend so much time obtaining an income for that level of life that they really have no time to live.

How sad to spend so much time earning a living that you do not have time to enjoy the living. I am not referring to those who must work long hours just to keep the family fed and clothed. I am referring to those who have become so addicted to the luxuries of life that they think the luxuries are essential.

Such an attitude greatly affects our spiritual priorities--spiritual things are bound to suffer and to take second place to the things of the world.

It is important then that we do some clear thinking about our attitude toward what this world has to offer. Although some have the attitude that money is the answer to everything, James 5:1-6 reveals that this belief is certainly not true.

"The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it" (Prov. 10:22).

James 5:7-12 HE IS AT THE DOOR!

To "grudge not" is to "complain not." We are not to groan or grumble against each other. In this life, where there is the tendency to be partial to others who have more than we do, James reminded us not to be grumbling and complaining about others.

We are not to develop an attitude of thinking the other person always has it better than we do. We must remember that the Lord can come back at any time to judge us for such attitudes.

James said, "The judge standeth before the door" (James 5:9); in other words, He is ready to enter the door. Having this concept of the soon return of Christ keeps us from being so critical of each other.

Always remember, Christ is about to enter the door, so the words you speak should be wholesome rather than negative or hurtful. So realizing that the Lord may soon return will have a significant effect on our attitudes toward others.

We will not be so quick to criticize others when we realize the Lord is about to return to judge us for what we have said. The Lord is fully able to judge the motives of our hearts (see 1 Cor. 4:5), but we must never take that prerogative upon ourselves.

The Lord will judge not only the good and bad things we have done but also our good and bad attitudes. If you have been mistreated and have borne up under it in a way that glorifies the Lord, you may be assured of a reward.

If you have been neglected by friends and by the world, the Lord will take care of that also. Let us trust Him completely to reward as He sees best because He is absolutely just and loving.

"And every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (1 Cor. 3:8).

James 5:13-16 SICKNESS AND SIN

The reason for calling the elders was apparently because the sickness referred to by James was a sickness that resulted from sin.

The elders were the spiritual leaders of the assembly of believers, and because of the type of problem involved, they--not a physician--were to be called.

It was the responsibility of the spiritual leaders to deal with, and pray for, those who had gone astray and as a result had been stricken by a sickness.

James did not use the word that is associated with ceremonial anointing but the word that is associated with the treatment of wounds. The word James used is often found in secular medical treatises of New Testament times.

The oil was, in itself, a healing ointment. So we see that James was referring to the best-known medical treatment of the time; that is, rubbing with oil.

The rubbing with oil was to be accompanied by prayer. This was apparently to be done first because the original language indicates that the elders were to pray over the sick person, having anointed him with oil (see James 5:14).

From this passage some derive the teaching of divine healing apart from medicine, but such a view is not supported by the text.

The oil was an accepted medical treatment of the day, so this passage actually encourages the use of known medical practices in addition to prayer for healing. Of course, the confidence of the elders was to be in God's ability to heal, not in the medical treatment itself.

"For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (1 Cor. 11:31).

James 5:17-20 PRAYER THAT WORKS

1 Kings 18:36-39

Because this was such a crucial prayer, it is worth noting the specific things for which Elijah prayed.

He had four specific requests of God. First, "Let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel" (1 Kings 18:36). The burden of Elijah's heart was that others would know the true God and that they would realize that He alone is God.

Second, "That I am thy servant" (v. 36). This revealed Elijah's humble attitude--he wanted to be known only as a servant of the true God.

Third, he asked God to show "that I have done all these things at thy word" (v. 36).

Elijah not only wanted to be known as the servant of God but also as an obedient servant. He especially did not want the prophets of Baal to think that he had dreamed up all of this on his own.

He wanted them to be clearly convinced that God had directed him. This is also an indication that God is a personal God. Baal could not direct anyone; even those who worshiped him could not expect personal guidance.

Fourth, Elijah prayed, "Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again" (v. 37). Elijah wanted his prayer to be heard by God, and he wanted the people to return to God.

Then the fire fell! It consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust and the water that had been poured in the trenches.

"When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God" (v. 39).

"And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (1 John 3:22).

JOE STOWELL DEVOTIONALS ON JAMES

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Final Exam James 1:2-4

"God tested Abraham." Genesis 22:1

In universities everywhere, mid-May brings late-night study sessions, caffeine-fueled writing binges, and ulcer-inducing stress as students are preparing for final exams—those critically important tests to determine how well the student has learned the lessons of the semester.

Let's look at a familiar incident in the life of Abraham through that lens.

Genesis 22 begins by saying, "God tested Abraham." In other words, it's like Abraham's big exam. And what is the test? God is about to test Abraham's allegiance to the one true God in a most stressful way.

So let's review: God called out Abraham to the city of Ur. Ur was an advanced culture and a highly sophisticated town, but it was rampant with idolatry. When God passed out this test to Abraham, Abraham was wandering through Canaan—yet another pagan, idolatrous region. And keep in mind that in pagan idolatry, the highest demonstration of loyalty to one's god was to offer—you guessed it—your children as a sacrifice.

With that in mind, look back at Genesis 22:1. The text actually says that it is the God who tests Abraham. This is in contrast to those lifeless forms of wood and stone that were the idols of the pagan Canaanites. And it's the one true God who comes to Abraham and gives him the following test.

Would the loyalty and allegiance of Abraham to the genuine Creator God match the misplaced loyalty and devotion of the surrounding nations to their false idols? The test is simple yet very demanding: "Abraham," God says, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love . . . and sacrifice him."

That's the test, plain and simple. It's a pass/fail exam with no room for grading on the curve. If Abraham obeys, demonstrating his allegiance, loyalty, and trust in the promises of God, he passes the test. If he refuses, he retains control over his son's destiny, but fails to demonstrate his commitment to following God no matter what the cost.

Well, we know the rest of the story. In fact, it's amplified and explained beautifully in the book of Hebrews where the writer explains that Abraham by faith obeyed, reckoning that even if Isaac died, God could raise him from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19).

So what does Abraham's test have to do with us? While God won't ask you to literally sacrifice a child on an altar, He does often require the things in your life that are precious to you. Think about it. Isaac was God's gift to Abraham. All of God's promises were wrapped up in that miracle child. How easy it would have been for Abraham to love Isaac more than he loved God. Or to put it another way, to love the gift more than the Giver! The test may be the same for you. God always wants to know that nothing in your life is more important or more valuable than your relationship to Him. It may even be a sinful pattern that for some reason provides temporary kicks, comfort, or security. Do you love Him more than the sin in your life?

If by faith you can believe with Abraham that when God takes something from you, God will give something back in even better terms, then you will pass the test and give Him all He demands and all He desires. Whether it's your money, your possessions, your career, your dreams, or even your children to His service—everything we give to Him is an opportunity to pass the test and in worship prove to Him that nothing in our lives is of greater value than His friendship and fellowship.

As you face the tests of this week, know that your Tester loves you deeply and is ready to help you pass, like Abraham, with flying colors!

YOUR JOURNEY...

What tests are you currently facing? What can you learn from the example of Abraham to help you pass the test with flying colors?

James 1:2-4 also addresses the issue of tests. Based on this passage, what is God testing and why?

If you're one of those people who has always dreaded taking exams, ask the Lord to change your perspective about His tests. Think through the reasons that He wants to test you, and trust Him to supply the courage and faith you need to pass the exam in a way that glorifies Him

Wall-Bangers Anonymous

Written by Joe Stowell for Our Daily Bread.

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials. —James 1:2

I'll never forget the time during college when, after I had finished writing a big paper that was due the next day, I heard a loud commotion in the room across the hall. My neighbor was in a state of panic, throwing stuff around his room looking for his paper. Frustrated, he banged his fist against the closet and shouted, "Thanks a lot, God. You make life one big laugh!"

I might have given him an A+ for theology—at least he knew that God was ultimately in charge—but an F for his response to the problem.

For those of us who get mad at God when life takes a wrong turn, we need a good dose of biblical therapy. So, welcome to "Wall-Bangers Anonymous"—a two-step program toward a positive, God-honoring response to pain.

Step One: Think straight about trouble. It's not only inevitable, it's indiscriminate. Trouble comes in all shapes and sizes. "Various trials" (James 1:2) affect our health, our careers, our relationships. Once we understand the facts, we can begin appreciating their significant value in our lives.

Step Two: Trade resistance and resentment for receptivity and rejoicing. "Count it all joy" (James 1:2). The joy is not in the presence of pain but in the knowledge that God is using our pain to refine us and make us better, not bitter.

If we embrace adversity,
Accepting every pain,
Then we will learn what we should know;
Our grief will turn to gain. —Sper

God chooses what we go through; we choose how we go through it

Under Pressure

“You know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” James 1:3

When our kids were growing up, we loved having picnics in the backyard. No picnic was complete without a plate full of big, juicy watermelon slices! From my kids’ point of view, part of the fun was playing with the seeds. As soon as a wet seed hit the table, they couldn’t resist the urge to press it with their thumb to see how far they could make it fly across the table.

I can’t help but think we’re a lot like that when life presses down on us. When the pressure gets too intense, we start looking for ways to bail out from under the thumb of circumstances that seem too much to handle. And all too often we are tempted to bail in terms of our attitudes, feeling angry, bitter, or even mad at God—or anyone else we can blame our problems on. Or, we are tempted to bail in our actions by refusing to persevere in righteous ways.

Thankfully, James offers some great advice about why it’s so important to stay under the pressure. He reminds us that God has a purpose in mind when He allows trials to press down on us. Like turning coals into diamonds, some things only happen under a lot of pressure. Staying under the pressure is how God tests our faith in order to make us “mature and complete” (James 1:4). But, if we bail in our attitudes or actions under the burden, we interfere with the productive intentions that God has for our lives.

It’s interesting that the Greek word James uses in our text for “perseverance” (James 1:3) is *hupomeno*. It’s derived from two Greek words: *hupo* (under) and *meno* (remain). James is making the point that in order to achieve God’s refining goals for our lives, we need to be willing to cooperatively remain under the pressure.

It boils down to whether or not you want comfort or character. You may think that life should be a bed of roses, but if that’s your take on life, you’re in for a big surprise—trouble happens! The issue is not if you will face trials, it’s how you will respond to the inevitable pressure that the problems of life bring.

It may be that you face pressure at work. In the face of a seemingly insurmountable project, it’s easy to think, “If I just fudge a little bit I could get this job done faster.” Or, when the problems at home won’t go away, we find ourselves wondering, “Maybe I’ll just leave so I won’t have to deal with this anymore.” The sin of pride causes us to respond to problems with thoughts like, “I don’t deserve this.” And soon our attitudes are in the dumper and God’s work is derailed.

In fact, the next time you’re tempted to bail on God and squeeze out from under the trouble, think of Jesus, who “humbled himself and became obedient to death” (Philippians 2:8). He “remained under” great suffering for the purpose of making you better.

So embrace the process and permit God to do His work of making you more mature and usable, for your good and His glory. Believe me—the pain will be worth the gain!

YOUR JOURNEY...

Do you try to bail out from under pressure? Why is it hard to remain under it?

What are some reasons why you might try to bail on God’s maturing process in your life?

What are some steps you can take to be more committed to the process of growth?

Take some time to pray and thank God for His desire to produce maturity in your life, and then surrender to the process.

The Perfecting Storm

“Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” James 1:4

In Cornwall, England, you can visit a place called The Eden Project. The Eden Project attempted to build the perfect environment in which plants and trees could flourish. Obviously named for the Garden of Eden, this collection of “biomes,” huge domes, provides a tightly monitored atmosphere with a perfect temperature range and humidity. There are no insects and there is no pollution. What more could a tree want?

But there was a problem.

After this wonder of science was built, the scientists on the project noticed something strange. The leaves on the big trees were beginning to wilt and the branches were starting to droop. Puzzled, they consulted a tree expert. After studying the situation, he reported, “Your problem is that there is no wind in the environment. It’s the wind that pushes and moves the tree fibers forcing the nutrients and moisture to be drawn up from the ground. Trees need the stress of the wind or they won’t thrive!”

How much is that like our lives? A lot!

Given a choice, we would construct our own little “Eden Project” around our homes, our families, our dreams, and our futures. In our bubble, we would have just the right emotional climate—a controlled and restricted atmosphere where we could click the delete button keeping out unwanted news and pain. Trouble would be carefully filtered before it could reach us, keeping us well protected from the “pollution” of suffering and heartache. In our dream world, we would no doubt think that designing this stress-free environment would provide a spiritual climate in which we could thrive!

Right? Well, not really.

James points out that our lives need a little “wind” if we are going to grow and mature. In fact, we are called to choose an attitude of joy in the face of life’s storms, trusting by faith that God is going to use them to help us grow. James says that the trials you and I face, whatever shape they take, test our faith. They are there to reveal whether or not we really believe the things we say we believe on Sunday mornings at church. Do we trust that God is good all the time? Do we really believe that His faithfulness is great and that His mercies are new every morning? Do we have the confidence that His faithfulness never fails and that He never bails on us when the storm clouds rise?

As your faith holds, strong perseverance—your ability to “hang in there”—enables you to stay faithful and steady in the face of the divine storm. And, as you patiently stay under the stress of the “wind,” God will make you “complete, not lacking anything.”

It’s the wind of life that stretches and presses the spiritual fibers of your heart to bring nourishment and vitality to your soul.

And, just in case you missed it, look back at the beginning of today’s passage. Did you catch it? James says, “Whenever you face trials,” not “if you face trials.” The storms of life are a given. And while these storms can be heart-wrenching, terrifying, and truly, truly dark at times, I am encouraged and reassured from Scripture to know that these trials are not random. They are yet another way that God is helping us grow, flourish, and mature. And if we understand that, then we can choose, by faith in our Father, to welcome His perfecting storm.

YOUR JOURNEY...

How have some of the storms of your life shaped and matured your faith in the past? What have you learned about God through them?

What storms are you facing at the moment? What is God teaching you in the midst of the storm?

Sometimes we need additional encouragement and perspective in the storm. Do you have Christian friends that can come alongside you during a season of trial and difficulty?

Hitting the Rapids

"Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward." Job 5:7

I’ll never forget my first white-water rafting experience. The guide made me wear a dorky helmet and a life jacket that was anything but flattering. Thankfully, my sagging self-image was rescued by the thought that if I didn’t put the stuff on, my life might be in jeopardy. Braced for the worst, I got in the raft, only to discover that life on the river was far more pleasant than I had imagined. The water moved smoothly through the meadows. The birds were in full song and the flowers on the banks added color to the already beautiful day. Not to worry!

But then I heard something around the bend. What was that noise? And what was that mist that rose from the water? As we turned the corner, my heart picked up speed as the approaching white water pounded the jagged rocks that we were about to navigate.

Life is a lot like river rafting—inevitably you hit the white water! No one is exempt. In the midst of his misery, Job declared that “man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7). In fact, there are only three kinds of people: Those who are headed for the white water and don’t know it yet, those who are in it, and those who have made it through. So the issue is not, will you hit the rapids? You will. The issue is, are you ready to navigate them successfully? And that is where you as a follower of Jesus have a distinct advantage.

First of all, you are not alone in the raft. The “I-will-never-leave-you-nor-forsake-you-Jesus” is at the back of the raft with His hands on the rudder. And, by the way, He has been through this white water before. Having been tested in every white water of life, He welcomes you to come to Him in complete confidence for grace and mercy in your time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Second, the trouble is intended to make you better, not bitter. To make you, not break you. Stop fighting the rapids—you can’t beat

them! Surrender to the intention of Christ to use the trouble to expose you to your weaknesses and to develop faith and character so that you will be increasingly capable and useful in the days ahead (James 1:2-4).

Third, if you don't know what to do or how to respond, don't trust your instincts. As fallen people, our first instincts are usually wrong. He promises to give you the wisdom you need to navigate the turmoil successfully. There isn't a situation in life that doesn't have a point of reference in the Bible. Knowing what to do begins with knowing where to go for advice—to God's Word. Protective and productive wisdom is as close as your Bible. Prayer is a source of wisdom as well, as we take the time to ask God for what we need (James 1:5). Staying in the throne room long enough for God to speak to our trouble through His Spirit often brings to mind something about the ways and will of God that helps us to know exactly how to respond. One thing is for sure: Don't do anything until you know the right response.

When life has you in the white-knuckle zone, as it inevitably will, know that He's in the raft with you. Take your clues from Him. He's been down the river before.

YOUR JOURNEY...

Have you been through any "rapids" lately? How did you navigate the situation? Did your approach make it better or worse?

Do you know anyone who is going through some "white water"? What are you doing to help them navigate successfully?

How do the three perspectives change the way you would normally handle difficulties? How do they change the way you would help someone else?

Read James 1:2-12. What specific encouragement do you find in this text to help you stay afloat?

Load Limits

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" 1 Corinthians 10:13

Daddy, can I help you?" It was my four-year-old son, Matt, who was watching me carry cartons of empty pop bottles to the car. We could return them for a dime apiece, so after months of stacking them up in the garage, I was off to collect the cash bonanza.

I said, "Sure, Matt," and he picked up a carton of bottles and put them in the car. When we got to the store, he grabbed his carton of bottles and shuffled along next to me across the big parking lot. About half way to the store, obviously exhausted, he looked up and said, "Dad, I can't carry this anymore."

Count on it, I didn't say, "Listen, Kid, you started this, so pick up that carton right now and finish what you started!" Of course not!

I took the carton out of his hands, because I knew it was too heavy for him to handle. As his earthly father, I understood what his limits were and helped him carry the load.

Thankfully, our heavenly Father understands our load limit and comes alongside to help. It's hard to stick it out during difficult times when the trouble in our lives seems far too heavy and there is no end in sight. It's in times like these that we feel like giving up—like we can't go on. But God's Word reminds us that "God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). It's important to note that this verse is talking about more than just bearing up under temptation. In the original Greek, the word temptation actually means "all kinds of trials."

Ever feel like you're in the middle of all kinds of trials? The problem with problems is that they have a tendency to drain us of our strength—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. And that's when our adversary likes to launch his attack. When we're weak, he haunts us with thoughts like: How could a loving God allow this to happen? and God has brought you to this place and has just left you here. Or, You're beyond help—God can't help you now. But when you start thinking these thoughts, you need to know that they are flat out lies from the pit. You can be sure that they don't reflect God's heart for you during difficult times.

In the Old Testament, one of God's names is Jehovah Jireh—our provider—and He always lives up to His name. He stands ready to provide abundant grace so that we can bear up until He has finished His work in the trial (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). He gives us a peace that passes understanding as we trust and rely on Him with a grateful heart (Philippians 4:6-7). He gives wisdom to see our tough times from His point of view (James 1:5). He gives us the assurance that He will stick it out with us and not leave or forsake us, so that we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What man can do to me?" (Hebrews 13:6).

So, chin up! Our troubles and trials have not escaped the notice of the One who comes alongside to help when it seems like the load is too much to bear.

The One who knows your load limit promises to limit your load!

YOUR JOURNEY...

Think back to a time when God helped you “bear up” under the pressure of difficult circumstances. Write a paragraph in your journal about how God’s power helped you through.

What promises of God can you claim to find strength in your time of trouble? Pray them back to God with a thankful heart until you sense His peace and presence in the midst of your pain.

Write a prayer of thanksgiving for a specific event that God helped you through. Read the following Scriptures for examples of Moses and Hannah who did this: Exodus 15:1-18; 1 Samuel 2:1-10.

Find someone who needs help “bearing up.” Use Scripture to encourage that person through a written note or a phone call.

The Safety Zone

“The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe” Proverbs 18:10

The first church I pastored was in Springfield, Ohio. Our home was situated near Wright-Patterson Air Force Base—directly in the flight path of landing B-52 bombers that were coming home after circling the globe in our nation’s defense. Needless to say, these low-flying nuclear warehouses made a horrible racket as they flew overhead. They were so low that I hoped they avoided leaving tire tracks on our roof.

But the biggest problem with their booming approach was the trauma they caused in the hearts of our young children playing in the backyard. Happily engrossed in their own little world, the growing sound of trouble in the distance and the shadow of the massive planes as they skimmed the treetops traumatized our kids with fear. They instinctively knew what to do. They ran into the house to look for their mom or dad! My legs still have the embedded marks of their fingerprints from clinging to me till the danger passed.

Every time I read this wonderful verse in Proverbs, I think about our children and the B52s. Like a kid frightened in his backyard, we are often anxious and sometimes terrified by the circumstances that come our way. Maybe it’s a health scare—a suspicious biopsy or the worried look on the doctor’s face. Sometimes it’s the threat we feel from family and friends who challenge and mock the beliefs we hold dear. The loss of a job, the betrayal of a trusted friend, the anxiety of not being able to cope as a single parent—all of these have a way of making us feel overwhelmed. Fearful and lonely, we need a refuge, a place to run.

Proverbs 18:10 is the MapQuest for our souls. It tells us to run to the name of the Lord. As the text says, His name is a strong tower and those who run to it are safe. So what’s so safe about His name?

His name is Provider—His grace is sufficient for every circumstance (2 Corinthians 12:9) and His wisdom is given in spades (James 1:5).

His name is the All-knowing and Almighty—nothing has escaped His notice, nor is anything beyond the scope of His power (Psalm 57:1-5).

His name is Good—regardless of what He permits to come into our lives, He will bring good from even the darkest situations (Romans 8:28).

His name is Father and Friend—the One who gave His Son to make you His child and to guarantee you a world to come where fear and anxiety are forever replaced by peace and joy (John 14:1-6).

So run to Him! There is no safe place without Him. And comfort in the time of stress is elusive apart from Him.

I guess this is why faith is so childlike. My children knew exactly where to turn when fear struck. They ran to the safety of their father’s love. May you and I be wise enough—and childlike enough—to do the same.

YOUR JOURNEY...

What fears have surfaced in your life this week? What was your response to these fears?

Where do you usually turn when you’re afraid? Friends? Escapism? Solutions apart from God?

Take action today by thinking about some of God’s Names (Healer, Sustainer, Provider, Redeemer, Almighty). Let the truths about Him be your strong tower today.

Protocol

Written by Joe Stowell for Our Daily Bread

Let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. —James 1:6

If you were invited to a meeting at the White House with the President of the United States, regardless of your opinion of him or her, you would probably go. Upon entering the White House, a protocol officer would meet you and outline the proper procedures for meeting the President. Suffice it to say, it would be unacceptable to let loose with a burst of undignified familiarity or negative criticism as you shook hands.

So it should come as no surprise that God's Word makes it clear that there is a protocol for entering the presence of God. Hebrews 11:6 outlines one aspect of appropriate interaction: "He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." God wants us to be fully devoted to Him—and He takes it personally when our hearts are filled with criticism, unbelief, and doubt.

James tells us that when we ask God for wisdom, the key to His response is whether or not we are asking "in faith" (1:6). God is pleased when we approach Him with unwavering faith.

So leave your doubt at the door and follow the protocol: Approach God with a heart of faith, and He will be pleased to provide all the wisdom you need.

God, give me the faith of a little child!
A faith that will look to Thee—
That never will falter and never fail,
But follow Thee trustingly. —Showerman

Exchange the dissatisfaction of doubt for the fulfillment of faith in God.

When the Going Gets Tough

"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial." James 1:12

There I was driving along, half hypnotized by the steady flow of traffic. I glanced at the car ahead of me. The bumper sticker read, "When the going gets tough, the tough go shopping!" I chuckled. But then I thought: Could you really call yourself "tough" if you headed for the mall every time life went sour? As I drove, I pondered how to really finish that sentence, "When the going gets tough, the tough . . . do what?"

A quick Internet search on the phrase returned endless possibilities for completing the thought. Here are some of the wackiest endings: "When the going gets tough, the tough "go to Asia," or, the tough "start knitting." One even said, "The tough lighten up!"

All of these alternative endings are humorous in their own way. But, they also represent ways to deal with "tough going." For example, shopping could symbolize immediate gratification. Racing off to Asia might mean you're running away from the problem. Starting to knit is a picture of distracting yourself from the trouble at hand. And if you simply lighten up, or laugh it off—that's kind of like denial.

I don't think any of us would get very far in life if we repeatedly chose those responses to trouble. They all contradict the traditional ending to the phrase. "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." The tough hang in there; they persevere. James 1:12 says: "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life."

In the Greek language, the word perseverance is literally made up of two words. One means "to remain." The other word means "under." That tells us that perseverance is the ability to remain under the pressure of difficulty with a good spirit. As Christians, we have a responsibility to bear the stress until God accomplishes His purposes. This gives us the assurance that our suffering has meaning.

In fact, God intends that we, in time, will blossom under the pressure. That's why James exhorts us to submit to the trial and let perseverance finish its job of sanctification. In James 1:4, the text tells us, "Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." And, check out Romans 5:1-21 where Paul says that perseverance produces character!

In addition to the blessings that God brings to us when we persevere, perseverance also allows others to see Christ at work in our

lives. With the growing interest in spirituality today, people are watching us more than ever before. They are looking to see if there is anything of value in our walk with Jesus. Or, are we just like anyone else when the going gets tough? They want to know, would a Christian use a string of four-letter words if she lost the big sale? Would a Christian booze it up after a crazy stressful day at the office? What would it take for a Christian to throw in the towel on his marriage? When we invite God to help us through situations like these, He furnishes the power to persevere so that onlookers can see that our Jesus is worth being faithful to regardless of the stress.

The next time a problem comes up and you're tempted to go shopping, gallivant off to Asia, or knit yourself into oblivion, remember: Since God has a purpose in your problem, it's worth hanging in there! So, if you are a follower of Jesus, your bumper sticker announces, "When the going gets tough, the tough hang in there!"

YOUR JOURNEY...

Many people in the Bible struggled with difficult circumstances, but they did not give up. Read Hebrews 11:1-40. What enabled those people to persevere?

Do you have true grit? Write down some recent responses to trouble in your life. Do you tend to stay the course, or do you look for a way out?

If you need encouragement to persevere, read the following Scriptures: Psalm 73:26; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12; Hebrews 10:19-39; 12:1-3

Hey, Where'd You Get That?

"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father" James 1:17

One of my favorite classical works of music is *The Creation*. But what I like even more than the stirring sounds and moving lyrics is the attitude of composer.

It was the year 1808, and the last note sounded as the symphony's performance came to a close. Applause thundered through the auditorium in honor of one of the greatest composers of all time, Franz Joseph Haydn. The piece that had been performed was called *The Creation*. Haydn had written it to glorify God, by telling the Genesis story of creation through music. Audiences all over Europe adored it. And that night, he responded to the crowd's ovation by pointing upward and exclaiming, "No, No! Not from me, but from thence! From heaven above comes all!"

At that same concert, Haydn's contemporary Ludwig van Beethoven is said to have knelt and kissed Haydn's hands in an act of honor. Praised by other great composers of his time and admired by the public as well, he was heaped with fame and adoration. Still, he refused to become prideful of the music God had created through Him. He knew from where it had come.

For sure, not many of us will be musical geniuses like Haydn. But God has given all of us talents and abilities. Some of us have exceptional people skills; some have what it takes to crunch numbers with precision. Others might be able to cook, write prose and poetry, or repair the transmission on a car. These gifts from God are the result of the way He created us—in His image. God is infinitely talented and able to do anything! Being made in "His image" means we have been given gifts from Him to accomplish good things and to contribute to our world.

But here's the rub. If we're not careful, the stealth enemy of pride will whisper to you that you are the one who deserves the credit. There is something really seductive about applause and affirmation. Giving the credit to others is not an easy thing to do. But in the end, who would you rather have people admire—you or your God? And even if you are tempted to honestly admit that you'd kinda like it to be you—upon further reflection, my guess is that you really don't want to go there. And you shouldn't. Competing with Him for the applause, especially when He deserves it all, is not a good idea. Particularly when we read that, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

Remember, there is a world out there that is sitting quietly, watching your performance, waiting to break into applause. And when the applause comes, stand, take a bow, and then let people know where it all came from!

YOUR JOURNEY...

Take some time to evaluate your reaction to the good things that you do. Pray and ask the Lord to show you areas of pride in your life, especially as they relate to the talents and abilities that He has given you.

At the top of a sheet of paper, write the phrase: "From heaven above comes all." Then list the gifts God has given to you. For each gift, brainstorm ways in which you could use it to serve the Lord and give Him the glory.

Memorize Micah 6:8 and 1 Corinthians 10:31. Each time you feel pride begin to take root in your heart, confess it as sin and let these verses encourage your heart to live humbly to God's glory.

Joyful Living

Written by Joe Stowell for Our Daily Bread

"Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy." 1 Timothy 6:17

Our search for joy takes us many different directions—dream holidays, shopping, food, clothes, friends, cars—the list is almost endless.

My guess is that if you perked up at the mention of shopping, holidays, or cars, you might have felt a twinge of guilt. We often view the joy of temporal things as less than spiritual and show our discomfort by apologizing for nice things: "I wouldn't have bought this, but someone gave me a wonderful deal." As if real Christians never eat quiche, drive cool cars, or wear designer clothes!

No doubt God's greatest gift to us is our relationship with His Son Jesus. It's a gift beyond comparison. Jesus promised that when we abide in Him we will experience the fulfillment of His joy (John 15:11), and without that kind of deep, abiding joy the rest of life is mundane at best.

But Scripture also casts the joy of the Lord in terms of temporal things. The enjoyment of "things" can be a positive spiritual experience. When we recognize that He "gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17) and that "every good gift . . . is from above" (James 1:17), our hearts should be full of thankfulness and praise. This, in and of itself, is an act of worship! Enjoy the Giver and the gifts.

We thank Thee, Lord, for daily food,
For plenteous store of earthly good;
For life and health we still possess,
With house and home so richly blessed. —Mohler

Our heavenly Father delights in bringing us delight.

Hey, You in the Corner

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31

I've always been intrigued by the nursery rhyme about Little Jack Horner. At first blush it seems rather cute and innocent. But on further reflection, there is something seriously wrong. The closing line describes the self-congratulating boy with his plum-covered thumb held high saying, "What a good boy am I!" But if he is all that good, what is he doing in a corner? As I recall, it's bad boys who get sent to sit in a corner. And all the pictures that I remember have him sitting there with a whole pie on his lap. I have never known a mother to give her kid a whole pie! It's conceivable that he stole it from the kitchen. And if you don't like my take on the story, then I need to ask you: What is he doing with his fingers in the food breaking every social standard of good eating habits? Then to top it off, he finds a plum in the pie (what did he expect from a Christmas plum pie?) and lifts it high, giving himself the credit for finding the plum. The least he could have done was to shout the praises of his mom for buying the plums and then baking them into the pie!

But before we are too hard on Jack, let's take a good look at ourselves. Compared to a lot of people, we feel pretty good about ourselves. It's easy to feel self-congratulatory about a lot of things. But in reality the applause is undeserved. Scripture affirms what we already know. When we are honest with ourselves, we have to agree with what God says when He claims that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). We are not intrinsically good. Oh, we may do good things now and then, but at the core we are fallen and sinful. We are born with the curse of sin, and we can't help ourselves. Which is why, when we finally do something good, we become proud and turn the good deed into an occasion to celebrate ourselves.

From God's point of view, we are in the corner for a reason. And in spite of our self-congratulatory ways, we find ourselves with far too much pie on our lap and with our fingers in the food too often!

Most serious, however, is our tendency to take the credit for our abilities and accomplishments when the credit belongs to God. Let's face it—and I want to be gentle here—we would be nothing if God had not given us our brains, the opportunities to succeed, the cleverness to stay ahead of the curve in the marketplace, and, for some, the physical features to turn a head now and then! All that we are and have comes from Him. As James reminds us, "Every good and perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17). But there we

are, forgetting all of this and with raised hand showing off all that God has provided for us, taking the credit for it as we boldly proclaim, "What a good boy am I!"

It's a serious thing to rob God of the glory that is due His name (Isaiah 48:1 [1L](#)). So let's determine that we will tactfully give God the credit for all that we are and are able to do. If He's been good to you (and He has), get out of the corner and let your world know who it was that put the plum on your thumb!

YOUR JOURNEY...

In what ways can you identify with Little Jack Horner? Is there an act of sin, or even a pattern of sin, that you have felt proud of?

To get the full context of Paul's advice to glorify God in everything we do, read 1 Corinthians 10:23-31 [1L](#). Is there a personal conviction you need to set aside in order to be a help and encouragement to a fellow believer?

Think about the things God has given you—your brain, your talents, your family—and take the time to praise Him specifically for each of those things. Then take it one step further and ask Him to help you use those things for His glory and not your own

Shattered

"The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." Psalm 34:18

If you had a chance to meet her, you would agree that the name we have affectionately given her really fits. She has a fantastic command of the world around her and a charming personality that makes you want to give her what she wants. And, of course, since "Cate the Great" is one of our grandchildren, my wife Martie and I delight in doing just that. After all, it's a grandparents' prerogative!

Martie once hosted four of our granddaughters for a special weekend tea party. Fancy invitations were sent, lacy décor was purchased, and I was banned from the proceedings. Cate the Great and her mother carefully chose an elegant wardrobe for the occasion, Cate's favorite "princess" costume.

Cate came with great anticipation of a regal entrance as "princess of the day" into the cultured society of her fellow cousins. It was to be her finest moment. Until we discovered that the dress had been left behind at her parents. Disaster! Cate's world, as she knew it, was shattered. All her hopes, dreams, and aspirations to grandeur were left behind with the princess dress. She didn't feel like Cate the Great anymore.

Martie could have launched into a timely exposition of how, in the bigger picture of real life, it was not all that big of a deal and that Cate should stop crying and realize that she would get over it and someday laugh at this little wrinkle in her world. Instead, Martie quickly proceeded to the nearest specialty store with crying Cate in tow to find another princess costume. Martie not only rescued the tea party, but helped rebuild Cate's shattered little world.

We shouldn't be surprised when God does the same thing for us. He "is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18). In His grace, He comes alongside whenever your world becomes shattered—whether it's shattered by your own fears and anxieties, or by disappointing events beyond your control. He could, of course, lecture you about the bigger picture of eternity and tell you to buck up and move on, but God compassionately comes alongside, allows you free access to His throne room in prayer, and listens to every one of your anxious thoughts (Philippians 4:6-8). Being the perfect Father, He never spoils or pampers, but lovingly offers every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). He is there, right now, waiting to rebuild and restore your broken world.

Your Journey . . .

Think of a time when you felt like your world was shattered. Did a friend or family member come alongside to help? Did you look to God for hope and help in the situation? Looking back on it, how is your perspective different now than it was then?

Is your life is shattered now? David faced great seasons of devastating disappointments and consistently resolved them with hope in God's merciful and gracious willingness to be there for Him in times of crisis. Thoughtfully read Psalms 13, 27, 28, and 42, and take them all personally!

Do you know someone who is currently experiencing a shattered situation? What can you do to help restore their shattered world today?

Put this verse in your head and heart for the next time your life is shattered. "But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation" (Psalm 13:5).

The Truth . . . for Jesus' Sake

"One of the Pharisees . . . said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.'" Luke 7:39

I'm a little tired of hearing angry Christians running around the world saying "We've got it right, and everyone else is wrong!" Granted, the clear teachings of God's Word are indeed right and anything that contradicts them is wrong. But what bothers me is the extent to which we give equal standing to God's Word and to our sometimes-twisted attitudes and opinions. I hear us talking all the time about "those people" who are causing moral decline and the politicians who are legislating God out and "do-whatever-you-want" in. We sound so long on mad and so short on mercy.

Sure, there are serious problems in the world. But behind those problems are real people who need the same Jesus that all of us needed when we came to the cross. It's important to note that in the course of Jesus' ministry He had more harsh words of reproof for the self-righteous religious folk than He did for the outright sinners whom He came to save. And it should be remembered that He took a big hit from the "good" people for spending time with the religious and social outcasts.

On a nightly cable news show not long ago, a TV preacher made some Bible-thumping statement about AIDS being judgment from God on the gay rights movement and that anyone who is gay doesn't deserve to live. I was embarrassed, upset, and heartsick all at the same time. Sadly, too many people believe that's what real Christianity is all about. But nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, that kind of angry rhetoric does not reflect the heart and teachings of Jesus. Jesus said, "I am . . . the truth" (John 14:6), so in order for me to confidently speak like I have the truth, I need to be sure that I am in sync with Him.

When Jesus came into Jerusalem for the first time after beginning His ministry, He wept over the city's brokenness. He spent time with sinners and told stories about God's compassion for prodigals and prostitutes. The heart of Jesus is marked not only with clarity about sin, but is also filled with compassion—not hatred—for those who do not yet believe and understand the truth. As His followers, our hearts should be broken for those who are broken and bent by sin. That means spending a whole lot less time acting like we are the truth and getting busy about pointing people to Jesus who is the Truth. And the best way to point people to Jesus is to start living like He lived.

The apostle James wrote to believers undergoing some tough opposition, instructing them not just to hear the truth but also to do the truth (James 1:22). In other words, we need to let Truth transform us before we try to articulate it to others.

Let's face it: Sometimes we have to show up for Jesus before we can speak up for Him. We need to show we care by reaching out and meeting the more difficult and not-so-easy-to-deal-with needs of people around us. To tutor an underprivileged kid, to care for a man dying from AIDS, to sit in silence with someone at a nursing home, to visit a widow and help her with her laundry. Maybe, just maybe, after that, we can tell them the truth about what we know to be true in Jesus.

Believe me, a heart that knows you really care might just be ready to care for the Jesus who made you care for them in the first place.

YOUR JOURNEY...

Do an attitude check. Would you rather hate those who are "big-time sinners," or love them as Jesus did?

How can you be more sensitive to those who aren't quite ready to receive the truth? In what ways can you begin to show the real Jesus to them? Make a list of people you know who upset you because of their lifestyle or publicly proclaimed philosophy. Make it a point to pray for them regularly. Ask God to help you show them the love of Jesus without condoning their lifestyle.

Read through James 1:1-26. Prayerfully write down some things you could begin doing differently in your life.

James 3

Back Seat Serenade

"For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" Matthew 12:34

I'll never forget a double date that Martie and I had with another couple in college. I was driving, which meant that my then fiancée, Martie, was in the front with me while the other couple was sitting in the back. My friend in the back was an All-American pitcher for our college baseball team, and he was engaged to a popular co-ed on campus. As we rode along, our group conversation

eventually dropped off and Martie and I thought we heard soft singing coming from the backseat. I could hardly believe it! This macho athlete was actually serenading his girlfriend! This guy had it bad—he had a “heart condition” that needed to be expressed!

We all have “heart conditions.” They’re those deeply rooted thoughts and feelings that ultimately show up in our words. Which makes our tongues the tattletales of the true condition of our heart. As Jesus said, “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”

When we have love in our hearts, our words are kind and gentle; they build up and encourage. Humble hearts speak about what is best for others and willingly admit and apologize for being wrong. Patient hearts are slow to respond to moments of stress, and God-honoring hearts look for opportunities to give God the glory and praise for all He has done. You can tell a lot about a person by what they say—and what they don’t say.

But it’s not just good hearts that show up in our words. Unfortunately for most of us, our words often reveal the dark side of our hearts as well. As James 3:10 tells us, “Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing.” Proud hearts love to boast about accomplishments and are willing to use words to put others down to lift ourselves up. Angry hearts vent through our mouths, and fearful hearts often lash out verbally for self-protection and defense. Self-centered hearts turn conversations back toward us. And when your heart feels slighted, you will find that murmuring and complaining are on the tip of your tongue.

As my pastor friend James MacDonald says, “You know a lot about a person by listening to what spills out when they are bumped!” How true. Next time you speak, listen to your words—they are telling on your heart! And if you don’t like the kind of secrets that your words are giving away, then listen to what you’ve said so that you can know what needs to be fixed on the inside. And fixing the inside may just mean that you turn over the control of your heart to the Holy Spirit. When you do that, pride, anger, fear, self-centeredness, bitterness, and all the other demons of your haunted heart will be chased away by the love, joy, peace, and patience that only the Spirit can bring (Galatians 5:22-23).

Pay attention to the words that get you into trouble, and you’ll be able to identify and deal with the sin that is at the heart of the matter. After all, all talk is heart talk.

YOUR JOURNEY...

How often is your speech a sweet serenade to those around you? Make it a point to use your words to show love to someone at least once each day this week.

Pray and ask God to make you more aware of your words—the good and the bad. Ask Him to show you how your words relate to the condition of your heart.

Spend time journaling about your top verbal struggles and find a verse that relates to each one. When you are tempted to engage in that sin, quote the corresponding verse. Chart your progress in the pages of your journal.

Meditate on Psalm 19:14; 51:10 and ask God to give you a renewed sensitivity for His blessing on your words and your heart.

Categories: Basics Of Faith, Blessings From, Character, Christian life, Christlikeness, Conviction Of, Integrity, Purity, Relating To God, Relationships, Repentance, Self Images, Sin, Sin, Thinking, Wisdom

JAMES 4

Whose Side Are You On?

“You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” James 4:4

Ever been caught in the middle of a fight? When I was a kid in junior high school, two of my buddies had a disagreement and planned to prove their dominant masculinity in a fight at the park after school. “Red” was a friend from my youth group at church, and Larry was a buddy from my neighborhood. As we walked to the park after school that day, all of Red’s friends were following him, while all of Larry’s friends clustered around him. I didn’t know what to do. Both of them were my friends. So I decided to do the diplomatic thing. First, I walked for a bit with Larry, and then I slipped over to Red’s side of the street. I’ll never forget what Red said to me. “Joe, you’re either my friend or Larry’s friend. You can’t have it both ways. Make up your mind.”

Ouch.

I knew right away that what he said had a ring of truth to it. Not unlike Red’s remark to me, the apostle James jabs us with a stinging warning: “Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”

I doubt that any of us would want to be on the wrong side of that equation. Yet it's so easy to sidle up to the ways of the world. How can we know whose side we're really on? Thankfully, Paul gives us a clue. In Galatians 5:19-21, just before he gives the famous list of the fruits of the Spirit, he lists several examples of how friendship with the world shows up in our actions: "sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like."

If you find yourself in that list, you're making a huge statement about whose side you're on. And here's a scary thought—not only are you a friend of the world, but an enemy of God when your actions stand in sharp contrast to His will and His ways. Thankfully, Paul doesn't leave us in enemy territory. He goes on to list some examples of what friendship with God looks like: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Jesus Himself made the grounds for friendship with Him clear when He said to His disciples, "You are my friends if you do what I command" (John 15:14). Doing His will is what proves our friendship with Him, and it is what empowers us to bear much fruit to His glory!

So, whose side are you on? Friendship with Jesus is proven when we walk with Him in His will and His ways, which means that friendship with Jesus is a choice—a choice between Him and the ways of this fallen world.

Take it from me, James, Paul, and my friend Red, you can't have it both ways. So be sure that you're walking in Jesus' crowd!

YOUR JOURNEY...

Read carefully through the lists in Galatians 5:19-23. Which list best describes you? Would the people who know you agree with your answer?

What do you think James meant when he used the phrase "adulterous people"? How does it affect you to think of your relationship with God and the world in terms of a love relationship?

None of us wants to be described as an "enemy of God." What do we need to do to prevent that from happening?

Remember, God's most passionate desire for your life is that you will bear fruit. Do you have that passion in common with Him?

Think of a practical way that you can be a friend of God today. (Hint: consult the list in Galatians 5:22-23.)

Like There's No Tomorrow

"Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow." James 4:14

I expected some challenges when I took on the presidency of Moody Bible Institute, but I never expected a death threat.

It happened during my first year at Moody. For reasons completely unknown to me, a convicted murderer decided that the world would be better off without me. And so, from prison, he let me know his feelings by sending a death threat. My colleagues and I immediately consulted with the Chicago Police, and they advised me, based on this guy's past criminal history, that he might very well have the connections and criminal bent to pull it off. We needed to take this seriously.

It's amazing how quickly news like that reshuffles your priorities. There were lots of tasks planned and my schedule was packed. But suddenly the important meetings didn't seem quite so important and the urgent, pressing items demanding my attention didn't seem quite so urgent and pressing. In fact, as I pondered the thought that my life was apparently in danger, my mind moved to two items that I had been trying desperately to avoid: shopping and bowling.

Under normal circumstances, shopping and bowling would be dead last on my task list. I particularly loathe shopping for clothes, especially when it involves standing in a cramped changing room trying on pair after pair of pants. And bowling? Well . . . I've just never been a big fan. But both of these activities, in that moment of considering my own mortality, represented opportunities to express love to those who counted most in my life.

My wife, Martie, had been asking me for quite a while to take our school-age son to do his back-to-school shopping. I knew that would involve traipsing from mall to mall, with hours (or what would seem like hours) of helping Matt in the dressing room. I had found every excuse to delay the pain! And Matt had also been asking me for weeks to go . . . you guessed it . . . bowling!

So when I got home that day, with the death threat looming over my head, I proposed that we spend the evening bowling and shopping for school clothes. Matt and mom were both stunned. Matt had no idea why I had experienced such a change of heart; he just happily jumped in the car! And off we went on a productive evening.

Well, obviously—and thankfully—I lived to see another day. And now, if I ever go bowling again, it will no doubt be with my grandkids! But I wish that I would always live as though today would be my last. Priorities get clear real fast when that's our perspective!

It's what James is getting at when he says, "You do not even know what will happen tomorrow . . . You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14). What difference would it make if we truly grasped the fact that there are no guarantees about what tomorrow holds?

I suspect we would be a lot quicker to forgive. I think we would be much more apt to consider the needs of others around us. We'd say "I love you" more often and prioritize people over things and duties. I think we would spend a lot less time pursuing earth-side stuff and care a lot more about eternity and the lostness of people around us.

Count on it . . . we'd all be a lot better off if we heeded the words of James!

YOUR JOURNEY...

How would today's priorities be reshuffled if you thought there was a possibility that you might not see tomorrow?

How can we, as followers of Christ, maintain a balance of responsibly planning for the future, and yet living with the awareness that each new day is a gift—not a guarantee?

I can't talk about the brevity of life without asking, Have you invited Jesus to be your Lord and Savior? Out of all the emotions that came with a death threat, my faith in what Jesus did for me on the cross gave me such assurance and joy in knowing that I would spend eternity with Him. If you don't have that assurance, turn to Him in faith today!