The Book of James

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Course Description

This is one course in the Tools for Teens curriculum. The Book of James is a study of the book of James emphasizing the practical exhortations of Christian living, while relating these to the historical and theological situations. (1 Quarter)

The author of this material suggests that the teacher reads the following books in conjunction with this material:


About “Tools for Teens”

Tools for Teens is a complete discipleship course designed to ground teens in biblical/theological content. The authors of this material believe in the following:

• Teens must be enabled to understand the doctrines of the Bible.
• Teens must be enabled to understand the content of the Bible.
• Teens must be enabled to understand the historical roots of Baptists, Christianity, and Fundamentalism.
• Teens must be enabled to relate to one another, authorities, and their community from a biblical perspective.

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Introduction

Tim was an average Christian. His parents were faithful members of Calvary Baptist Church. He grew up in Sunday School, attended all of the Vacation Bible Schools, was saved, and baptized at an early age.

From kindergarten until sixth grade, Tim attended a public school. However, when he reached his Junior High years, his parents put him into a Christian school. Their reasoning was that Tim would now learn biblical principles he could use throughout his life. However, by the start of his Tenth Grade year, finances got tight, and his parents informed him that he would have to go back into the public school.

His first day of school, Tim felt out of place. He noticed people did not wear what he was used to seeing in the Christian school. During class breaks, he would see people standing in the hallway with rock music blasting out of open lockers. He saw a girl and guy “making out” in the open. Sometimes, his teachers would use profanity and laugh at students who told “dirty” jokes. Once in a while, he would smell a strange smell. He found out later it was marijuana. Needless to say, he was out of place.

Not only did Tim realize he was out of place, but those around him started to notice. Over time, Tim’s attitude changed from a “Beware of sin” attitude to one of “Become like them so they don’t realize I’m different” attitude. Why not?! The other students he found out were Christians would “let their guard down!”

So, for Tim, it started with the occasional participation in “dirty jokes” (He was careful not to laugh too loudly). Then, it progressed to an experimentation of rock music. Soon, he loved the music!

When Tim became a Senior, he became involved with a girl. He did not know if she was a Christian. He started to date this girl because she had some morals, but mainly because she was good looking!
Within a month, they were dating pretty steadily. Tim took her to football and basketball games. After the game, Tim and the girl would go “parking.”

What happened? Tim was taught biblical principles in the Christian school. Why didn't this work? What was Tim’s problem? [Student input]

James wrote the book of James to combat a problem similar to Tim’s. James instructed believers in the days of the early church to expect trials. When trials come, Christians are not to allow the world to influence them into sin, but to flee from sin.

For this reason, James is a very practical book. It is a book from which you can learn, especially when your friends want you to sin.

Who wrote the book?

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ . . . (Jas 1.1a)

The name, James, was very popular in the days of the New Testament. It comes from the Greek Word, Iakobos (Ἰακώβος), which is from the Hebrew word “Jacob.”

Since the name, James, was very common, it is easy to see why many people disagree on who wrote this book. For the most part, the primary “candidates” for the author are – James the Apostle or James the Elder.

James the apostle

James the Apostle was one of the original twelve apostles that Jesus chose.

These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John. (Mt 10.2)

It is unlikely that James the Apostle wrote this book because he was martyred in 44 AD. The Book of James was written about 50 AD.
James the elder

James, the Elder, was the pastor of the church in Jerusalem. He was in the inner circle – Peter, James, and John.

James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars . . . (Gal 2.9)

James, the Elder, was the younger brother of Jesus. The Bible records that Jesus had brothers and sisters.

When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. Coming to his home town, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. “Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?” they asked. “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren’t all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” (Mt 13.53–56)

Tradition says that he prayed for the sins of people so much that his knees became numb. They were so swollen that people called him “camel knees.” He was very popular. This upset the Scribes and Pharisees. They made up a plan to kill him.

They asked James to speak to a crowd from on top of the temple. The Scribes and Pharisees pushed James off of the temple onto the street below. This did not kill him. They threw large stones on him. This also did not kill him. At that moment, James is noted to have said, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!” Finally, a person clubbed him on the head and he died.¹

To whom did James write?

. . . to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations . . . (Jas 1.1b)

James is writing to Jewish Christians that were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. This most

likely is a reference to the scattering of the Christians at the stoning of Stephen.

Stephen was stoned to death for being a Christian and promoting his beliefs. This caused great fear among all of the other Christians living in Jerusalem at the time.

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. (Ac 11.19)

Having fled Jerusalem for their lives, these Christians were living as “strangers” in a different place. The persecution that they faced in Jerusalem was extreme in the eyes of the Christians. However, James repeatedly warns his readers to expect persecution.

. . . it is clear that most of James’ readers were poor, and that many were experiencing oppression from wealthy and powerful people.

Why did James write?

Throughout the book, James gives the Christians practical advice in handling persecutions, trials and life in general. His book is an encouragement to believers to respond to trials in a godly way. James’ purpose for writing is . . .

. . . to show that a true Christian will have a life full of good works, no matter the situation around him.

How does James achieve his purpose?

Key verses:

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? . . . As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (Jas 2.14,26)
Outline

I. Introduction, 1.1
II. True believers persevere under trials, 1.2–18
III. True believers reflect God’s word, 1.19–27
IV. True believers love others, 2.1–12
V. True believers produce good works, 2.14–26
VI. True believers are self-controlled, 3.1–18
VII. True believers reject the world’s system, 4.1–12
VIII. True believers are humble, 4.13–17
IX. True believers are content, 5.1–6
X. True believers persevere, 5.7–12
XI. True believers pray, 5.13–18
XII. Conclusion, 5.19–20

Learning the Truth

This week, you are to read the Book of James from two modern versions (NASB, KJV, NIV, or NKJV). Also, write ten questions you may have from the book (please provide the reference for each question).
This quiz was designed to test your knowledge. You did not expect this quiz. Trials in life are similar. They come when you don’t expect them. They are also designed with a purpose. The purpose of trials is not to make you “trip up,” but rather to reveal who you truly are!

Remember that James overall purpose is to show that a true Christian will have a life full of good works, no matter the situation around him. Therefore,

You must respond appropriately to trials.

Consider trials as positive opportunities, vv 2–4.

Consider it (trials) pure joy . . . (v 2a)

James says to “consider it pure joy.” Literally, the Greek reads “all joy.” This is a strange command to obey when trials come. However, James is not saying to enjoy trials or “jump into” trials, but rather see trials as something positive. In other words, when you are in the middle of a trial, have comfort, knowing that trials are positive things, not negative.

James uses two words to refer to trials.

. . . whenever you face trials of many kinds . . . (vs. 2b)

Trials have two different aspects.
Trials come when you least expect them! James uses the word, *peripipto* (περιπίπτω). This word has the idea of falling into, or facing something unexpectedly. It is the same word used of the man who fell among thieves in the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Just like the “Pop Quiz” we had at the beginning of the lesson, trials will come, and when they come, they are unexpected.

Trials hit you in different ways! The words “many kinds” {ποικίλος (poikilos)} can mean “various colors.” It is one way a Greek person would say “infinite ways.” Some trials are simple, while others seem impossible. However, we all know that there is an infinite number of different trials a person could face.

Trials come unexpectedly. They are various, sometimes numerous. Note that James tells believers to consider them “all joy.” For every trial you face, you will be able to see them as positive things.

Why are they positive? Because trials make believers mature.

> Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (v 4)

Remembering this will help us keep a positive attitude during difficult trials. If we lack the ability to remain positive (and everyone does¹), we need to pray . . .

**Ask God for wisdom during trials, 1.5–8.**

*When you ask, God gives wisdom to handle trials, v 5.*

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (1.5)

¹ The first class conditional sentence notes the “standing need” of every believer.
Everyone needs wisdom. This verse could be stated, “If any of you lacks wisdom, and you do!, he should ask God . . .”

Since we all lack wisdom, we need to pray, asking God for wisdom. God will give us wisdom if we ask for it! Note that God “gives generously.” That is, God gives without hesitation or reservation!

**When you ask, have confidence in God, vv 6–8.**

Some teach that you need to “pray, believing.” If you pray, believing that God will do something for you, He will do it if you have enough faith. They treat God as if He is some kind of “wishing well” or “magic mirror,” and that if they just believe that they will get something, they will. This is opposite of what James is teaching. The point James makes is that believers must pray in faith. Their prayers must reflect confidence in God. Confidence not only in God’s ability to give, but also confidence in God Himself.

A person who doubts that God is able to help them in trials is referred to as “that man.” “That man” is a derogatory term. It is used to show that “that man” is out of control! He has no firm ground. James describes him as “tossed by the sea.” He has no firm ground to stand on, no anchor in which to place his confidence!

**Keep a heavenly perspective during trials, 1.9–12.**

**The poor man’s perspective, v 9.**

The poor man is not distracted by owning lots of things. Therefore, when trials hit, he has his perspective already in place – on heaven.

**The rich man’s perspective, vv 10–11.**

The rich man is distracted by the things he owns. However, when the “scorching heat” destroys the
“beauty” of his riches, he soon knows their value.\(^3\) They are worthless, especially with eternity in view.

The rich man serves as an illustration of a Christian who has the wrong perspective. He placed his confidence in the things he owned, not realizing that their value was worthless.

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. (v 12)

A person who maintains a heavenly perspective will persevere. He can look forward to eternal life in heaven.\(^4\)

**Realize that God seeks to show your faith genuine, 1.13–18.**

**God never puts you in a situation where you have to sin, vv 13–15.**

On the contrary, God uses tests to show that your faith is genuine.

When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. (v 13)

We know that God plans everything in our lives. Temptations and testings are part of God’s plan. Some people may say, “If it is part of God’s plan, then God must be tempting me!”

God uses tests, not to cause people to sin, but to give them an opportunity to show that their faith is genuine.

The verse could be restated,

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\(^3\) The land of Israel is known for its fierce “east winds” (siroccos). They are scorching hot, killing almost everything in their path.

When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me to do evil.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone to do evil… (v 13)

Temptation to do evil comes from within man, not from God. Man’s sinful desires snag him like a baited hook dangling before a hungry fish.⁵

God always seeks to work things out for good, vv 14–15.

Everything God does is good (vs. 17). God’s character demands that everything He does is right! To say that God tempts people to sin is an insult to God, who by His own nature is the epitome of goodness.

James points out that our own salvation is proof that God is good! God chose us for salvation! He gave us something we did not deserve! Therefore, can we blame God for our trials? No!

Learning the Truth

1. Outline the first chapter of James.

⁵ The terms “dragged away” (ἐξελέγκω) and “enticed” (διελείαζω) are fishing terms.
2. Pray every day this week, asking God to give you the wisdom to handle trials that come your way.
GOD’S WORD IS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL. Only by the Word of God can a person be saved. Also, only by the Word of God can a person grow and mature.

How mature are you? In other words, how often do you study and obey God’s Word?

James challenges believers to live a life full of good works, no matter the situation by stating that . . .

Believers must obey God’s Word.

Believers must learn from God’s word, vv 19–21.

Believers must listen carefully to the Word.

The churches during the days of James were much different from our churches. First, believers did not carry their own Bibles to church. Bibles were copied by hand and very expensive. It wasn’t until 1500 years after James wrote his letter that Christians had their own copy of a Bible. This required the believers to listen carefully to the Bible teachers in their churches.
Second, people would often interrupt the church services because they were talking out loud to one another, comparing notes or speaking in tongues. This would cause confusion. That is why Paul wrote the following to the Corinthians:

If anyone speaks in a tongue, two – or at the most three – should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God. (1Co 14.27–28)

James warns the believers that they need to listen carefully to the Word. This is a warning to believers who go to church merely to teach their own beliefs. Later on, James tells the believers that few of them should "presume to be teachers." (cf. 3.1)

This attitude is destructive. A person who is always trying to get other people’s attention by constant talking is detrimental to the church.

One man wrote, “Listening is the art of closing one’s mouth and opening one’s ears . . .”

Believers must submit to the word.

Believers must “accept the word planted in you.” James has already shown in verse 18 that believers have been “given birth through the word.” The Word of God has changed these people into believers. Now, James tells the believers to accept the word.

To accept the word means to learn from it and submit to it. A great example of believers who submitted to the Word are those at Berea.

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Ac 17.11)

This word is implanted in the believers. It changed the depraved sinners into new creatures. The Word

of God changed these people from the inside. Now, they were to show the change on the outside.

James says to get rid of all moral filth and evil. The words “get rid of” are from the Greek word meaning “take the clothing off.” The picture here is of a person that is wearing clothing that is filthy.

Christians have been given a new set of clothes. We have been given the “new man.” However, sin still remains. We need to get rid of the sin that is prevalent. The KJV uses the word “superfluity,” meaning “excess” sin. Believers are not only obligated to get rid of the excess. The fact is that sin is everywhere. It is overflowing. We need to get rid of the sins of our past.

The only way to get rid of sin is by submitting to the Word of God. It is the Word that gave you a new set of clothes in the first place. It can keep your clothes clean.

Believers must change according to God’s word, vv 22–25.

The goal of a believer is to change his life according to what God’s Word teaches. Bible study and reading are not just exercises before you go to bed at night or wake up in the morning. The Bible is a measuring stick by which to measure your attitudes and actions.

A person who reads his Bible or hears preaching in church must respond appropriately. James illustrates this by a man looking into a mirror. The word “look” means to examine an object. The man looking in the mirror knows what he sees. He understands what he is supposed to do! Notice the similarities between the hearer and the man who looks into the mirror.
Too many Christians are like these two men. They are “spiritual sponges that soak up information in church, sit, sour and then stink!”

How do believers avoid becoming “sour stinkers?” According to verse 25, there are some things you need to do.

**Study the word of God.**

The Greek word for study means “I stoop to see.” It gives the idea of looking closely into something. This is something that you need to continually do.

**Obey what the word of God says.**

As we have seen in the illustration of the “hearer” and the “man looking into a mirror,” it is not enough to just hear and understand God’s Word. Though that is the place to start, it is not the ultimate goal. Obedience is the goal.

James says that a person who continues to study the Word of God and to obey the Word will be blessed. Literally, he will be blessed in doing it.

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Believers must **live** according to God’s word, vv 26–27.

How can you really tell if you are living according to God’s Word? By the following tests:

**A believer who lives according to God’s Word will be self-disciplined**, v 26.

James uses the tongue to illustrate a self-disciplined life. A person who can control his tongue is a person who is truly submissive to the Word of God.

However, James warns believers of the person who acts religious, but can’t control his tongue. This person deceives himself by thinking that he pleases God.

**A believer who lives according to God’s Word will meet the needs of others**, v 27a.

James describes a believer who has true religion (a changed life by the Word of God) as one who desires and works to meet other people’s needs.

Widows and orphans were on the bottom of the social ladder in the days of James. They were poor and often the targets of slander and abuse. James’ point is that a believer will seek to meet their needs without expecting anything in return.

**A believer who lives according to God’s Word will separate from ungodliness**, v 27b.

We live in a world that is contaminated with sin. However, since God’s Word is implanted in us, we need to continually devote ourselves to studying it and living by it. In this way, we can keep ourselves “in this world”, but not “of this world.”
Learning the Truth

1. Outline the second chapter of James.

2. *Special project:* Write below two ways in which we can serve the Senior Citizens in need in our church.
WHENEVER YOU DO SOMETHING for someone else, you should do it for the right reason. Don’t expect to get something back. James has just taught us that believers must care for the needs of those who are needy. These are people who may not be able to repay your kindness; however, you must care for them anyway.

Now James turns to the topic of favoritism. This is a similar problem. We often treat people well so we can get something from them. Christians must never act this way!

Christians that have lives full of good works, no matter the situation . . .

Don’t play favorites!

Playing favorites is evil.

What is favoritism?

The word “favoritism” comes from the Greek word meaning “to receive the face.” This means to make judgments about someone based on their external appearance, popularity, etc. Christians should never show favoritism to people based on different races, social classes, or physical appearance.

How evil is favoritism?

James illustrates favoritism with a common problem. A person discriminates between a rich person and a poor person. Note how James contrasts the rich man
and the poor man. This illustration shows how evil favoritism actually is.

**Rich man**

*Gold Ring:* Rich people were known by how many rings they had or the quality of each ring. Sometimes people rented rings to show themselves as wealthy. The Greek literally states this man is “gold-fingered.” He has many rings on his fingers.

*Fine Clothes:* This is literally shiny, white clothes. Some people were known to have woven silver in their clothing.\(^1\) Clothes, in general, were very expensive and most people could not afford to purchase new ones. Though most Jews and Romans wore white robes, usually only the wealthy and Roman politicians wore bright white robes. They would make their robes bright white by rubbing chalk into them.

*Led to Good Seat:* At gatherings, banquets, church, and meetings, special places were reserved for the prominent guests. This man is led to the reserved place.\(^2\)

**Poor man**

*Shabby Clothes:* These are filthy or dirty clothes. These may be stained, soiled clothes. This person was not wealthy enough to maintain his clothes as nice as the rich people.

*Sit on the Floor:* Whereas the rich man was led to the prominent position, this man is told to sit in the worst place. One translation states it this way, “You\(^3\) stand over there, please, or if you must sit, sit on the floor!”\(^4\)

Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (2.4)

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2. James uses the word “meeting.” This does not necessarily mean “church” but any meeting.
3. Emphatic Σί.
James states that Christians who discriminate like this person are judges with wrong motives. These people think that if they treat the rich person well, they will be treated the same.

Playing favorites is ungodly.

God does not play favorites.

The other three times this term is used in the New Testament, it refers to God as one who does not show favoritism.5

For God does not show favoritism. (Ro 2.11)

And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him. (Eph 6.9)

Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism. (Co 3.25)

Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? (Jas 2.5)

God chose the poor to be saved. God did not choose people for salvation because they had something to offer God. Therefore, since we are chosen by God without favoritism, we must not show favoritism to others.

God is slandered by favoritism.

Notice how foolish it is for a Christian to show favoritism to another person.

But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? (2.6–7)

Christians in James’ day were often poor people. Rich people would take advantage of the Christians
and exploit them. It does not make sense for a Christian to show favoritism to a person who takes advantage of him anyway.

Also, more tragically, these are the same people who slander God’s name. Do these people deserve special treatment? No.

Playing favorites is against God’s will.

Favoritism breaks God’s royal law.

This law is royal because it has been given by the King – Jesus Christ. James’ point is not that Christians are only to love one another, but all others as well. Christ expects us to have an impartial love for others. This law is the heart of the entire will of God.

Favoritism results in God’s judgment.

James notes two sins that most people see as very bad sins – adultery and murder. These two sins carried the stiffest penalties known to the Israelites. If one broke one of these laws, death was the penalty.

James point is that favoritism is a serious sin. Therefore, when one shows favoritism, he is just as guilty of sin as if he murdered someone.

Note that a person who does not show favoritism will be judged mercifully.

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment! (2.12–13)

Learning the Truth

1. Read James chapter two again and write down any questions about things from this chapter that you may not understand.
2. *Special project:* Think of an individual you have sinned against. Pray for that person and ask God to help you love him/her as you should. Make it a point to do one of the following this week:

- Repent of your sin and ask for their forgiveness.
- Write him/her an encouraging letter.
- Invite him/her to participate in an activity with you and your other friends.
I is it possible to be a Christian and still sin? The answer is obviously, “Yes.” However, a true Christian will be convicted and deeply disturbed by sin. Today, some teach that a person can live any way he wants and still be assured of his salvation.¹

John MacArthur reveals these teachers this in his book Faith Works.²

Charles Ryrie

“Disobedience and prolonged sin are no reason to doubt the reality of one’s faith.”

“A believer may forsake Christ and come to the point of not believing.”

Zane Hodges

“Nothing guarantees that a true Christian will love God.”

“Calling on the Lord” means appealing to Him, not submitting to Him.

“Genuine believers might even cease to name the name of Christ or confess Christianity.”

These two men and others that follow them misinterpret certain Biblical passages – namely, James 2.14.

¹ John MacArthur in, The Gospel According to Jesus, demonstrated that a true faith works. However, Zane Hodges wrote Absolutely Free, which denies that faith must work. The controversy is known as “Lordship Salvation.” For a good critique and explanation of “Lordship Salvation,” read Michael Horton, Christ the Lord (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992).
What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? (v 14)

The obvious answer to this question is “No.” His point is that a non-working faith is not true saving faith.

Christians will have a life full of good works.

True saving faith works!

True saving faith has action, vv 14–17.

James gives an unbelievable situation to illustrate his point. A man, a fellow Christian, is in desperate need of clothing and food. A person can live without some things in life, but he cannot live without food or clothing.3

The lack of clothing does not necessarily mean that the person was naked. People often wore an outer garment and an inner garment. This is similar to today. This could mean that he did not have any clothes but his underwear. The point is that this fellow Christian is without clothes and is in an embarrassing situation.

Instead of helping the needy man, a person mocks him. A modern translation gives good sense of what this person says by saying, “Good luck to you!”4

Although this needy person approaches another Christian for help, he does not receive it. How does James describe the scrooge?

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (v 17)

The scrooge’s faith is dead. James describes a dead faith in this passage as:

- Good for nothing (2.14, 16b);

3 Remember that James is writing to people in a climate that still gets very cold.
4 Phillips Translation.
• Unable to save (2.14b, 18–19);
• Useless (2.20); and
• Unable to justify (2.24)

Many people “play church.” They may be faithful to the services, come to all of the activities, and be an all-around “nice person.” However, James says if a person is not ministering to others, his faith is useless, and he may not have true saving faith in the first place.

**True saving faith is not just a profession, vv 18–19.**

Many people profess to be Christians. However, some fail to persevere. Some reject Christ and turn completely away. Why do these people fall away? Because they may not have been saved in the first place.

James illustrates the difference again between a saved person and an unsaved person. James sets up a “straw man.”

A profession of true faith cannot be separated from works (v 18).

This man says that a true Christian can have faith and not have works; and a true Christian can have works and not faith. Faith and works cannot be separated in the genuine believer. If he has one, he must have the other. “Neither is an option for any Christian.”

A profession of true faith is not just correct theology.

James now states that even if this man has correct theology, it does not guarantee that he has a genuine faith. This man is merely mouthing words.

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5 In Greek exegesis, this is called a diatribe.
6 Moo, James, pg. 106.
James uses a familiar theological point that every Christian will agree with:

You believe that there is one God . . . (v 19).

Agreement with this statement alone does not prove that a person is a Christian. Though it is true doctrinally, it does not guarantee that one is committed to the truth.

Notice the response of demons to this truth. They “shudder.” This word literally means that their hair is standing on end. A person must believe not only that God is one, but that He is the One that is in full control of everything, and that everyone is accountable to Him! This the demons would not want to admit.

True saving faith is obedient, vv 20–26.

By now you are probably wondering how this passage reconciles with the Apostle Paul’s words,

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. (Ro 3.28)

James is not contradicting Paul. Both James and Paul would agree that a person cannot be saved by works; however, a saved person will have a faith that works. Paul was teaching about the process of becoming saved. James is talking about life after salvation. Notice the illustrations below:

Figure 1: This shows that Paul’s and James’ teaching do not conflict. Rather, when Paul addresses the topic of works in relation to salvation, he speaks of works before salvation. James’ teaching involves those works that come after salvation.

Figure 2: This answers the question: “How does works and salvation have to do with each other?” Simply, one cannot add faith in order to gain salvation. After salvation, one will show he has true faith by his good works.
The Reformers used to say: “We are justified by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.”

James illustrates this truth by using two individuals from the Old Testament – Abraham and Rahab. Why does he use these two people? Abraham represented a Jew who was the premier father of the nation. Rahab was a Gentile who was a prostitute. James uses two extremes to show that any Christian is able to have a “working faith.”

**Abraham** was obedient.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? (v 21)

Compare this verse with Genesis 15.6, which says Abraham was justified when he believed God would give him and Sarah a child. This was 30 years before he sacrificed Isaac.

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (Ge 15.6)

How could Abraham be justified twice? In a sense he was. Abraham was saved when he believed God’s promise of a child. At that time, he placed his faith in
God. The second time, Abraham obeyed God, and God declared His approval. That is he was declared to be righteous.

Every Christian is saved one time. However, when a Christian obeys God, God reaffirms His approval. Did you realize that every time you obey God, He reaffirms His approval of you?

Rahab’s was obedient.

Rahab was a prostitute who believed in God and helped God’s servants. Therefore, she obeyed God. Her faith in God resulted in obedience.

The last verse of this section wraps up the whole idea.

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead (v 26).

A “faith” that does not obey God is not saving faith at all. James says this kind of “faith” is dead. It is like a corpse that has no life. A person cannot separate true faith from obedience. If you are a genuine believer, you will and must obey God.

Learning the Truth

1. The Bible provides three examples of OT heroes of the faith that lived in obedience. Describe their obedience and faith.

Rahab (Joshua 2; 6.22–25)

Barak (Judges 4–5)
Jepthah (Judges 11–12.7)

2. Write down all of the ministries you are involved in at your church. If you are not involved in any ministry, sit down with your pastor this week and talk about ways to change that.
Here is a popular saying today, “You are what you eat!” One person reworded this statement and said, “You are what you think!” In other words, what you believe determines how you will act.

People tend to say one thing, yet live completely opposite. They may profess their own righteousness with their tongue, and in the next breath sin terribly. It takes a tremendous amount of self-discipline to live the way you believe. This is exactly James’ point.

*Christians will have lives full of good works, regardless of the situation around them.*

**Believers are known by their godly speech.**

James starts this chapter by exhorting the believers not to flippantly seek the role of the teacher. Teachers influence the lives of many people by what they say. Since they have a wide influence, they must be very careful of their words. Their “judgment will be according to the principle that increased influence means increased responsibility.”

Not only should teachers be careful in their roles, but also believers in general must guard their tongues.

2. Note the “we” of verse 2.
One of the hardest things to discipline is your tongue. Let’s note some examples of how we don’t have control of our tongues:

- The “cut down”: This is an attempt to elevate oneself above another person by insulting him or her.
- The mispronounced swear words: These are substitutes of swear words that sound similar, but not exactly. Eg. Gosh, Darn, Heck, Geees, Crud, Shoot
- The swear words and crude words: These are words that are not accepted by our culture. Eg. The “f__, d__, b__” words; and words like “crap.”
- Gossip, bragging, and lying are all forms of speech that indicate a person does not have self-control.

Not one of these should be a part of our language. These indicate a lack of self-discipline on our part.

Godly speech is under control, vv 3–6.

Control is illustrated by the horse, v 3.

It does not require a big harness to turn a horse. The most vulnerable part of an animal is its head.3

James tells us it requires a small metal object called a “bit” to control a horse. The bit is designed to put pressure on tender gums lining the back of the jaw. His point is, the tongue, although it is small, has the ability to control our lives.

When the tongue is not restrained, small though it is, the rest of the body is likely to be uncontrolled and undisciplined also.4

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3 Two hikers (a man and his wife) were traveling down a trail. They went about three miles and had lunch. After lunch, they continued another five miles and turned around. When they got back to their lunch site, a hungry mother bear was waiting for lunch. She attacked the man by grabbing his shoulder. He and his wife heard the bear’s teeth crunch through the bone and cartilage while the bear dragged the man down the trail. His wife remembered instructions to control a bear when attacked. The instructions said, “Don’t look the animal in the eye, it makes them madder. If you can get an object, aim for the face and hit the bear back.” All the woman had with her was a pair of binoculars. She swung the binoculars, hitting the bear in the nostrils several times while she avoided eye contact. Finally, the bear let go of her husband. A small object, compared to the great size of the bear, made it submit. From Lorraine Lengkeek, “I Fought a Bear to Save My Husband’s Life,” Good Housekeeping (September 1992):70–78.

4 Moo, pg. 122.
Control is illustrated by a ship, v 4.

Three things made it difficult to control a ship when James wrote his letter.

The ships were very large.

For the most part, they were cargo ships. They used larger ships so they could make fewer trips. The ship Paul the apostle was shipwrecked on had 276 passengers, including grain. (cf. Ac 27.37–38)

The sea had strong winds.

The Mediterranean Sea is known for being unpredictable. Often sailors would travel only 40 miles at a time and stay close to land at all times. Remember, Paul was caught in a storm that came up suddenly.

The ships had small rudders.

Ships then, as today, had small rudders. This allowed them to get close to land. James’ point is that even though a rudder is small, it sets the direction for a whole ship.

Your tongue can set your direction. In conversation with other people, you can set the whole direction of the conversation. Make sure you are constantly keeping it under control.

Control is illustrated by a forest fire and a deadly snake, vv 5b–6.

The tongue has great potential to destroy other people, including yourself. It has the same potential to destroy as fire and deadly venom. You must control it.

The tongue is first described as a small spark that can cause a “great forest fire.” In Palestine, it would be more accurate to think not of a forest of towering trees but of the uncultivated brushwood or scrub. It is impossible to stop a small spark in

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this setting from causing a great fire. James does not say that the tongue is uncontrollable. His point is that a small thing like the tongue can cause great damage. Thus, you must control it.

**Godly speech is consistently godly, vv 9–12.**

A person cannot consider himself to be godly when he treats his brothers and sisters in Christ with disrespect. The folly of this hypocritical thinking is seen by James’ illustrations of the spring, fig tree, grapevine, and salt spring.

Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig-tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

(Jas 3.11–12)

A person going to a fresh water spring expects to find fresh water. A person harvesting grapevines expects to find grapes, not olives. These illustrations show that one can tell what a freshwater spring and a grapevine are because of their product. In relation to speech, you can determine a person’s godliness by his speech. If he/she has bad speech, he/she has bad thoughts.

**Learning the Truth**

Read the following Proverbs regarding the tongue and compose a sentence on how you will practice the proverb each day.

Proverb 15.7

Proverb 16.24

Proverb 21.23

Proverb 18.13
Proverb 17.27

Proverb 27.2
An old phrase states that “Methodists are Baptists who can read.” This phrase is, of course, not accurate. People equate wisdom with a person’s knowledge about world events, literature, and politics. While all of these issues are important (and we must never neglect these issues), these issues do not give a person godly wisdom.

How does a person become wise? This is a question every believer should ask. Believers must be very careful about how they attain wisdom. Some have rejected Fundamentalism because they wanted to be accepted by the “world.”

James illustrates in this passage a wise person will have a life full of good works, regardless of the situation around him. A wise person is a godly person!

Godly wisdom requires a humble lifestyle, v 13.

James uses two words to refer to a person who is wise – “wise man,” and “endued with knowledge.” Both words have slightly different meanings. “Wise”
comes from the word sophos (σοφος), from which we get terms philosophy, sophisticated, etc. This term relates to knowledge that comes from experience. In particular, this knowledge is the experience of a person having a personal relationship with God. The second word is more technical. It is epistomos (ἐπιστῶμος) from which we get the word epistemology. Epistemology is the study of knowledge. This word was often used of a person who is an expert.

James does not miss a point. If you claim to have wisdom (that is a personal relationship with God and an expert in the things of God), then your life will prove it!

How are really wise people going to act? How will a person who has godly wisdom (a personal experience with and an expertise in the things of God) act? Will he be a bragger? Will he attempt to show his “smarts” by gaining attention?

No! This person will be meek! Notice the word is meek, not weak! The same Greek word is also translated as a person who is humble. The person who truly knows God from experience and is an expert in the things of God will be humble. Why? Because he knows how great God is! God is holy, while you and I are exceedingly sinful! God is all loving, you and I are selfish! The more a person knows who God is, the more humble that person will be!

Some people are teaching today that people, especially teens, suffer greatly from a lack of “self-esteem.” Popular Christian psychologists say that the root of many teenage problems is a lack of self-esteem. They give examples of teens who try to commit suicide as those who lack self-esteem. Something does not make sense! Teens often commit suicide because they feel they deserve better than what they have in life. Does a person who thinks he should be treated better have a low
self-image? On the contrary, he is proud! He thinks he should be treated better than others.

A person who truly has a personal relationship with God and is an expert in the things of God will also live a humble life.

Godly wisdom requires rejecting the world’s “wisdom,” v 14–16.

Now James describes a person who is ungodly. Note the contrast from verse 13. In verses 14–15, James calls a person who has bitter envying and strife a person who has earthly wisdom. If James was able to use quotes, he would have put them around the word wisdom to indicate the sarcastic way in which he uses the term. In other words, this person’s “wisdom” is false.

What does James mean by “bitter envying and strife?” The word “envy” comes from the same Greek word translated “zeal,” or “jealousy.” Zeal and jealousy can be good! Paul said:

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy. (2Co 11.2)

Paul was concerned that the Corinthians would remain loyal to God!

However, here James says that this is a bitter zeal or jealousy. It is bitter like salt in the mouth. These people do not have wisdom from God, but worldly “wisdom.”

The second word “strife” is better translated “selfish ambition (NASB).” This word was used of workers who worked only for pay. You might think, “What’s wrong with that?” The problem is that these people were motivated only by money. They did anything just for more money!

These two things, envy and selfish ambition, are a serious problem. In verse 14, James says that people who are engaged in these traits are “against the
“truth.” They deny the truth. James has used the truth to refer to the gospel itself.

Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth (1.18)

The point is, don’t have ungodly jealousy or selfish ambition. When a person has these characteristics, they are, in effect, lying against the gospel. They are acting as if they are unsaved.

Show me a person who is jealous and is selfish, and I will show you a person who has serious questions about their salvation!

Godly wisdom is proven by your pure character, vv 17–18.

James uses the word “but” to make a contrast. He first started talking about godly wisdom, then he switched to worldly wisdom. Now he points to godly wisdom again.

Your character must be pure! James says this is “first!” It is the prominent, the most important character trait! This is what controls all of the other traits. The traits that make up your life are to be pure. They are not contaminated. They are clear from stain, free from sin. It is the genuine thing!

Are you living a genuine life? Is it pure? Is it free from sin? How is your dating life? Is it pure, or are you involved in sin? How about your friends? Do you tell an occasional dirty joke, talk about the wrong things you saw on TV or on a video?

If you are living a life full of impurities, you are immature, unspiritual, and living a life contrary to that of a genuine Christian!

Your pure character must be peaceable!

You need to always seek to be at peace with others. It is descriptive of a person who is “peace-loving.”
You should always be striving to make and be at peace with others, not trying to cause problems.

Remember, this peace is always pure. You should never pursue peace at the expense of purity. You are never to compromise by sinning for the sake of making peace. When your friends want you to get involved in a sinful activity, the proper way to pursue peace is to respond, “I’m sorry, but I cannot be involved, and neither should you!”

**Your pure character must be gentle!**

This word has the idea of being considerate, courteous, reasonable, kind. You always need to give thought to others. God has dealt very kindly with us. We are to have the same attitude.

**Your pure character must be easy to get along with!**

This is a person who listens to others’ opinions. He is not stubborn, but always willing to cooperate.

**Your pure character must be full of mercy and good fruits!**

You should have the attitude of mercy. It is an attitude of compassion.

**Your pure character must be without partiality!**

You must not be a person who causes divisions. Nor should you be a person always looking for faults in other people. Both of the ideas are found in this word.

**Your character must be without hypocrisy!**

Why do you do things? Do you do them to make yourself look good, or do you really have a concern for others and the things of God?
Learning the Truth

This week, you have learned how to be wise. You need to put into practice each of these attributes. The best way is to think about one of these topics each day.

Review your lesson and make an effort to apply one of these traits each day!

Day 1: You must be peaceable.
Day 2: You must be gentle.
Day 3: You must be easy to get along with.
Day 4: You must be full of mercy and good fruits.
Day 5: You must be without partiality.
Day 6: You must be without hypocrisy.
Have you heard of the ‘War of the Whiskers’ or the ‘War of the Oaken Bucket’ or how about ‘The War of Jenkins’ Ear’? These were actual wars. You are probably more familiar with The “War of 1812” or ”The Civil War” or “World Wars 1&2.” War is a fact of life. It is caused by conflicts.

These conflicts may be family conflicts that are not justified. They may be like the war between the and the McCoys. This war was started over 100 years ago because of a dispute between two people. The families got involved in verbal arguments that developed into gun fights. They have been fighting ever since. The people involved now have no reasons for conflict, yet they like to fight; therefore, they continue fighting.

Though war itself is not sinful, at least one side of the war is sinning. God promised the Israelites the Promised Land. When people refused to worship God, the Israelites destroyed their cities. Therefore, war can be justified and righteous. Preserving God’s name is one of the most righteous acts a person can do. What is the cause of all wars? Sin. Sin that goes unresolved.

So far, James has talked about the importance of getting rid of sin in our lives. He talked about the sin of the tongue and of “worldly wisdom.”

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member that back in the second lesson we talked about dealing with trials and temptations in the right way. James first points to the issue of the tongue because we need to deal with ourselves and the sin within ourselves. If we don’t deal with these sins, they will show themselves and cause problems. They may even start wars.

A true Christian will have a life full of good works, regardless of the situation around him. Therefore,

The only way we can stop wars is to stop our selfishness.

Selfishness must be stopped, vv 1–3.

James asks the question, “What causes fights and quarrels?” Then he answers this with another question, “Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?”

Why do wars start? Because we seek our own desires. The word “desires” comes from the same Greek word from which we get the word “hedonism.” Hedonism teaches that pleasure is the chief goal in life. This thinking came about 500 years before James refers to it here. The Epicureans were known for eating a lot and doing whatever felt good. “If it feels good, do it!” “Whatever brings the greatest pleasure and the least amount of pain must be right.” These were their mottos. This is selfishness to the core!

A selfish person doesn’t ask God for help, v 2b.

A selfish person does not see the need for God’s provisions. He has an “I can do it on my own” attitude. When you get worried, upset, and angry at a situation, yet fail to pray for God’s help, you are actually demonstrating that you are selfish.
When a selfish person does ask God, he asks with wrong motives, v 3.

James admits that selfish people do sometimes pray. When they pray, it is with selfish intents.

The NIV says, **You ask with wrong motives.** In the Greek, it is literally stated this way:

You ask and you do not receive because in an evil manner you ask, so that, on your own pleasures, you may squander (what you get).

These people were not interested in God’s will. They were interested in their own desires. God does not use these kinds of prayers.

**Selfishness is schizophrenia, vv. 4–6.**

A schizophrenic person is one who seems to have different personalities. He or she appears to be normal, then the next minute, does strange things.

The people of this world are hedonistic. Everyone is looking out for himself. They do whatever pleases them. Why? Because they are sinners by nature. They never consider God and what pleases Him. When Christians act this way, James calls them adulterous people. Why? The word “adulterous” is a figure of speech that means the people are unfaithful to God. You cannot love God and love the world. This is impossible. There will be conflicts. When we hear of people committing adultery, we think, “How terrible!” Yet, when we think of people being worldly, we think nothing of it. We rationalize by saying to ourselves, “They are going through a stage of life.” James uses the word “adulterers” to get the attention of the readers because they are being unfaithful to God.

God doesn’t want us to desire the world. He wants us to desire Him!

*Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.* (Ex 34.14)
Selfishness must be **combated**, vv 7–12.

Sometimes you hear people say, “The devil made me do it.” However, James says that you have a choice; you can’t blame the devil for your sin. The word “submit” means that you are placing yourself under God’s authority. The next word, “resist,” is a military term meaning to “stand against.” When you obey God and flee temptation or sin, Satan will flee from you.

To support this fact, James lists ten statements called imperatives. These are commands that must be carried out immediately.

*Submit* yourselves, then, to God. *Resist* the devil, and he will flee from you. *Come near* to God and he will come near to you. *Wash* your hands, you sinners, and *purify* your hearts, you double-minded. *Grieve*, *mourn* and *wail*. *Change* your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. *Humble* yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

These commands can be condensed into some general truths.

**Respond to God’s conviction.**

James says that we need to “come near to God.” When Christians sin, they strain the relationship between themselves and God. God brings a Christian back by the Holy Spirit. He reminds Christians that their actions do not match up to the standards of scripture. When God convicts, turn back to Him.

**Confess** your sins.

The words “wash your hands” formed a common picture in the minds of the Israelites. A priest was to go through an elaborate ritual, washing his hands many times before sacrificing.

Make a bronze basin, with its bronze stand, for washing. Place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and put water in it. Aaron and his sons are to wash their hands and feet with water from it. Whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die. Also, when they approach the altar to minister by pre-
senting an offering made to the LORD by fire, they shall wash their hands and feet so that they will not die. This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants for the generations to come. (Ex 30.18–21)

Clean hands signified a clean life. Confessing our sins before God is a very serious matter.

Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.

James is not saying that laughter is not a Christian thing to do. Rather, laughter in the Old Testament was often attributed to a fool who refused to change his life. James tells these people to “grieve, mourn and wail.” A person who refuses to change literally laughs in God’s face.

**Recognize that you need God, and God alone!**

James sums up all of these commands by returning to the idea of submission. We are to humble ourselves before God. A humble attitude is the opposite of selfishness.

**Learning the Truth**

The Westminster Catechism starts by asking the question, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer is “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” Memorize this question and answer this week.

Read 1 Corinthians 10.27–33. Describe in a short paragraph Paul’s attitude toward other believers.

Read Psalm 73. Describe in a short paragraph Asaph’s attitude toward God.
THE BIBLE IS FULL OF ILLUSTRATIONS that teach us that the most dangerous plans a Christian can make are those that ignore God’s plans.

God’s plans are carried out, no matter what you plan. (cf. Eph. 1.11) The prophet Amos warned the Israelites that God’s plans would be carried out.

Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. (Am 5.18–19)

Though they will try to flee from God’s judgment, they will eventually be judged.

What about the example of Jonah? He thought he could escape God. However, God had His way.

Since God is in control of Christians lives, they must **have lives full of good works, regardless of the situation.**

*Christians must plan their lives according to God’s desires.*

**Christians cannot afford to ignore God’s desires,** vv 13–14.

James is the only person in the New Testament who uses this phrase, “Now Listen.” He says it here and in chapter 5.1. Whenever these words are used in the Bible (only six times), they mean that something very
important is being said. This is something very seri-
ous. Every Christian is guilty of what James is point-
ing out. Christians are living their lives while ignoring
God’s desires.

**Ignoring God assumes that God is helpless or dead,**
**v 13.**

The people are described as being arrogant,
self-confident people that exclude God from their
plans:

- They exclude God from where they go.
- They exclude God from how long they stay.
- They exclude God from what they do.
- They exclude God from getting the glory from
what is accomplished.

It is not wrong to make plans. However, the Greek
language indicates that these people are confident in
themselves.¹ These people know for certain that this
will happen and no one will step in their way.

This arrogant attitude claims that God is not in-
volved, nor can be involved, in their plans. In other
words, God is either severely crippled or even dead.

**Ignoring God is a foolish risk, v 14.**

People who make plans without God are foolish be-
cause only God can control the future. God has
planned exactly what will happen tomorrow, and He
will make sure that everything in that plan occurs.

From one man he made every nation of men, that they
should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the
times set for them and the exact places where they should
live. (Ac 17.26)

James describes life as a mist. We are not sure what
James is referring to as the mist. He may be referring
to the fog that covers the ground in the morning,
which is gone by noon. Just as the fog in the morning

¹ Future, Middle, Indicative of πορεύομαι.
quickly dissolves; so life quickly disappears—it is gone before you know it.

**Christians must live according to God’s desires, vv 15–17.**

**Christians must view life as dependence on God, v 15.**

James states that we are to plan our lives according to God’s will.

Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”

This does not mean that every time we do something we need to say the magic words, “If it is the Lord’s will.” These words are not magic stamps that validate all of our plans. James’ point is that in whatever task a Christian is doing, he must recognize that God allows him to do it. A Christian depends on God’s providence.

**Christians must repent of arrogance, v 16.**

Christians are arrogant when they think life revolves around themselves. They think that they are in control of the universe. If a person ignores God when making plans, he will become a boaster.

Boasting is a form of lying. Man says things that he is not able to do.² He gives himself the credit when in reality God has allowed it.

**Christians must obey God’s commandments, v 17.**

We are sinners. We sin in two different ways:

**Sins of commission**

These are sins we commit. e.g. Swearing, lying, fighting.
Sins of omission

These are sins when we fail to do what we are supposed to do. e.g. Irresponsibility, failing to love; not witnessing.

This verse speaks of sins of omission. Christians are to view their lives as God-controlled lives. When people fail to take this perspective, they sin by ignoring God and boasting in their own abilities.

Learning the Truth

Question Number 11 in the Westminster Catechism asks, “What are God’s works of providence?” The answer is, “God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful, preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.” Memorize this question and answer this week.

Satisfied in God

5:1–6

If I were to give you a check for one million dollars, how would you spend it? Do you ever wish that you had one million dollars? Sometimes people beg God for this kind of money. They think things like . . .

“If I was rich, I would be able to give more to church!”

“If I was rich, I would serve the Lord the rest of my life!”

“If I was rich, I would be able to spread the gospel more!”

This kind of thinking assumes that a person needs lots of money to do what God wants him to do. That is a wrong assumption.

In the last chapter, James discussed the problem of selfishness. Selfishness causes wars (4.1–12). Then, James specifically pointed to a selfish problem that every Christian is guilty of at one point or another: the sin of ignoring God’s plans (4.13–17). Now, in chapter five, James speaks to the unsaved.

Why would James start writing to the unsaved? There are a couple of reasons:

• He may be writing to encourage the people of Israel who are abused by the selfish rich people. The wicked have their day coming.
• He is warning the wicked that may attend the assembly of the Christians.

Christians are encouraged. God will judge the wicked. Therefore, it is imperative now that a believer has a life full of good works, regardless of the situation around him. Since the wicked crooks will be judged . . .
... Christians must not desire to be like wealthy crooks.

Wealthy crooks are miserable people, vv 1–3.

The Bible never condemns someone for having money. Matter of fact, Abraham, Solomon and Job were the richest men in the Bible and they were godly, faithful men. James is not rebuking rich people. He is warning people who got their money sinfully. Some people gain money illegally and unethically. James is warning them of the judgment to come.

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. (v 1)

Old Testament prophets would pronounce severe judgment by saying, “Weep and wail.” This indicates that the people were in deep sin. The sin James points to here is the abuse of wealth. The Old Testament often warned people of this sin.

Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin. (Dt 24.14–15)

Their accumulated riches are worthless, v 2.

James notes three areas of wealth common in his days. People were considered rich if they had a large harvest of food, many expensive clothes, and lots of silver and gold.

Their food is rotten, v 2a.

The people of James’ day were mainly farmers. The word “wealth” refers to the abundance of crops. Here, James states that their crops, though they are many, are rotting.
Their clothes are moth-eaten, v 2b.

As mentioned in previous lessons, rich people often wore expensive clothing. The clothes moth would lay eggs in their clothes. The moth larvae would eat holes in the clothes when the people were not aware, destroying whole wardrobes.\(^1\)

Though the rich crooks thought their wealth was secure, moth larvae were destroying it.

Their jewelry rusted, v 3a.

Gold and silver do not corrode or rust. However, in the days of James, gold and silver had traces of alloy that would rust, damaging the value of the gold and silver. The Greek language literally states that their silver and gold are completely rusted through,\(^2\) rendering them worthless.

Their accumulation of riches is foolish, v 3.

Being rich is not a sin. However, loving and placing your trust in riches is a sin.

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Mt 6.20)

The smell of rotting food, the ragged look of their clothes, and the rusted-out jewelry of the rich are like a neon sign showing their foolishness. Their riches also show their loyalty: they valued themselves rather than God. When the judgment fires of Hell come, their riches will testify against them.

Wealthy crooks earn judgment, vv 4–5.

Wealthy crooks have stolen from God’s people, v 4.

The phrase “failed to pay” does not mean that these crooks are keeping the money a little while longer.

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\(^2\) Note the perfect κατίωται.
This means they never intended to pay the money in the first place. They have used people as slaves.

These rich men were not paying their workers. Instead, they used the worker’s money to buy themselves more gold, clothes and food.

**Wealthy crooks are like dumb animals about to be slaughtered, v 5.**

These people are pictured as animals that are gorging themselves, not knowing that their days are numbered.

The days in which we live are the last days before the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord includes the Tribulation in which many people will be slaughtered.

**Wealthy crooks harm innocent people, v 6.**

The sin of the wealthy people was terrible. This was a crime against people who had no means by which to defend themselves.

James states that these men “were not opposing you.” The innocent people did not retaliate, but showed a Christian spirit even when they were wronged.

**Learning the Truth**

1. Read James 5 this week and outline the chapter below.
2. Find at least two other passages in the Bible regarding materialism and memorize them this week!
ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR BOOKS in the Bible is the book of Revelation. This is because prophecy and end times are interesting. However, we are not to study prophecy for mere entertainment. We are to study prophecy because it motivates us to live godly (cf. Titus 2.11–13). We must live godly because Christ may come soon.

The Bible teaches that Jesus will return. His return will be in two stages. He will return in the clouds and rapture the church. After this first return, the tribulation will occur destroying many people. After the seven years, Christ will come back to establish his kingdom on earth. Are you prepared?

Already, James has noted that a true Christian will have a life full of good works, regardless of the situation around him. The situation is that Christ may come at any time.

Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days... You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. (5.3,5)

Now James turns his attention to the Christians. As the unbeliever refuses to live godly even in the last times, believers are sometimes guilty of the same sin.

Because the lord is coming, live godly.

Living godly=Living patiently, v 7.

Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains.
Live with patience in difficult circumstances.

“Be patient, then.” James uses the word “then” to look back to the trials he has just explained. They were:

- Stolen from (5.4)
- Made poor (5.4)
- Condemned (5.6)
- Murdered (5.6)

The trials that believers suffered were extreme, however, James tells them to be patient.

How do you live patiently in difficult circumstances?

The word “patient” literally means “to be long tempered, longsuffering.” This means a person can undergo a trial, no matter how severe, and keep his temper under control. In light of what these believers had endured, our trials are minor.

James uses a small word, “until” (εἰς), to note two things. First, believers are to be patient until the Lord comes. Second, believers are to be patient because the Lord is coming. You are to “exercise patience as you wait for and look for the coming of the Lord.”

James uses the farmer as an illustration of a person who must live patiently. Farmers must be patient. They are to wait for the summer and autumn rains.

Why must a farmer be patient? Autumn rains fell in October and November. Summer rains fell in April and May. The farmer had to wait until the autumn rains to plant. The rains would soften the soil and make it possible to plow and plant crops. After planting, the farmer had to wait until the rains in the summer would mature the plants. If he didn’t wait, the crops would not grow to full maturity. Patience was
necessary for a good crop. Why was the farmer so patient? A good crop took time.

We must also be patient as we await the coming of the Lord.

**Living godly=Living **courageously, **v 8.**

You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.

The words “stand firm” come from one Greek word that means “to strengthen something so that it becomes immovable.” It carries the idea of standing firm for one’s convictions.

The Lord’s coming is just around the corner. We must not be afraid of doing what is right.

**Living godly=Godly **speech, **vv 9–11.**

If you knew that you would be judged for what you say, you would be very careful! Note the progression:

- The Lord is coming. (v 7)
- The Lord is near. (v 8)
- The Lord is standing at the door! (v 9)

This is a serious matter! The judge stands at the door.

What does James mean by “grumbling against each other”? Literally the phrase can say two things:

*Do not grumble against others, brothers!*

or

*Do not blame others, brothers!*

**Job and the prophets are our examples, v 10.**

Job underwent severe trials. However, he praised the Lord at the end of his life.
I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. (Job 42.2)

The prophets had difficult messages to proclaim; however, they were obedient and were blessed.

The point is: no matter how difficult the trial is, you must not grumble and complain. Be confident that God is working out His plan.

Job and the prophets are blessed because they endured, v 11.

They were faithful and were blessed. The word “blessed” comes from the Greek word meaning “happy.” They were content because they were faithful.

Paul wrote to encourage us today in a similar way.

For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. (Php 1.29–2.2)

Living godly=Speaking truthfully, v 12.

The Pharisees developed the idea that any oath not made in the name of God was not binding. To the Pharisees, an oath made by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or the like, may sound impressive and convincing to the hearer, but not binding on the speaker. James says, “no!” When you say “yes,” you better mean “yes,” and when you say “no,” you better mean “no.” Every word you utter ought to be the truth.
Learning the Truth

1. Read James 5.13–19.

2. Pray every day this week that you will live godly. Thank the Lord for saving you and coming to take you home in the future. Confess your sins to Him regarding the matters of impatience, grumbling, courage and truthful speaking.
Prayer

5.13–18

Prayer is an important aspect of the Christian life. Many books have been written on prayer, however, many do not give good guidelines for praying.

An example of the abuse of praying is given in John R. Rice’s book, Prayer: Asking and Receiving. He was very poor because he lived in the days of the Depression. He had no money for college, so he went to his familiar place for prayer under a bush. Under that bush, he promised God that he would tithe ten percent of his income and become a preacher or a gospel singer. Then he asked God to give him money for college. With very little money, he packed his horse and went to college. He thought that since he prayed, God would have to provide.¹

Did God provide for John R. Rice? Sure, no one can dispute this. However, prayer must always be prayer of faith in accordance with the will of God. John R. Rice makes prayer sound like a way to convince or persuade God until He finally relents.

James gives guidelines for prayer. He closes the book with this topic. Prayer is necessary. Christians will face situations which are difficult to handle. Therefore, a true Christian will pray, regardless of the situation around him.

Regardless of the situation, God expects us to depend on Him and pray.

When should you pray, vv 13–16a?

You should pray in difficult times, v 13a.
James notes here that we are to pray when we are in trouble. This word is the most general word James could have used for difficult times. The idea is that in any difficult situation, you need to pray.

You should pray in happy times, v 13b.
Unfortunately, many Christians only pray in difficult times. However, James encourages us to pray when we are happy. Happy times are some of the best times to pray. A person who prays during such times recognizes that God is in control. It is God who gives bad and good times.

You should pray in times of sickness, vv 14–16a

The meaning of “sick.”
The word “sick” (ἀσθένεια) can mean two different things—physical and spiritual.

Some suggest James is referring to spiritual sickness and healing (cf. 1Co 8.12). But he no doubt is talking about physical healing for the following reasons:

- The word “sick” (ἀσθένεια) as used in the Gospels almost always refers to one who is physically sick.
- The only other passage in the New Testament that involves anointing with oil involves physical sickness.
  They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them. (Mk 6.13)

The method for healing.
The sick person is supposed to call for the elders. It is not the job of the elders to seek out the sick people and anoint them.

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James is heavily influenced by the Gospels. This is easily understood since James was the half-brother of Jesus.
Ask for prayer. This is the main emphasis of the paragraph. It is the prayer of faith that brought the healing, not the anointing.

Anoint with oil. What does this refer to?

- **First option:** This was a common medical procedure. One doctor in the days of James said that oil was “the best of all remedies for paralysis.” Oil was also used for small problems like toothaches. However, if oil is the answer, then shouldn’t the person call medical doctors? Also, though oil was an effective medicine, it was not the only medicine.

- **Second option:** The most likely reason James chose to anoint with oil is that it is symbolic. In the Old Testament, priests were anointed with oil, meaning that they were dedicated to God’s service. They have entrusted God with their lives.

  Those were the names of Aaron’s sons, the anointed priests, who were ordained to serve as priests. (Nu 3.3)

If you were to walk into a local Christian bookstore, you may find a bottle of oil that says, “Special anointing oil.” It comes with detailed instructions for anointing. According to these people, you need to do the following:

**Consecrate the oil:** pray for the oil in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Anoint the sick:** call them by name and state that you are acting in the name of Jesus Christ.

**Seal the anointed:** again, call them by name and state that you are acting in the name of Jesus Christ. Pronounce a blessing as the Holy Spirit dictates.

As you can see, these instructions go well beyond the instructions James has given. It is not the oil itself that is the healing agent. It is the prayer of faith. The anointing of oil is a symbolic way to show that the
person is dedicated to God’s service and reliant on Him for healing.

**How should you pray, vv 16 b–18?**

In order to emphasize the power of a righteous man’s prayer, James puts the verb first. The second half of verse 16 could literally be translated, “is able to accomplish much, the prayer of a righteous man, in its working.”

**Pray energetically, v 16b.**

The words “powerful and effective” translate one Greek word. The word is ἐνέργεω (energeo), from which we get our word “energy.” The righteous man puts much energy into praying.

**Your prayers must match your life, vv 16b–18.**

James is careful to show that Elijah was a man just like we are. Sometimes we elevate Old Testament saints to the status of “Super Christians.” However, Elijah and the other prophets had sin natures. Elijah still lived a righteous life, and God honored his prayers.

**For whom should you pray, vv 19–20?**

**Fellow Christians who are backslidden, v 19**

We are to energetically compel those who proclaim that they are Christians to live godly lives. This means you must live godly.

**Unsaved people who are headed toward Hell, v 20**

God uses our prayers to work in people’s lives. How do our actions “cover a multitude of sins”? If a person repents, then God forgives that person. God is a merciful judge. In this way, his multitude of sins have been covered, or better translated, “taken care of.”
Learning the Truth

Read the entire book of James this week and study your notes for a quiz next week!
Bible Quiz!!!

You may use your Bible to answer the following list of questions.

**True / False**

- **False** 1. James was an apostle.
- **False** 2. If you “pray believing,” you are assured you will get what you ask for!
- **True** 3. God never puts you into a situation where you have to sin.
- **False** 4. God chooses people to be saved because they have something to offer Him.
- **False** 5. A true believer may forsake Christ and come to the point of not believing.
- **True** 6. Hedonism is the sin of selfishness.
- **False** 7. A sick person in 5:14 refers to a spiritually sick person.
- **False** 8. Anointing a sick person with oil provides miraculous healing.
- **True** 9. A self-centered person excludes God from where he goes, how long he stays, what he does, and getting the glory from what is accomplished.

**Matching**

Compare the descriptions between a person who looks in a mirror and one who reads the Word of God. Draw a line connecting the same concepts.
**Multiple Choice**

Chart below at least one way the relationship between saving faith and works is to be viewed?

**Man Looking in a Mirror**
- Needs to fix his appearance
- Understands his face is a wreck
- Ignores his appearance
- Refuses to clean up his appearance
- Forgets to clean up his appearance

**Hearer of the Word**
- Needs to get rid of evil
- Understands his ungodly actions
- Ignores his sinfulness
- Refuses to live godly
- Forgets his need to repent

**Finish the Statement**

*A true Christian will have* . . . a life full of good works, regardless of the situation around him.

**Essay**

Write a short paragraph explaining one of the following passages in James.
Bible Quiz!!!

2.14–26

3.1–12

3.13–18

5.14–16a
For Further Study


