

FAITH BY DESIGN pt.2

design thinking
for your faith

BY DESIGN



FAITH



Faith By Design pt.2: Design Thinking For Your Faith

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WEEK 05

Day 29-35

Written by Pastor Paddy McCoy,
Lead Pastor, Crosswalk Portland.

Faith by Design | James 2:14-26

The Ethical Effect — Faith without fruit is false (2:14-17) Faith without fruit is futile (2:18-19) Faith without fruit is fatal (2:20-26)

The closing years of the twentieth century saw major changes sweep across our world. In the former Soviet Union, Jews who had been discriminated against for scores of years were freed in growing numbers to immigrate to Israel. The Berlin Wall crumbled. Eastern Europe taught us that no one could be suppressed and discriminated against indefinitely. In South Africa change continues to be in the wind. We in America must remember that we are only one generation removed from racial segregation ourselves. Yet in the Middle East discrimination is at an all-time high, and in the United States there is still so much discrimination between black and white and Jew and Gentile. **Application Point:** Where are Christians to be when it comes to accepting all people in Christ?

WEEK 06

Day 36-42

Faith by Design | James 1:1-12

Words as well as Works — Controlled speech is directive (3:1-5) Contentious speech is destructive (3:5-8) Conflicting speech is deceptive (3:9-12)

There is a new phenomenon capturing American culture today. Radio and television talk shows dominate the media. We are a nation of talkers. What comes out of our mouths is so vitally important that James devoted twelve entire verses in the middle of his letter to the subject. Having just dealt with the relationship of faith and works, James now deals with the relationship of faith and words. Our words reveal what is actually hidden in our hearts. Thus, the apostle admonishes us to “take note of this; everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry” (James 1:19).

Application Point: Words are powerful. Self-esteem and self-confidence are often learned or lost in a parent's words when we are children. Our Lord himself considered careless speech to be a very serious matter (Matthew 12:36-37). Thus, James makes three statements about the tongue in James 3:1-12, and he gives two illustrations for each statement.

WEEK 07

Day 43-49

Faith by Design | James 3:13-18

Wisdom — Wisdom of the World (3:13-16)

Wisdom of the Word (3:17-18)

Knowledge is exploding in our day. Textbooks and encyclopedias are behind the times almost as soon as they come off the printing press. We can travel farther and higher and faster than anyone before us. The computer age continues to advance at such a pace that technology becomes outdated with each passing month. However, in the midst of this explosion of knowledge, wisdom is practically non-existent. Many people's lives are in shambles. Position, power, and prosperity have not brought peace and purpose. In our modern world, where so many homes are disintegrating, so many hopes are smashed, and so many dreams are dashed, we need wisdom above all else.

Application Point: The world's wisdom is rooted in the secular, the sensual, and the satanic. In the words of James 3:15, "Such wisdom does not come down from Heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil." Never have people needed wisdom more than today, and so few of us know where to find it. In this paragraph of James' epistle, he examines both kinds of wisdom—the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of the Word—and he teaches us how to apply the wisdom of the Word to our everyday lives. white and Jew and Gentile. **Application Point:** Where are Christians to be when it comes to accepting all people in Christ?

WEEK 08

Day 50-56

Faith by Design | James 1:1-12

War and Peace — War has its symptoms (4:1-3)

War has its sources (4:7-12)

"What causes fights and quarrels among you" (James 4:1)? Our current world situation makes James's opening question as relevant in our day as in any previous generation. War has been a part of every era of human history. No civilization has been immune to it. In the early days of the twenty-first century, many of the conflicts around the world have their roots firmly embedded in centuries of ethnic hatred and hostility that are finally reaching the boiling point. The Bible tells us that in the last days there will be an escalation of wars, eventually culminating in a final climactic battle, Armageddon.

Application Point: War is real. Some of us are at war with ourselves, as our flesh wars with the Spirit. Others of us are at war in our homes. Some of us are even at war with God. What causes these fights and quarrels? We who are living on the brink of an apocalyptic war should heed the words of James. He reveals that war has its symptoms, its sources, and its solutions. James 3:1-12, and he gives two illustrations for each statement.

Introduction:

Today is the day! We are going to begin to look at our faith, our life, and what God would have us be and do. We will do this through a study in the book of James, and we will also spend 14 weeks breaking down who we are, and what we want our faith and our religion to be. Without doing this, we will always stay in the beginning stages of our faith, and we will never be able to get that higher level of thinking and living and believing. We call this higher level "faith maturity" and we can all get there.

Have you ever held a really well designed spoon. I know that seems silly, but seriously, have you? I have a friend who loves making spoons by hand, and I love him for it. When my father died, he sent me a spoon through a mutual friend, as he lives in Australia. This spoon is amazing. The balance is perfect, it is big enough to be efficient, and it looks cool. Leighton, I will always treasure that gift you made with your own hands.

When things are designed well, they have a tendency to work well and be the most effective things in our lives. They become useful and help us be the people we need to be. I've spent a lot of time looking at design thinking, experience design, and innovation, and I have always felt these principles would go well in a faith setting. So today it begins, we begin to redesign our lives of faith.

I believe God is the author of good design. He put thought into us before he created us. He didn't slap-dash us together, rather, he built into us everything we would need to be not only amazing, but compassionate and merciful. The greater qualities he gave us are not the most forceful all the time, so sometimes we have to create infrastructures in our lives for them to shine through.

That is what we are trying to do. Thanks for coming on this journey with us. I hope it changes you, I know it is changing me.

Pastor Timothy Gillespie

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Timothy Gillespie', with a stylized flourish at the end.

WEEK 5

Written by Pastor Paddy McCoy, Lead Pastor, Crosswalk Portland.

JAMES 2:14-26 (NLT)

Faith without Good Deeds Is Dead

14 What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? **15** Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, **16** and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

17 So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

18 Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." But I say, "How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds."

19 You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God.[a] Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. **20** How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless?

21 Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? **22** You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. **23** And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." [b] He was even called the friend of God. **24** So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

25 Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. **26** Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.



Faith without fruit is false — 14-17

Faith without fruit is futile - 18-19

Faith without fruit is fatal - 20-26

Like many passages in the book of James, James 2:14-26 has been widely discussed and wrestled with for generations. On the surface, it seems to emphasize the importance of actions, or as it is often translated, “works.” In fact, it could come across as if James is arguing that it’s your “works” that save you. However, the problem is a misunderstanding of the core issue.

As we come to this passage, we have to first of all recognize that James was writing to Jews who had grown up with a strong focus on the law and doctrine. Of course these Jews were also Christians, which means that they had accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, as the fulfillment of the law, and as the ingredient for their salvation.

But these same Jews were still learning the difference between being steeped in the law and Jewish tradition, and what it means to follow Jesus. They were still wrestling with the idea of Jesus being on the throne of their hearts, instead of the Torah, or the temple, or Abraham, or Moses. James, throughout his letter, is trying to help them see what a life following Jesus looks like and how it differs from their past lives.

With his strong emphasis on the teachings of Jesus, specifically the Sermon on the Mount, and inspired by his time meditating on the book of Proverbs, he writes. And in this passage, he tries to explain to the Jews that if they put their trust in Jesus, fully and completely, and if they truly believe that He was and is God, then their lives will show it. They will live AS IF God really does love them as Jesus loved, that God really is present as Jesus was present, that God really will work in and through us as He did Jesus. These truths, rooted deep in our hearts, will change how we live our lives.

And in a country where too many people claim to follow Jesus and yet seem to act nothing like Him, we need the truths in this passage. We need to be reminded that claiming to believe in Jesus or follow Him isn’t going to change the world; trying to be Jesus to the world just might. It’s like the apostle Paul said in his first letter that was written to the churches in Galatia, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith (trust) in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2: 20)

Our works don’t save us, but living our life in such a way that shows our belief that Jesus does? That just may save the world.



1 – Can you pinpoint anything in your life that is different or has changed with Jesus as your Savior, your center, versus the life you lived before knowing Him more?

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2 – In what ways do you see professed Christians not living out the life and teachings of Jesus?

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3 – In what ways do you see professed Christians trying to model their lives after the life and teachings of Jesus?

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14 What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? 15 Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, 16 and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? 17 So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

I don't know about you, but I've always had a hard time defining faith. In the past, I've defined it as a set of beliefs, but that didn't seem complete, or exciting.

Of course, I've used the famous passage in Hebrews 11: 1, "Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see." And that works for sure, but an even more simplistic definition I now have for faith comes from the Greek word for faith, "pistis." Of the different ways to translate this word, I like the word "trust" the most. So in other words, faith for me is about who I trust.

This helps me a lot when I read this passage, because it seems like James is speaking to a problem amongst some of these Jewish believers in Jesus, and the problem seems to be people saying that they believe in Jesus for their life and their salvation, but their lives are no different because of it. They continue to chant the Shema which they have twice a day for their whole lives, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one." (Deuteronomy 6: 4). They go to synagogue each week, and they do what they're supposed to do according to their rituals and traditions, and yet, they now believe in Jesus. But what is different

about their lives now that Jesus is their Lord? What's changed and what difference does their "faith" make in their daily lives?

These are some of the issues that James seems to be addressing in this passage. In today's focus, he even uses an example of a brother or sister who has no food or clothing for the day. It's not that the brother or sister doesn't have any food in their cupboard or clothes in their closet; it's that they are literally hungry and naked now.

Surely a follower of Jesus who believes and trusts in Him would not just pass by the person in need, would they? I mean, Jesus not only told us to love one another, He showed us how and commanded us to do the same (John 13: 34-35). So if we believe in Jesus, if we follow His teachings, if we TRUST in Him, then wouldn't we see ourselves in this moment as Jesus' answer to this man's or this woman's need?

James is saying that if our faith in Jesus doesn't produce this kind of response, this kind of fruit in our lives, then it's a false faith. It's more for looks than for action, and James' argument throughout this entire letter is that following after Jesus changes you. It changes what you believe, it changes what you do, and it changes who you are, for the better.



1 – How would you define faith?

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2 – Why do you think it can be so easy for us to go to church, sing the songs, hear the sermons, but change little to nothing about our lives?

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3 – How do you think we go about the work of trusting in Jesus more than in ourselves or our institutions or our political parties or really anything else?

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18 Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.” 19 You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. 20 How foolish! Can’t you see that faith without good deeds is useless?

Hands down, I think this passage is the most striking of the week. James isn’t messing around. The gloves are off and the goats are running wild (ok, I’m not sure what that last saying means).

James is saying, “Look, you say you believe in God, right? Great, even the demons believe in God. So what? What difference does it make in your life? How are you better than a demon?”

It is clear in this book that James had first-hand experience with Jesus. There are many echoes from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) in his letter, as well as other teachings of Jesus. And having spent so much time with Jesus, James would have seen how the demons responded when they encountered Jesus. They fell at His feet and declared who He was, the Son of the Most High God. (see Mark 3: 11 and 5: 7 for examples). And it’s an interesting aside to note that as powerful as the demons seemed to the people, they all had to obey whatever Jesus said because He was in charge, not them.

James says that if you claim faith, or trust, in God but nothing else in your life is different because of it, then you’re just like those demons and your faith is futile, useless.

So what makes us different from the demons? It’s how we respond. It’s what we do with the knowledge that Jesus is the Word that became flesh and made His dwelling among us. That Jesus is God’s clearest revelation of who He is and how much He loves us. It’s all about who we trust in-God, or ourselves? God, or our talents? God, or money? God and His goodness, or the devil and his lies? Where is our faith/trust and what fruit is it producing in our lives?



1 – Why do you think James uses demons to compare a life fully trusting in God vs a life where we say we believe but we clearly don't trust?

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2 – If we talk about our “works” as fruit, then what kind of fruit can knowing Jesus produce in our lives (see Galatians 5: 22 for help)?

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3 – Do you find your faith useful in your life, does it seem to make a difference, or does it too often feel useless, like something you put on and take off when you go to church? If it feels useless, can you think of anything you could do to change that feeling?

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21 Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. 23 And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." He was even called the friend of God.

Now James goes to the Jewish vault of heroes to bring out the "big guns" of the faith. For the Jew, he gives two examples of people who exemplified the kind of life he is talking about. However, it's important to note for us that these heroes weren't perfect.

As critical as Abraham is to the Jewish faith and our history, and as much as the phrase, "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith" is repeated, Abraham had his own challenges. If you remember, God had told Abraham, who had no children, that He was going to bless him with more offspring than there are stars in the sky. However, from Abraham's perspective God was slow in fulfilling his promise, so at one point he and his wife Sarah take matters into their own hands. Out of that comes marital strife, hurt and pain. It wasn't a good situation. All because they got tired of waiting and trusted in themselves more than God.

Thankfully, that wasn't the end of Abraham's story. Because of God's mercy, Abraham eventually did have a son with his wife, Sarah. But then Abraham was tested in his faith to see if he really trusted in God and God's promise. Abraham was faithful, believing that God was good and would provide and he acted upon that belief.

Look, at the end of the day, I believe that God wants the same thing for us. He wants us to believe that He really is loving and good, and then He wants us to live our life in such a way that affirms and is consistent with that belief. And He doesn't want that for us because He's demanding, He wants that for us because He knows it's the best way for us to live life; fully trusting in Him and His love and care for us.



1 – Do you believe that God is truly good and loving and wants the best for your life? If not, what keeps you from believing? If so, what’s one thing you can do today to live into this truth?

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2 –Who are your heroes of the faith, the people you admire and look up to and would want to be like when it comes to living the life of faith?

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3 – What is it that these heroes do that you admire and would want to emulate?

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24 So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone. 25 Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. 26 Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.

I am so fascinated by the use of Rahab in this passage and in the Scriptures.

We first meet Rahab in the book of Joshua, chapter 2, and all we're told about her is that she was a prostitute. We also know that she was considered a heathen by the Jews, someone who wasn't an Israelite and not raised as a believer in the one true God. And yet, this same woman becomes a hero in the story because of her profession of God and her protection of two Israelite spies, and then she becomes an example throughout Jewish history as the mother of all those who convert to faith in God. Rahab is even mentioned in the lineage of Jesus!

So what was it that made this woman, who admittedly had a rough past, change her ways and live a better life? She encountered the God of Israel. In Joshua 2:11, she professes to the Israelite spies, "the Lord your God, is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below." Rahab was putting all of her eggs in one basket, God's. She was convinced that He was good and mighty and powerful, and that He could do what He said He would

do. Then, she lived into that belief, that trust, that faith.

James ends this passage by saying that faith without that kind of action, that fruit, is not only false, it's not only futile, but it's actually fatal. The word for dead in the Greek is literally that, lifeless, without breath, nothing.

If God can make an Old Testament prostitute an example of faith for generations to come, maybe He can do the same with you and me.



1 – How would you describe your faith? Which of the following definitions are you closer to: 1-my faith is living an active, an integral part of my life that I depend on regularly, 2-My faith is something I used as a descriptor, a title of sorts, but it's not something I live by.

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2 –If you're closer to definition 2 than 1, do you think you'd want to make a change? If so, what would be your ideal way of interacting with your faith?

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3 – What are some steps you could take today to move the needle so that your life reflects your faith in word/deed/action/fruit?

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She came into my office and plopped down on the couch after a chapel service one day. You could tell that something heavy was on her heart. I knew her, not well, but what I knew of her was that she was sincere, kind, and as I often say, a good egg.

"Pastor Paddy," she said, "I've been told my whole life that baptism is important and that if I believe in Jesus, then I have to be baptized. But I've been confused, too, because I believe that Jesus has the power to save someone even without baptism." You could tell she wasn't just thinking out loud, but she had been praying and struggling with these thoughts for some time.

"Look at the thief on the cross," she went on. "He wasn't baptized and Jesus said that he would be in paradise. I'm not against baptism, I just don't understand why I have to do it. Can you help?"

Immediately, I did what I always do in these types of situations, especially with these types of questions; I prayed in my head, "Lord, please help me know what to say."

I asked her a few more questions about her past and her spiritual journey. She clearly had a love for Jesus and believed in Him and His teachings.

As we talked, I felt led to talk with her about marriage. I told her that when a couple falls in love, they do that in their own hearts first. They spend time together, they get to know each other, and over time they fall in love and over time they choose to commit to each other. Most of

that happens inside first. However, there comes a point in time when those two are ready to commit their lives to each other, and they want the whole world to know how they feel about each other, and so they publicly declare their love and devotion to each other in front of family and friends.

I told her that baptism is similar. At first, we go through a falling in love with Jesus. We spend time with Him, learn more about Him and His teachings. But then, there comes a time when we are ready to say that we want to spend our whole lives with Him and we want the whole world to know it. So what do we do? We get baptized as a way of declaring to our friends and family that we love Jesus and choose to follow Him.

When we got done talking, I prayed and told her to let me know when she would like to get back together and keep talking. I figured that we'd have a long road ahead of us, navigating what baptism is and isn't.

To my utter surprise, she called me later that night and said, "Pastor Paddy, I want to do it! I want to get married to my best friend." It was her way of saying she wanted to get baptized.

And I have to tell you, of all the baptisms I've done, this one was one of my favorites. The girl's mom had made food for the wedding—I mean baptism—reception afterwards. The girl entered, marching to the wedding music that her friends were playing. She was wearing



white (don't worry, she changed before we went into the water), and she spoke her vows to God. I spoke God's vows to her by reading different passages in Scripture. Afterwards, we went down into the water as she married her best friend.

Faith naturally produces fruit in our lives and that fruit changes us. It can even change the people around us. If it doesn't produce this change or this fruit, then it's

not faith according to James. It may be false, or futile, or even fatal, but it's not faith.

And it all begins with investing fully into that relationship with the only one who is worthy of your trust. The more you spend time with Him, devote your life to His, the more fruit you will grow and the more change will come.

1 – If you have been baptized, can you remember why you made that decision and what you remember from that day that was special to you? If you haven't, what may be holding you back?

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2 – What are some ways that you have found that really help you connect with God? List some of your favorite types of activities that you enjoy using in your walk with God.

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3 – Knowing that you learn to trust God the more you spend time with Him, just like any relationship, what are some areas in your spiritual life that you'd like to improve upon and/or need help with?

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We live in a day when in many cities the church is losing its place of respect and influence. While many church members are quick to say they are people of faith, the world shouts back with the haunting question of James 2:16, "What good is it?" Because the church has lost its voice in so many communities, our whole nation is involved in an ethical effect.

And yet we know that when we invest in our relationship with God, when we look to Jesus as the author and perfecter of our faith, when we learn to trust in Him, the fruit of faith will be produced in our lives and our words and our actions can start to match up.

So if the book of James is a window into what the life with Jesus looks like, then how are we doing?

I was 32 years old when I was asked this question for the very first time. An elderly woman who I didn't recognize walked up to me in the waiting area of a doctor's office, entered into my personal space, and said, "Hey, how are you and Jesus doing?" My first response was, "And your name is?" I was shocked, but after the shock wore off and I reflected on this moment, I realized, I was 32 years old and no one had ever asked me that question. I was a pastor, and at this point in my life I had interviewed for several jobs related to living out my faith and my calling, and yet no one asked me how Jesus and I were doing.

Of course, I hadn't asked others that question either. Maybe I was afraid of the answer. Maybe I wasn't confident enough in my own walk to ask someone else about theirs.

Either way, nowadays I make it a point to ask those I have the privilege of sitting with in a meaningful conversation, "Hey, how are you and Jesus doing?" I do this because I believe it's the most important question I could ask. Because, you see, when we can support each other in our spiritual walk, when we can help each other trust in Jesus more, then I believe our lives will produce fruit that show the world that He is the Lord of our lives. When that happens, I believe the kingdom of God begins to shine even brighter here on earth as in heaven.



Here are some questions to get you thinking:

- 1— How are you and Jesus doing?
- 2— What things do you find in your life that you seem to put more trust in than Jesus?
- 3— What are some steps you could take this week to remove your dependency on those things and seek to make Jesus more central in your life?
- 4— Who are some of the people you look up to, your heroes of the faith, that you have the ability to connect with and how might connecting with them regularly help strengthen your faith?
- 5— What are some ways we can discern whether or not a person is living by their faith versus just using their faith as a check box for an hour or two on a Sabbath?
- 6— I often find that my own busyness in life keeps me from seeing the needs of those around me and, thus, I miss the opportunity to live my faith out because I'm too distracted. What might be some ways to slow down and be more aware of those needs and how God may have equipped me to meet those needs?
- 7— Why do you think so many Christians profess faith, show up to church, but their lives don't reflect the life of Jesus in any way?
- 8— How do you and I avoid the same problem?
- 9— Do you believe that there is nothing you can do that "works" to make God love you more, and there is nothing you can do that "works" to make God love you less? How might the answer to this affect how you live out your faith?

Application Point: The conflict between faith and works is age old. The whole argument originated in the issue addressed in James 2:14-26. The ethical effect, that is faith without fruit, is the burden of James 2:14-26. James reveals to us that a faith without fruit is false, futile, and fatal.

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WEEK 6

JAMES 3:1-12 (NLT)

Controlling the Tongue

1 Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. **2** Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.

3 We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. **4** And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. **5** In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches.

But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. **6** And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.

7 People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, **8** but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. **9** Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. **10** And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! **11** Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? **12** Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring.

1 Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. 2 Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way. 3 We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth.

This starts out kind of strange. He uses a term of endearment (dear), and then immediately tells them what they “shouldn’t” be. It seems he is hesitant to let people teach in the church because there will be harsher judgment on them. Perhaps he is worried about deceit and manipulation that has been happening in some of the churches by those Paul called “super-apostles.” (2nd Corinthians 11:5) These were false teachers, teaching something other than the gospel of Jesus Christ.

He gives a little ground in the second verse. He reminds us that all of us make mistakes, but that controlling our tongues is not so easy; if it were, we could control the rest of ourselves. I think this was pretty kind of him to say. Honestly, I speak for a living, I teach scripture and try to apply it to my life and yours. I get the words wrong ALL THE TIME, I make mistakes, I say illustrations that shouldn’t be said. I am sure I offend others—although I don’t mean too. Teaching and preaching is difficult on a good day, and disastrous on a bad day, and anti-gospel on the worst days.

Anyone who teaches or speaks for a living understands this. Many of you come to church for a “good word” and hopefully

receive one most of the time. However, as church-goers, we need to make sure we are not just consumers of the words spoken, but doers as well. When a word convicts, there should be an uncomfortable feeling in our guts. When a word stings, we know it was just for us. When a word is offensive, we have to first check our hearts to see if God is trying to tell us something.

Early in my ministry, I had to preach on a Friday night for a collegiate group and then on the next day, Sabbath, at my church. Friday night went really well, which was a relief. So well, in fact, that I figured I would just forget what I had worked on for church and do this same talk again... What a mistake!

I didn’t seem to realize that a group of young adults and a group of very not young adults would receive my words with very different ears. As much as the Friday night group loved it, the Sabbath morning group did not. It was quiet through the jokes, uncomfortable through the illustrations, and by the end, the tension in the room was not because of a “hard word” given, but because of many misplaced words. I had missed the mark that morning, and it was my fault. I won’t tell you what happened next, but I will say this. Some church

members are gracious to young pastors—believing they can learn, and some are not.

But what I learned that weekend was the power of a word. Words can slay or words can build. They can make things better or worse. Words have the power to inspire or the power to tear down. Words are not light things, but heavy and burdensome at times. We must take them seriously.

That last text, verse 3, says that you can lead a large horse around by a small

bit. This is simply saying that the right word at the right time is important. The next time you speak, the next time you post, the next time you communicate, think about what you want the outcome to be. Where do you want to lead people with your words? Are they worth saying, will they bring people together, can you show love through them?

Words matter. A lot.

1 – Write down an exchange you had with someone that did not go well. Could you have used different words?

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2 – How can you “tame your tongue”? What would it take to begin to use language that heals?

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3 – How can you de-escalate an argument, whether at home or at church, when you don’t agree with someone, or when someone doesn’t agree with you?

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4 And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. 5 In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. 6 And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.

James continues using metaphor to talk about the importance of words and the tongue. He is making a case for how powerful words really are. They can help people change direction, they can help people grow from one viewpoint to another. But for as small as it is, it has tremendous power.

I had a flashlight that someone gave me. It was pretty small, but the light was intense. It was one of those military flashlights that could seriously hurt someone's eyes if they looked into it at any given moment. I used to sit in the backyard and point it at trees and bushes and every once in a while it would scare a wild animal away. Even though it was small, it had a great deal of power.

So do your words. The idea of a forest fire sparking is something that those of us in Southern California are deeply aware of. A small spark can destroy everything. Or, it can set the world on fire. Think of the greatest speeches you have ever heard. The Gettysburg address was only 272 words long. It clocked in at just under 2 minutes, but its words endure to this day. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream speech" delivered on August 28, 1963, while much longer, has

captured, held, and shaped the thoughts of many over the years.

The text says that "the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches." Some translations use the word "boast" for what the tongue can do, i.e. boast of great things. However, the NLT translation says that "great speeches" can come from the tongue. To use the word "boast" might be heard as negative, and this is perhaps not the intent of the author. Rather, great speeches means that it can be both inspirational and aspirational in its intent.

Aspirational. What do you aspire to be, to contribute, to be remembered for? When was the last time you thought about what you aspired toward? It is very possible to live in such a manner that you forget your aspirations. Sometimes, excellent is the enemy of the good, and so we don't get things done, we wallow in our present context, unable to move forward, scared we won't do so well, and fearful we will fail completely. But living with aspiration is one of the most important things we can do.

To me, Jesus is the most aspirational character that we can see. To meditate on and study his life is the thing that inspires me most in life. We often take those sto-

ries that we have learned over the years and have put them in a back pocket of our thoughts, and we only deal with Jesus in the most philosophical way. However, as we study anew the stories of Jesus, his

life and ministry, we are inspired anew to live our lives differently. The words on our tongues become the overflow of our hearts, and our hearts are filled with Jesus. This is a good recipe for us to live by.

1 – To what do you aspire?

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2 – What inspires you?

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3 – How can your tongue be an asset to you in the conversations you have about your faith?

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7 People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, 8 but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. 9 Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God.

James is using this illustration of taming the animals as a pretty common understanding of what humans do. The idea that we domesticate animals, that we can train and tame animals would have been very relevant in the lives of the ancients. When livelihoods depend on the connection with the animals that allow you to have industry, food, and even commerce, how you can work with your animals is very important.

The tongue, however, is not such a docile creature. In fact, James calls it evil and full of deadly poison, and it can both praise God and rain down curses on those whom God created. And that seems to be the dilemma most of us face. We have these tongues that are our best asset, but also our worst enemies, and most of us spend our lives trying to both tame them and use them in a way that lifts up others and forwards the work of Christ in the world.

I grew up in a home where sarcasm was our economy. The one with the quickest tongue would often be the one who won the day. We weren't so much mean as we were constantly sparring to make sure we had a voice in the conversation. This was just our family culture, and I thought it was pretty common in other families as well. It took me quite a while to understand that my economy of words was seen as not only

aggressive, but mean by many of my early colleagues. I would like to say that I have tamed my tongue, but I often fall into old patterns of speech that can be destructive. I have lots of work to do, and I pray often that my words will not be the undoing of the gospel in someone's life.

The last phrase in verse 9 always gives me pause: "It curses those who have been made in the image of God." I guess we have to ask the question, who is made in the image of God? Is it just the people who look like me, that I know, that I agree with? If we are all made in the image of God, then we need to be on the lookout for when we are beginning to communicate in a way that does not honor the image of God in other's lives. I think this is particularly true when we are online. While the last few months have been particularly difficult and divided, and the upcoming months will probably hold the same, we need to be considerably thoughtful about the way we communicate our opinions and our associations. While the world is so divided, the church doesn't have to be. We can disagree, while still staying in fellowship. But, HOW we speak and interact becomes paramount to being able to continue fellowshiping together.

In all interactions, it is important that we work not to be slaves to our tongues. They are difficult to tame.



1 – Can you remember a time when your tongue became poison to someone?

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2 – What kind of things can you do that will help you be slow to speak, especially in anger.

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3 – Have you ever written a letter and put it in a drawer before you sent it? Did that help you cool off before you said something you couldn't take back?

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10 And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!

Now this is confusing. James switches from “tongue” to “mouth.” It is possible that his words may be reminiscent of Jesus’s teaching about the defilement of speech. (Matthew 15:11, 17-18). As well, he uses the term “my brethren,” translated as brothers and sisters, not as an introduction to a new topic, but for emphasis. He is trying to make an impassioned plea to his readers. It was meant to be inclusive, therefore the translation of “brothers and sisters,” as we all have this problem with our mouths.

I quote this scripture a great deal, but Luke 6:45 “...from the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” This means what is in our hearts is what comes out of our mouths, and we need to have God continually searching our hearts in order for our mouths to speak those things which will bring grace and compassion to others. Now, you may not be interested in grace and compassion coming from your mouth, but if that is the case, I wonder why not? What are we to be, as Christians, to the world? How do the words we speak bring unity and growth to the world around us? Are the words we speak ordained of God, or are they acknowledging that we have anger, fear, and hatred inside of us?

You see, our mouths are weapons, they are tools, they are springs of life or screams of death. I know that is pretty serious, but that is how serious words are. I spend most of my life speaking to people, whether it is from a pulpit, a classroom, or one-on-one. When not speaking, I am writing, and I have to think clearly about what I am going to say. I know when I am doing well with God, with others, and with myself, as well, I know when things are shaky. My heart tells my mouth the truth about me, even when my brain doesn’t quite get it.

How do you know the state of your heart? Listen to your words.

That’s a pretty simple formula, but it “speaks” volumes into what you are feeling inside your heart. If your words are harsh and angry, it is time to search for what is really going on inside. Words don’t start in the mouth and on the tongue, they start in the heart. If your words are unifying and compassionate, then your heart is probably in a good place to begin with.

Doing heart checks are important. We sometimes allow ourselves to forget what is happening in our hearts, and then we are confused as to what is coming out of our mouths. When we get confused, it’s time to reset, find some time to reflect, and do a heart check.



1 – When was the last time you did a heart check?

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2 – What has been breaking your heart lately?

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3 – How can you align your heart closer to the heart of God?

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11 Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water?

Okay, I recognize that this is getting a little weird. But the question is a good one. Can water coming out of a spring be both fresh and salty? Interestingly, it can, and often would in the waters around Palestine, particularly in the Jordan rift valley. While certainly not the only place this happens in the world, it surely would be difficult to have this phenomena happen in such an arid area.

When we went to Israel with the Crosswalk Destinations crew in 2019, we were able to be in the area where this would have happened. The Jordan rift valley is an ancient place, with an even more ancient feel. While beautiful in a desert way, it is also rugged and barren. Can you imagine being a traveler in that desert, seeing a spring, a source of life-giving water, only to find that it is brackish? Not only would that be disappointing, it would be life-threatening in certain circumstances.

Perhaps this is what it is like when you are hoping for a gracious word of encouragement from a Christian brother or sister, and rather than sweet and life-giving water of love, you are given the brackish water of criticism and anger. I think this happens all too often in our lives. We go away thirsty, empty, and with a bitter taste in our mouths. Unfortunately, there are always those who look to tear a brother or sister down, and they don't always have a reason, except for the condition of their heart.

The truth is, a spring is only as good as its source.

Where the water comes from is really important. So what is the source of your love and what is the source of your anger? From where do they come? And how can you slow down enough to know which source to tap?

When I was growing up in the 80's our main source of water throughout the summer was the garden hose. This was well before we had "bottled" water. We would have thought it foolish to get water from a bottle. Hoses were just fine. The taste of warm rubber making the bouquet just perfect on a 100 degree summer day! It was gross, but we didn't care, we were young and dehydrated.

While James is about to make the point that the water is only as good as its source, it is interesting to see that when a spring has more than one source, the output is inconsistent. So this is the question today:

What is the source you pull from?



1 – Do you ever feel like you have a divided heart?

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2 – What do you read/listen to that gives you hope?

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3 – Are you allowing good things into your heart, or do you allow things that shouldn't get inside to destroy the good that is in you?

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12 Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring.

Now, James decides to give us the natural flora and fauna of the region to make his point. The biggest point is that one kind of tree has to make fruit that is within its nature to bear. This is a bit different than the previous illustration that he uses, but the point is well made. The truth is that having both positive and negative speech is not what God wants from us.

As humans, we are super complicated. We all know that. But the gospel is pushing us toward a greater experience of grace and we are to give that away as a gift. When our speech is ugly, angry, and ungraceful, we are not representing the gospel well. And the truth is, if we believe in the gospel, then we believe the gospel is something that is supposed to be integrated into every part of our being. That means whatever we are pulling from in our lives needs to have a portion of the gospel attached to it.

I find this particularly hard in disagreement. I know I have said this so many times you are probably getting tired of hearing it, but we have to learn to communicate in ways that don't distract from the gospel. This does not mean that we need to agree with everyone around us, but we have to find a way to communicate with respect, with grace, and with compassion.

While counseling is not my forte, I find myself in the situation often. I find that those couples who can communicate through a crisis are much better off. Too often, people find themselves fighting about how they are

fighting with one another, and that creates an added tension that keeps them away from solving the real problems they need to deal with. Once our communication is gospel oriented, we can begin to deal with other problems as well.

James wants us to understand that good and bad speech in one Christian person is difficult, should be inadmissible, and is self-contradictory.

So how do we work on creating a single-source for our speech? In some ways, it is pretty simple and has been answered before; (1:17) Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our father..." This is where we must begin. What if we began every day with this thought in mind? What if we realized that God has a great many good things for us, and good speech is one of those things. While the tongue is difficult to tame, the one who made the tongue can help us. If God can be the source of our communication, then God can also help us tame the wild stallion that is our tongue.



1 – What is your first thought in the day?

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2 – Can you direct it to God?

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3 – What promise can you hold onto, today, that will change the source of your speech with others?

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The texts this week speak of how difficult it is to tame our tongues, and how they can taint the whole of the body and destroy our relationships and mislead people about the gospel. I have said it before, but words matter a great deal. How we use them, how we deliver them, and how they are heard. It is of paramount importance that Christians work with the Holy Spirit to help make sure that the source of their words are from God and not from the world. While we may disagree, we have to learn how to do it from a place of grace, rather than a place of hurt.

While this seems simple, we know it to be increasingly difficult. Today's world is so divided, and the sides seem to see each other as enemies. This is a false dichotomy. The issues that we are dealing with in today's world cannot be solved by one side versus another. Rather, they need to be dealt with by unifying the conversation. That does not mean agree, but it means they work for understanding. I know it seems impossible, but it can't be. We have to rise above the rhetoric of sides. We start this by listening, hearing, believing, and trying to understand what others are saying.

Here is another thing I would like to posit. Christ says that we are to love our enemies. If that is gospel, and we call ourselves Christians, then there is an even greater call for us to love those with whom we disagree. If you have divided your world into those that agree with you and those that don't, your first gospel call is to love those that don't agree with you. Strangely, by identifying the enemy, you have identified those you are to try and love the most. The gospel is funny that way. Just when you figured out who you are supposed to ignore, the gospel tells you to love them the most. This is infuriating, but if we are to call ourselves Christians, we have to take the words of Jesus seriously.

I don't expect this to be easy. It is not as if it is easy for me. But that's the beauty of belief in Jesus; he doesn't ask us to do easy things, but he is there to help us with the hard stuff. If we were only asked to do easy things, then why did Scripture speak so often of the suffering that those who believe will experience? I suppose our faith lives are not always meant to be easy, simple, or without complication.



Notes

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Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for taking notes.

WEEK 7

JAMES 3:13-18 (NLT)

True Wisdom Comes from God

13 If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. **14** But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying. **15** For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. **16** For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.

17 But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. **18** And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.

What is “wisdom” in the Bible? The word usually refers less to factual knowledge and more to skill. It is more “know how” than “know that.” Particularly, biblical wisdom deals with knowing how to live. As such, it is similar to the Greek literary form of paraenesis, or ethical instruction.

We have spoken of Paraenesis before. It is those ethical learnings, those moral teachings that take several forms. In the Old Testament it is found in the legal material of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. In the New Testament, James takes a special place as wisdom literature. While it shows up in the form of the letter, with a greeting and speaking intimately to its readers, using “brothers and sisters” often, it is really a book of instruction. This wisdom, for our purposes, is helping us to understand how to design our faith lives to be what we hope they might be, according to how God is guiding us.

By now, you should have at least a napkin scribble of where you want your faith and life to progress toward. As we work backwards from that vision, we have to look at the place wisdom will play in our lives. Our faith should move us toward a much broader view and vision of what wisdom can do for us. It is not just “street smarts” or “book smarts”; rather, it is a practical and useful wisdom that knows how to connect what is taught in scripture to how we live our lives and express our faith to the world. Also, biblical wisdom will always lead us toward a greater “shalom” or peace in our

lives with God, with others, with the earth, and with ourselves.

Wisdom leads to faith maturity. A mature faith is one that is not easily shaken, is open to discussion, has a great sense of morality and ethics, and is inclusive. It is not defensive, but expansive in its ability to have a conversation with someone who does not agree, and a mature faith is deeply interested in the moral growth of others. Through all of this, a mature faith understands that God cannot be contained in words, yet seeks to find the best words possible in order to relay who God is and what He can do for those around us. A mature faith understands that belief is like a diamond that is not a burden to carry.

Remember, at the beginning of the chapter James had mentioned that not everyone should teach. This is the connection with now being taught about wisdom. Those who are not wise should not be teaching in the church, as they will cause division and destruction before they cause unity and growth. The good news is that wisdom comes from God, and He can imbue that desire to learn and be wise into each of us.



1 – Have you prayed for wisdom lately? Today might be a great day to do it.

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2 – How can you know if you are wise? Perhaps as wisdom grows, you will find yourself making fewer of the same mistakes.

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3 – What are you reading today to increase your wisdom?

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13 If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom.

Now, this is not just for teachers, but for everyone. While James started the chapter speaking to those who should teach, he has moved to more general wisdom for everyone. Here, the author uses two different words that the NLT translates as “wise” and “understand.” Another way to render these words would be “wise and sensible,” but there is a stronger emphasis on the mastery of God’s ways.

Then, James goes on to show us two different ways in which to prove to unbelievers that we are living up to what are considered “God’s ways”; humility, and doing good. What is interesting is that the word used for “life” does not mean a personal or private life, but rather, it is the same word used in 1 Peter to connote a more public life, particularly as it relates to those who don’t believe in God. Therefore, our lives become our witness. David Dark, in his book “Life’s Too Short to Pretend You’re Not Religious” says: output. My witness is the sum of everything I do and leave undone. The words are there, but the actions speak louder. James is making much the same argument here. What we do and what we don’t do is incredibly important when it comes to what other people think of not just Christians, but of God, as well.

The truth is, we must give evidence to the fact that we are followers of Jesus. The term “Christian” is not a label or a ban-

ner we get to put on ourselves; rather, it is a verdict the world will put on us as a legacy of our labor. Is it really enough to say “I believe” and then never show the world how that affects every fibre in your being? To believe is to demonstrate and express who God is, and James thinks that wisdom, goodness, and humility are part and parcel of what we are trying to show people.

Some use the term “meekness” rather than “humility”. I really like this word. For some reason, in today’s world the idea of meekness is equated with weakness, but this is not the case. Meekness is the opposite of arrogance. And Jesus spoke about meekness at one point: Matthew 5:5, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” This is a pretty profound promise. While it doesn’t seem as if the meek will inherit anything, this is a promise from the lips of Jesus himself, so perhaps we should take it seriously.

To be meek, in this context, is to understand—with humility—how much we need to depend on God. There is an arrogance to thinking that we have got this all worked out for ourselves. Meekness is not weakness when it is connected to God; rather, it is the power of God in our lives.



1 – Has anyone called you meek or humble? Is that an attribute you aspire to?

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2 –Why do you think that meekness is vilified in today's world, even by Christians?

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3 – How can we become more humble in our approach to faith and life?

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14 But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying.

James is continuing his thought using a pair of conjunctions; "but" and "if". These conjunctions pair together the idea of meekness and humility to the bitterly jealous and selfish ambition of verse 14. These words that are used are pretty damaging. Using the term "bitterly" in front of "jealous" amplifies the intensity of the word. Often, jealous was translated with a more neutral word, "zeal"; however, the author here clearly wants us to understand that this word needs to be seen in its negative connotation. As well, "selfish ambition," which is one word in the Greek, was often used to discuss politicians who are greedy, putting their own ambitions above everything else, usually leading to division, not unity.

But James lets us know that these things come from our hearts. If you have ever heard the phrase "they have a black or narrow heart," it comes from these words. As James seems to see it, the problem of rivalry, partisanship and jealousy is not external, but it is in your heart. The heart is where so much of our lives are decided. We have to not only guard it, but let God search it, as well.

Now, the second part of the sentence is a little bit more difficult. The reason being is that it does not seem to let us know what the boasting is about! Is it about the wisdom that you have? Is it about how much God has given you? Is it boasting about yourself, and therefore not allow-

ing the truth of what you really feel to be shown? There are a great many different interpretations of this particular part of the text, but perhaps we could translate v.13 and v.14 like this:

Are any of you truly wise? If you are, you must show it by living a right life and by being humble and wise in everything you do. This is true wisdom. 14 But if you have a heart full of jealousy and a desire to be better than other people, you must not boast that you are a wise person [or, have spiritual understanding]. If you do that, you turn what is true into a lie.

This sentence structure is strange, but perhaps the meaning is a bit more clear. "Turning what is true into a lie" is interesting to me. How can something that is true become a lie? It seems to have a little to do with intent. What is the intent from which you speak, and how does that affect the words you are using, and how does your attitude affect those who are hearing?

When our intent is less than gracious, less than stellar, and less than honest, something bad happens, even when we are using the truth. What truth are you in danger of distorting because of your intent? It is worth asking.



1 – How can you know your own intent?

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2 – What can you do to change your intent? Is that even possible?

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3 – Have you ever felt wise, and what was the outcome of that thought? Was it humility and a good life?

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15 For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.

These are strong words for us today. Basically, it is saying that God has a particular kind of wisdom, and jealousy and selfishness do not make the list. At the end, there is a crescendo that basically says these things are earthly, then unspiritual, and then demonic. Whenever this idea of demonic is introduced, we should probably take pretty serious stock of what is being said.

You notice it was a downward spiral (perhaps a better word than crescendo). From earthly, these thoughts move us away from even our spirituality until they become something downright evil (demonic). The word "earthly" can simply mean to be the opposite of heavenly. When you are considered earthly, you are not considered to be someone who can rise above the shackles of this earth in order to live a more godly life. Rather, you are earth-bound to behave and react without a manner of heaven in your behavior.

Then, this "wisdom" is unspiritual. This can simply mean that is "devoid of spirit." So I will ask a question here; when was the last time you asked the Holy Spirit for guidance before you did something? I mean, it is easy for us to simply move forward with what we think is right, and with what we want to do. Have you been able to carve out time to ask God for guidance in every given situation? While that may seem like it is not possible, it perhaps is.

When you design your faith-life, there should be some moments of reflection, where you can seek the wisdom of God, and when you can do a heart check. Without these, you may move forward in a way that includes jealousy and selfishness rather than those things of God we have discussed before.

So how do you design some time into your life for the Holy Spirit? The concept is simple, but the execution might be difficult. Here is a quick list and then an explanation:

- 1** — Submission. This is a daily occurrence. It is when we begin our day with the acknowledgement that God is our king, our lives are His, and our commitment to Jesus is more important than the other things we will experience each day.
- 2** — Request. This is when we ask God to not only be the Lord of our lives, but to ask the Holy Spirit to be our guide in our decisions as well. We also ask for time to process the way the Holy Spirit would have us process. I believe that God works in time, and even stretches time for us to be able to process in partnership with the Holy Spirit to make good choices.
- 3** — Follow. Now, this is when we have to do it. Execution is always where things fall apart. But if we are serious about what we are asking of the Holy Spirit, then we have to be willing to



follow the guidance we receive. We might not all receive the guidance in the same way. For some, it may be a clear understanding of which way to go. For others, it might be a sense of

peace. And for others, it might be the word of a trusted advisor, speaking the words of God into our lives. However God works, listen and follow.

1 – When was the last time you submitted your day and decisions to God?

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2 – What would that prayer sound like to you?

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3 –How can you make sure you have the time to do this each day?

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16 For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.

James is going to express what the consequences are for such false wisdom. And the consequences are essentially evil. There is really nothing good that comes out of it. When our desires are jealousy and ambition for ourselves, we will wreak havoc on those around us, and certainly within the community of Christ. We all know people like this. People who seem to want to lead in church because of the status it gives them, because of the power and the position they perceive to have because of it.

When I was in college and seminary, you could always tell those who were going into the ministry in order to have “power” over other people. They perceived their pulpits as much grander than they were, and they were sure that their ability to be in control of others was a God-given right. Quite honestly, they were a little bit scary. They were sure that the position granted them the right to bully, cajole, and demand certain things from those with whom they were in community. I never understood this kind of attitude.

To be sure, there is a respect that CAN come with the job of Pastor, but that is only granted through the trust of the community. Those of us who are pastors and leaders know that we only lead as far as the people in our congregations trust us to be words of life and love. Without this trust, we are not leaders, but we are clanging gongs and cymbals in people's lives. Disorder is some-

thing that can be created quite easily with poor leadership and a lack of trust.

Since these things, jealousy and selfish ambition, are not wisdom from God, where do they come from? Usually, they come from insecurity. When we are jealous of what other people have or what they are, it is usually more of a reflection on what we think about ourselves than what we really think about anyone else. Selfish ambition usually extends from our desire to be “more” and to get that “more” in any way possible. Notice that ambition is not the problem, but selfish ambition is. When we are only focused on what we have and what we want to have and to be, we fall into the trap of ambition that is selfish and that is fueled by jealousy.

These two aspects, working together, ultimately begin to create disorder and chaos around us and in the communities we find ourselves. We are not content with what God has given us and with the trajectory He has made for us, so we push the issue. Whenever I have done that in my life, I have found myself lacking, wanting, and in a place that ultimately does not honor God, nor is it a place where I can most effectively use my talents. My competencies are best used where God places me. Is that the same for you when you look back at your life?



1 – Where have you been guilty of moving ahead of God’s plan for your life because of selfish ambition? How did that work out?

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2 – DIs ambition itself bad? Why or why not?

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3 – How can you work on the jealousy you find yourself experiencing at times? Social media is often great at exacerbating these feelings of jealousy. Perhaps a social media fast can quell some of these feelings.

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17 But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. 18 And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.

James turns on a dime. Using the term “but” shows us that he is going to contrast something, and in this case it is the wisdom that does come from heaven. It is a few things that are worth mentioning:

- 1** —Pure. That means it comes with no selfish ambition or jealousy. It is a wisdom that seeks to increase the joy and contentment of everyone around it.
- 2** —Peace Loving. It does not seek to disrupt or disorder those things in which it comes in contact. Rather, it is growing a sense of peace around it. Do your words do this in other people’s lives?
- 3** —Gentle. Rather than being loud, it is the small voice that people want to listen to. If we think we have to be the loudest voice in the room in order to be heard, then we don’t believe that our words have the gravity they need to be spoken softly, yet listened to widely.
- 4** —Willing to yield to others. We can allow other people to speak and still find our voice being important. It is easy to think that perhaps we don’t have enough volume or time to make our points. But heavenly wisdom knows that we are in this for the long-run, and we will be able to say that which needs to be said at just the right time.
- 5** —It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It should not be surprising that the more mercy we give, the more we see the fruits of that mercy, our words will cultivate good deeds. When we are full of mercy, we will also see the fruits of that kind of wisdom in our lives and the lives of others.
- 6** —It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. That means this wisdom is not self-seeking, nor is it insincere in its ability to speak to others. It wants what is best and greatest for those around it, and it is not jealous of anyone; therefore, it does not need to get close to anyone for favors, regardless of station.
- 7** —Peacemakers. Since wisdom from above does not seek station, there is no reason to fight and scratch for position. Therefore, they can become peacemakers and cultivate righteousness in those they serve because there is no need or desire for personal gain. This is truly what it means to be a peacemaker.

James ends this verse with an emphasis on peace. Apparently, he had some concerns about the conflict that was happening within the churches at the time. A better translation of this text is perhaps “The harvest of righteousness is sown in peace.” This



is very true. Without the desire for peace, we won't have it within the church. Have you ever wondered what will make you break fellowship with other people? Is it politics, is it personal preference over worship style,

is it the fact that people are not doing what you want them to do in church? The truth is, we all have hills that we will die on. Should we be careful that those hills are gospel, and not preference?

1 – Have you ever broken fellowship with someone over a disagreement?

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2 – How can you produce peace so that you might harvest righteousness in your life and your family's life?

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3 – Are the above mentioned qualities things that you aspire toward? If not, why not?

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This text talks about the wisdom that comes from God and how important it is for the way that we live our lives together. If we are designing our faith, wisdom is an incredibly important piece of the puzzle. Solomon prayed for wisdom above all else (1 Kings 3:1-14). He understood that of all the gifts that God gives, wisdom is the gold standard. So much flows from God's wisdom, as it is imbued into those who believe. There is no gift that can match its usefulness and maturity.

The beauty of these texts is we see what is of God, and what is not of God. You can tell this by the fruits that you see coming from the way wisdom plays out in your life. While there is never a direct one-to-one approach to our lives of faith, over time, we can see trends and themes that show us if how we are experiencing faith and putting into action has fruit, or if it is rotten at the root.

Faith maturity is something we should all aspire to. Without wisdom, maturity is much harder to attain or perhaps impossible. Faith maturity has some aspects that are worth mentioning.

- 1 —A mature faith trusts God's saving grace and believes firmly in the humanity and the divinity of Jesus. These things are non-negotiable for the mature Christian.
- 2 —A mature faith experiences a sense of personal well-being, security, and peace. These are things that come from God, and not simply from knowing the right things. We have a sense of peace

knowing that God is consistent in our lives, and that He is for us, and not against us.

- 3 —A mature faith integrates faith and life, seeing work, family, social relationships, and political choices as part of one's religious life. There is no bifurcation from what we believe about God and what God calls us to be in other aspects of our life.
- 4 —A mature faith seeks spiritual growth through study, reflection, prayer, and discussions with others. A faith like this enjoys the interplay of conversation and thoughtful disagreement. While not looking to simply be an apologist for one's faith, a mature Christian can understand other points of view and value them as expressions of God's unfolding grace.
- 5 —A mature faith seeks to be part of a community of believers in which people give witness to their faith and support and nourish one another. Community is very important for those with a mature faith. Christianity is not meant to be experienced alone, and so life together is important.
- 6 —A mature faith holds life-affirming values, including a commitment to racial and gender equality, affirmation of cultural and religious diversity, and a personal sense of responsibility for the welfare of others.



7 —A mature faith advocates for social and global change to bring about greater mercy and compassion in the world, according to the mission of God as seen in Luke 4.

With these things in mind, we know that the wisdom of God moves us closer to

these expressions of faith and life together. We should always be praying for wisdom, perhaps even before courage and strength. The wisdom that comes from God is an imperative for the life of a Christian. The good news is that God has a great deal of it and wants to give out as much wisdom as possible.

Here are a few questions for you to ponder this week:

- 1 — Where does your wisdom come from, and how do you ask God for more?
- 2 — When do you know that your wisdom is failing you, and you need some heaven-sent wisdom?
- 3 — What is the greatest gift God can give you?
- 4 — Have you ever made decisions only to have them end in chaos and disorder around you? What could you have done differently?
- 5 — When did you last submit to God and ask the Holy Spirit for more wisdom in your life?
- 6 — What is the greatest piece of wisdom you have ever been given? Where did it come from?
- 7 — How do you search the scriptures for wisdom?
- 8 — Was it news to you that James was wisdom literature and not just a letter?
- 9 — What can you do to help others search for God’s wisdom?

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WEEK 8

JAMES 4:1-12 (NLT)

Drawing Close to God

1 What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? **2** You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. **3** And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

4 You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God. **5** Do you think the Scriptures have no meaning? They say that God is passionate that the spirit he has placed within us should be faithful to him. **6** And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say,

“God opposes the proud
but gives grace to the humble.”

7 So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. **8** Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. **9** Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. **10** Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.

Warning against Judging Others

11 Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you. **12** God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor?

4 What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? 2 You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. 3 And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

In this chapter, James is going to take on the infighting that is happening with the Christians of the day. He wants them to understand where their fighting comes from and he is forceful and deeply effective in his expression of displeasure at what is happening.

Before we jump into this, I want to ask you a question: Have you ever been involved in a church that was constantly fighting? Where did that fighting come from? Often, it is over opinions that cannot be reconciled. Occasionally, it is over theological differences, and often it comes from a crisis of character for those involved. It is too often that churches split because of issues that cannot seem to be resolved by those involved. James wants us to know that this division comes from somewhere.

He begins by asking the question, "What is causing the quarrels and fights among you?" And then, he answers the questions in a pretty profound, but also a pretty rough way for those who are listening. He wants them to know that they come from the evil desires at war within your heart. There is jealousy involved, there is violence, and there is a pretty serious willing-

ness to take whatever you can get. He uses words like "fight," and "wage war," and "kill" and "scheme." These words should not be taken lightly. When we begin to think of ourselves before others, we are willing to allow them to be seen as less than human, and therefore, we disregard their lives and their achievements in light of what we want.

I know this sounds harsh, but so does the author. There have been many attempts over the years to soften this language or to explain it away. However, to read it as it stands makes the most impact. While it might have been an idiom, using the word "kill," much like we would say "I'd kill for some chocolate right now." However, he reiterates that the people are willing to wage war to get what they want. For James, this seems to be unbecoming of Christians. And even when they do ask God for something, they don't do it in the correct spirit. Their intentions and motives are all wrong.

The last line: "You want only what will give you pleasure," is particularly poignant. Christians at the time were apparently confused as to their motivations. While they would sometimes ask for things, and good things, from God, their motives were all



wrong. They wanted comfort, they wanted status quo, and they wanted to make sure things were good for them, but it seems at the cost of someone else. This was a particularly serious issue in the church, and it remains an issue today. The idea that Christianity exists to maintain the status quo is perhaps one of the worst ideals that

has seeped into modern Christianity. Christ was always pushing back on the comfort, on the ease, and on the inability of the religious establishment of the day to call out what is wrong. Are we guilty of the same complacency? And if we are, what are we to do about it?

1 – Have you ever asked God for something, but it was from the wrong motivation?

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2 – What was the outcome of that ask of God?

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3 – How can we, as Christians, follow in Christ’s footsteps and be those who are working toward a more equitable world?

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4 You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God. 5 Do you think the Scriptures have no meaning? They say that God is passionate that the spirit he has placed within us should be faithful to him. 6 And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble!"

Unfaithful Creatures! This is another way of saying what they were acting like. He uses the feminine, so you could say "adulteresses" if you wanted to. It is those who are unfaithful to their marriage vows. While not a literal situation here, the point is that these believers were beginning to, like the Israelites of old, find idols that they found much more interesting than God. In this case, it is a friendship with the WORLD.

Perhaps we should unpack that for a moment. The "friendship" idea could be translated as "love" for the world. To be friendly with the world means that you are aligning yourself with things of this world, and not the things of God. To be too committed to the ideals and ideologies of this world means that you have a relationship with God that is antagonistic, (enemy of God). Again, James sounds harsh here, but there is a theme that needs to be picked up. If we are too committed to things of this world, how can we be committed to the things of God?

He repeats the phrasing again in the second half of verse 4, so it must be something he wants us to understand. In that vein, I have another question for you: What do you lose when you lean on the things of

God? When compassion, mercy, justice, and healing are the highest principles for God's mission in the world, do you lose something when those become your highest principles as well? If you do, what is it that you are holding onto in this world? I don't ask this question lightly. If we are designing our lives of faith, and we want our lives to include the same things that are in the life of Christ and what he finds to be valuable, we may have to re-orient our lives in a particular way. The way we re-orient our lives might send us in a very different trajectory than we are currently on. How would that make you feel? Would you be willing to do it if God called you in a different direction?

In verse 5 he asks a question about Scripture and whether or not it has any meaning. That can be personalized to ask if it has meaning in your life! Are you someone who is open to learning new things, open to the Holy Spirit in your life changing directions? Even our ability to follow him comes from the spirit he has put inside of us. Again, what is your relationship with Scripture? Are they nice words that hold no sway in your life? Or are they authoritative above all other things in your life?



If these texts seem challenging to you, they were supposed to be. James was challenging the first century Christians to truly be people who believe in what has been revealed to them through the scriptures. Are we any less willing to heed this warning? Is our faith a faith based on the Bible, or is it a faith based on ideas and ideologies of this world that don't come from scripture? Do we know the difference? Are we willing to seek truth from scripture? These are big questions for a random weekday morning, but they are important for us to ask.

You see, if we build our foundation for our faith-lives on anything other than the revealed word of God, we are in danger of building something that is not based on Scripture, and will only approximate a biblical faith. I am deeply concerned that there are too many of us who call ourselves Christians, yet are not interested in being biblical; and if that is the case, we have some heart work to do.

1 – Where do you want your faith foundation to come from? Be specific, even finding texts that will help build that foundation.

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2 – What can you do in order to make sure your faith is fully grounded in the Bible, as opposed to other ideologies?

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3 – When was the last time you decided to re-evaluate from where you were getting your worldview?

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6 And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. 7 So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world.

I am jumping back to verse 6 as we didn't really do it justice in yesterday's writing. Verse 6 is quoting from Proverbs 3:34. (You could say that wisdom literature in the New Testament loves to quote from wisdom literature in the Old Testament). The message is that pride is not something to work toward, yet grace is given to the humble. I don't think this text is talking so much about pride as we would perhaps define it, but much more closely related is the idea of arrogance, with humility being its opposite.

The arrogant are those who disregard God's claims and promises and rather show contempt for Him and despise others who might disagree with them. Arrogance is a pretty bad sin in scripture, as it hardens hearts and doesn't allow for people to be able hear the voice of the Holy Spirit in their lives. We have all probably been guilty of this at one point or another, but that doesn't mean we can't change and have God humble our hearts and minds. Unfortunately, humility is sometimes seen as something we don't want, rather than an attribute that God wants for His people. We do live in a world where the most arrogant and bombastic seem to rule the day. That is unfortunate, as scripture seeks to show us a better way. As Christians, we always have to look

for a better way.

Verses 7 and 8 give us the way forward. Humility, resistance, and coming close to God. When we ask what it means to humble ourselves before God, we answer like this; we allow God to be God in our lives, and not try to take that place ourselves. It is important that we don't think we have more information than God does, more strength than God does, and more wisdom than God does. When we do that, we are leaning into our own understanding, and that is not such a great way to do things. So we have to give ourselves to God, submit to His will and of course, He will help us resist the devil. As well, we need to wash our hands and purify our hearts.

Wash our hands? In this Covid-19 world, we understand the literal meaning of this, but the truth is, this means that we should repent. The previous phrase mentions that we should “draw close to God, and He will draw close to us.” This is great! It means that we have a God who is not worried about being intimate with His creations. He wants us to be close to him and He wants to be close to us.

But He does want us to repent, to wash our hands. Repentance connotes a change in direction and a recognition that



things should and need to change. Repentance is hard, but it is also freeing. When we decide we will not hold onto that which we bore around, we find our lives are a bit lighter than they were before. We find that we can and will change our ideas, our

world views, and our desires. Repentance is a way forward, not backward, and it allows for us to be able to move in a different direction without the baggage we had been carrying around. It is a new start, a new day, and a new beginning.

1 – When was the last time you repented, and not just of a behavior, but of a way of thinking?

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2 – Why do you think it is so hard to repent?

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3 – What has God been working on in your heart that you need to confess and repent of?

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9 Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.

We used to sing this campfire song as a round. The words were, "Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord (x2), and he will lift you up, higher and higher, and he will lift you up."

Do you remember that one? We'd get three or four groups singing this song in a round and it felt like the words were spiraling up to the heavens. However, I never really knew where it came from, or what the context was for this little ditty we would sing. Having seen verse 10, I finally realized where it came from. It came from a deep sense of repentance and from literally having tears about where we were before. The fact that verse 9 says that we should cry, have sorrow and deep grief, sadness, not laughter, and gloom instead of joy is pretty profound. Scripture doesn't say this kind of thing all the time.

These verses are almost calling for an "attack" on your own heart and hypocritical attitudes. "Attack" sounds strong, but change is not easy, and after repentance and submission there is a pretty significant mourning period for what we were. No one likes to go through this. NO ONE. And so, mostly, we just don't do it. To search our hearts, to root out the incorrect and detrimental beliefs that we live by is so painful that it does cause tears and sorrow

and grief. So it is much easier not to do any of this. It is a much easier life to simply go on believing what you already believe, never question or search your own heart, and never change your mind on anything. I think too many of us are comfortable to live here.

I will tell you the truth; in the last two months I have had to recognize where my worldview has been lacking, where I was part of a problem that has persisted for far too long in my own church and country. This realization has been hard, and there has been much grief and despair. And I know this can become a political discussion very quickly. I am not interested in that, as I am sharing my journey. As I have read, researched, learned, and allowed God to search and change my heart, I have experienced the sadness instead of laughter, and the gloom instead of joy. I don't believe I experience a change in values, as I have always valued diversity and not being racist. However, when a shift happens in your understanding of the world, there is some pain involved. Usually, a shift in worldview takes years, if not decades, but things have been changing quickly, and I don't just preach certain Bible verses, I believe them. Therefore, the heart work that I have had to do is hard, and I have had to repent and grieve. But honestly, it has



made me a better person, more compassionate and willing to listen, more available to the work of the Holy Spirit in my life and the lives of others. It has kept my heart

pliable. Having God search your heart is heartbreaking, but it is also healing. It is worth the risk and worth the journey.

1 – What has God been leading you to learn about yourself? Is it a hard truth?

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2 – What do you do when you grieve? How do you handle it?

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3 – How can you be sure that God is speaking to your heart? What does that sound/feel/work like?

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11 Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you.

The theme of judging one another is a pretty popular theme in scripture. Actually, let me say that correctly; the theme of NOT judging one another is a pretty popular theme in Scripture. It often tells us not to judge others and that God is the only righteous judge, because God knows our hearts and is the only one who can make a real decision based on all the facts. James has switched from calling them adulterers and has started calling them brothers and sisters again. However, he is also making sure they are not continuing to sow strife in their communities by their willingness to judge others in the community.

It is a truth that when things are bad in our lives, we often try to distract ourselves from our own insecurities and mistakes by focusing on the shortcomings, or perceived shortcomings, of others. While this is a pretty human response, we should be working toward a better way of living and thinking about our lives. James wants them to stop judging as a matter of community. It is hard to live with people that you are judging or that are judging you. His point is that if we stop this, we will probably have less about which to be frustrated with one another.

Do you remember being a kid with your brothers or sisters or cousins, and when one of you would get caught for doing something, you would immediately blame someone else for what they were doing as well, so perhaps you could move some of the punishment away from yourself? We have all done this, and even in the story of the first parents, Adam and Eve, they do the same thing. To redirect judgment is pretty common, but we are called to live uncommon lives. And that means that we have to deal in the reality of the lives that we are living. The good news is that we were never expected to be perfect; rather, we are expected to be striving toward a holiness that comes from God and is granted by God as well.

The desires we have to deal with in our own hearts need to be where we begin any conversations. But I do want you to remember, when we are called not to judge others, we need to be graceful with ourselves as well. We don't really even know our own hearts as well as God does, and so we should allow God to be the one who judges us, gives us guidance through the Holy Spirit, and does the work of mending our broken hearts.



1 – Have you been judging others so as not to feel judged yourself? What can you do to stop that from happening?

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2 – Do you think God judges harshly or with wisdom and grace?

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3 – What can you do about changing the way you are judging others? What kind of exercises might be a good practice?

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12 God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor?

This last text of the week places the ball firmly in the court of God when it comes to judgment. He alone has the power to judge righteously and rightly. He alone has the power to know enough to be the judge. When we judge on so much we don't know, we will inevitably get things wrong, so we need to leave judgment up to God.

Have you ever been wrongly accused of something, or have you ever been judged for something that was not correct? The worst of these experiences show up in our legal system, and that can literally lead to someone losing their life for something they did not do. A good exposition on this is a movie I just watched called "Just Mercy." While this movie deals with many themes worth watching, the idea that someone is judged on faulty evidence is always frightening to me.

This is the case when we judge others, or when others judge us. It is so simple to think we know someone, what their motivations are, and what we think they are thinking. However, people are much more nuanced than this. People are very complex creatures, and we do not have the capacity to understand ourselves, let alone others. When God tells us not to judge, it is because we will ultimately get it wrong, and that can have horrible repercussions in our lives as well as those we are judging.

This is the problem with today's world. We have made a binary out of every conversation and opinion. You are either left or right, for this or against that. We have no nuance in today's dialogue. It is a shame, because we are always looking for what we have to disagree upon rather than starting the conversation from where we do agree. When we do this, which is a form of judgment, we stop the conversation and fall into the trap that the world loves: us against them.

But the truth is that it is "God for all of us." And if this is true, then we can be okay with God being the judge, as He knows the best way to not only judge us, but to save us as well. When we live beyond the binary, we are not sucked into the politics of the day. Honestly, I pray for us all that we can do this in our lives. If we can't, I have fear that the church will split, that people will buy into the fear-mongering that is being sold to every side of every argument, and we will make no progress in our understanding of people who do not think like us.

My prayer is that we learn to transcend.



1 – How can you find what you have in common with those you would normally come to judge?

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2 – Is it possible to allow God to judge those you disagree with, as He will judge you?

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3 – Who do you need to reach out and speak to, so that you can put these ideas into motion?

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This week was not the easiest when it comes to the instruction given to us by James. He dealt with drawing closer to God, with repentance, with not being quarrelsome and with being humble. These are all themes that we could spend months on as Christians, and mostly, they are themes that we seek to incorporate into our lives as we grow and seek to know Christ more profoundly.

While it might be easy to be a Christian, it is difficult to be a Biblical Christian. If we say that the Bible is our measuring rod and authority, then we have to take it pretty seriously. What this means is that we are going to need to take these words at their face value and do some real soul-searching and begin to conform our behavior and thoughts to this kind of thinking. It will never be easy, but good things never are.

What is the hardest thing you have ever had to face? Was it something internal or external? Sometimes, the heart is the hardest thing to face. Without knowing that we have a God who can walk us through even the changing of our own heart, we would be easily lost. However, we do have that savior, we do have that guide through the Holy Spirit, and we do have a father who loves us dearly. Our job is to humble ourselves and let God be God. He is the one who can carry us through the hard times of change that we are often faced with in our lives.

To be open to change is a powerful way to live in this world. The beautiful thing about the gospel is that it will constantly push us to move ahead, to progress as human beings toward God. Our ultimate goal is that we are the best expressions of Jesus in the world, and the only way to get there is to follow God's guidance in order to continue to move toward His grace and compassion and mercy.

As designers, you know that some of the hardest steps are foundational. I was working at a church that was trying to build a new young adult chapel. We tore out the old chapel before we had a clear plan moving forward. When we began to survey the soil, we learned that we were going to have to sink pillars down almost 100 feet because of the dilution of the soil and the water in the soil. Liquefaction is what it was called. I had never heard about it before. But the only way to build over this kind of soil was to sink those pillars down so far as to go past the liquefaction and into more solid soil. The truth is that we sometimes need to plant our pillars of faith super deep in order for us to be very strong in our ability to stay with our values of following Jesus. It was incredibly expensive to do this. But at the end of the day, it made the building stronger.

Our journey of faith will be expensive, but it will be worth it.



Here are some questions to go along with this week's sermon:

- 1 — How has God been changing your heart?
- 2— Are you growing more toward Jesus each day?
- 3 — Is there something for which you need to repent?

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Notes

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Notes

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