

James 5:12
“Be Still, and Know that I Am God”
August 23, 2026

This verse almost seems out of place, at first glance. The interpretation is straightforward: We as believers are to be so honest in our words, that we should never need to call upon a transcendent entity to prove we are telling the truth. Our word is to be our bond.

But to the first century Jewish believers, the act of taking an oath, swearing something to another person, or taking a vow, swearing something to God, was a commonplace occurrence.

The original intent had been corrupted by the Pharisees, as Jesus taught. Perhaps James is warning us against being too confident in our assertions while we are in the midst of trials and temptations. And perhaps, our take-home application is to be more silent than wordy, while we are going through a trial.

James 5:12 “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No,” lest you fall into judgment.”

“swear” = Gr *omnyo* = make an oath; affirm your truthfulness by appealing to a transcendent entity. When you “swear” to something, you make an appeal to a higher authority, to say that you really mean it. Ultimately, it is to assert yourself and your plans.

Matthew 5:33-37 James is basically quoting the words of Jesus.

Matthew 23:16ff The Pharisees had a system of swearing on lesser things, and you weren’t expected to keep your word, then swearing on something really important when you really were keeping your word. This gave an illusion of piety, and it was hypocritical.

James 5:12 “But above all...” Is James saying this is the most important thing in his Epistle? Or is this point the most important point in a list of points?

James 4:10 “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.”

James then gives ways in which we humble ourselves.

James 4:11,12 We humble ourselves by not being the judge.

James 4:14,15 We humble ourselves when we stop living arrogantly.

James 5:1-5 We humble ourselves when we stop taking advantage of people.

James 5:7-9 We humble ourselves when we leave the vengeance up to the Lord.

James 5:10,11 We humble ourselves when we accept God’s plans without pushing back.

Look at the OT vow. **Leviticus 19:12** Making an oath and NOT keeping it profaned the name of God. See **Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21f**

Jacob’s Vow – **Genesis 28:20ff** Jacob was in a trial. He made a deal with God (IF God delivers me, then I will serve Him!!!). God had already told him the “end intended by the Lord.” Jacob inserted his will into what God had already promised. He was bargaining with God.

Hannah’s Vow – **1 Samuel 1:10ff** Hannah, in a trial, made a vow to God. This one turned out well.

Jephthah’s Vow – **Judges 11:29ff** Jephthah, in a trial, made a vow to God. This one turned out poorly. God was already with him, and he did not need to make such an oath.

Ecclesiastes 5:5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.

6 Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake...

Job is one of our examples that James gives us. The last recorded words from Job’s mouth:

Job 42:6 Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes.”

James 5:12 Perhaps the most important part of humbling ourselves is that we do not insert our wills into the trial, and we accept with humility what God has allowed to happen to us. That is endurance.