

JAMES CHALLENGE SERIES

February 11, 2024

Week 6 James Challenge (Last Week!)

Opening Monologue

Today's Sermon concludes the wonderful James Challenge we have been doing. You have from March 10th-17th to finish up everything, tally up your points and turn in all worksheets on Sunday March 17th. Our goal would be to have our drawing for the prizes before Easter. If we can't make that happen, it will take place on April 7th.

In James' final chapter he doesn't hold back in many rebukes about the distractions of life. He warns the church and Christians to guard their hearts and minds. He essentially says in his writing; do you want to be friends with the world or a friend of God?

This world attempts to lure us in, which leads to sin and distractions. James addresses worldly wealth, impatience, and busyness in his final chapter. Listen to the sermon for deeper clarity, insights and understanding.

In this final rebuke James warns the rich oppressors for "hoarding wealth, self-indulgence, and taking advantage of hard workers." (5:1-6) He then turns quickly to being impatient about the Lord's return. He says, "stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near". (5:7-11) James concludes his letter by telling us to pray. "Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray." (5:13-18)

Final remarks: "My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth, and someone should bring him back, remember this: whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way, will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins." (5:19-20)

Be sure to listen to the Sermon as we dive deep into this chapter.

In Christ's Love,

Rev. Brad Standfest

To Listen to this week's Sermon: "James Challenge Series Week 6." Go to the Sermon tab here in our APP or use the links to our website or YouTube Channel where you can also listen to our Sermons:

Web: <https://www.almontvineyardchurch.org/media>

You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/@almontvineyardchurch>

Key Sermon Text

James 5:1-20

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+5%3A1-20&version=NIV>

Mark 8:36

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+8%3A36&version=NIV>

Matthew 24:30-31

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+24%3A30-31&version=NIV>

Matthew 24:36-25:13

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+24%3A36-25%3A13+&version=NIV>

Acts 1:11

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+1%3A11+&version=NIV>

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Thessalonians+4%3A13-18&version=NIV>

James Challenge Introduction

The Purpose:

The goal to this challenge is to draw families and individuals closer to Jesus Christ. I am hoping that this challenge will spark devotional time in your homes if you do not already do them. I am praying that you will all see that putting Gods word into action will bring blessings on your life. His word does not return back "void" (Isa. 55:11). I am praying that this Challenge will bring revival to your personal walk with Jesus and your families. In the end, it is not about the prizes that can be

won, rather lives getting closer to our Savior- that's the real prize!

The Challenge:

I welcome you or your family/team to enter into the James Challenge. This challenge will go on for 6 weeks and can be played individually or as a family/team. **(Not both)** You can do both, and that would be great; but you can only submit **one challenge per household** to be entered into the Grand Prize Drawings.

The Top Teams who complete The James Challenge with the highest number of points will be entered into a grand prize drawing that will take place at the end of The Challenge. All work must be **submitted by March 17, 2024**. The AVC will provide you with envelopes to return all of your team(s) work. **Please make sure to put your team's name on the outside of the envelope. - Don't forget this!!**

Each week you will receive a new challenge sheet located in the Foyer. If you miss a week, please contact the Church Office to receive the week you missed. The challenge sheet will explain what you need to do and will also explain Make up points. The sermons will surround the study, so we all get a double portion of God's word. Also, **in each sermon you will have a keyword or phrase** which will be recorded on each week's challenge sheet, so you must listen, or watch live to the sermons to obtain the keyword point(s).

The Top prizes are:

Two- One Night Stay at Best Western (Lapeer) & \$40 to Applebee's

Two- \$100 Axecadia/Arcade & \$30 Blend Yogurt

One- \$80 Emagine Theatre

One- \$50 Dinner at Blind Fish (Lapeer)

One- \$150 Dave & Busters

Digging Deeper Commentary: James 5

James 5

WARNING TO THE RICH / 5:1-6

After taking a deep breath, James turns his attention to the rich. They have been hovering in the background throughout this letter. Chapter

1 included the challenge to see that humble circumstances have distinct spiritual benefits (see 1:9–11) as opposed to riches, which require humility. In chapter 2, James warned about the destructiveness of preferential treatment based on wealth. At the end of chapter 4, James warned against being seduced by the world. He begins chapter 5 by warning wealthy non-Christians of their hopeless end and the worthlessness of their riches. Their wealth will not save them from God's judgment. Their crimes include hoarding wealth, not paying their workers' wages, living in luxury and self-indulgence, and murdering innocent people. But they will not go unpunished. This should comfort the believers, knowing that any wrongs against them will be avenged. It should also be a clear warning that they shouldn't make riches the focus of their desires because, ultimately, riches amount to nothing. Does James care what happens to the rich? If he didn't, he would be violating his own forceful statements about the law to love one's neighbor. Being rich doesn't make someone a non-neighbor.

5:1 Now listen. James has followed his appeal for submission to God with helpful applications of the principle to several different groups. In 4:11–12, submission to God means that brothers do not verbally abuse one another. In 4:13–16, submission to God means that our future plans are made with humility. In 4:17, submission to God means that failing to do what we know God wants us to do is sin. Here James turns his attention to a group even farther from the truth.

MONEY: WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

DANGERS OF MONEY

Forgetting God (Deuteronomy 6:10–13; 8:11–20 Proverbs 18:11 Luke 18:24 1 Timothy 6:9–10)

Acting dishonestly, taking advantage of others (2 Kings 5:20–27 Proverbs 10:2; 22:16, 22–23 Isaiah 5:8–9 Amos 3:10; 5:11; 8:4–7 James 5:1–6)

Being greedy (Exodus 20:17 Luke 12:15–21 Ephesians 5:5)

Allowing it to take God's place (Proverbs 11:28; 18:11 Matthew 6:24 Luke 6:24)

ADVICE ABOUT MONEY

Give generously and cheerfully to help the poor (Proverbs 11:24-25; 19:17; 21:13; 22:9; 28:27 Luke 12:33-34 2 Corinthians 9:7)

Give generously to those doing God's work (Deuteronomy 25:4 Nehemiah 13:10-11 1 Timothy 5:17)

Tithe (Malachi 3:8-10 1 Corinthians 16:2)

Don't accept bribes (Exodus 23:8 Psalm 15:5 Proverbs 17:23)

Pay your taxes (Romans 13:6-7)

Always be honest (Deuteronomy 25:14-16 Proverbs 20:10, 23 Luke 16:10-12)

Provide for your family (1 Timothy 5:8)

Plan wisely for the future (Proverbs 21:20; 22:3; 24:3-4, 27; 27:23-27)

CORRECT PERSPECTIVE ON MONEY

Everything comes from God (1 Chronicles 29:11-14 Colossians 1:15-17)

Money cannot buy salvation (Proverbs 11:4 Ezekiel 7:19 Matthew 16:26 Luke 16:19-31; 18:18-25)

Riches do not last (James 1:10-11 Revelation 18:11-19)

Money never satisfies (Ecclesiastes 5:10-11 Luke 12:15)

Don't show favoritism to the rich (James 2:1-9)

Money carries responsibility (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

Obey God rather than chase after money (Psalm 119:36 Proverbs 19:1; Psalm 17:15)

Be content (Philippians 4:11-13 1 Timothy 6:8 Hebrews 13:5)

A WORD TO EMPLOYERS

Pay wages in full and right away (Leviticus 19:13 Deuteronomy 24:14–15 Jeremiah 22:13 Malachi 3:5)

Severe judgment awaits employers who unfairly withhold wages (Amos 5:11; 8:4–7 James 5:1–6)

Be fair (Proverbs 11:26 Ephesians 6:9 Colossians 4:1)

You rich people. These are probably not believers, but rich nonbelievers (perhaps the same people referred to in 2:6), for James does not hold out to them any immediate offer of deliverance as he does for sinning believers. Very likely the wealthy landowners are the objects of James's scathing rebuke.

Weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. No, these rich people are not in misery now—they have lavish surroundings, plenty of food, plenty of money. But misery is coming upon them—not earthly suffering, but eternal suffering—and they should be wailing in sorrow for what they will lose then. The words weep and wail were often used in the Old Testament by the prophets to describe the reaction of the wicked when the Day of the Lord (the day of God's judgment) arrives (see Isaiah 13:6; 15:3; Amos 8:3). Jesus said that those who would be excluded from God's kingdom would be weeping and gnashing their teeth (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

While the rich are invited to weep and wail, we are not invited to gloat. In fact, gloating over their present repentance or future humiliation would be a backhanded admission that we are envious of their possessions. Before demanding justice from God, we must always check our motives. The descriptions of judgment that follow are prescriptions against desiring that life-style ourselves. The lustful desires for riches will be just as shamefully shattered as the riches themselves. Submission to God never allows us to move very far from repentance and humility.

As is the case with many passages in the Bible that deal with judgment on the mismanagement of wealth, the question of application is important. Frankly, most people, whatever their financial condition, will not easily claim the title of "rich." This is specially true

when the context includes harsh criticism. If we claim not to be wealthy, then do we pay attention only to what God says about those who are oppressed? What if we are among neither the wealthy nor the oppressed? Does God allow us to know about his judgment just so that we can cheer with those who have been mistreated? Or does our knowledge of God's plans make us responsible to be careful of our allegiances? If we are members of a society where oppression is widely practiced, we may feel God's judgment even if we were not actively treating others unjustly. What James makes clear (see 2:1-7) is that believers need to be a force that combats oppression, treats oppressors with dignity but not deference, defends the rights of the oppressed, and treats them with respect. Whatever our position on the financial scale, allegiance to Jesus Christ ought to make a difference in the way we live.

5:2 Your riches have rotted. The instability of wealth is the clearest warning of the coming misery of the rich. Goods that rot and are ruined and possessions that break and rust all indicate the impermanence of life. God sends reminders along the way (sickness, death of others, disasters) that we need to find security in what is eternal. Misery will be the result of ignoring these indicators of impermanence. As he often does in this letter, James simply gives direct application of the teaching of Christ. Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Matthew 6:19-20 NIV). The Greek word for riches (ploutos) is a general description of all that these rich people have. But their money, security, lavishness, and self-indulgence are as good as rotted because they can do nothing for them in eternity. In ancient times, wealth included, for the most part, hard goods such as food (as in crops), clothing, and precious metal. Some could be lost because it had become rotten.

Your clothes are moth-eaten. These rich people hoarded even their clothing, not willing to give their excess to the poor. They had so many pieces of clothing (a luxury in those days), that before they were worn out, moth larvae had eaten them. Remember, this letter was addressed to people in a society where a poor man probably had only one cloak.

5:3 Gold and silver are corroded. Precious metals have been hoarded away, unused. When it is kept from being used to help others, wealth “corrodes”; in other words, it is wasted. Although silver and gold cannot actually corrode, they can tarnish, and the tarnish testifies to how long the gold and silver have been kept untouched. James warns us that even what seems most indestructible is doomed if it is not put to good use.

Today, certain pieces of paper have great value: stocks, bonds, and future commodities. But all these valuable items are transitory. The market that makes a person wealthy one day robs him or her of everything the next. Inflation is not only an economic state, it is also a view of life that places too high a value on the things of this world. The greater the inflated value of things that are not lasting, the greater the disappointment at their loss. Jesus made very clear what the bottom line really is: “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26 NIV). Compared to the values of the kingdom of God, the earth’s most precious possessions fade away in tarnish and rust.

You have laid up treasure for the last days. Jesus repeatedly warned that his return would be unexpected. His followers were to live in constant anticipation of his return. References to the last days were reminders of the Christian priorities. Their lives were to be spent doing what really mattered—serving Christ (see Mark 1:15; Acts 2:17; 2 Timothy 3:1; Hebrews 1:2). When the last days arrive, the hoarding will all be a waste. The rich will be caught with their hands full, but it will be an accumulation of nothing. These people will face God’s wrath because they have chased after earthly treasure to the exclusion of treasure in heaven. Their hoarding will not only demonstrate their wrong priorities, it will also show how their actions deprived the needy of help and resources that could have been given. James has already pointed out that “judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful” (2:13).

ANTIDOTE TO HOARDING

To be prepared for the last days we should:

- Live in submission to God.

- Live in awareness of and response to God's grace.
- Live in sensitivity to the needs of others.
- Live to meet the needs of others.
- Live with a view toward eternity.

5:4 The wages you failed to pay the workmen ... are crying out against you. These workmen worked for rich people during the day and would be paid at the end of the day. They were poor peasants. Most likely they had been forced off their own land by foreclosures, and then they hired themselves out to the wealthy holder of a huge estate. They lived on the verge of starvation—today's wages bought tomorrow's food. If a worker did not receive his pay, his whole family went hungry. (Jesus' parable of the workers in the vineyard is a picture of this society; see Matthew 20:1-16.) If the owner refused to pay—either to hoard it until the end of the harvest in order to keep the workers coming back, just to be ornery, or to default completely—there was little or nothing the workman could do. Complaining might mean loss of a job and blacklisting, and he couldn't afford a lawyer. The money that should have gone to the workers is also evidence against these rich people.

This verse brings the weight of God's work ethic in the Bible to bear on the conditions that James is confronting. If these rich people are Jewish unbelievers, perhaps they will respond to the condemnations God consistently leveled against those who cheated in their business dealings (see Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:14-15; Proverbs 3:27-28; Jeremiah 22:13; Malachi 3:5).

Both the withheld wages and the harvesters are crying out to God. This expression recalls God's response to the first act of injustice in Genesis 4:10: "The Lord said, 'What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.'" Abel's blood cried out to God for justice. The picture emphasized God's awareness of injustice. It will not go unpunished.

The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. There was no excuse for lack of payment—these workmen had harvested heaps of grain that would be sold. But the rich were willing to let it rot rather than to even pay the workmen. The only

resource the poor had was to call out to God, the Lord Almighty. This name for God is, literally, Lord of Sabbath; it conveys the sense of awe, power, and majesty of the Creator. The supreme ruler will intercede for the poor. This name is used in Isaiah 5:9, also condemning the rich: "The LORD Almighty has declared in my hearing: 'Surely the great houses will become desolate, the fine mansions left without occupants' " (NIV). This is the almighty God who hears the cries of the poor (see also Psalm 17:1-6; 18:6; 31:2).

What are the implications of God being almighty or all-powerful? If we are facing oppression, faith requires that we remember God is our strength and our defender. Temporary circumstances do not change the fact of God's sovereignty. God will protect us from spiritual evil in this life and give us the joys we desire in the next. He will insure that justice will be done, and he will judge the oppressors.

5:5 You have lived on the earth. The rich must realize that everything they have is earthbound. Their reward is here and now; their judgment will come later.

Luxury and self-indulgence. The life-styles of the rich and famous may make interesting media fodder, but they are noxious to God. These rich, who have taken the land from the poor and then refused to pay their deserved wages, have shown gross lack of concern and selfishness. To this they have added an attitude of wastefulness and self-indulgence that God detests.

Terms such as luxury and self-indulgence invite us to defensiveness. The availability of resources and credit quickly have us redefining luxuries as necessities, and self-indulgences as perks or rewards. But following Christ means that our tendencies must be questioned. They also must be curbed. Rich people like the ones James was describing will not do this because they have not submitted to God. Our lack of discipline in these areas will indicate our need for submission also.

A life of luxury and self-indulgence is essentially worthless. Money will mean nothing when Christ returns, so we should spend our time accumulating treasures that will be worthwhile in God's eternal kingdom. Money itself is not the problem: Christian leaders need money to live and support their families; missionaries need money to help them spread the gospel; churches need money to do their work

effectively. It is the love of money that leads to evil (1 Timothy 6:10) and causes some to oppress others to get more. This is a warning to all Christians who are tempted to adopt worldly standards rather than God's standards (Romans 12:1-2) and an encouragement to all those who are oppressed by the rich.

God is not against pleasure, entertainment, or beautiful things. But everything must be submitted to him. They are meant to be helps to others, ways to restore us for further work, bridges of contact with others, and hints reminding us that God has been very gracious to us.

Fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). For these people, their treasure is worldly wealth, "fattened" in ways that were not just. They have enjoyed life, feasting as they would on the day when an animal is slaughtered. Ironically, James says that they are like fattened animals and that they will be slaughtered when the day of God's judgment arrives (see Jeremiah 12:1-3). Selfishness is a dangerous fattening of our hearts. Selfishness leads to judgment and destruction. (See Deuteronomy 6:10-12 for the dangers of prosperity.)

5:6 Condemned and murdered innocent men. These innocent men are believers, the poor workmen and harvesters mentioned in 5:4. This murder probably was both active and passive. Inconvenient people may indeed have been murdered; but more likely, the poor people who could not pay their debts were thrown in prison or forced to sell all their possessions. With no means of support and no opportunity even to work off their debts, these poor people and their families often died of starvation. God also considered this murder. Either way, in the unjust system, it was legal. The poor were defenseless (were not opposing you). Their only recourse against the evil rich was to cry out to God.

One of the marks of oppression is a dissatisfaction with merely abusing others or taking from them what is theirs. Oppression demonstrates its demonic origin in its goal to destroy those being used. James is confronting a mind-set that treats others without regard for their dignity, conspires to cheat them out of everything, defrauds them of possessions and wages, and disregards the very

lives of those who have been mistreated.

There will always be organizations and institutions that allow this kind of oppression to exist legally. The rich will get richer. The poor will sink more deeply into poverty. But believers must know that God is passionately against oppression. Human law, as contrived as it sometimes is, does not determine right and wrong in God's eyes. Human law does not require charity or genuine concern for our neighbors. But God's law and God's character demand a higher order of living from us.

Christians can easily fall into this kind of sin by rationalizing and saying, "It doesn't apply to me," or, "What can I do?" Yet Christians can incorporate and tolerate harsh business practices even in their own enterprises. Firing people close to retirement, unfair treatment of women in salary policies, and other injustices can exist unless we change how we treat people.

The conditions that James is describing may seem hopeless. Many of the rich will not repent. Believers can live with hope, however, because Christ is coming back. He will bring judgment and justice. It is to Christ's return that James now turns.

PATIENCE IN SUFFERING / 5:7-12

The believers, most of whom were poor, were frequently exploited by the rich and were persecuted because of their faith. This external pressure led to problems in the church as their frustration reached the boiling point. James encouraged the believers to be patient until the Lord's return. But the patience he describes is not passive. It is a patience that involves action:

- Firm perseverance in the face of trials
- Loving and caring for one another in the church
- Refusing to criticize or grumble against other believers
- Praying for the sick
- Confessing sin
- Bringing back any who wander from the faith

Each believer clearly had much to do to keep his or her own life-style, behavior, and speech in line with what James was teaching. James's

entire letter called those believers, and calls us, to right behavior. In this section, James illustrates some helpful sources for personal application. After speaking of the need for patience, he proceeds to reveal a number of different lessons that reinforce and apply his theme. The principle of patience will not mean much unless we can apply it to our lives. By looking at life through James's eyes, we discover there are many ways God gives us guidance and encouragement.

5:7 Be patient. James again directs his remarks to his brothers in Christ. The patience that he calls for requires them to wait under duress. James tells his brothers to be patient, even in the midst of injustice. The believers need to endure, trust in God through their trials, and refuse to try to get even for wrongs committed against them (see also 1:2, 12; Psalm 37). But patience does not mean inaction. There is work to be done—serving God, caring for one another, and proclaiming the Good News.

Until the coming of the Lord. There is an end point, a time when patience will no longer be needed—the Lord's coming. At that time, everything will be made right. The early church lived in constant expectation of Christ's return, and so should we. Because we don't know when Christ will return to bring justice and remove oppression, we must wait with patience (see 2 Peter 3:8–10).

Generations have come and gone, yet the Lord's coming is still on the horizon. Patience is still expected of believers. We are asked in Hebrews to consider the generations of faithful men and women who lived before Christ: "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth" (Hebrews 11:13 NIV). The faith of those people was based on God's character and promise. In addition, our faith is based on the foundation of Jesus himself, the fulfillment of the promise. Knowing that Christ has come once, just as promised, we should be able to wait patiently and actively for his next coming.

As an example of patience, James talks about the farmer who must wait for his "valuable crop." (NIV) He prepares the field, waits for the "autumn rain" (NIV) as part of sowing the seed, cares for the growing

crop, and then waits for the “spring rain” (NIV) as the crop ripens. In Israel the autumn rain comes in October or November after the seed is planted; the “spring rain” (NIV) comes in March or April just before harvesttime. Those who live in arid places understand the remarkable effect of a single rain. The seasons can change in a day, almost before someone’s eyes. As the rain falls, dried trees come to life and parched ground springs into bloom. James actually calls these the “early” and “latter” rains (NKJV), using an expression for an ideal growing season. Patience is what must be exercised and developed between the rains. Even nonfarmers have plenty of opportunities to develop patience. The waiting for the arrival of a baby, starting a new job, finishing school, waiting for a loved one’s visit, slowly improving health during a prolonged illness—all these situations try our patience. We will exercise patience as we concentrate on the end result of our waiting. God’s way is seldom the quick way, but it is always the complete way.

5:8 Stand firm. Standing firm is difficult in the face of temptation, persecution, problems, trials, and suffering. This challenging phrase literally means “be patient and strengthen your hearts” (see also 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:17). Instead of being like the rich people of verse 5 who have “fattened” their hearts on the wealth of this world, believers are to allow the assurance of Christ’s return to strengthen their hearts. The English words stand firm are used because they convey the meaning of *sterizo*, which could also be translated “establish” or “confirm.” Again, consider the heart: a strong, steady heartbeat characterizes a healthy person; a racing or erratic pulse rate is a sure sign of physical trouble. Whatever the circumstances, James encourages us to be rock solid in our faith and to have a faith-inspired joy that permeates every part of life (see 1:2–4).

The coming of the Lord is near. Like the farmer, we invest a long time in our future hope. The farmer is at the mercy of the weather—it is outside his control. Likewise, the timing of the Lord’s return is beyond our control. James believed that Jesus could return in his lifetime. We ought to live with the same conviction. Christ may come back today; at any time, his return may be “near,” for we do not know when it will occur (Matthew 24:27, 37, 39; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10). But

we do know that it will occur.

5:9 Do not grumble against one another. These believers, facing persecution from the outside and problems on the inside, may naturally find themselves grumbling and criticizing one another. James doesn't want them to be filled with resentment and bitterness toward each other—that would only destroy the unity they so desperately need. Refraining from grumbling is part of what it means to be patient (5:7).

James combines the highest standard of expected behavior with a true understanding of how people often behave. Each time he focuses on a significant pattern of behavior, he almost immediately turns to a human reaction that will undermine the process if it is not confronted. In a similar passage (4:11), James follows his appeal about the importance of submitting to God with a warning about brothers slandering one another. Here he turns from the importance of patience to the danger of grumbling. Is it not profoundly human to avoid facing a weakness in ourselves by pointing to the same weakness in others? In this case, people who are struggling with their lack of patience can always find an example or two of someone who is even less patient than they are! But blaming others instead of facing our sins leaves us open to the judgment of God.

5:10 As an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Jewish Christians knew the stories of the prophets, many of whom suffered greatly or were killed for proclaiming God's message (for example, see Elijah in 1 Kings 19:1ff; Jeremiah in Jeremiah 38; Amos in Amos 7). James is reminding his readers that even those who spoke in the name of the Lord had to endure suffering. Part of his point is that God does not preserve from suffering those he has called; rather, he preserves them in suffering. They are an example to all believers because of their obedience and faithfulness despite the hardships they endured.

When our ready response to suffering is grumbling and complaining, we reveal our misunderstanding of what God promises to do. When we are tempted to believe that patience is impossible, God reminds us of those who did endure with patience the trials he allowed into their lives. We may take or refuse to take them as an example, but we are

not allowed to claim that patience is impossible.

5:11 As you know. What we know, we can remember; what we can remember, we can use for encouragement and application. When we lack an awareness of the history and teaching in the Bible, we have little to fall back on in suffering. History is filled with accounts of those who have suffered extreme deprivation and had to rely on their memories of the Scriptures. Many have confessed that they wished they had learned more of the Bible while there was leisure to learn. Here James is leading his readers to apply the lessons from Old Testament lives. For instance, Job may offer us a fascinating look at ancient history and an interesting biography, but Job's best work is as a teacher: one who has suffered and can help us cope with suffering. His life is an example we need to follow.

We consider blessed those who have persevered. The perseverance of God's prophets may have led them to horrible deaths, and the people of the time may have seen them as cursed—but we now consider them blessed. Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11–12 NIV).

Beyond vague spiritual overtones, what does it mean to be blessed? The background to the English word is almost entirely religious, having to do with ceremonies or indications of God's approval. The Greek verb *makarizo* can also be used to mean "fortunate" or "happy," although neither of those terms carries the same spiritual weight in English as the word blessed. It is helpful to think of being blessed as having or sensing God's approval and acceptance. In this way, we could paraphrase this verse: "We consider approved by God those who have persevered." It is not a wasted effort to pause for a moment and imagine the deep sense of well-being a person experiences in knowing that he or she has been approved by God.

James seems to shift his emphasis in this verse from patience to perseverance, but the shift is a natural one. Perseverance is patience stretched out. Only tested patience deserves the title of

perseverance. James is coming full circle to the original thoughts in this letter. Perseverance is an advanced result of the testing of faith (see 1:2-4, 12). Throughout Scripture, perseverance is required of all believers. For example, “All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22 NIV); “By standing firm you will gain life” (Luke 21:19; see also 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Philippians 3:13-14; 2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Job’s is no groveling, passive, unquestioning submission; Job struggled and questioned, and sometimes even defied, but the flame of faith was never extinguished in his heart.

—William Barclay

You have heard of Job’s perseverance. Job may have complained, but he did not stop trusting or obeying God (see Job 1:21; 2:10; 16:19-21; 19:25-27). And the Lord did deliver and restore him (see Job 42:12). The believers, after all the suffering they had endured thus far, were encouraged not to give up—God would deliver and reward them.

What the Lord finally brought about. In an age of instant solutions and results, how the word finally grinds against our will. We would much rather read “quickly” or “immediately” than be reminded again that God’s timing and priorities are different from ours. But perseverance is never instantaneous. There are no shortcuts to what the Lord brings about; the pathway before us is perseverance. Any explanation of the Christian faith that overlooks or denies the importance of perseverance will disappoint those who believe it. We can see clearly from Job’s life that perseverance is not the result of understanding. Job never received an explanation from God for his suffering. This is partly because pain is often a part of life that must be endured beyond explanations. There are many things we can understand, but not everything. God’s purpose is not that we just develop a mind full of explanations and answers; his purpose is to bring us to a place where we trust him.

The Lord is very compassionate and merciful. God does not enjoy watching his people suffer. He allows them to face such pain because a greater good will be produced. Some who have suffered a great deal more than any of us have unashamedly praised God:

“Because of the LORD’S great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail” (Lamentations 3:22 NIV see also Psalm 103:8; 111:4). In the meantime, James encourages his readers to trust in God, wait patiently, persevere, and remember God’s incredible love, compassion, and mercy for his people.

Here, as in 2:13, when James has led us to a place of real challenge, he makes the challenge possible by adding the hope of God’s mercy. Left with our own resources, perseverance is beyond us. Our trust in God must combine the desire to persevere and the willingness to receive God’s help. God can help us persevere. He can even help us want to persevere. But he will not force us to persevere if that is not our desire. “For it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13 NRSV).

5:12 Do not swear. James is referring to Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:34–37. To swear means to make an oath. Making oaths was a common practice, and James wanted it discontinued among the believers. People made disrespectful or arrogant verbal guarantees that they themselves could reverse by legal technicalities. Like boldfaced warranties with lots of fine print, these oaths were intended to create an impression of truth—but those who uttered them did not really expect to be held to them. Christians should not need to use oaths in order to guarantee the truth of what they say. Our honesty should be unquestionable.

Should we take oaths in court? The oaths forbidden here are those used in casual conversation, not formal oaths taken in a court of law. Legal oaths are intended to bind those who make them. Perjury is a serious offense. Most scholars conclude that James does not require us to refuse to take oaths in court. The swearing that so irritated Jesus and James made a mockery of the truth.

The foundational principle behind these concerns is rooted in the third commandment, “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name” (Exodus 20:7 NIV). We can see the danger of judgment in the flippant use of God’s name in our society. The blatant lack of respect for God and for Jesus is crystallized in their names’ being reduced to

expletives. Those who don't like that kind of language get labelled as "sensitive listeners." We must not accept the label. Believers need to realize that this lack of respect is probably at least as often due to ignorance as to willful disobedience. One way to find out is to ask the person if he isn't sometimes afraid when he casually uses the Lord's name. If the question raises curiosity about why on earth he or she should be afraid, a simple quoting of the third commandment might start an interesting ongoing discussion.

Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned. Believers should not need oaths, for their speech should always be truthful. There should be no reason for them to have to strengthen a statement with an oath. God will judge our words.

A person with a reputation for exaggeration or lying often can't get anyone to believe him on his word alone. For example, this person might say, "I promise!" or "I swear!" Christians should never become like that. Always be honest so that others will believe your simple "yes" or "no." By avoiding lies, half-truths, and omissions of the truth, you will become known as a trustworthy person.

FAITHFUL PRAYER / 5:13-18

James closes his letter as he began it, with a call to prayer. In 1:5, after an opening challenge about joy in trials (which can easily be shown as a description of prayers of praise), he urges believers specifically to pray for the wisdom they need in becoming mature. James informs us that God will give generously that kind of wisdom without blaming us for our lack. The sole requirement is a faithful trust in God's supply. Later, in

4:1-3, James addresses the kind of selfish prayers that God does not answer. His confrontation is unmistakable: "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (4:3 NIV). Prayer is an essential tool, but it cannot be used to manipulate God.

James uses his closing words to describe effective prayer. He details prayer in several forms (praise, intercession, confession) and connects prayer with several other important spiritual disciplines (healing, confession, anointing, correction, praise, and mutual forgiveness). If we can say that James's letter summarizes the work of faith, his

conclusion focuses on faith's finest work—believers effective in prayer.

5:13 Are any among you suffering? They should pray. There are many responses to trouble. Some of us worry; some of us vow revenge against those who have caused the trouble; some of us let anger burn inside us. Some grumble. But James says the correct response to trouble is to pray (see also Psalm 30; 50:15; 91:15). This is not necessarily a prayer for deliverance from the trouble, but for the patience and strength to endure it.

There are three main reasons for not praying when we realize we are in trouble: ignorance, arrogance, and shame. If we do not know that God wants us to pray when we are in trouble, we are simply ignorant of Scripture. If we do not pray when we are in trouble because we are trusting in our own resources to get ourselves out, we are being arrogant. And sometimes we may want to pray but are ashamed because the trouble we are in is our own fault. James gives permission and encouragement to those who are ignorant. He urges submission to those who are arrogant. And he reminds those who are ashamed that God is full of compassion and mercy (5:11). To all of us he commends prayer.

Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. James says that if we are fortunate enough to be happy, we should thank God by singing songs of praise (see also 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Because our praise is directed to God, singing is actually another form of prayer. These songs of praise can be the formal Psalms from the Old Testament, or spontaneous personal creations that express some aspect of God's character or our response to him.

THE BENEFIT OF SINGING

Almost every Sunday, we unconsciously apply James 5:13. The use of hymn singing in worship is not merely to create a mood, allow people to stand and stretch, or provide a break between the spoken parts—hymn singing is a form of prayer. It ought to be composed, played, and sung with devotion. We should think of what we are singing and sing with joyful reverence. Whether it is our song, or one composed by another, our expression of the words ought to be genuine. By its nature, music allows us to come as close as possible to praising God in perfect union. Perhaps not every person is happy, but the joyful

expression of a few may actually be what God uses to lift the spirits of those who are broken or lost.

The quicker we are to blame God for misfortune, the slower we are to praise God when good things happen. Some of us take our happiness too lightly. We accept it as if it is our due or simply the product of our efforts. In happiness, it is easy to forget God. But a real appreciation of happy times will lead us to recognizing their source. If prayer is to be our constant communication with God, then happy times should naturally add rhythm and music to our expressions of thanks and praise to him.

5:14 Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders. One characteristic of the early church was its concern over and care for the sick. Here James encourages the sick person to call for the elders of the church for counseling and prayer. The elders were spiritually mature men who were responsible for overseeing local churches (see 1 Peter 5:1–4). These men would pray over the sick person, calling upon the Lord for healing. Then they would anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord (NIV). Jesus himself instructed us to pray in his name (John 14:14). As the elders pray for this one who is sick, they are to voice clearly that the power for healing resides in the name of Jesus.

Many of the details in this passage have to be consciously applied in our own age. James wrote to people in rather small communities, bound tightly by language and culture. We live in communities marked by isolation—even from people living next door. The early church practiced house calls. Contact, prayer, appeals to the presence and power of God, expectations of God’s direct intervention, and healing were part of daily life. The life of faith really was a life-style, not a weekend component of a compartmentalized life that fits God into one’s weekly schedule for a couple of hours on Sunday mornings. A literal practice by church leaders of James’s guidelines for healing prayer would make churches much more personal and effective.

The sick person here is incapacitated physically. Anointing was often used by the early church in their prayers for healing. In Scripture, oil was both a medicine (see the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke

10:30–37) and a symbol of the Spirit of God (as used in anointing kings; see 1 Samuel 16:1–13). Thus the oil may have been a sign of the power of prayer, and it may have symbolized the setting apart of the sick person for God’s special attention.

USE OF OIL

Many ceremonies and actions (such as fasting and baptism) were so well known among the early Christians that specific instructions are not always included. The same is true with anointing. We don’t know what kind of oil this was, or how exactly it was administered. The only hint we get is a delightful description in one of the Psalms that fits nicely with the themes that James is emphasizing here: “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore” (Psalm 133:1–3 NIV).

More important than the oil itself, however, the key function of the elders is their prayer for the sick person, as evidenced in the verses that follow.

5:15 The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well. The prayer must be from the heart, sincere, with trust in and obedience to God behind it, and with no doubting, as in 1:5–8. The believing is the role of the elders who are praying, not the sick person’s (nothing is said about his or her faith). It is possible that the sick person’s faith is exercised in calling the elders. Also, if there is need for confession, the elders will be able to minister to the individual. The process insures dependence of believers on each other.

The Lord will raise him up. Not the elders or the oil, but the Lord himself does the healing. Does this mean that every prayer for healing guarantees that God will make the sick person well? It must be emphasized here that the prayer offered is a prayer offered in faith—not only the faith that believes God can heal, but also the faith that expresses absolute confidence in God’s will. A true prayer of faith will acknowledge God’s sovereignty in his answer to that prayer. It is not always God’s will to heal those who are ill (see 2 Corinthians 12:7–9). A prayer for healing must be qualified with a recognition that God’s will is

supreme.

It is shameful to find Christians hesitating to pray because God might not heal the way they wish. It is not our role either to decide how God will answer our prayers or to excuse him if our human desires are not met. Trusting God only as long as he cooperates with our plans is no trust at all. The prayer offered in faith gives God a free hand to work. Because believers have an eternal viewpoint, we can claim the absolute certainty of this promise—God can and will heal, though not always in this world. In the afterlife God “will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:4 NIV). To limit God’s answers only to this world would indicate that we are trying to make God submit to our needs and desires in this life rather than submitting to him.

Jesus chided human attempts to measure faith. He pictured the strongest faith as no bigger than a mustard seed. To the disciples’ questions about unanswered prayers Jesus replied, “Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20 NIV). Clearly the size of our faith in God is not important; rather, it is the character of the God in whom our faith rests that makes the difference.

An overemphasis on our faith’s involvement places too much responsibility on our capacity to know God’s plan in the matter. But if we have a small faith that simply trusts in a wise, merciful, and powerful God to do what is best, we will see miracles happen.

If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Sin may or may not be the cause of the illness, but an opportunity for confession is given, and the elders are there to receive it. No demand of confession is given; James uses the word “if.” This condition is important because all too often we are prone to assume that sin is the cause of someone’s suffering. The Bible teaches that sin can cause sickness (see Mark 2:1–12; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 11:27–30), but it also notes clearly that this is not always the case (see John 9:2–3).

5:16 Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another. It is not God's plan that his people be alone. Members of Christ's body should be able to count on others for support and prayer, especially when they are sick or suffering. The elders should be on call to respond to the illness of any member, and the church should stay alert to pray for the healing of any who are sick. But we are often not only guilty of hesitating to lean on each other in our sicknesses and weaknesses. We are even more liable not to confess our sins to each other.

Fellowship in our churches could be vastly improved if we could follow James's formula here. Confessing our sins—such as resentment, a grudge, lack of forgiveness, etc.—can and often does lead to the healing of physical ailments. Unresolved anger and guilt create real stress. If a believer could freely confess sin to someone whom he or she has wronged, confess publicly to the entire church if needed, or confess in private (if more appropriate), and then have the church pray for him or her, the barriers that are erected between people could be torn down. There would no longer be the internal conflicts, and fellowship would be strong and supportive. Those who are sick may be healed (NRSV), and the church would be unified in its prayer efforts.

The recent emphasis on small groups within churches has risen largely from a need to recapture some of these basic features of life in the body of Christ that have been neglected. When Christians are really working to "carry each other's burdens," the world does take note, and we come closer to fulfilling "the law of Christ" (see Galatians 6:2 NIV). Loving your neighbor as yourself does include, above all else, praying for him or her.

In Christ's kingdom, every believer is a priest to other believers (1 Peter 2:9). We must help others come to Christ and tell them of Christ's forgiveness.

The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. The prayer is effective because the person who is praying is righteous. The person is not sinless, but he or she has confessed known sins to God and is completely committed to him and trying to do his will. Again, we can say that the righteous person gets what he or she wants in prayer

because he wants what God wants.

The Christian's most powerful resource is communication with God through prayer. It is the instrument of healing and forgiveness and is a mighty weapon for spiritual warfare. The results are often greater than we thought were possible. Some people see prayer as a last resort, to be tried when all else fails. Our priorities are the reverse of God's. Prayer should come first. Some see prayer as a way to obligate God to give whatever they claim in faith. God is pleased to use our prayers to accomplish his purposes and he delights in answering our needs, but he is never bound by our prayers. God's power is infinitely greater than ours, so it only makes sense to rely on it—especially because God encourages us to do so.

5:17-18 Elijah was ... like us. Prayer is indeed powerful—remember Elijah? The story is found in 1 Kings 17:1-18:46. Elijah had great power in prayer. A drought came as a sign to evil King Ahab of Israel that the idol Baal did not have power over the rain, God did. And when Elijah prayed, it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Then he prayed for rain, and the heavens gave rain (NIV).

James uses Old Testament people to illustrate each of his major themes:

- The nature of faith is found in the lives of Abraham and Rahab (2:21-25).
- Perseverance is exemplified by Job (5:11).
- Effective prayer is exemplified by Elijah (5:17-18).

These lives are important to us. They are examples to be followed. When we choose all our models from contemporary people, we may eventually be disappointed by their failures. Other generations of believers cannot let us down. They made their mistakes, persevered, and are now testimonies that life can be lived for God. Hebrews reminds us, "Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Hebrews 12:1).

ELIJAH WAS LIKE US

Elijah was human, a follower of God who sometimes got depressed or had doubts. He snatched defeat out of the jaws of victory when he ran from Jezebel after decisively crushing the prophets of Baal. But James uses Elijah as an example of someone who did not allow his own weaknesses to undermine his trust in God. Elijah's weak belief in himself forced him to believe even more firmly in God. James is inviting us to identify with Elijah's weakness so that we might develop the same honesty and power in prayer that Elijah exercised. The same God who listened to and acted on Elijah's prayers will give attention to ours.

RESTORE WANDERING BELIEVERS / 15:19-20

Behind this question about the identity of the wanderer is a pastoral concern. In practice, it makes no difference whether the wanderer was actually a believer or not—we are commanded to attempt to turn the person back to the faith (see Ezekiel 3:18-21; 33:9; 1 Timothy 4:16). If the wanderer should die while wandering, the pastor or group is left to wonder about the eternal state of that person. Families sometimes agonize over the fate of a loved one who has wandered away from the faith. Frankly, we cannot know. To determine what was really occurring within that person we would have to be God. If we have done what we could to reach out to wanderers while they were still living, we must then turn their eternal destiny over to God. James urges Christians to help backsliders return to God. By taking the initiative, praying for the person, and acting in love, we can meet the person where he or she is and encourage his or her return to God.

5:19 If one among you wanders from the truth. By saying one among you, James is referring to a believer who has fallen away from the faith by becoming involved with idolatry or heresy. He also reminds us that no one in the group is immune from wandering. The one could be us. To wander means a serious departure from the faith—otherwise known as “apostasy.” The Greek word is *planete*, (from which we get our word “planet”); it suggests wandering away from the correct path. It means wandering, like Pilgrim in *Pilgrim's Progress*, from the right path onto another path that will lead only to destruction. Truth, as used here, does not refer to peripheral doctrinal concerns, but to the central truth of the Christian faith—namely, that Jesus is the Son of God, the Lord and Savior who died for our sins and rose again from the dead. Choices and actions that lead us towards denying the

lordship of the living Christ carry us away from the truth.

And someone should bring him back. When someone does wander, the church or Christian community ought to try to bring him back, not for judgment, but for repentance and restoration. But this phrase also has a distinct personal application, for the group is represented by someone. When a believer is aware of another believer's wandering, that knowledge carries with it responsibility for action. All these images portray a community where people care deeply for each other, and wanderers are not allowed to slip through the cracks unnoticed. Are we willing to try to bring back someone who has wandered, or do we simply wring our hands while the person goes off into darkness?

5:20 Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins. The error of the wandering sinner is so serious as to lead to death—spiritual, eternal death—if he or she is not brought back (see 1 Corinthians 11:30; 1 John 5:16). But when the believer repents and returns to God, God will forgive, cover over, and forget that person's sins (see Psalm 32:1; 1 Peter 4:8).

The context is somewhat unclear about the identity of the wanderer. Is it a person who is a believer wandering away, or is it a person in the group who has not truly believed and is wandering away? Christians disagree over whether or not it is possible for people to lose their salvation, but all agree that those who move away from their faith or who are not genuine in their profession are in serious trouble and need to repent. The point of this verse is clear, though: we are to bring the wanderer back—not debate whether or not the person would be lost if we didn't.

What began with a challenge to endure hardship with joy now closes with an appeal to watch out for each other. Believers are to pursue their faith, together. It is God who saves and keeps, but he allows us to be involved in one another's Christian life.

It is an unforgettable sight to witness the Christian welcome of someone who has strayed and returned, watching God's forgiveness

work through the body of Christ as believers accept the person who is repenting. From the view of eternity, it must really be like a cover being pulled over a “multitude of sins.” James has repeatedly instructed us that Christians should not grumble against each other and judge each other. When we pray for each other and speak God’s forgiveness to each other, we, the church, experience and demonstrate the life Christ gave us. God promises that what has been covered by forgiveness will be remembered no more. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more” (Jeremiah 31:34).

The letter of James is Christianity with its sleeves rolled up. It is the working person’s practical guide to living the Christian faith. It spells out what it means to follow Jesus day by day. James emphasizes faith in action. Theories are for theologians, but James is interested in life! Right living is the evidence and result of faith. The church must serve with compassion, speak lovingly and truthfully, live in obedience to God’s commands, and love one another. The body of believers ought to be an example of heaven’s principles applied on earth, drawing people to Christ through love for God and one another. If we truly believe God’s Word, we will live it day by day. God’s Word is not merely something we read or think about, but something we do.

Resources: Rev. Brad Standfest, Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, Talk Thru the Bible, David Guzik, James, David Guzik’s Commentaries on the Bible, Bruce B. Barton, David Veerman, and Neil S. Wilson, James, Life Application Bible Commentary

Sermon Notes

The Book of James is an In Your Face Book...

It’s a Real & Raw Challenge of our Faith to fix our eyes on Jesus...

James gives a whole N.T. Theology in 5 short chapters... - It’s a Power Punch!!

“Jesus’ brother James gives us a picture of this world... the lusts and pleasures it offers humanity. James’ point blank question is... Are you going to be a friend of the world or a friend of God? He essentially says: You may have the world by the tail, but your soul is rotting away.

Don't be fooled... be warned but encouraged... Eternity is waiting for you." (PB/Multiple Sources)

We can become easily distracted from what's really important... Jesus says this: "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" Mark 8:36

I may have said this before... But 2024 would have been my 30th year at Ford Motor Company...

Satan will whisper in my ear... You should have stayed, look what you have lost...

You know what I say to that... Get behind me Satan... I have gained Eternity

- Preaching the Gospel
- Ripping People out of Darkness
- Baptized 100's of people
- Plant a Church
- Got a Church Family

In James 5... James tells us about several Distractions that can Invade our lives

Distraction that can Invade our lives:

1. Distraction of Gaining the World- Wealth & Riches (5:1-6)
2. Distraction of Impatience & Busyness (5:7-18)

"James has developed the idea and need for complete dependance on God. He now naturally rebuked those most likely to live independently from God- the rich. While Jesus counted some rich followers among his followers, we are compelled by God's word that great wealth can cause a significant obstacle in God's Kingdom work. James is speaking to people that lived their lives in arrogant independence."

Read James 5:1-6

Here are the 3 Primary Sins of the Rich in this context

Sins of the Rich (James 5:1-6)

- Hoarded Wealth
- Failed to Pay (Fraud)

- Self-Indulgence- spending on self

Here is the Key Piece to all of this... Their Sins: “reached the ears of the Lord Almighty”

Christian Truths of our Finances

- We should be Generous
- We pay what's Owed
- Give Cheerfully to the Lord in Tithe & Offering
- Take Care of the less fortunate

The Lord sees what we are doing...

Distraction #2 is Impatience & Busyness

Read James 5:7-8 & 10-12

Jesus' Return:

Matthew 24:30-31: Jesus will come back on the clouds of heaven with power & glory... His angels will sound the trumpets...

Matthew 24:36-25:13: No one knows the day or the hour... Not the Son (Jesus) or Angels but only the Father. Like the days of Noah people will be carrying on...

Acts 1:11: Jesus will come back in the same manner he went into heaven

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: Jesus will come down from heaven... the dead in Christ will rise first and those still alive will be taken up to him in the clouds.

Read James 5:13-18

Read James 5: 19-20

Week 5 James Challenge

Opening Monologue

Believe it or not we are starting Week 5 of the James Challenge! By now you should be racking up the points... in hopes of winning one of our prizes when we do our drawing right before Easter. If you have fallen behind... it's not too late to catch up. Most of all, I pray you or your family have grown in God's word... and challenged by Jesus' brother James.

James' theme to practical Christian living is: Don't just listen to God's word... live it out! James says: "Do what it says." (4:22b)

Why is doing what it says (God's Word) so hard? It's because we have to walk out of our doors each and every day into the world. Whether we want to admit it or not... we are emotionally impacted by everyday life. We live in a world that preaches unbiblical truths... and we are left wrestling with others and ourselves. In other words, the world can rub off on us if we get too close...ever notice that? If we are not careful, we can develop what James calls a "friendship with the world."

How do we protect ourselves... and our families?

"Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." I define the word "submit" in this week's sermon; but in worldly terms, submission is viewed as weak and cruel. As we see, the "great America" has submitted to power and money. It corrupts and brings the whole house down...just look at what's going on around us.

If we are not careful, corruption can leak into our lives. This is why James says "resist" the devil (stand against him, don't let him in). We will dive deeper into this in the sermon. Here is a trustworthy truth from the Lord's brother.

"Come near to God and he will come near to you." (James 4:8a)

Please be sure to listen to this week's sermon; and hop into your James Challenge worksheet!

Be Blessed!

In Christ's Love,
Rev. Brad Standfest

To Listen to this week's Sermon: "James Challenge Series Week 5." Go to the Sermon tab here in our APP or use the links to our website or YouTube Channel where you can also listen to our Sermons:

Web: <https://www.almontvineyardchurch.org/media>

You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/@almontvineyardchurch>

Key Sermon Text

James 4:4-10

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+4%3A4-10+%26amp;version=NIV>

Romans 7:15 & 21

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+7%3A15&version=NIV>
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+7%3A21&version=NIV>

James Challenge Introduction

The Purpose:

The goal to this challenge is to draw families and individuals closer to Jesus Christ. I am hoping that this challenge will spark devotional time in your homes if you do not already do them. I am praying that you will all see that putting Gods word into action will bring blessings on your life. His word does not return back "void" (Isa. 55:11). I am praying that this Challenge will bring revival to your personal walk with Jesus and your families. In the end, it is not about the prizes that can be won, rather lives getting closer to our Savior- that's the real prize!

The Challenge:

I welcome you or your family/team to enter into the James Challenge. This challenge will go on for 6 weeks and can be played individually or as a family/team. **(Not both)** You can do both, and that would be great; but you can only submit **one challenge per household** to be entered into the Grand Prize Drawings.

The Top Teams who complete The James Challenge with the highest number of points will be entered into a grand prize drawing that will

take place at the end of The Challenge. All work must be **submitted by March 17, 2024**. The AVC will provide you with envelopes to return all of your team(s) work. **Please make sure to put your team's name on the outside of the envelope. - Don't forget this!!**

Each week you will receive a new challenge sheet located in the Foyer. If you miss a week, please contact the Church Office to receive the week you missed. The challenge sheet will explain what you need to do and will also explain Make up points. The sermons will surround the study, so we all get a double portion of God's word. Also, **in each sermon you will have a keyword or phrase** which will be recorded on each week's challenge sheet, so you must listen, or watch live to the sermons to obtain the keyword point(s).

The Top prizes are:

Two- One Night Stay at Best Western (Lapeer) & \$40 to Applebee's

Two- \$100 Axecadia/Arcade & \$30 Blend Yogurt

One- \$80 Emagine Theatre

One- \$50 Dinner at Blind Fish (Lapeer)

One- \$150 Dave & Busters

Digging Deeper Commentary: James 4

Theme and Purpose—Throughout his epistle, James develops the theme of the characteristics of true faith. He effectively uses these characteristics as a series of tests to help his reader evaluate the reality of their relationship to Christ. The purpose of this work is not doctrinal or apologetic but practical, as James seeks to challenge these believers to examine the quality of their daily lives in terms of attitudes and actions. A genuine faith will produce real changes in a person's conduct and character, and the absence of change is a symptom of a dead faith.

4:7 Submit to God. Next James introduces a series of commands that both require and strengthen humility as we obey them. Humility is among the qualities that we simply cannot pursue directly. It, along with such traits as self-control, patience, endurance, peace, and joy, is a by-product of living God's way. In obedience we exercise what little humility we have. As we obey and become confident that obedience is

the best way, humility will develop without our conscious attention. In fact, the less attention we give our own humility, the more likely we are to keep it.

[The devil] cannot dominate the servants of God who hope in him with all their hearts. The devil can wrestle, but he cannot pin. If, then, you resist him, he will flee defeated from you in disgrace. —Hermas

We submit to God by recognizing both his friendship and his authority. We enter a relationship with God, not as equals, but as trusting servants. Friendship with God grows out of submission to him, not the other way around. Submission means that all we are and have is available to God without reservations. In the language of James, submission means that we consciously recognize God's desires ahead of our own. The word submit (*hupotagete*) literally means "be subject" in the sense that a soldier is expected to carry out the orders of his commanding officer. Submission is living a life that expresses to God, "Not my will, but yours be done." Submission is an act of the will assisted by God's Spirit.

Although he is not specifically defining the term, James is describing the life of faith. True faith responds to God actively rather than passively. Although God initiates and facilitates all that occurs between us and him, our involvement is never entirely excluded. Personal submission to God is part of living faith.

Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Although our own evil tendencies (1:14) and the desires battling within us (4:1) are the immediate sources of our problems, to give in to those internal desires is to yield to the devil (see Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 22:31; John 13:2, 27). Satan knows that as long as he can stimulate human pride, he can delay God's plan, even if only temporarily. But as powerful as Satan is, his only power over believers is in his powerful temptations. The devil can be resisted—and our resistance will cause him to flee. Conversely, a lack of resistance will practically guarantee ongoing harassment by Satan (see also Ephesians 6:10–18 and 1 Peter 5:6–9).

Once we have identified the devil as our enemy, we need to understand who he is and how he operates in order to effectively resist

him. In the Bible, the names “devil” and “Satan” identify the same evil being (see Revelation 20:2). He is identified as the leader of angelic beings who revolted against God and were banished from heaven. The devil’s primary purpose now is to separate man from God. Destined for destruction, he wants to take as much of creation with him as he possibly can. Among the reasons we so desperately need God’s grace is that we are locked in mortal combat with a superior enemy. We need God’s help to resist Satan’s separating schemes and instead draw near to God. We must realize that the devil’s power over us is only as strong as the illusion that he is more powerful than God’s help. We must trust that “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4 NIV).

The devil’s tools are seductions of many kinds. He tried three of them on Jesus (Matthew 4:1–11):

1. the seduction of self-sufficiency (challenging Jesus to meet his own needs)
2. the seduction of self-importance (challenging Jesus to test God)
3. the seduction of power (challenging Jesus to exchange power over the world for submission to the devil).

TACTICS AND WEAPONS FOR RESISTING THE DEVIL

We are commanded to “resist” the devil, to take a stand against him, now! Those intent on submitting to God ask, “how?”

TACTICS

God has not left us without battle plans. Here are some of his instructions:

Refuse to accept Satan’s suggestion that we can be separated from Christ. (Romans 8:38–39)

Ignore the temptation to doubt God’s grace. (1 John 3:19–24)

Reject the lie that we are beyond forgiveness. (1 John 1:9)

Pray before, during, and after attacks by the devil. (Philippians 4:4–7 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24 James 1:2–8)

Allow Christ to replace our way of thinking with his way of thinking.

(Philippians 2:5–8; 4:8–9 Romans 12:1–2)

WEAPONS

While the devil employs weapons of terror and illusion, God equips us with weapons of real power. They are only ineffective when we leave them unused. Among them are:

The belt of truth—wherever the truth is spoken and lived, the devil is unwelcome. (Ephesians 6:14 John 8:32; 14:6; 17:17)

The breastplate of righteousness—living rightly is the result of advanced training in the faith. When we are living under God’s guidance we are on guard against the devil’s attacks. (Ephesians 6:14 Hebrews 5:12–14 1 Peter 2:12)

The footwear of the gospel of peace—communicating the gospel is taking back territory controlled by the devil. (Ephesians 6:15 Matthew 24:14 Romans 1:16)

The shield of faith—our faith in Christ makes him our shield and protector. (Ephesians 6:16 Hebrews 11:1 1 Peter 1:3–5)

The helmet of salvation—the salvation that God offers is our eternal protection. (Ephesians 6:17 1 Thessalonians 5:8–9 Romans 1:16)

The sword of the Spirit, God’s Word—the Bible is a weapon when its truth is put to use, exposing the devil’s work and helping those who are losing the battle. (Ephesians 6:17 2 Timothy 3:16 Hebrews 4:12)

Prayer—in prayer we rely on God’s help. (Ephesians 6:18–20 Hebrews 4:16 James 5:13–16)

As Paul wrote, “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:3–5 NIV).

The commands that follow, and indeed the rest of this letter, are footnotes on the above two statements. Both submission to God and

resistance toward the devil are required. Friendship with the first; war with the second. James goes on to reveal glimpses of the variety of ways that submission to God and war with the devil are carried into the events and relationships of life.

4:8 Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Next, James clarifies, expands, and applies his two commands to submit to God and to resist the devil. This and the following phrases emphasize action—our part in responding to what God has done. In Hebrews 10:19–22 the writer uses the same imagery to picture the dynamics of our relationship with God: “Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water” (v. 22 NIV). Hebrews describes the old system, where God was separated from the people in the Holy of Holies, in the temple, by a curtain. But Christ provided a way through the curtain by his own body so that we might approach God without fear. We do not have to come very far when we come near, but we do have to come. The idea of submission now includes the added benefit of God’s immediate response. As we submit our wills and desires to God, we will discover his care and closeness in ways we cannot perceive when we are in rebellion against him.

In order for some to act out their decision to come near to God, it is helpful to participate in some physical movement towards God. It may mean returning to church after an absence. It may involve continuing to attend church, but with a new sense of encountering God in worship. Others may need to make a public declaration within the church of their decision to draw near to God. These are not substitutes for the inward action of seeking God, but they can help confirm our intention.

Cleanse your hands, you sinners. The command to wash hands means to purify our actions and change our external behavior. The connection of washing to submission can be seen in the account of the Last Supper, where Jesus washed his disciples’ feet. They had to submit to his serving them, which Peter found difficult to do (see John 13:3–10). The picture, then, involves the submission of our exterior lives to God’s cleansing. The way we live matters to God.

As we submit or draw near to God, we will become aware of habits and

actions in our lives that are not pleasing to him. Washing our hands pictures the removal of these things from the way we live. We must distance ourselves from the sins that God points out.

Purify your hearts, you double-minded. Similarly, the command to purify hearts calls for purity of thoughts and motives—changes on the inside. The people could not remain double-minded, trying to love both God and the world. If we allow the world to entice us away from God, we too have become “double-minded.” James has already used this term in 1:8. There it refers to someone who can’t decide if God is reliable. Here it refers to someone who is trying to maintain a friendship with both God and the world. Purity of heart, then, implies single-mindedness.

HOW DO WE PURIFY OUR HEARTS?

The Bible explains purifying our hearts as an act of submission to a cleansing that we cannot achieve on our own. John reminds us that “the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7 NIV). The writer of Hebrews points this cleansing directly to our hearts and minds by telling us, “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (Hebrews 9:14 NIV). Both internal and external cleansing are made possible by Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf. We submit to the washing by asking God to make us clean. We pray like David, “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow” (Psalm 51:7 NIV).

4:9 Lament and mourn and weep. Submission to God brings people to a new awareness of their condition and shortcomings. As God draws near to us, we ought to sense our unworthiness. After all, we are being allowed to approach the holy, perfect God.

James has described a long spiritual process in the last eight verses. He began by describing people in conflict with each other and within themselves. Then he described the source of those conflicts as inappropriate desires motivated in large part by trying to stay close to

the world and to God. Unmasking such a life and calling believers to submission may not be a welcome message. Surrender may not come easy. Long-held desires may respond with defiance. Repentance may have to include remembering how far we have broken from God's way before we have turned back.

These different terms, lament, mourn, and weep, capture the struggle of a soul drawing near to God. There is a dying which takes place. Paul invites us to consider ourselves "dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11 NRSV). Today, few gospel preachers tell their listeners that they must forsake their selfish ways and surrender their lives to Jesus. Instead, they hear about turning to Christ as if it somehow did not involve the rather painful turning away from something or someone else.

Let your laughter be changed to mourning and your joy to gloom. This is a call to deep and heartfelt repentance. The people's laughter (scornful laughter that refuses to take sin seriously) and their enjoyment of the world's pleasures need to be completely changed—to mourning and gloom over their sins (see also Luke 6:25). Until this happens, there is no room for the laughter of real freedom and the joy of the Lord. The Christian life involves joy—but when we realize our sins, we must be mournful so that we can repent. Only after mourning can we move on to joy in the grace God gives us.

The sorrow being described in this verse is not a public show. We should not attempt to impress God with elaborate displays of repentance. There may be a time of public confession, but the grief-work over sin is largely private and interior. The presence of close friends may help, for sometimes they know us better than we know ourselves. They can also hold us accountable to our confession. But the outcome of this entire process must result in submission to God. The promises of his coming near (4:8), or of his lifting us up (4:10) are sure, but they can only be perceived by those who have humbled themselves before God. It is to this last picture of submission that James now turns.

4:10 Humble yourselves before the Lord. Echoing the Old Testament words from verse 6, that God gives grace to the humble, James tells his readers to humble themselves before God. God exalts

those who humble themselves (Job 22:29; Proverbs 29:23; Isaiah 57:15; Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14; Philippians 2:5–11; 1 Peter 5:6). The picture gives us a helpful definition of God’s grace: it is God lifting up those who have humbled themselves before him.

Humbling ourselves means recognizing that our worth comes from God alone. It is recognizing our desperate need for his help and submitting to his will for our lives. Although we do not deserve God’s favor, he reaches out to us in love and gives us worth and dignity, despite our human shortcomings. According to Luke 18 (NIV), when Jesus noted those around him who were “confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else” (v.9), he told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector who found themselves together in the temple praying. The contrast between the two men challenges the tendency we have towards self-righteousness. The Pharisee “prayed about himself” (v.11), while the tax collector humbled himself and prayed, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (v.13). Jesus pointed out that only the tax collector returned home “justified before God” (v.14). Jesus’ summary was, “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (v.14).

He will lift you up. One of the most touching biblical illustrations of this truth is found in Jesus’ parable of the forgiving father (see Luke 15:11–32). The son took his inheritance and set out to be the world’s best friend. It was not until he found himself bankrupt in every way that he repented. He returned home, grieving. The son confessed to his father that he was unworthy to be called a son. But the father lifted him up and welcomed him back into the family. The act of returning required submission. The wayward son’s words of repentance required humility. The end result was great joy. Humility before God will be followed by his lifting us up.

WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT TO SUBMIT TO GOD?

- Self-reliance and independence are strong cultural values.
- The systems of advertising and entertainment promote our self-reliance and independence.
- Humility is a trait discouraged and ridiculed in the media.
- All of this reinforces our natural tendency toward selfishness.

TRUST GOD IN MAKING PLANS / 4:13-17

James maintains the passion of the last section in this new one. The progression has moved from submitting ourselves and our relationships to God, to our future and the need to entrust it to God.

This section includes three essential facts of life that make for good planning:

- (1) God is in control—"If it is the Lord's will" (4:15)
- (2) Life is a daily gift—"we will live" (4:15)
- (3) All our going and doing must be carried out with the first two points in mind.

This section is not an argument against making careful plans; rather, it is a caution to submit to God, even in our planning.

4:13 Listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will ..." NIV

The you is most likely businesspeople. Addressing this letter to scattered people presumes, at least in part, people moving to establish new lives in distant places. The last paragraph dealt with the spiritual dangers facing those who do not travel. This section deals with those who travel abroad. But its lessons apply to any situation that requires planning. Listen (see also 5:1) carries the Old Testament connotation of divine judgment that's imminent. It expresses disapproval and warning to those who disregard it.

Business travel for selling and trading was common in the first century, especially among Jews—for example, Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:2, 18; Romans 16:3) and Lydia (Acts 16:14). Planning is not evil—in fact, businesspeople are wise to plan ahead. Traveling merchants make travel plans—to leave when a ship or caravan is ready, to buy and sell their goods, to probably stay a year, and to return with a profit. They plan in specific detail. The problem that James addresses, however, is that God is not included in those plans. The merchants plan with arrogance, thinking they can go wherever they like and stay for as long as they like. Their way of planning, doing business, and using money may be honest, but it is really no different than the planning of any pagan businessperson. These Christian businesspeople ought to know better.

James is not even questioning the profit motive in the plans of these brothers and sisters. He is simply confronting that easy progression of living without consideration for God. Terms like self-assertiveness, self-confidence, and self-centeredness may have some limited usefulness, but they also describe attitudes that can ignore God. Yet God owns us and all our business.

LEAVING GOD OUT

Here are some common ways that we talk about the future and make our plans, while leaving God out:

- When we describe retirement in selfish terms as our time to enjoy the fruits of our labors
- When we see work and careers as ways we can make money in order to buy what we want
- When we define money as a symbol of independence
- When we imagine ourselves in control of major areas of life under the rationalization that God is not interested in such mundane matters
- When we make practical decisions about education, job changes, moving, investments, and spending—all without prayer

The fact is that God has a prior claim on our lives. First, because he is our Creator, his purposes can demand precedence over our priorities. Second, for believers, this claim is reenforced by the knowledge that we no longer belong to ourselves: “You are not your own; you were bought at a price” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20 NIV). God’s claim on us is both as Creator and Savior. Our submission to God must be expressed in every area of our lives.

GOD’S WILL AND OUR PLANS

It is good to have goals, but goals can disappoint us if we leave God out of them. There is no point in making plans as though God does not exist because the future is in his hands. The beginning of good planning is to ask: “What would I like to be doing ten years from now? One year from now? Tomorrow? How will I react if God steps in and rearranges my plans?”

We can plan ahead, but we must hold on to our plans loosely. If we put God’s desires at the center of our planning, he will never disappoint

US.

4:14 You do not even know what tomorrow will bring. There is a problem with these well-made plans—no one can know what will happen tomorrow, to say nothing of a year in the future (see Proverbs 27:1; Luke 12:16–21). These people were planning as if their future was guaranteed. James is not suggesting that they make no plans because of possible disaster, but to be realistic about the future as they trust God to guide them. Because the future is uncertain, it is even more important that we completely depend on God. The plans for our lives need to include frequent self-reminders about God’s role in the future. One helpful, traditional prayer is: “Lord, I know I don’t know what the future holds, but I’m glad I know you hold the future!” Our attitude on any particular day must never leave us open to the response God gave the rich man in Jesus’ parable, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you” (Luke 12:20 NRSV).

What is your life? You are a mist. James illustrates his point that our lives are uncertain by comparing them to a fog that covers the countryside in the morning and then is burned away by the sun. Life is short no matter how long we live. We shouldn’t be deceived into thinking we have plenty of time left to live for Christ, to enjoy our loved ones, or to do what we know we should. Today is the day to live for God! Then, no matter when our lives end, we will have fulfilled God’s plans for us.

PARTNERSHIP WITH GOD

God is the senior partner in any business we pursue. The following questions will keep our business in line with God’s priorities:

- Purpose—Does our mission ultimately serve God and the people he created? Does it practice harmony with his creation?
- Philosophy—Do our business practices and principles treat people with dignity? Are they ethical, caring, and compassionate? Are they examples of good stewardship of resources?
- Plan—Do our daily activities and attitudes show clear evidence of the Christian life? Do we consult the Bible for constant input to our decisions?

4:15 You ought to say, “If the Lord will ...” Believers cannot live

independently of God; therefore, our plans cannot ignore him. We must make sure those plans include the clause, if the Lord wills. We are to plan, but we are to recognize God's higher will and divine sovereignty.

James began this chapter by exposing the danger of our uncontrolled desires. We are prone to demand our will. The way out of danger involves submission of our wills to God, so that our attitude becomes more and more in line with the Lord's will. We exchange our desires for his desires. Then we discover, to our great delight, that those things that we rightly desired are granted after all, only now there is no doubt that God has been the provider. Jesus said, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33 NIV). The kingdom of God and his righteousness exist anywhere that God's will is being carried out.

This means far more than simply saying, "If God wills," whenever we speak about future plans, for that too can become meaningless. It means planning with God as we make our plans. Our plans should be evaluated by God's standards and goals, and they should be prayed over with time spent listening for God's advice. Such planning pleases God.

4:16 You boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. These businesspeople, instead of focusing on God's will in their plans, were arrogantly boasting as though they could control their own destiny. Such boasting is evil because it takes no thought of God.

The most dangerous moments in life occur when a plan we have engineered succeeds. That moment of satisfaction can more easily become pride than it can become humility. But the Bible illustrates the truth that even our greatest successes ought to be submitted to God. Daniel recounts vividly the story of King Nebuchadnezzar's moment of success. His reflection was entirely self-centered: "He said, 'Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?' " (Daniel 4:30 NIV). Daniel had warned the king that pride would be his downfall. The prophesy was fulfilled exactly: "Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until

his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird” (Daniel 4:33 NIV). The king was humbled. When he was finally restored, his reflection had a distinctly different tone: “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble” (Daniel 4:37 NIV).

HUMILITY—ONE WAY OR ANOTHER

The choice is inevitable. Either we humble ourselves before God, or we will be humbled. That humbling may not be immediate, but it is guaranteed. It will come at that time when all people, joyfully or not, will recognize God’s right to our submission. Everyone will recognize God’s authority when “at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10–11 NRSV).

4:17 Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin. Verse 17 sums up all of chapters 1–4. It sums up the entire ethical problem in the whole Epistle of James. He may be telling these merchants that they know what they should do—that is, honor God in their business practices. If they ignore that, they sin. In a broader sense, James adds these words as an admonition for all his readers to do what he has written. They have been told, so they have no excuse.

We tend to limit sins to specific acts—doing wrong. But James tells us that sin is also not doing what is right. (These two kinds of sin are sometimes called sins of commission and sins of omission.) It is a sin to lie; it can also be a sin to know the truth and not tell it. It is a sin to speak evil of someone; it is also a sin to avoid that person when you know he needs your friendship. We should be willing to help others as the Holy Spirit guides us. If God has directed you to do a kind act, to render a service to others, or to restore a relationship—do it. You will experience a renewed and refreshed vitality to your Christian faith.

Resources: Rev. Brad Standfest, Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible*, David Guzik, *James*, *David Guzik’s Commentaries on the Bible*, Bruce B. Barton, David Veerman, and Neil S. Wilson, *James*, *Life Application Bible Commentary*

Sermon Notes:

What can you say about the Lord's Brother James... He comes at you like a Bull in his writing style...

I like what the Scofield Theologians say about James:

"The Book does not yield to strict analysis. It is a series of didactic sayings clustered around certain recurring themes. James's language is forceful and often eloquent. He stresses Practical Christian Living... giving pictures of life in the early church."

Don't just listen to God's Word... Live it out

James says: "Do what it says" (James 1:22b)

Do What it says!!

We are in Chapter 4 of James... And it's a Power Punch of Topics:

I look at this Chapter and Think... James, maybe you should have written some more chapters...

Theologian Wilkinson Comments: "These Jewish believers were beset with problems that were testing their faith... James was concerned that they were succumbing to impatience, bitterness, materialism, disunity, and Spiritual decay."

Let's be honest... There is a Wrestling match that goes on within us at times... The Temptations and Trials

We Do things or Say things we Shouldn't do/say...

Sometimes it's' like... Dog gone it... I just about didn't do that- LOL- After the fact

Apostle Paul says this about the wrestling that goes on

within: For what I want to do I do Not do, but I what I hate to do...

When I want to do good, evil is right there with me... Romans 7:15 &

James uses a Strong tone to get our attention and then offers us the solution to Overcoming our battles...

Read James 4:4-6

When we become too friendly with the world, we do bad things...

The World is Preaching and Teaching Unbiblical Truths...

So... How do we overcome our own Madness and the World's craziness... Here's the Answer ...

Read James 4:7

We have been taught by the Slogan: Be who you want to be...

Isn't it: Be Who God Created you to be...

This Word Submit Means:

Biblical Use of "Submit"

- To Submit to one's Control
- To Yield to one's admonition or advice
- To Arrange under, obey, be subject

We submit to the Authority of Jesus Christ in our lives...

We Overcome the World... Our Actions and Attitudes... Through AND In Christ...

To Live is Christ...

The Second Part to James 4:7: "Resist the Devil and he will flee from you"

Resisting Means

- To Stand Against
- To Oppose
- Not Letting in
- Not Entertaining

When we are walking in the Authority of Jesus Christ we Can and Will push Satan back...

Read James 4:8-10

NO APP Notes for Week 4 James Challenge

Week 3 James Challenge

Opening Monologue

We are in Week 3 of our James Challenge. Chapter 3 of James is a power punch... as I like to use the term.

James was familiar with Jesus' teachings and alludes to them on multiple occasions. James says this: "We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check." (3:2)

The word stumble means we make mistakes... we trip and fall down at times. James takes this word (stumble) and expounds on it deeper and further. He links this stumbling to an untamed mouth- ouch!

Was James thinking of Jesus words in the Gospels? Here is what Christ said: "For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." (MT. 12:34b) Our words matter don't they... they carry weight and power. (Proverbs 18:21) They can be used to cause damage or bring healing. (We go deep into this in this week's sermon)

Paraphrasing James's deep theology and analogies ... he says our "tongues are full of deadly poison" and with it "we praise the Lord and curse men." He concludes by saying: "this should not be." (James 3)

The reality is... we may have hurt others with our words; or we may have been recipients of negative slanderous words in our lives- maybe both! Whatever the case is in your life, Christ wants us free of guilt or any shame. He wants our wounds to be healed of any negative words spoken over us. Jesus can heal us if we ask. Let us sing this old hymn as a cry to our Lord for healing and restoration.

"I surrender all" <https://youtu.be/SW8EA7DEQ2M?si=71mkET5UIAsGhBcO>

In Christ's Love,
Rev. Brad Standfest

To Listen to this week's Sermon: "James Challenge Series Week 3." Go to the Sermon tab here in our APP or use the links to our website or YouTube Channel where you can also listen to our Sermons:

Web: <https://www.almontvineyardchurch.org/media>

You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/@almontvineyardchurch>

Key Sermon Text

James Chapter 3

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+3&version=NLT>

James Challenge Introduction

The Purpose:

The goal to this challenge is to draw families and individuals closer to Jesus Christ. I am hoping that this challenge will spark devotional time in your homes if you do not already do them. I am praying that you will all see that putting Gods word into action will bring blessings on your life. His word does not return back "void" (Isa. 55:11). I am praying that this Challenge will bring revival to your personal walk with Jesus and your families. In the end, it is not about the prizes that can be won, rather lives getting closer to our Savior- that's the real prize!

The Challenge:

I welcome you or your family/team to enter into the James Challenge. This challenge will go on for 6 weeks and can be played individually or as a family/team. **(Not both)** You can do both, and that would be great; but you can only submit **one challenge per household** to be entered into the Grand Prize Drawings.

The Top Teams who complete The James Challenge with the highest number of points will be entered into a grand prize drawing that will

take place at the end of The Challenge. All work must be **submitted by March 17, 2024**. The AVC will provide you with envelopes to return all of your team(s) work. **Please make sure to put your team's name on the outside of the envelope. - Don't forget this!!**

Each week you will receive a new challenge sheet located in the Foyer. If you miss a week, please contact the Church Office to receive the week you missed. The challenge sheet will explain what you need to do and will also explain Make up points. The sermons will surround the study, so we all get a double portion of God's word. Also, **in each sermon you will have a keyword or phrase** which will be recorded on each week's challenge sheet, so you must listen, or watch live to the sermons to obtain the keyword point(s).

The Top prizes are:

Two- One Night Stay at Best Western (Lapeer) & \$40 to Applebee's

Two- \$100 Axecadia/Arcade & \$30 Blend Yogurt

One- \$80 Emagine Theatre

One- \$50 Dinner at Blind Fish (Lapeer)

One- \$150 Dave & Busters

Digging Deeper Commentary: James 3

CONTROLLING THE TONGUE / 3:1-12

In the early church, teachers were very important. Both the survival and spiritual depth of believers depended on them. In the church at Antioch, they were ranked in status with the prophets who sent out Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1). Teachers were the point of contact for all new believers because converts needed instruction in the facts of the gospel, and teachers would build them up in the faith. The problem, however, was that some teachers had the ability to communicate but were driven by very worldly motivations. They would take leading positions in a church, form cliques, and use their teaching positions to criticize others. In this way, they could maintain their position and importance.

Chapter 3 is an elaboration of 1:19, "slow to speak." Christians need constant diligence and discipline. Nowhere is this more necessary than

in the use of the tongue. Christians need help from God to speak wisely. All believers should take this chapter to heart, not just leaders and teachers; all Christians need to control what they say. And all types of speech, private and public, need to be brought under Christ's control. The only sure cure for selfishly motivated teaching and speaking is true repentance. This involves being honest and humble before God and admitting our sins (4:6–10). Only then will we be able to avoid sinful speech and bring healing to the Christian community.

3:1 Not many of you should presume to be teachers. James taught that people should not rush to be teachers. Many of his status-conscious readers would have desired the reputable position of teachers in the community.

What was so attractive about being a teacher? Becoming a rabbi or teacher was the highest calling of a Jewish child. Teachers had great influence and status in the early church (Ephesians 4:11). Because teachers were rare, each teacher had much work to do, and teaching was central to the work of the church. Because teachers taught primarily through verbal communication, it was vital for them to control what they said. Through their positions, teachers could present wrong doctrine. They could also create divisions in the church by promoting themselves rather than the message of Christ.

That some will presume they are teachers is implied but not actually stated by the text. Coming hard on the heels of chapter 2, one of the most honorable “works” that would immediately come to the Jewish mind would be the position of teaching. James has in mind a greater emphasis on spiritual growth and self-control before someone assumed the role of a teacher.

We who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

Teachers will have the greater judgment. Teaching authority carries with it greater responsibility. As works reveal the depths of a person's faith, so words show the depth of a person's maturity. The teacher is held to greater accountability because of his or her key teaching role (Luke 12:42–48). James is not against teachers; instead, he is alerting us to the great responsibilities that go with teaching and its potential problems. James valued the ministry of teaching, but he knew that its social attractiveness and power made teaching potentially dangerous.

The desire to be in the spotlight as the spokesperson and authority was a problem then as it is now. We must help immature and undisciplined speakers grow before we give them platforms. We must help new Christians grow in knowledge and make sure they possess in their personal experience what they profess with their words before we give them positions of influence and up-front public speaking opportunities.

3:2 We all stumble in many ways. We all make mistakes or slip up when we are off guard. We all stumble, but our most frequent failures occur when we are speaking. To “stumble” means to go astray or sin. The fact that we all sin in many ways is illustrated frequently in the Bible (see 2 Chronicles 6:36; Psalm 19:13; Proverbs 20:9; Romans 7:14–16; 1 John 1:8, 10). Because we are prone to make mistakes in our speech, we need to be even more careful to let God control what we say. He is capable of guiding our motivation, our thoughts, our very choice of words, and even the impact our communication has on others.

The ease with which we all stumble is James’s second reason for cautioning those who want to teach. The first was the weight of greater responsibility. Teachers are not just people who are mature enough not to stumble—they also ought to be those who correctly handle their failures. Believers are frequently guilty of putting immature Christians (for example, newly converted celebrities) into positions of authority and then being disappointed when these young believers are not able to live up to the expectations placed on them.

If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man. Perfect here means mature or complete. Many people may think that it is impossible to control the tongue, but most people haven’t even begun to try. The ability to control the tongue is the mark of true maturity for the Christian (see 1:19, “be slow to speak”). When Jesus confronted the religious leaders about their accusations against him, he said that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks—showing that what is inside of a person affects what they do with their speech (Matthew 12:33–37). He also said that we must give account for every careless word we utter (Matthew 12:36).

Able to keep the whole body in check. The expression in check (chalinagogesai) means “to bridle,” which introduces the analogies James uses next. James is saying that anyone who can control his or her mouth will be able to control the rest of his or her body. The wisdom and love from God and the self-restraint given by the Holy Spirit will help us exercise this control.

One of the greatest forms friendship can take is the willingness of one friend to correct with compassion the speaking of the other. When someone points out something wrong we said, or a hurtful way of speaking, our first response may be defensive. But we must learn that a true friend cares for us, including the way we talk. Are we willing to genuinely care for that person in the same way?

3:3-5 Bits ... Rudder ... Tongue ... What do these things have in common? They are all small but very effective controllers—they each direct something much larger than themselves. James is building a case for the damaging power of our words. We see this evidenced in history when dictators such as Adolph Hitler, the Ayatollah Khomeini, Joseph Stalin, and Saddam Hussein used their words to mobilize people to destroy others. We see it evidenced in church splits and in the ruining of a pastor’s reputation. And we see how verbal abuse in the home can destroy the very personhood and character of spouses and children.

3:3 Bits ... make them obey us. If a person’s impulsive speech is uncontrolled, his or her whole life is headed in the wrong direction. Horses are larger and stronger than people, but they can be turned with a small bit in the mouth. We should let Christ bridle our mouths instead of speaking out every time a thoughtless word comes to mind. From this point on, James shows that not only teaching, but all forms of speech can be powerfully beneficial or destructive.

3:4 Ships ... are so large. Ships were some of the largest and most powerful man-made structures known by early Christians. Ships moved tons of cargo across the sea. Reminding his readers that a large and powerful oceangoing vessel could be controlled by a small rudder, James drives home the point of how powerful and pivotal the tongue can be. In our time we have seen how oil spills from large tankers can cause billions of dollars of damage, all because of an

uncontrolled rudder. Small things control much. The use of the tongue has split churches and destroyed lives. We can use our speech in impulsive, automatic, and thoughtless ways, lashing out at others and passing on gossip. Without control, destruction is sure to follow.

ARE YOU UNDER CONTROL?

What we say and what we don't say are both important. Proper speech is not only saying the right words at the right time, it is also controlling our desire to say what we shouldn't.

Examples of an untamed tongue include: gossiping, belittling, cursing, bragging, manipulating, false teaching, exaggerating, complaining, flattering, and lying. Before speaking we should ask, "Is this what I really want to say? Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?"

In Colossians 3:5-11, Paul associates eliminating sins of speech with the stripping off of the old self. This can only be accomplished by God working in us.

3:5 The tongue is a small part of the body. As the bit, the rudder, and the spark, the tongue is a small but influential part of the body. Since the mouth reflects and directs our life-style, we must learn to control it. Anything capable of such great evil must also be capable of great good. Paul taught that the whole body, including the tongue, ought to be considered a "living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1) to God.

A great forest is set on fire by a small spark. During the dry season in Israel, the grass, low thornbushes, and scrubs were as dry as explosive tinder. One spark could spread a wild fire. The first two analogies (bit and rudder) were directed at the tongue's effect on the person. The spark analogy speaks to the effect of the tongue beyond the person. This illustrates the following warnings:

- Our words have wide-ranging impact. They are able to kill at a distance. Not only do they hurt people face-to-face, but like long-range missiles they can be launched from a remote conversation, or like mine fields they can be planted to do their damage much later. Innuendo may be regarded as fact. Juicy tidbits may be repeated and cause their damage long after they are started.

- We can't control the effects of our words. In tinder dry conditions, a forest fire can quickly burn out of control. Likewise, a rumor can take off and take on a life of its own. We must carefully monitor what we say.

Satan uses the tongue to divide people and pit them against one another. Idle words are damaging because they quickly spread destruction. We dare not be careless with our words, thinking that we can apologize later, because even when we do, the damage remains. A few words spoken in anger can destroy a relationship that took years to build. Remember that words are like fire; they can neither control nor reverse the damage they do. For example, a public figure's reputation can be greatly harmed by a quote taken out of context or a false allegation.

3:6 A world of evil. The tongue is the source of all kinds of evil because of the damage it can cause in the world and bring to the rest of the Christian community.

BIT

A small bit controls a large animal.
Can we control our use of the tongue?

RUDDER

A small piece of wood steers a huge ship in heavy wind.
The tongue, though small, can create grave consequences.

FIRE

A small spark unleashes a destructive force.
Do we recognize the destructive force our words can have?

ANIMALS

People can tame animals.
Can we tame our speech and our impulsive thoughts?

POISON

The venom of a snake kills its prey.
Can we keep our words from poisoning us and others?

SPRING

A spring can produce only one kind of water.
Is our speech a spring that's good or foul?

FIG TREE

Trees bear just one kind of fruit.

Is our speech bearing good fruit, or is it mixed with bad?

TONGUE

The tongue can be used for good or evil.

Does our speech reflect our Christian maturity?

Sets the course of nature. The uncontrolled tongue can set our entire human existence on fire. The NRSV translates “the course of nature” as “the cycle of nature” (literally, “the wheel of being”). The expression was used in ancient times to indicate “the ups and downs in life,” as well as one’s entire human existence.

This means that the tongue can destroy all the good that we’ve built up over a lifetime. While we have ministered for years and years and seen abundant fruit, if we fail to control the tongue, we can undo all the good we have built up in our years of ministry. Our speech has a power that few other capabilities possess.

Set on fire by hell. The verb implies habitual action. In other words, the tongue keeps on setting on fire and inflaming our passions. It inflames our temper; it leads us to actions that are displeasing to God. Even intelligent people can behave like fools when reacting to unthoughtful criticism. They become inflamed by the use of the tongue.

3:7 All kinds of animals ... have been tamed by man. Genesis 1:28 states: “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground’ ”(NIV). Genesis 9:2 says: “The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands”(NIV). Psalm 8:6–8 also echoes the fact that God has given dominion to humanity over all the animals. Human ingenuity has tamed wild creatures to make them useful. But no person, by his own unaided power, can restrain the tongue.

3:8 No one can tame the tongue. Proverbs 13:3 says, “He who guards his lips guards his life.” So what hope is there for taming the tongue? We are helpless ... unless we get help.

No person can tame the tongue, but Christ can. To do it, he goes straight for the heart (Mark 7:14–15; Psalm 51:10) and the mind (Romans 12:1–2). We should not try to control our tongue with our own strength; we should rely on the Holy Spirit. He will give us increasing power to monitor and control what we say. For when we feel offended or unjustly criticized, the Spirit will remind us of God’s love and keep us from reacting. The Holy Spirit will heal the hurt and keep us from lashing out. We can make sure we are in the Spirit’s control by incorporating Scripture into our life and by asking the Spirit to direct our thoughts and actions each day.

A restless evil. Restless means unstable and incapable of restraint. The tongue is always capable of evil; it remains untamed throughout life. With our tongue we can lash out and destroy. By recognizing the tongue’s deadly capacity, we can take the first steps to keep it under control.

Full of deadly poison. What we say can be dangerous and deadly, carrying poison that drips long after the words are spoken. David said in Psalm 140:3, “They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent’s; the poison of vipers is on their lips.”

Instead of making excuses for sounding off, we can exercise restraint and allow God’s peace and wisdom to guide what we say.

Our society encourages us to speak out in a thoughtless way, totally disregarding the deadly impact our words may have. Christ’s attitude is for us to deal with our anger and frustration honestly and maturely but to use restraint in how we reveal these feelings to others.

3:9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father. Praising God or blessing was a normal daily practice for Jews and Jewish Christians, thus using the tongue to curse others should have seemed abnormal. The blessing of God was a common practice in Jewish devotional life. “The Holy One, Blessed is He” is one of the most frequent descriptions of God in rabbinic literature. The “Eighteen

Benedictions,” a liturgical formula used daily by righteous Jews, concluded each of its parts with the blessing of God. Lord and Father is used only here in the New Testament. Paul’s favorite reference to God was “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 15:6; 2 Corinthians 1:3; Ephesians 1:3).

We curse those who are made in the likeness of God. We should have the same attitude of respect for fellow human beings as we have for God, because they are created in his image. Yet we have this horrible, double-sided tongue.

Some people think that the only restraint against foul talk, calling people names, and bad language is social disapproval. But God’s Word condemns it. James says that the reason we should not curse people is because they have been made in God’s likeness. We should not use any word or name that reduces them to anything less than their full stature as God’s created beings. The doctrine of “total depravity” doesn’t mean that the image of God is obliterated in a person, but only that every aspect of our being is affected by sin. There is still something in the sinner worth saving. That is why Christ came to die.

3:10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. James knew that followers of Christ might be capable of both praise and cursing because of what he had observed in the disciples. Peter promised Christ, “I will not deny you” (Matthew 26:35 NRSV), but then he denied Jesus with oaths and curses (Matthew 26:69–75). In 1 John 3:18, the apostle John says, “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (NIV). Earlier in his life, John was willing to call down fire to destroy a Samaritan village (Luke 9:51–56). Because speech reveals a person’s heart, it exhibits the same potential to help or destroy. The tongue reflects the inner person (Matthew 12:34).

The deceitful, dual use of the tongue is the result of double-mindedness, fickleness, and the instability of a life that is ruled by impulse rather than by the love of God. The tongue reveals either maturity or immaturity. It gives a picture of our basic human nature, made in God’s image but fallen into sin. God works to change us from the inside out. As the Holy Spirit purifies our heart, he gives us self-control so that we will speak words that please God. Instead of fighting,

we need to be helpful, positive, and encouraging toward others.

3:11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? James pictures the inner being, the heart, as a spring. Jesus used the same illustration in his conversation with the Samaritan woman: “But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14 NIV). There were many springs and wells throughout the ancient land of Israel.

WHAT SPRINGS FROM YOU?

Many of James’s readers knew that some springs had been contaminated by salty water, and some had gone brackish and foul. But others still bubbled up safe and clean water. It would be like comparing the fresh-flowing Jordan River with the salty Dead Sea. Although different kinds of water won’t bubble from the same opening, Christians’ speech can be very inconsistent. One time we may speak in a way that honors God and another time in a way that gives Satan power to operate. We can choose how we will respond. If we do not, we give Satan an opening to control us.

3:12 Can a fig tree ... yield olives? Jesus used the same illustration in Matthew 7:16–20; 12:33–35; and Luke 6:43–45. We should produce the kind of fruit that we’ve been created and regenerated to produce—the fruit of righteousness (see James 3:18).

No spring can yield both salt water and fresh. The implication from this answer to the question in 3:11 is that only a renewed heart can produce pure speech. Only Christ can change us as God changed the bitter water for the people of Israel at Marah (Exodus 15:23–25). This event is used repeatedly in Scripture as an illustration of the danger of complaining.

If the source of our thoughts and actions is the love of God in our life, then we will not be able to generate the kind of negative speech that James warns us against.

BRINGING OUR SPEECH UNDER GOD'S CONTROL

To help bring our speech under God's control we can:

- Count our blessings. By focusing on the positive, we will take away the anger and bitterness from our spirit that leads us to make negative comments or accusations towards others.
- Get in touch with the love of God. As we allow God to satisfy our spiritual needs, we will have less of a need to strike out at others.
- Write our thoughts in a letter instead of lashing out. We can pour out our inner feelings, and then not send the letter. Instead, we should pray over the letter and ask God to give us a change of attitude and spirit.
- Wait before responding to a comment, criticism, or piece of gossip.
- Make five positive comments to every negative one that we make about someone else.
- Treat everything we say as a gift to another person. We should ask: "Are my words a gift that I truly want to leave in their hands?"

WISDOM FROM HEAVEN / 3:13-18

James lays down a challenge before the church for those who claim to have true wisdom: they need to observe the true wisdom that comes from heaven. The church James wrote to was a church under pressure. When under pressure, a church can split into factions. There was no formal clergy or ordination process, so self-styled teachers could emerge, claiming to have wisdom. As each teacher promoted his brand of wisdom and gained a following, the community of believers was divided. In the New Testament church there were many problems with factions or a "party spirit" (see Acts 6; 1 Corinthians 1; see also Philippians 1:17; 2:3).

Jesus taught that we would know true teachers from false ones by how they lived (Matthew 7:15-23). Good teachers will exemplify good life disciplines. Their activities, actions, and accomplishments will reveal the true heart of their Christian faith. In this section, good deeds are contrasted with bitterness, and humility is contrasted with selfish ambition.

3:13 Who is wise and understanding? This is a rhetorical

question answered by James in the next phrase. The truly wise person demonstrates his or her understanding of Christ by the way he or she lives. Few people are foolish enough to openly claim to be wise. But most do want to live effective lives. We would like our words and thoughts to be significant to others. And yet wisdom is not a characteristic we can claim for ourselves. It is a quality recognized by others. True wisdom is measured by the depth of a person's character.

Joseph's life (see Genesis 37–50) is a shining example of wise living. His experience certainly had its share of trials and temptations: sold into slavery by his brothers, sexually harassed, unjustly imprisoned. Joseph could have despaired many times. Yet he trusted God. He did not know what the future held, but he did know who held his future. He concentrated on what the events of his life required of him rather than being overly concerned with what others were doing. Joseph's trust was vindicated. We can expect God to respond to our trust in the same way.

Let him show it by his good life. Our works show where our hearts are invested (Matthew 6:19–21, 33). Do our attitudes and motives match our actions? While we may not claim to be wise, we can aim at living in wise ways. The guidance given to us in God's Word is dependable wisdom. The specific qualities James is about to list ought to be part of our ongoing prayers, and they ought to be part of the intentions of our life.

Humility that comes from wisdom. False humility is ruled out. We are not to be hypocrites who pretend to be humble, using "humility" to impress others. Instead, we should take an accurate look at ourselves. "Be honest in your estimate of yourselves" (Romans 12:3 TLB). And we should watch out for pride in our relationships with others. Pride is having an attitude of self-importance about the talents and abilities that God has given us and using them to set ourselves up as superior or to be divisive in our relationships with others.

Wisdom, then, involves both actions and attitudes in living. A wise life will display not only goodness, but also humility.

3:14 Bitter envy and selfish ambition. What is the relationship of

worldly wisdom to ambition? Why is ambition so harmful? Our selfish nature can harbor and become saturated with bitter envy and selfish ambition. Bitter envy is misguided zeal that results in contentiousness. It is anger at the accomplishments of others. Whenever we find fault with a leader, we must ask ourselves what is motivating us to feel strongly about that person's failure. Do we actually share the same weakness? Do we imagine ourselves doing better in that role? Or are we in fact, simply envious of the abilities or success God has allowed him or her to have? A positive answer to any of these ought to make us very careful in how we express our criticisms.

Here and in Philippians 2:3, selfish ambition refers to leaders in the church who are developing a "party spirit." This party spirit is produced when our ambition leads us to split the church in order to develop a certain "party" mentality among others, who blindly follow. This produces factions who are for or against the pastor or certain programs, who take sides on issues not necessarily central to the Christian faith.

Selfish ambition is the desire to live for one's self and no one or nothing else, only for what we can get out of it. In our desperate attempts to persuade others to see our point of view, we may lose our sense of reason and conviction and become fanatical. Then we will want to wipe out those who persistently oppose or disagree with us. This leads to bitterness. We want to win. We want to be right—to have the last word at all costs. This is what it means to be selfishly ambitious. Having confidence in only our knowledge, we arrogantly lord it over others. (See 1 Peter 5:3 for more on being concerned for what we can give rather than what we can get.)

Do not boast. When our true motives are exposed, one defense is to become arrogant. Our very pride ought to tell us that our desire to be seen as wise is based on selfishness. The moment that we least want to admit our pride is the moment when recognizing it will do us the most good.

Deny the truth. The specific truth to which James is referring is the truth that we might be harboring bitter envy and selfish ambition. But resisting truth in one way can easily lead to resisting truth in general.

Denying the truth or speaking against the truth is a chief characteristic of the devil mentioned in John 8:44, where he is called the “father of lies.” To talk as if we are wise and good when our life denies it is the lie for which Paul condemned the Jewish Christians (Romans 2:17, 23).

3:15 Such wisdom ... is earthly. The source and standards of this kind of wisdom are from the world and not God. Its teachers are self-centered and shallow.

This wisdom doesn't come from faith—it is godless and unspiritual. Unspiritual (NRSV) could refer to the natural man. The term for unspiritual is used in the New Testament for the person who does not have God's Spirit (3:15), or does not accept the guidance that comes from the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:14). This person teaches only the wisdom of this life. His or her wisdom is based on human feelings and human reasoning alone without God's help.

Of the devil. The real source of these thoughts is the devil. It is foolhardy for believers to assume that Satan does not have access to most of the knowledge available to us. From the devil's point of view, the temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4) was a wise plan, wisely carried out. Satan even used Scripture in making his suggestions to Jesus seem reasonable. He failed because he was up against real wisdom. The devil still makes use of the same resources that God has provided for us. But his purposes are destructive; they can produce a climate in the church, at home, and at work that damages relationships. Think of how quickly our words, language, and tone of voice can create a destructive climate.

3:16-17 Disorder and wickedness of every kind. Jealous people think they must be first in everything. They cannot stand to see anyone else in the limelight, or have anyone else cast a shadow on what they do. This leads to desires and strategies for revenge that can lead to chaos.

The wisdom from above. The following seven characteristics of heavenly wisdom are strung together like pearls. They are what wisdom does. These qualities are seen in Christ's character and are also embodied in the famous chapter on love (1 Corinthians 13). Do you desire these qualities for your life? Have you prayed for God's help

to exemplify them in your life?

First indicates that this is a main characteristic and a key to the others, not just number one.

Pure. We must be pure enough to approach God. To be fruitful for him, we must have moral and spiritual integrity.

Peaceable. This is peace that goes beyond inner peace; it is opposed to strife. It is peace between people, and between people and God. It must be peace that affects the community. Christians must not only prefer peace, but they should also seek to spread it. Since chapters 3 and 4 deal with dissension, purity must be understood as a key trait of a peacemaker—one who can withstand those who attempt to split the church.

Considerate. This is the opposite of self-seeking. It does not demand its own right. It goes beyond the strict requirements of justice. To be kindly and considerate is to make allowances for others, to temper justice with mercy. It is the kind of treatment that we would like to receive from others.

Willing to yield. Heavenly wisdom is reasonable, flexible—willing to listen and to change. Just as good soldiers willingly follow orders from their superiors, people with heavenly wisdom willingly follow God's orders and respond to his correction.

TWO TYPES OF WISDOM

WISDOM FROM BELOW ———— **WISDOM FROM HEAVEN**

Characterized by:————— **Characterized by:**

Bitter envy (v. 14) ———— **Purity (v. 17)—personal transparency or holiness**

Selfish ambition (v. 14) ———— **Peaceable (v. 17)—willing to sacrifice for peace**

Boasting (v. 14) ———— **Considerate (v. 17)**

—gentle, not seeking its own way

Denying the truth (v. 14) ———— **Willing to yield (v. 17)**—agreeable, willing to reevaluate, open

Being earthly-minded (v. 15) ———— **Merciful (v. 17)**—compassionate

Being unspiritual (v. 15) ———— **Impartial (v. 17)**—single-minded toward God and people

From the devil (v. 15) ———— **Sincere (v. 17)**—without hypocrisy

Resulting in: ———— **Resulting in:**

Disorder (v. 16) ———— **Good fruit (v. 17)**

Evil practices/actions (v. 16) ————
Righteousness/good actions (v. 18)

Full of mercy and good fruits. God's wisdom is full of God's gracious forgiveness. And his love leads to practical action, helping and serving others. We should be willing to forgive even when the problems we are facing are someone else's fault.

Impartial means to be single-minded and free from prejudice toward people and without double-mindedness toward God (1:5-8).

Sincere. According to the Greek (anupokritos), this word means "unhypocritical." God's wisdom makes people genuine.

3:18 Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. William Barclay paraphrases this as follows: "For the seed that one day produces the reward that righteousness brings can only be sown when personal relationships are right and by those whose contacts produce such relationships." (For more on sowing wisdom and truth and reaping righteousness see Psalm 1:3; Proverbs 11:30; Galatians 6:7-10; Philippians 1:11.)

This section gives three suggestions for controlling the tongue:

- 1. Seek God's wisdom.**
- 2. Admit jealousy and arrogance without trying to cover them up.**
- 3. Create a climate of peace wherever God leads you.**

In Matthew 5:9, Jesus promises that the peacemakers will be blessed. Their reward will be to see right relationships between God and people.

Resources: Rev. Brad Standfest, David Guzik, James, David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible, Bruce B. Barton, David Veerman, and Neil S. Wilson, James, Life Application Bible Commentary

Sermon Notes:

James is a Power Punch of a Book and He wastes No time getting to Key Issues that arise in the Church & Christian Living...

I Believe James 1:22 describes the Book and James' Heart:

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

"Do what it says:" In other words: Follow the Instructions... Don't just do what you feel like doing

[Bakery Story]

Suppose an Owner of a Bakery needs to hire a Baker... In the interview the Bakery owner asks this Man: Are you a Baker and for How long have you been baking? The Baker says Oh yes, I am a Baker... I have been a Baker for 15 years- Hired... All is going well... Until one day the Bakery Owner notices some Hamburgers mixed in with the Donuts... and the Bakery Owner says what are you doing making Hamburgers... You're a Baker... Sorry, Sorry says the Baker and he blames his Stumbling on the Distractions of life... These stumbling's continued to

happen until one day the Bakery had more Hamburgers on the shelves than donuts... And the Owner told the Baker... I'm sorry, you must leave... You Identify as a Baker but you have turned into a Grill Master...

Many people are Identifying as Christians, but because of the Distractions & Stumbling's in their lives they have become someone else.

The Stumbling's & Distractions of Life can lead us astray...

Theologian Guzik says this about Stumbling:

"This ancient Greek word Stumble does not imply a fatal fall, but something that trips us up and hinders our Spiritual progress. We all stumble, and James includes himself. Yet he did not excuse his or our stumbling. We all stumble, but we should press on to a better walk with the Lord, marked by less stumbling."

Brace yourselves... Here comes a Power Punch from James:

"We all stumble in many ways..." **Read James 3:3-6**

Paul compares the Bit of a Horse & Rudder of a Ship to our Tongues...

Such a Small Piece... But has so much Power...

Look at this Comparison to get an Idea:

Horse/ Bit/ Full Horse = 1800 lbs

Rudder/ Large Ship= 180,000-280,000 Gross Tons

Do you suppose James got some of his thoughts from Jesus or Solomon

Here's One Thing Jesus said about our Words:

Matthew 12:34b-35 For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things

out of the evil stored up in him.

Here's what the Wisdom of Solomon said:

Proverbs 18:21 The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Here is the Key Phrase for our James Challenge: Words Carry Life or Death

Think about this: Take Note

Children, Teenagers, Adults, Coworkers, Friends, & Family Members all listen to the Sounds of your Christianity~ PB

Read James 3:9-17

Some of you have Damaged (Wounded) others by your words OR you have been Damaged

As I said at the beginning... Let us sing this old hymn as a cry to our Lord for healing and restoration.

"I surrender all" <https://youtu.be/SW8EA7DEQ2M?si=71mkET5UIAsGhBcO>

Week 2 James Challenge

Opening Monologue

Welcome to Week 2 of our James Challenge. Don't worry if you missed week One, you can still do the challenge. Be sure to get the Challenge Sheets at AVC... or if needed by Email; please contact the AVC Office. Also, there is a YouTube Video (Almont Vineyard Church) that gives a detailed description of how to do the challenge. If in doubt... check it out!

The Book of James can be labeled the proverbs of the New Testament.

At times we see James hop from topic to topic with a power punch. James doesn't sugar coat anything... as he challenges our "faith into action."

The Second Chapter can be divided into two sections as described in this week's sermon. "Don't show favoritism", and our "Faith Calls us to Action."

In James 2:1-12, James mixes the word "favoritism" into multiple categories. Discrimination, judgment, and evil thoughts... that's an in your face approach, isn't it? But let's face it, we have all been guilty of all of these things. The real issue and challenge from James is... are you still doing this?

We should not be looking at people's outward appearances and showing them favor or casting judgement. We may not like what they wear, what they look like, or where they live; but these play no eternal significance in God's Kingdom. We talk much more about this in the sermon.

In the second section of Chapter 2 James turns his attention to our faith. I quote, "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." (2:17) We should know that James is NOT talking about working our way into heaven. Rather, because we have a deep faith in Christ, our lives should reflect this relationship. Jesus says we will be able to recognize people by the fruit they produce. (MT. 7:20)

Unfortunately, our faith can get plagued with life's burdens and difficulties. So, we must be aware of where our priorities are and who we are really serving.

"Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is a God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder." (2:18-19)

Keep pressing into the James Challenge. Our goal is to be challenged and grow our faith in Christ- deeper roots- more growth- bigger spiritual muscles:)

Blessings in Christ Jesus!
Rev. Brad Standfest

To Listen to this week's Sermon: "James Challenge Series Week 2." Go to the Sermon tab here in our APP or use the links to our website or YouTube Channel where you can also listen to our Sermons:

Web: <https://www.almontvineyardchurch.org/media>

You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/@almontvineyardchurch>

Key Sermon Text

James Chapter 2

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+2&version=NIV>

James Challenge Introduction

The Purpose:

The goal to this challenge is to draw families and individuals closer to Jesus Christ. I am hoping that this challenge will spark devotional time in your homes if you do not already do them. I am praying that you will all see that putting Gods word into action will bring blessings on your life. His word does not return back "void" (Isa. 55:11). I am praying that this Challenge will bring revival to your personal walk with Jesus and your families. In the end, it is not about the prizes that can be won, rather lives getting closer to our Savior- that's the real prize!

The Challenge:

I welcome you or your family/team to enter into the James Challenge. This challenge will go on for 6 weeks and can be played individually **or** as a family/team. **(Not both)** You can do both, and that would be great; but you can only submit **one challenge sheet per household** to be entered into the Grand Prize Drawings.

The Top Teams who **complete The James Challenge** with the highest number of points will be entered into a grand prize drawing that will take place at the end of The Challenge. All work must be **submitted by March 17, 2024**. The AVC will provide you with

envelopes to return all of your team(s) work. **Please make sure to put your team's name on the outside of the envelope. - Don't forget this!!**

Each week you will receive a new challenge sheet located in the Foyer. If you miss a week, please contact the Church Office to receive the week you missed. The challenge sheet will explain what you need to do and will also explain Make up points. The sermons will surround the study, so we all get a double portion of God's word. Also, in each sermon you will have a **keyword or phrase** which will be recorded on each week's challenge sheet, so you must listen, or watch live to the sermons to obtain the keyword point(s).

The Top prizes are:

- Two- One Night Stay at Best Western (Lapeer) & \$40 to Applebee's
- Two- \$100 Axecadia/Arcade & \$30 Blend Yogurt
- One- \$80 Emagine Theatre
- One- \$50 Dinner at Blind Fish (Lapeer)
- One- \$150 Dave & Busters

Digging Deeper Commentary: James 2

DO NOT FAVOR THE RICH / 2:1-13

2:1 My brothers. The readers were members of the church and his dear brothers in the Christian faith. James addresses his brothers because what he is explaining is a family issue. Among believers in Christ there exists a common accountability to God's Word. Whenever we remind one another of something Jesus taught, it must be done in such a way that we remember we are also required to obey. Biblical truth applies to all of us. By saying "my brothers," James emphasizes the togetherness of real obedience to Christ.

As believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. James appeals to a single fact that binds these people together—they are all believers. His reference is not to common human values or general goodwill, but rather to the strongest bond that believers claim. The family relationship he is describing is limited to those who believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

Early Christians developed descriptions for Jesus that expressed the depth of their trust in him. They could be called reflective names, since they resulted from reflections on Jesus. Paul gives us a number of his reflective names for Jesus:

- his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:9)
- Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24)
- the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15)
- the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead (Colossians 1:18)
- our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13)

Some of these became significant as titles for Christ. This exercise of designing personal descriptions of Christ can be a beneficial discipline for a Christian. It helps us focus on what Christ means to us. For example, each of the terms in James's title conveys an aspect of his understanding of Christ's unique role:

- The one in whom we believe is **ours**. There is personal ownership and relationship. A significant line has been crossed when a person can say, not only "Jesus is Lord," but also "Jesus is my Lord." And a believer ought always to seek fellowship with others so they can say together, "Jesus is our Lord."
- The one in whom we believe is **glorious**. The word relates to the impression Christ made on people when they realized who he was. John made Christ's glory the most convincing aspect of his incarnation: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14 NIV). Glorious describes the divine nature of Christ, expressed even in his humanity.
- The one in whom we believe is **Lord**. The effectiveness of seeing ourselves as servants depends on who we see as master. This Greek word (kurios) for "master" or "owner" came to be used frequently to refer to God. Jesus specifically claimed the title (Matthew 7:21-22; Mark 5:19; Luke 19:30-31; John 13:13-14). In the New Testament church, "Lord" rapidly came to refer to Jesus in his role as Master of

persons and creation. It is a term believers use to express their submission to Christ.

- The one in whom we believe is **Jesus**. Mary (Luke 1:26–33) and Joseph (Matthew 1:18–21) were each told to give the unique child born of a virgin the name Jesus. In each case, the reason given related to a different aspect of his purpose in coming to earth. Mary was told, Jesus “will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:32 NRSV) while Joseph was told, “he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21 NRSV). The name Jesus means “Yahweh saves” or “Yahweh the Savior.” No other name stands so clearly for Christ’s dual nature as the God-man. Jesus often called himself Son of Man while at the same time claiming God was his father. When we read that Christ promises we can “ask ... anything in my name” (John 14:14), we shouldn’t be surprised at the reverence with which this name is said by believers.

- The one in whom we believe is **Christ**. Christos was the Greek word used to translate the word messiah (anointed one) from Hebrew. In the early church Christ rapidly became as much a name as a title for Jesus—he was the promised Savior. At the time John wrote his Gospel (c. A.D. 85), he felt it necessary to translate Messias (a transliteration from Hebrew into Greek) as Christos (see John 1:41; 4:25), for this term was more familiar to the Gentiles.

Don’t show favoritism. Another translation would be “Stop showing favoritism.” The construction of the Greek shows that James was forbidding a practice already in progress. This phrase has also been translated, “My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?” (NRSV). The believers receiving this letter were already guilty of practicing discrimination. The believers apparently were judging people based only on externals—physical appearance, status, wealth, power; as a result, they were pandering to and being unduly influenced by people who represented these positions of prestige.

In general, social distinctions did not exist in the early church. Masters sat beside their slaves during worship; sometimes a slave was the leader of the assembly. But from its beginnings, the church had many

poor, outcasts, and those of little class or influence. So when a rich person was converted, the church members needed to guard against making more of a fuss over him or her than they would at the conversion of another poor person.

Upon what grounds did James make this command? Because impartiality is an attribute of God (Deuteronomy 10:17; Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Galatians 2:6; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25); impartiality was an attitude Jesus practiced (Matthew 22:16; Mark 12:14; Luke 20:21); Scripture had warned against favoritism (Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 1:17; Psalm 82:2; Proverbs 18:5). James emphasized two clear points:

1. Shunning the poor contrasts with God's attitude because he chose the poor to be rich in faith (2:5).
2. Favoritism goes against God's royal law to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (2:8). Showing favoritism based on external considerations is inconsistent with faith in Christ, who breaks down the barriers of race, class, gender, and religion (Colossians 3:11).

James's command remains important for churches today. Often we treat a well-dressed, impressive-looking person better than someone who looks poor. We do this because we would rather identify with successful people than with apparent failures. The irony, as James reminds us, is that the supposed winners may have gained their impressive life-style at our expense. Our churches should show no partiality with regard to people's outward appearance, wealth, or power. The law of love must rule all our attitudes toward others. Too often preferential treatment is given to the rich or powerful when offices for the church need to be filled. Too often, a church brushes aside the suggestions of its more humble or poorer members in favor of the ideas of the wealthy. Such discrimination has no place in our churches.

2:2 If a person ... comes into your assembly. James launches into a vivid hypothetical case study. Two men were entering a meeting. We can assume that these men were both visiting, since they are described only by appearance. The meeting was either a gathering of Jewish Christians or a meeting of the Jewish synagogue. The Greek word sunagoge (meeting or assembly) generally refers to an assembly

of people meeting for various purposes. In some instances the meeting was for legal purposes—in most instances, for worship. At the time James was writing, many Jewish Christians still worshiped on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, and they still called their assembly a “synagogue.”

With gold rings, in fine apparel. One man was rich, as noted by his clothing and jewelry. A ring signified upper class and power. Rings were the same kind of visible status symbols that cars function as today.

And a poor man in filthy clothes. This poor man was dressed in filthy rags; he was most likely a beggar. James makes it very clear that the action about to be taken, if not guarded against, will be based entirely on the appearance of these two guests. The motive or attitude of the visitors does not come into question in this case study. Neither we nor the church members can know at first glance why these two people decided to come to the meeting.

Depending on the size of a church, the arrival of a visitor can have an electric effect. Sometimes panic sets in. The rush to welcome can be overwhelming to the newcomer. But whether the greeting is reserved or enthusiastic, what is most clearly communicated is its genuineness. Individual Christians can have a significant ministry in looking for newcomers of any kind in church and making them feel welcome. The decision to follow Christ has often been made easier by a warm and honest welcome at the door of a church.

2:3 You pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes. The rich man was shown special attention—the Greek word meaning “to look with favor on” a person. The believers were impressed by him. He became the object of special service and deference.

And say to him, “You sit here in a good place.” The rich man was singled out and escorted to a comfortable and favored seat.

Say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit here at my footstool.” The poor man gets standing room only, or a seat on the floor. It’s as if he is being told to stay apart from his “betters” by allowing them the seats, while he is given neither dignity or comfort.

The Jews had a practice of seating the most important people nearest the sacred scrolls. Other people would be seated in the back. This unhealthy practice was still carried on by some Christians. Those with the most important jobs or roles would get preferred seating. James speaks out against this. It is our relationship with Christ that gives us dignity, not our profession or possessions.

The Christian answer is not reverse discrimination—treating the poor like royalty and the rich like scum. Our goal is to treat people without consideration for their status. No one is unworthy to be seated.

Once, as Jesus observed the behavior of people arriving for an important social event, he commented on the tendency to jostle for the places of honor (Luke 14:7–11). His instruction was, “But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests” (Luke 14:10 NIV). Jesus was warning against self-exaltation. Later, Jesus emphasized the danger of misreading outward evidence when he described how he appears to the world: “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in” (Matthew 25:35 NIV). The point is that favoritism is not just mistreating people or breaking a standard of conduct—it is, in fact, treating Jesus as though he had little value.

When we gather for worship, we ought to be conscious that even if we are familiar with everyone in the room, Christ is present. If there are two or three of us gathered in his name, he is there (Matthew 18:20). Before we worship, we ought to recognize Christ’s presence. Can we not assume that he follows his own advice? When Jesus meets with us, does he assume a place of honor or jostle for our attention? Or should we imagine that Jesus takes the place of deepest humility among us and waits to be recognized as Lord? When we neglect or ignore the poor or powerless, we also ignore Christ.

2:4 Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? James expected his readers to answer “yes” to his question. He condemned their behavior because Christ had made them all one. Paul later wrote, “There is no

longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28 NRSV). These believers were ignoring that fact. They were forced to admit that they were discriminating against the poor person and becoming unjust judges with evil thoughts, making their judgments by worldly standards. As Christians they professed obedience to Christ, but their conduct defied him. Leviticus 19:15 firmly states: “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.” In addition, they broke the commandment of Jesus, who said, “Judge not that you be not judged” (Matthew 7:1).

Why is it wrong to judge a person by his or her economic status? Wealth may indicate intelligence, wise decisions, and hard work. On the other hand, it may mean only that a person had the good fortune of being born into a wealthy family. Or it can even be a sign of greed, dishonesty, and selfishness. When we honor someone just because he or she dresses well, we make appearance more important than character. Sometimes we do this because:

- Poverty makes us uncomfortable, and we don’t want to face our responsibilities to those who have less than we do.
- We too want to be wealthy, and we hope to use the rich person as a means to that end.
- We want the rich person to join our church and help support it financially.

All these motives are selfish. They may appear nothing more than practical considerations, but James calls them evil.

Another false assumption that sometimes influences our treatment of the rich is our misunderstanding of God’s relationship to wealth. It is deceptively easy to believe riches are a sign of God’s blessing and approval. But God does not promise us earthly rewards or riches; in fact, Christ calls us to be ready to suffer for him and give up everything in order to hold on to eternal life (Matthew 6:19–21; 19:28–30; Luke 12:14–34; 1 Timothy 6:17–19). We will have untold riches in eternity if we are faithful in our present life (Luke 6:35; John 12:23–25; Galatians 6:7–10; Titus 3:4–8).

2:5 Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith. Jesus’ first followers were common people. Christianity has a

special message for the poor. Jesus often spoke of his mission to the poor: “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20 NKJV; see also Matthew 11:5; Luke 4:18). In a social system that gave the poor very little, Jesus’ message to them was certainly good news.

Though most agree that James expected this rhetorical question to be answered “yes,” some would argue that the biblical references to poor usually have to do with spiritual poverty. This is especially the case anytime the Bible seems to be saying that it might be an advantage to be poor. Their basis is the first Beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3 NKJV). It is fundamentally important for us to acknowledge our spiritual poverty before God. But here James is simply making the observation, and expecting us to agree, that the poor in spirit are most often the poor in material wealth.

And to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? This does not mean that rich people are doomed and that poor people are automatically saved. Christianity offered much to the poor—the common people clamored to follow Jesus. But it demanded much of the rich. After speaking with Jesus, the rich young man “went away sad, because he had great wealth” (Matthew 19:22 NIV). The poverty of poor believers (those who love him) is only poverty in the eyes of the world, but they are rich in faith and will inherit the kingdom. The rich are not excluded from the kingdom; just as the poor are not “chosen” due to any merit of poverty. However, great riches can stand in the way of a person recognizing his or her need for God (Mark 10:23; Luke 12:34). The poor, on the other hand, have nothing about which they can boast before God (1 Corinthians 1:29). To continue to show favoritism to those who are only rich by the world’s standards is not only wrong, but shortsighted.

Rich or poor, believers must obey God and love him. This could be called the heart of James’s message. If we really love God, both our faith in him and our obedience to him will be right. We will not belittle anyone with whom we share a common inheritance.

2:6 But you have insulted the poor. The Greek word for insulted is

etimasate, which means “dishonored” (see NRSV; NKJV). James’s readers had dishonored the poor because they did not treat them as God treats them. The vivid imagery of Jesus’ parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:23–35) and his comment concerning the anointing given to him by the sinful woman (Luke 7:36–50) come to mind as the poor are being ignored or ushered to humble seats. Jesus’ summary was, “Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little” (Luke 7:47 NIV). None of us have been forgiven little. But we betray an attitude of pride when we treat each other without honor.

James showed how evil their actions were by asking three questions.

First, **Is it not the rich who are exploiting you?** In this society, the rich oppressed the poor. To exploit means to use someone for profit—to take advantage of someone and to use him or her selfishly for one’s own purposes. As we are reading these questions, we must remember James’s original case study (2:2–4). Both the rich person and the poor person in mind here are probably visitors to the church who are unbelievers. At best they are people whose faith is not yet known. James’s questions reveal his underlying observation that the believers are treating with great honor those they ought to approach with some reserve (the rich) because there is a high probability that they are not believers, while at the same time dishonoring those whom they ought to approach respectfully because, quite possibly, they are dealing with a brother or sister who is a believer, or who is quite likely to become one.

The rich exploiting the poor was not a new development; there are references to this throughout the Old Testament (Jeremiah 7:6; 22:3; Ezekiel 18:7; Amos 4:1; 8:4; Malachi 3:5). If a poor person needed a loan, the rich person might offer it, but often at exorbitant interest (even though charging interest to a fellow Israelite was forbidden by God’s law—see Exodus 22:25). In first-century Palestine, landowners and merchants often accumulated wealth and power, forcing the poor people from the land and causing them to become even poorer.

Second, **Is it not they who drag you into court?** The rich typically showed no mercy or concern for the poor. They would take the poor to court, most likely for not repaying a debt. Wealthy moneylenders often took advantage of the poor. A creditor, if he met a debtor on the

street, could literally grab him and drag him into court. James can ask this question because he takes it for granted that his readers would understand that believers are not to be taking legal action against each other. What an amazingly contemporary issue! What statement are we making to the world when it sees, within the church, believers habitually taking each other to court? The Bible does not deny that rightful grievances occur between people. But the options for settlement are broader and healthier. They include forgiveness, reconciliation, restitution—all handled among believers themselves (see, for example, Matthew 5:23–26; 1 Corinthians 6:1–8).

2:8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well. Love is the source from which our attitudes toward others should flow. This royal law is a law from the king himself, in this case, the King of kings (see Matthew 22:37–40). This law is God’s will for his followers, for he said, “Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12). In the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18; Proverbs 14:21), one’s neighbor would be a fellow Israelite; but Jesus’ application included everyone with whom we might come into contact—even foreigners (Luke 10:25–37) and enemies (Matthew 5:44). References by Jesus to Leviticus 19:18 are recorded six times in the Gospels, “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord” (NIV, see Matthew 5:43; 7:12; 19:19; 22:37–40; Luke 6:31; 10:26–28). James was calling his readers to obey the royal law of love that would forbid them to discriminate against anyone who entered their fellowship.

We are to show favor to everyone, whether the person is rich or poor. We are to be kind, overlooking other superficial trappings. Our attitudes and actions toward others should be guided by love. When asked what was the greatest commandment, Jesus replied, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ... And ... ‘love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (Matthew 22:37–39 NRSV).

2:9 But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. James does not trivialize their actions. Showing favoritism is not a minor transgression or an

unfortunate oversight; according to James it is sin, and those engaged in this action are lawbreakers. 1 John 3:4 says, “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness” (NIV).

2:10 For whoever shall keep the whole law and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. Even our attitudes and motives come under the law’s jurisdiction. As Jesus explained in his Sermon on the Mount, “Anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.... Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:22, 28 NIV). The attitude of favoritism was no different, so James points out to his readers that by their actions toward these wealthy visitors, they were actually breaking all of God’s law.

Jesus said: “Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19 NIV). The believers had not made the connection between God’s command to love their neighbor and their discrimination against the poor.

James’s point here is not that showing favoritism is as “bad” as murder, but that no matter what commandment someone breaks, that person is guilty of an offense against God. He or she has violated the will of God. We cannot excuse the sin of favoritism by pointing to the rest of the good we do. Sin is not simply balanced against good—it must be confessed and forgiven.

So why is a person who commits one sin guilty of breaking them all? James is not attempting to discuss greater or lesser sins. He is pointing to the overall effect of any sin on our relationship with God. Where we tend to see God’s rules like a fabric, James sees glass. If we throw a small or large stone at the fabric, the hole will be similar in shape and size to the rock thrown. If we throw a stone at the glass, however, any sized stone will shatter the glass. This does not mean that breaking any commandment is just as bad as breaking any other (for example, stealing bread instead of murdering a person). It does mean that deliberately breaking any commandment shows our attitude toward God’s direction for our life.

Christians must not use this verse to justify sinning. We dare not say: “Because I can’t keep every demand of God, why even try?” James

reminds us that if we've broken just one law, we are sinners. We can't decide to keep part of God's law and ignore the rest. We can't break the law a little bit. If we have broken it at all, we need Christ's payment for our sin. We must measure ourselves, not anyone else, against God's standards. Once we have asked for forgiveness for our sins, we must renew our efforts to put our faith into practice each day.

2:11 For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. Here James illustrates his point that the law is a unit, and to break one law is to become guilty of the entire law. Jewish theologians of the day would have disagreed with James, saying some laws were “light” and some “heavy,” meaning that breaking some was not as serious as breaking others. It might seem that stumbling on the act of showing favoritism is breaking one of those “least commandments,” not nearly as bad as committing adultery or murdering. But God's law was not written with “heavy” and “light” commands so that obedience to some outweighed obedience to others. Believers are called to consistent obedience.

From our perspective, there do seem to be degrees of sin. The immediate effects of some sins seem much more destructive and horrible than others. This is true. What we must remember, however, is God's perspective. He not only sees immediate effects, but he also sees hidden and long-term effects. And the long-term effect of all sin is rebellion against God. We make a serious error when we get caught up in discussing possible degrees of sin. It is as if we persist in asking God the question, “How badly must I sin before the law is broken?” Whereas the question we ought to be asking is, “Have I grasped the truth that any sin, no matter how insignificant it may seem to me, shatters the law?”

By the time Nathan confronted David about his relationship with Bathsheba, David had managed to break most of the commandments (see 2 Samuel 11:1-12:23). Among other things, David had disobeyed God, coveted another man's wife, stolen her, plotted the man's murder, and lied repeatedly. Psalm 51 records David's repentant

desire for forgiveness: “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge” (Psalm 51:4 NIV). Before God, self-justification is always a wasted effort. As lawbreakers we should come in confession and humility, placing ourselves under God’s mercy and grace.

2:13 Because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy is precisely what the believers were not showing when they insulted poor people. If they continued to discriminate, they would be in danger of facing their own judgment without mercy. This is an excellent statement of New Testament ethics: What we do to others we actually do to God, and he returns it upon our heads.

The relationship between mercy and concern for the poor is made clear in Zechariah 7:9–10: “This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other’ ” (NIV, see also Isaiah 58:7–9).

We must be merciful because God is merciful:

- “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6 NIV).
- “Because the LORD your God is a merciful God” (Deuteronomy 4:31 NRSV).
- “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.... As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him” (Psalm 103:8, 13 NIV).

But Jesus made it clear that God will show mercy only to those who do likewise (see Matthew 5:7; 6:14–15; 12:7; 18:21–35; 25:31–46; Mark 11:25). We stand before God in need of his mercy. We can’t earn forgiveness by forgiving others. But when we withhold forgiveness from others after having received it ourselves, we show that we don’t understand or appreciate God’s mercy toward us.

Mercy triumphs over judgment! Not showing mercy places us only under the judgment of God, but showing mercy places us under

God's mercy as well as his judgment. We will always deserve God's judgment because we can never adequately obey God's royal law. But our merciful actions are evidence of our relationship with Christ. And it is that relationship that vindicates us. We stand before God, from whom we know we deserve judgment and upon whom we are depending for mercy. Because of God's character, his mercy triumphs over judgment. (Bruce B. Barton, David Veerman, and Neil S. Wilson, James, Life Application Bible Commentary)

FAITH RESULTS IN GOOD WORKS / 2:14-26

The remainder of chapter 2 is often cited to show that the teachings of James and Paul were completely contradictory.

- James: "Faith without works is dead." (2:26 NKJV)
- Paul: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (Romans 3:28 NIV); "A person is justified not by the works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ." (Galatians 2:16 NRSV)

However, careful reading and understanding of both Paul and James will show that instead of contradicting, their writings really complement each other.

First, consider the writers' viewpoints in light of the situations they were addressing in their letters. They were confronting different issues. Paul was responding to the Judaizers, who said works—such as circumcision and observing Jewish ceremonial laws—were necessary for salvation. James was responding to those who believed that mere intellectual agreement was enough to obtain salvation.

Second, there is a difference in the time frame in the believer's life as they make their statements. Paul began at the very beginning—at conversion. No one can ever earn God's forgiveness and salvation. We can only accept it. James spoke to the professing believer, one who has already accepted that forgiveness and salvation, explaining that the person must live a new life. No one can be saved by works; no one can be saved without producing works. We are not saved by good works, but for good works. James's point was not that works must be added to faith, but that genuine faith includes works.

THREE PRINCIPLES OF FAITH

In chapter 2, James argues against favoritism and for the necessity of good deeds. He presents three principles of faith:

- 1. Commitment** is an essential part of faith. You cannot be a Christian simply by affirming the right doctrines, agreeing with the biblical facts, or even giving mental assent to the gospel (2:19). You must commit your mind and heart to Christ.
- 2. Right actions** are the natural by-products of true faith. A genuine Christian will have a changed life (2:18). The gospel is a seed that will eventually prove its vitality by its fruit.
- 3. Faith without good works** doesn't do anyone any good—it is useless and perhaps lifeless (2:14-17). If a planted seed never sends up a shoot and never ripens, how can someone claim it took root?

The demonstration of a living faith in loving action [2:14-26]

1. The principle established: true faith will be accompanied by action (14)

- **What does it profit, my brethren:** James thought it impossible that someone could genuinely have saving faith with no works. But someone could say **he has faith**, but fail to show good works. So, the question is valid: Can that kind of faith save him?

“The apostle had just before declared, that they who are unmerciful to men shall find God severe to themselves, and have judgment without mercy: but hypocritical professors boasted of their faith as sufficient to secure them against that judgment, though they neglected the practice of holiness and righteousness.” (Poole)

- **Someone says he has faith but does not have works:** James wrote to Christians from a Jewish background that discovered the glory of salvation by faith. They knew the exhilaration of freedom from works-righteousness. But they then went to the other extreme of thinking that works didn't matter at all.

- **Can faith save him?** James did not contradict the Apostle Paul,

who insisted that we are saved not of works (Ephesians 2:9). James merely clarifies for us the kind of faith that saves. We are saved by grace through faith, not by works; but saving faith will have works that accompany it. As a saying goes: faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone; it has good works with it.

o Paul also understood the necessity of works in proving the character of our faith. He wrote: For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10). He also wrote: This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. (Titus 3:8)

• **Can faith save him?** “That is, his profession of faith; for it is not said that he has faith, but that he says, I have faith.” (Clarke)

2. An example of dead faith (15-17)

• **If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food:**

To fail in the most simple good work towards a brother or sister in need demonstrates that one does not have a living faith, and we can only be saved by a living faith in Jesus.

o “Under these two of nakedness and hunger, he comprehends all the calamities of human life, which may be relieved by the help of others; as food and raiment contain all the ordinary supports and comforts of life, Genesis 28:20; Matthew 6:25; 1 Timothy 6:8.” (Poole)

• **Be warmed and filled:** To say this means you know that the person in front of you needs clothing and food. You know their need well, but offer nothing to help them except a few religious words.

o “How many have we now-a-days that will be but as friends at a sneeze! The most you can get out of these benefactors is, ‘God bless you, Christ help you.’ ” (Trapp)

• **What does it profit?** Real faith, and the works that accompany it, are not made up of only spiritual things, but also of a concern for the most basic needs—such as the need for comfort, covering, and food. When needs arise, we should sometimes pray less, and simply do

more to help the person in need. We can sometimes pray as a substitute for action.

o “Your pretending to have faith, while you have no works of charity or mercy, is utterly vain: for as faith, which is a principle in the mind, cannot be discerned but by the effects, that is, good works; he who has no good works has, presumptively, no faith.” (Clarke)

• **Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead:**

This is the first time James speaks of a dead faith. Faith alone saves us, but it must be a living faith. We can tell if faith is alive by seeing if it is accompanied by works, and if it does not have works, it is dead.

A living faith is simply real faith. If we really believe something we will follow through and act upon it. If we really put our trust and faith on Jesus, we will care for the naked and destitute as He told us to do.

“He doth not say, faith is dead without works, lest it should be thought that works were the cause of the life of faith; but faith without works is dead; implying, that works are the effects and signs of the life of faith.” (Poole)

What are some marks of saving faith?

- It is faith that looks not to self, but to Jesus Christ.
- It is faith that agrees with God’s word, both inwardly and with words.
- It is faith that in itself is not a work that deserves reward from God; in this sense it is simply refusing to think God is a liar, and that in itself is not a good work, simply the absence of a sinful work.
- It is faith grounded in what Jesus did on the cross and by the empty tomb.
- It is faith that will naturally be expressed in repentance and good works.
- It is faith that may sometimes doubt; yet the doubts are not bigger than the faith nor are they more permanent than the faith. This faith can say, “Lord I believe; help my unbelief.”
- It is faith that wants others to come to the same faith.
- It is faith that says more than “Lord, Lord” as in Matthew 7:21–23.
- It is faith that not only hears the word of God but does it, as in Matthew 7:24–27.

3. A living faith cannot be separated from works (18-19)

- **You have faith, and I have works:** Some might try to say that some have the “gift” of works and others have the “gift” of faith. “It’s fine for you to have your gift of works and that you care for the needy. But that isn’t my gift.” James will not allow this kind of thinking. Real faith will be demonstrated by works.

- **Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works:** The appeal of James is clear and logical. We can’t “see” someone’s faith, but we can see their works. You can’t see faith without works, but you can demonstrate the reality of faith by works.

- **You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe; and tremble!** The fallacy of faith without works is demonstrated by the demons, which have a “dead” faith in God. The demons believe in the sense that they acknowledge that God exists. But this kind of faith does nothing for the demons, because it isn’t real faith, and that is proved by the fact that it doesn’t have works along with it.

4. Abraham as an example of living faith (20-24)

- **Do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?** James will now use the Old Testament to demonstrate what he has already said about the character of a living faith, showing that a faith that is not accompanied with works is a dead faith that cannot save.

- **Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?** Abraham was justified by faith long before he offered Isaac (Genesis 15:6). But his obedience in offering Isaac demonstrated that he really did trust God.

- James properly estimates that Abraham actually did offer **Isaac his son on the altar**, even though the angel stopped him from actually killing his son. Yet he had **offered Isaac his son** in his firm resolution and intentions and would have surely completed the act had not God

stopped him. Abraham was so complete in his obedience that he counted Isaac as dead and set him **on the altar**.

- **Faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect:** Faith and works cooperated perfectly together in Abraham. If he never had believed God, he could have never done the good work of obedience when asked to offer Isaac. As well, his faith was proven true—was completed, was made perfect—by his obedient works.

- “Here is a proof that faith cannot exist without being active in works of righteousness. His faith in God would have been of no avail to him, had it not been manifested by works.” (Clarke)

- **You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only:** The faith only that will not justify a man is a faith that is without works, a dead faith. But true faith, living faith, shown to be true by good works, will alone justify.

-“It is faith that justifieth the man; but they are works that justify faith to be right and real, saving and justifying.” (Trapp)

-Works must accompany a genuine faith, because genuine faith is always connected with regeneration—being born again, becoming a new creation in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17). If there is no evidence of a new life, then there was no genuine, saving faith.

-As Charles Spurgeon is reported to have said: “The grace that does not change my life will not save my soul.”

5. Rahab as an example of living faith (25-26)

- **Rahab the harlot:** Significantly, James used two examples of a living faith—Abraham (the father of the Jews) and Rahab (a Gentile). James perhaps is subtly rebuking the partiality that may have developed on the part of Jewish Christians against the Gentile believers starting to come into the church.

- **Was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works:** Rahab demonstrated her trust in the God of Israel by hiding the spies and

seeking salvation from their God (Joshua 2:8-13). Her faith was shown to be living faith because it did something. Her belief in the God of Israel would not have saved her if she had not done something with that faith.

-The lesson from Abraham is clear: if we believe in God, we will do what He tells us to do. The lesson from Rahab is also clear: if we believe in God, we will help His people, even when it costs us something.

-“He designedly put together two persons so different in their character, in order more clearly to shew, that no one, whatever may have been his or her condition, nation, or class in society, has ever been counted righteous without good works.” (Calvin, cited in Hiebert)

• **For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also:** As much as you can have a body with no life (a corpse), so you can have a faith with no life—and faith without works is a dead faith, unable to save.

-“Therefore, if no deeds are forthcoming, it is proof that the professed faith is dead. Notice that James does not deny that it is faith. He simply indicates that it is not the right kind of faith. It is not living faith, nor can it save.” (Burdick)

-We can think of an apple tree; where is the life of the tree? It is in the root, and underneath the bark of the tree in the trunk. The life is not in the apples, the fruit that is displayed in season; but if the tree is alive it will produce apples in season.

-“Man is not justified by faith alone, that is, by a bare and empty knowledge of God; he is justified by works, that is, his righteousness is known and proved by its fruits.” (Calvin)

Resources: Rev. Brad Standfest, David Guzik, James, David Guzik’s Commentaries on the Bible, Bruce B. Barton, David Veerman, and Neil S. Wilson, James, Life Application Bible Commentary

Sermon Notes:

Many Scholars agree that the Book of James was written between 44-48 AD...

This means it was written 10-15 years after Jesus' Death and Resurrection... (That's Remarkable—Archeology has led to this proof)

Honestly... If you deny the Life of Jesus Christ, you also must dismiss Ancient History and people like Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the Great and so on...

The Reality Is... Jesus' Life & Ministry are a Historical Fact, and his brother James is an eyewitness to what he saw...

We are in the 2nd Chapter of James... Your Challenge Sheets will reflect this...

James 2 can be broken down into 2 Slices... Here they are:

Part 1: Partiality and Discrimination in the family of God (2:1-13)

Part 2: The Demonstration of a Living Faith in Loving Action (2:14-26)

Read James 2:1

James uses Strong Words to Describe Christ here... Jews would have understood this as the Shekinah Glory of God...

Shekinah Meaning

- A Manifestation of God's Personal presence
- "The Christian faith is explicitly called a belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Divine Glory—a Striking Term... as the full manifestation of the divine presence and majesty of God the Father." (Moffatt)
- The Book of Hebrews describes Christ as "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." (Heb. 1:3)

Read James 2:1b-5

[Gold Rings in Roman Society]

- In Roman Society Men wore gold rings particularly on their left hand- (Hand to the Face) LOL

- They had Jewelry shops where people could rent rings...

Whether we want to admit it or not... America is set up to show Favoritism... Or Better yet Reciprocity...

Reciprocity is: You scratch my back and I'll take care of you... Back door Deals... It's the backbone of Washington DC- Bought & Paid for...

James is saying: Don't do that... Don't play Favorites... Don't Discriminate... Don't Judge people because they wear Baseball caps in church... or because someone has a Tattoo

Pastors ... don't Wine & Dine your top Tithers...

“For the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7)

That's some Heavy Stuff... But it gets Better...

Faith into Action... Read James 2:14-17

[Father Analogy]

- **Father with kids & wife**
- **If I don't spend time with Children: Take to School, Go to Games to Cheer them on , or Love my Wife**

What kind of Father am I... I'm not... I'm a Provider not a Real Father

Read James 2:18-19

- **Faith has to have Action**
- **Jesus said: “A Christian will be recognized by their fruit.” Mt. 7:20**

James 2:19... Is what I call the Icing on the Cake

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

Listen to this: If you think that because you believe in God... or you go to this Church or that Church. Maybe you say I'm a Jew or I'm a Christian... I even give money. That's all good on the surface but that doesn't get you a free ticket into heaven...

We have a lot of Believers in God... And a lot of Fans...

Romans 10:8-11: But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

Week One James Challenge

Opening Monologue

Welcome to our New Series Called the James Challenge!

Details about the James Challenge and how it works are found further down under this Opening Monologue. Be sure to view the YOUTUBE Video if needed, which explains the James Challenge in detail and answers many questions.

As you will learn in the Sermon and in the App Commentary; James was Jesus' brother. This power packed book draws many connotations from the Gospels of Christ. As you will read and study... James in 5 short chapters covers the heartbeat of the Good News. I want to encourage you to dive into this marvelous book and learn, grow, and

be challenged by his powerful and anointed words.

James wastes no words or time in the first chapter and says: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:2-4) We dive deeper into this text in this week’s Sermon!

I don’t know anyone who is joyous when they are faced with trials. In fact, that’s not James’s intention at all. Many of life’s trials are very painful (literally) when we go through them. Let me be clear... James is not saying trials are joyous. He makes this clear in the rest of his context and communication.

“Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (v. 4) Persevering means we are building endurance. Endurance is the main ingredient in running this triathlon called life. So, the good result(s) from going through trials is that we build Spiritual muscles. It literally strengthens our faith. So, we can be joyful knowing God is going to make us “mature and complete.”

This week I share a real and raw trial I experienced that turned my life upside down... but in the end, it has shaped me into the man of God I am today. - Praise God! (Joyful)

The Challenge is ON... Tune in, grab your worksheets and let’s dive in!

Blessings in Christ Jesus!

Rev. Brad Standfest

**To Listen to this week’s Sermon: “James Challenge Week 1.”
Go to the Sermon tab here in our APP or use the links to our
website or YouTube Channel where you can also listen to our
Sermons:**

Web: <https://www.almontvineyardchurch.org/media>

You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/@almontvineyardchurch>

Key Sermon Text

James 1:1-15

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+1%3A1-15&version=NIV>

James Challenge Introduction

The Purpose:

The goal to this challenge is to draw families and individuals closer to Jesus Christ. I am hoping that this challenge will spark devotional time in your homes if you do not already do them. I am praying that you will all see that putting God's word into action will bring blessings on your life. His word does not return back "void" (Isa. 55:11). I am praying that this Challenge will bring revival to your personal walk with Jesus and your families. In the end, it is not about the prizes that can be won, rather lives getting closer to our Savior- that's the real prize!

The Challenge:

I welcome you or your family/team to enter into the James Challenge. This challenge will go on for 6 weeks and can be played individually **or** as a family/team. (Not both) You can do both, and that would be great; but you can only submit **one challenge per household** to be entered into the Grand Prize Drawings.

The Top Teams who **complete The James Challenge** with the highest number of points will be entered into a grand prize drawing that will take place at the end of The Challenge. All work must be submitted by **March 17, 2024**. AVC will provide you with manila envelopes (or buy your own) to return all of your work. **Please make sure to put your team's name on the outside of the envelope. - Don't forget this!!**

Each week you will receive a new challenge sheet located in the Foyer. If you miss a week, please contact the Church Office to receive the week you missed. The challenge sheet will explain what you need to do to earn make-up points for that week. The sermons will surround the study, so we all get a double portion of God's word. Also, in each sermon you will have a **Keyword or Phrase** which will be recorded on

each week's challenge sheet, so you **must listen, or watch live** to the sermons to obtain the keyword point(s).

The Top prizes are:

Two- One Night Stay at Best Western (Lapeer) & \$40 to Applebee's

Two- \$100 Axecadia/Arcade & \$30 Blend Yogurt

One- \$80 Emagine Theatre

One- \$50 Dinner at Blind Fish (Lapeer)

One- \$150 Dave & Busters

Overview of James

Faith without works cannot be called faith. It is dead, and a dead faith is worse than no faith at all. Faith must work; it must produce; it must be visible. Verbal faith is not enough; mental faith is insufficient. Faith must move into action. Throughout his epistle to Jewish believers, James integrates true faith and everyday practical experience by stressing that true faith "works." It endures trials; it obeys God's Word; it produces doers; it harbors no prejudice; it controls the tongue; it acts wisely; it provides the power to resist the devil; it waits patiently for the coming of the Lord. Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, Talk Thru the Bible

Introduction and Title

Faith without works cannot be called faith. Faith without works is dead, and a dead faith is worse than no faith at all. Faith must work; it must produce; it must be visible. Verbal faith is not enough; mental faith is insufficient. Faith must be there, but it must be more. It must inspire action. Throughout his epistle to Jewish believers, James integrates true faith and everyday practical experience by stressing that true faith must manifest itself in works of faith.

Faith endures trials. Trials come and go, but a strong faith will face them head-on and develop endurance. Faith understands temptations. It will not allow us to consent to our lust and slide into sin. Faith obeys the Word. It will not merely hear and not do. Faith produces doers. Faith harbors no prejudice. For James, faith and favoritism cannot coexist. Faith displays itself in works. Faith is more than mere words; it is more than knowledge; it is demonstrated by obedience; and it overtly responds to the promises of God. Faith controls the

tongue. This small but immensely powerful part of the body must be held in check. Faith can do it. Faith acts wisely. It gives us the ability to choose wisdom that is heavenly and to shun wisdom that is earthly. Faith produces separation from the world and submission to God. It provides us with the ability to resist the Devil and humbly to draw near to God. Finally, faith waits patiently for the coming of the Lord. Through trouble and trial it stifles complaining.

The name Jakobos (James in 1:1) is the basis for the early title Jakobou Epistole, "Epistle of James." Jakobos is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Jacob, a Jewish name common in the first century. Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, Talk Thru the Bible

Author—Four men are named James in the New Testament: (1) James, the father of Judas (not Iscariot), is mentioned twice (see Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13) as the father of one of the twelve disciples, but is otherwise completely unknown. (2) James, the son of Alphaeus (see Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13), elsewhere called James the Less (Mark 15:40), was one of the twelve disciples. Apart from being listed with the other disciples, this James is completely obscure, and it is doubtful that he is the authoritative figure behind the epistle. Some attempts have been made to identify this James with the Lord's brother (Gal. 1:19), but this view is difficult to reconcile with the gospel accounts. (3) James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John (see Matt. 4:21; 10:2; 17:1; Mark 3:17; 10:35; 13:3; Luke 9:54; Acts 1:13), was one of Jesus' intimate disciples, but his martyrdom by A.D. 44 (Acts 12:2) makes it very unlikely that he wrote this epistle. (4) James, the Lord's brother (see Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3; Gal. 1:19), was one of the "pillars" in the church in Jerusalem (see Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:18; Gal. 2:9, 12). Tradition points to this prominent figure as the author of the epistle, and this best fits the evidence of Scripture. There are several clear parallels between the language of the letter drafted under his leadership in Acts 15:23-29 and the epistle of James (e.g., the unusual word *chairein*, "greeting," is found only in Acts 15:23; 23:26; and James 1:1). The Jewish character of this epistle with its stress upon the Law, along with the evident influence by the Sermon on the Mount (e.g., 4:11-12; 5:12), complement what we know about James "the Just" from Scripture and early tradition.

It has been argued that the Greek of this epistle is too sophisticated for a Galilean such as James, but this assumes that he never had the

opportunity or aptitude to develop proficiency in Koine (“common”) Greek. As a prominent church leader, it would have been to his advantage to become fluent in the universal language of the Roman Empire.

For various reasons, some assert that James was a stepbrother of Jesus by a previous marriage of Joseph, or that the “brothers” of Jesus mentioned in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 were really His cousins. However, the most natural understanding of the gospel accounts is that James was the half brother of Jesus, being the offspring of Joseph and Mary after the birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:24–25). He apparently did not accept the claims of Jesus until the Lord appeared to him after His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7). He and his brothers were among the believers who awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). It was not long before he became an acknowledged leader of the Jerusalem church (see Acts 12:17; Gal. 2:9, 12), and he was a central figure in the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Even after Paul’s third missionary journey, James continued to observe the Mosaic Law as a testimony to other Jews (Acts 21:18–25). Early tradition stresses his Jewish piety and his role in bringing others to an understanding of Jesus as the Messiah. He suffered a violent martyr’s death not long before the fall of Jerusalem.

Digging Deeper Commentary: (James 1)

How often do we open a letter without checking to see who sent it? Ancient letter writers signed their names right at the beginning, so readers immediately knew the source. Modern readers of the New Testament, however, frequently skip over the address. It strikes us as unimportant. Our oversight is a mistake. The first verses of New Testament books often tell us the writer’s identity and how the writers perceived their roles. In James’s case, these helpful insights prepare us for the entire letter. We treat letters with more respect when we understand who sent them and why. (Bruce B. Barton, David Veerman, and Neil S. Wilson, James, Life Application Bible Commentary)

1. Joyful living requires self-control and contentment. Even in trials, joy should be our chosen response. Joy allows us to endure the test until it has accomplished its purpose. So, contentment leads to self-control,

which clears the way for further contentment. Understanding the purposes of trials and the importance of joy will require wisdom, which comes from God. Are you content?

2. Wisdom combines what we know with what we must do. God is our source of wisdom. He is willing to give complete wisdom to all those who ask him in faith. God's wisdom is not just a certain way of knowing or thinking. Like faith, it is practical and active. Have you asked for it?

3. Hypocrisy occurs whenever belief and action are separated. For the Christian, hypocrisy is unacceptable. God's wisdom leads us away from hypocrisy and toward a life of hearing and doing God's commands. Are you listening to and doing what God has said?

4. Christians must live their faith, not just talk about it. Real Christianity is ethics at the very core. Are you doing what you say you believe?

1:1 James. James is only mentioned by name a few times elsewhere in the New Testament (Matthew 13:53-55; Acts 1:12-14; 15:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; Galatians 1:19; 2:7-9). But as the leader of the Jerusalem church, he was known on a first-name basis by the rapidly expanding Christian world. By simply using his first name, James manages to convey both humility and authority as he signs his letter. He could have identified himself as "brother of Jesus" or "leader of the Jerusalem church," but the only addition to his name is the title of servant. Real authority doesn't need to promote itself. It was often said that Jesus spoke with unusual authority (Matthew 7:28-29; Mark 1:22, 27). The quality of Jesus' message had the ring of truth. James's name must have conveyed that same kind of authority. He felt no need to identify himself as Jesus' brother. It was not that role that gave James his authority anyway. His authority came from recognizing and confessing that Jesus, his brother, was also his Lord.

Servant of God. The Greek word *doulos* (slave, servant) refers to a position of complete obedience, utter humility, and unshakable loyalty. Obedience was the work, humility was the position, and loyalty was the relationship that a master expected from a slave. Many of the first followers of Christ were, in fact, slaves. But among Christians, the idea

of being a slave of Christ became not a position of humiliation, but a place of honor. There can be no greater tribute to a believer than to be known as God's obedient, humble, and loyal servant. When we struggle to display any one of those qualities, we will tend to be weak in the others also. If Jesus actually is our Lord, our actions must be obedient to him, our attitude must be humble before him, and our life must be loyal to him.

Lord Jesus Christ. The three names that make up this title refer to the unique character of Jesus. He is the heavenly, exalted **Lord** who will one day return in glory to this world. He is **Jesus**, God come to earth as a human being. He is **Christ**, the anointed one who fulfilled God's purposes by dying for us.

Jesus As Lord

The identification of Jesus Christ as Lord was a radical statement in James's time. To the Jews it was blasphemous because no human could be called "Lord," and to the Romans it was treason against the authority of the emperor. To everyone who claimed it, it was a sign of giving Christ control over life, career, and ultimate destiny. Thousands of believers eventually lost their lives in horrible ways because they would not take back their statement: "Jesus is Lord."

The twelve tribes. The original twelve tribes of Israel no longer existed. Deportation of the ten northern tribes had effectively destroyed their identity. All that was left of that part of Israel were the mixed-race Samaritans who were despised by the Jews. By the time of this letter the term the twelve tribes had come to describe the regathered and renewed Israel that God would create in the last days (Ezekiel 47:13; Matthew 19:28; Revelation 7:4-8; 21:12). That regathering has been made possible by Jesus the Messiah.

Scattered. The phrase "scattered among the nations" translates the Greek word diaspora, a technical term referring to Jews who had left Palestine by force or by choice. The deportation of Jews to foreign lands had been practiced since the days of the Assyrians over six hundred years before Christ. But many Jews had also emigrated to other lands in the quest for wealth and opportunity. This network of

Jewish communities scattered throughout the Roman Empire became the stepping stone for the spread of the gospel. The book of Acts describes the missionary pattern of Paul and others. In almost every town they visited, the presence of a Jewish synagogue gave them an open forum from which to communicate the Good News. What history records as the splintering of the nation of Israel was used by God to facilitate the spread of his Word.

Following the resurrection of Christ and the early successes of the young church in Jerusalem, the believers were severely persecuted. They were forced to escape to distant places. Taking their faith with them, they began to carry out the commission Christ had given his disciples in Matthew 28:19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (NKJV).

The sense of accountability to the church in Jerusalem remained strong until the destruction of the city in A.D. 70. Paul's missionary journeys included reports to the apostles there. Early conflicts within the church were discussed and settled in Jerusalem (Acts 15). This letter from James indicates that there may have been regular channels of communication between groups of believers.

ENDURING TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS / 1:2-18

James wrote to believers facing difficult times. Their troubles ranged from personal trials to disabling doubts; from persecution for following Christ to the lure of respectability in their community and the dangers of spiritual pride. James wrote to encourage his brothers and sisters in their faith.

James's approach illustrates the variety of forms that encouragement can take. At times, James confronts. In other places, he gently encourages. He uses hyperbole (extreme illustration) in a way that reminds us of his half brother, Jesus. Sparks and forest fires, rudders and large ships create mental pictures like Jesus created with his needles and camels. James even uses humor as a tool to encourage. He is clearly someone who practices the truth of Hebrews 10:24, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (NIV). He begins his letter looking directly at trials and daring

to spur his fellow believers with a challenge: “Meet the very worst that life presents you with joy.”

1:2 Consider it pure joy ... whenever you face trials. How can a person consider trials a reason for joy? This is a remarkable command—we are to choose to be joyful in situations where joy would naturally be our last response. When certain circumstances make us angry and we want to blame the Lord, James directs us to the healthier alternative—joy. When trials come, “don’t resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends” (Phillips). Those who trust in God ought to exhibit a dramatically different, positive response to the difficult events of life.

Our attitude is to be one of **pure joy** (genuine rejoicing). This is not joyful anticipation for trials. Instead, it is joy during trials. The joy is based on **confidence in the outcome** of the trial. It is the startling realization that trials represent the possibility of growth. In contrast, most people are happy when they escape trials. But James encourages us to consider it pure joy in the very face of trials. The response he is describing may include a variety of feelings, but it is not simply based on emotions. James is not encouraging believers to pretend to be happy. Rejoicing goes beyond happiness. Happiness centers on earthly circumstances and how well things are going here. Joy is God-oriented rather than event-oriented because it centers on God and his presence in our experience.

JOY

Joy is a deep sense of well-being that may at the same time embrace sorrow, tears, laughter, anger, pain. Joy is more a decision than a feeling. It is choosing to live above feelings but not deny them. It is not intense happiness, although choosing joy sometimes produces happiness. Joy is a particularly Christian response to life since it depends on faith in God’s sovereignty. It is quiet and grateful, and it inwardly delights in the goodness of God. Joy can be understood in the context of the two other main responses to life:

1. Drifting. Some float in the ebb and flow of life’s experiences, hoping one moment and despairing the next. This response leaves the

person entirely at the mercy of the events of life.

2.Pretending. Some pretend to be happy, determined to put up a good front, no matter what the circumstances. In comparison with these two, joy is more honest. It admits to hurts. It recognizes suffering and willingly participates in it. Joy is a contentment that comes from realizing that nothing can “separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39).

Consider means “chalk it up” or “regard it as.” Count it pure joy because your experience of trial is evidence that you will grow. Don’t let pain or struggle take away the joy of new growth, new insight, new depth, or new dependency. Focus on the future benefits of your difficult time.

My brothers. By using this term repeatedly, James emphasizes Christian solidarity with all who read his letter. It reminds us that the lessons in this book are for us. We rarely have to face trials alone. Believers always have Christ with them; they also have one another. When we attempt to manage pain, loneliness, failure, and other trials alone, we are not using the resources that God has made available through other believers. We are here to help each other. We are not to go it alone!

Whenever you face trials. Whenever doesn’t allow much room for doubt. We are urged to be joyful not if we face trials, but whenever. To face trials is more literally expressed as to “fall into” trials. These are the unavoidable difficulties of life. Falling into trials is like falling among robbers, as did the traveler in Luke 10:30. Trials, problems, situations can be joy-robbers if we lack the proper attitude. Later in the chapter (1:13–15), James deals more directly with temptations that are self-inflicted. But there will be times when, no matter where we turn, we encounter trials.

Trials of many kinds. Where do these trials come from? They can be hardships from without or temptations from within. They come when we are least prepared and when we are most certain they could never come. A trial may be a hard situation that tests a person’s faith such as persecution, a difficult moral choice, or a tragedy. Life’s trail is marked with such trials. Enduring one trial is not enough. God’s purpose in allowing this process is to develop complete maturity in us.

Considering your trials to be joy comes from seeing life with God's perspective in mind. We may not be able to understand the specific reasons for God's allowing certain experiences to crush us or wear us down, but we can be confident that his plan is for our good. What may look hopeless or impossible to us never looks that way to God!

1:3 The testing of your faith produces endurance. Dokimion is the Greek word translated testing; it means "approved after testing." Although we tend to think of testing as a way to prove what we don't know or don't have, testing ought to be seen as a positive opportunity to prove what we have learned. Testing is an important term because it is positive rather than negative. This is the exact term used in 1 Peter 1:6-7 for "proved genuine" and means that the trial is God's attempt to prove our faith genuine. It is a test that has a positive purpose. The person being tested should become stronger and purer through the testing. In this case, the trials do not determine whether or not believers have faith; rather, the trials strengthen believers by adding perseverance to the faith that is already present.

Endurance is faith stretched out; it involves trusting God for a long duration. In the context of the rest of the New Testament, it is important to see that James is not questioning the faith of his readers—he assumes that they trust in Christ. He is not convincing people to believe; he is encouraging believers to remain faithful to the end. James knows that their faith is real, but it lacks maturity.

We cannot really know our own depth until we see how we react under pressure. Diamonds are coal, subjected to intense pressure over a period of time. Without pressure, coal remains coal. The testing of your faith is the combined pressure that life brings to bear on you. Perseverance is the intended outcome of this testing. Other words that could be used for this outcome include "endurance," "steadfastness," "fortitude," and "staying power." The word endurance has a particular connection with this diamondlike quality created by testing, since the Latin root of this word means "to harden." Perseverance is not a passive submission to circumstances—it is a strong and active response to the difficult events of life. It is

not passive endurance, but the quality of standing on your feet as you face the storms. It is not simply the attitude of withstanding trials, but the ability to turn them into glory, to overcome them.

Produces. This word was commonly used in agriculture to indicate the harvest or yield. Testing of faith produces a harvest, or the final product, perseverance. The results are gradual. There is an end in sight, but arriving there takes time.

When the writer of Hebrews portrayed the heroes of faith (Hebrews 11), the outstanding characteristic of the Old Testament men and women of faith was their endurance. They lived on a promise. They acted in faith. “Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised” (Hebrews 11:39 NRSV). They stayed true to God even when they faced one of the most difficult hardships of all—not seeing the fulfillment of what had been promised to them. Elsewhere in the New Testament, perseverance is also noted as one of the essential parts of the believer’s life (see Romans 2:7; 5:3–5; 8:24–25; 2 Corinthians 6:3–7; 2 Peter 1:2–9).

What makes trials so difficult to endure? It is not our nature to endure. When it comes to trials, we would rather escape, explain, or exit the difficulty. In fact, we will tend to do almost anything to avoid enduring a trial.

REACTIONS TO TRIALS

- **Escape**—Our first line of defense is to avoid, deny, or escape. We don’t want to face trials; we would sooner keep our back to them. But James is not writing here about avoidable trials. These are not difficulties to look for so we can practice endurance. These are trials and temptations that come looking for us.

Escape is certainly a valid strategy when it comes to those temptations and trials that we willfully walk right into by our habits or wrong choices. These are temptations that Paul urges us to “flee from” (1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Timothy 6:3–11). The list includes envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, and sexual immorality. Peter reminds us that the problems caused by our disobedience need to be

handled differently: “But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God” (1 Peter 2:20).

James gives us a plan for the worst-case scenario. It is James’s answer to one of our questions: “When we are following Christ and find ourselves facing trials of many kinds, what do we do when there seems no way to escape?”

- **Explain**—When we face trials, we tend to ask, “Why is this happening to me?” If only we could understand God’s reasons, it would be much easier to endure whatever we are suffering. If we can explain, we can endure. But insisting on specific answers actually weakens our endurance. James does not encourage us to expect understanding. He urges us to get on with our service with joyful endurance, rather than attempt to explain every event that God allows into our life. What do we do when we face trials of many kinds and cannot explain them?

- **Exit**—Once a trial is upon us, we want to get beyond it as quickly as possible. Any shortcut offered is tempting. But quick solutions to trials often involve compromise in areas that we should not negotiate. The temptation to revert to an old pattern, or indulge a habit, has not been joyfully endured if our resistance has only lasted a few minutes. Trials should not be allowed to outlast us; we are to outlast trials. Unfortunately, we are very much like the people who claim they are serious about training for long-distance races, but only succeed in running around the block once. A taste of hardship is no trial.

Even the commanded response of joy in trials will disappoint us if we expect that joy will eliminate the need for endurance. Our joy must itself develop endurance. At this point, our best example is Jesus, “who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2 NIV). James does not hesitate to encourage us in joyful endurance when our question is “What do we do when we face trials and there is no quick exit?”

1:4 Let endurance have its full effect. The word perseverance in

Greek (hupomone) suggests “steadfastness under trial.” What faithful perseverance generates is a whole person, recognized by three significant characteristics:

1. Mature —seasoned, experienced, well-developed, fit for the tasks God sent us into the world to do. Maturity in this sense is not related to age. It is a quality developed by how much we have learned from the trials we have experienced. Someone has defined experience as the ability to recognize a mistake when we make it again. Maturity is the ability to recognize a mistake before we make it again. It is a trained ability to learn from each previous experience. But maturity takes time.

2. Complete—fully trained. The weaknesses and imperfections are being removed from our character; we are gaining victory over old sins; we are demonstrating a sense of competence about life. This completeness relates to the breadth of our experience. We have passed through trials of many kinds. To be complete means that we have become mature in many areas of life. God does not want cheap substitutes, but thoroughly developed Christians.

3. Not lacking anything —the basic life skills are there, ready to be used; the obvious weaknesses or blind spots of the past have been corrected; more and more clearly we mirror Christ himself! We will not be lacking anything when we are mature and complete in all the essential areas of life. Although this last quality is stated in the negative, it describes a security or contentment that comes from knowing that God has what we need, when we need it. Believing in God’s faithfulness, we have everything we need.

TESTED FAITH IS STRONG FAITH

Tested faith brings about a depth of character (Romans 5:3-5)

Tested faith enables us to comfort and encourage others (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)

Tested faith increases dependence on God for wisdom (James 1:5; 3:17-18)

Tested faith encourages us to lead a productive and effective life (2 Peter 1:5-9)

Tested faith helps us to identify with Christ (Matthew 4:1-11 Hebrews 5:7-10)

Tested faith allows us to focus on our future hope in Christ (Romans 8:18-24)

Scripture does not promise us perfection in this life. So to be mature and complete is not sinless perfection. These terms describe a person who is fully committed to obeying God's commands. Perfection, as the Bible defines it for believers, is a right relationship with God expressed in a life of obedience. The work of perseverance is never done in this life, but there must be substantial progress. The writer of Hebrews is insistent: "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God" (Hebrews 6:1 NIV).

Where there is testing, there are failures along the way. It is possible to experience trials and not learn from them or develop perseverance. Growth is not guaranteed. But James fully expects believers to respond to trials with joy because they understand that the process is producing a deeper, more certain faith. He would expect no less from us.

1:5 If James 1:2-4 describes the benefits of responding correctly to trials, this verse draws attention to our hopelessness without God's assistance, and how we can receive wisdom to triumph over trials. The shift is sudden and helpful. The command to consider (1:2) relates to the need for wisdom (1:5). We need a certain kind of wisdom in order to consider it pure joy when facing all kinds of difficulties. If we are paying attention to the implications of the first verses in this letter we will be struck with our lack of wisdom. That wisdom, says James, comes from God.

If any of you lacks wisdom. The wisdom that we need has three distinct characteristics:

1. It is practical—The wisdom from God relates to life even during the most trying times. It is not a wisdom isolated from suffering and trials. This wisdom is the tool by which trials are overcome. An intelligent person may have profound ideas, but a wise person puts profound ideas into action. Intelligence will allow someone to describe several reasons why the car broke down. The wise person chooses the most likely reason and proceeds to take action.

2. It is divine—God’s wisdom goes beyond common sense. Common sense does not lead us to choose joy in the middle of trials. This wisdom begins with respect for God, leads to living by God’s direction, and results in the ability to tell right from wrong. It is a wisdom that James will describe at length in chapter 3.

3. It is Christlike—Asking for wisdom is ultimately asking to be like Christ. The Bible identifies Christ as the “wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24; 2:1–7).

Ask God. Recognizing our lack of wisdom might cause us to despair, but God wants us to turn to him instead. How do we know that God has answered our request for wisdom? When trials come, we will find ourselves responding with an attitude of joy. We will realize that joy is not our own doing but is a gift.

Who gives generously to all. Our request to God for wisdom ought to be shaped by the following qualities of God’s giving:

- **God gives generously.** Since God’s generosity has included the gift of his own Son, “how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32 NIV). The wisdom we need is one of those “things” God will graciously give to us. The Greek expression in this verse could be translated “the giving God.” God’s generosity is universal. It is one of those basic characteristics of God that is revealed in creation. Jesus went further and guaranteed God’s generosity to his children (Matthew 7:7–11; Mark 11:24; Luke 11:9–13; John 15:7). What better request can we present to God than to take him at his word and ask for wisdom to face the inevitable trials?

- **God gives without strings attached.** God gives ungrudgingly.

God is not resentful of our dependence on him, but welcomes our requests. God does not complain or criticize us for our incompetence, nor is his help halfhearted. Because God does not reproach us, we can be honest with God in our prayers and pour out our deepest feelings to him. God accepts us and understands our weaknesses, so we can come to him when we face difficulties and suffering. So we must never hesitate but come boldly to God to get his wisdom.

It will be given to him. God's reply is sure. The gift here is wisdom. Note that what God promises is to supply the wisdom for what must be done. Decisions still will have to be made, and actions will have to be taken. The wisdom is God's guidance, not his removal of our participation. Following our prayer and God's answer, we will be back where we started, only better equipped to "consider it pure joy" (1:2). We must remember that God's promises do not submit to our plans. This verse is not permitting us to ask God for wisdom to bring about our will. Instead, we should humbly ask him for wisdom to remain in his will.

1:6 Let him ask in faith. The one condition for receiving this gift of God is faith. God will generously give wisdom, but the one who asks will not receive it if he does not have confidence that God will answer the request.

Our faith is being tested by various trials (1:2-4). That same faith must be directed toward God as we realize our need for his wisdom. When we ask, we must believe. Faith is single-minded commitment, trusting fully in God. Faith holds on to God during testing (see also Job 13:15; Daniel 3:16-18). It is continued confidence in God despite outward circumstances. The writer of Hebrews expresses both the importance of faith and the kind of faith that God requires: "And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Hebrews 11:6 NRSV).

With no doubting. Doubt means "a divided mind." Doubting here has nothing to do with doubting whether God can do something; rather, it describes a people "divided" between being self-centered and being God-centered. This is the reason why James adds the idea

of the “wave,” because it really means to be tossed to and fro between self and God. Doubting is trusting self more than God and being earth-centered rather than heaven-centered in our prayer requests and in handling the problems of this life.

WHAT DOES “AND NOT DOUBT MEAN?”

The phrase “without doubting” is not connected with new faith or weak faith or faltering faith. If it was, none of us would have our prayers answered. It is not honest intellectual doubt or lack of clarity about the solution. It is not confusion over whether it is right to ask. It is divided loyalty. It is doubting that God cares, that he is powerful, that he is good.

He who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. The behavior of sea waves is unsettled, going back and forth, driven by the varying winds, like the doubter’s mind. Such a person wavers between choices and may, in the end, make no decision at all. Circumstances become the decision makers in that person’s life. When God’s promises and commands are given equal authority with our feelings, desires, and the world’s ideas, the result is an unsettled sea of indecision and chaos.

1:7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord. God’s promises are not lottery tickets to be claimed in faint hopes that they will deliver what they describe. God’s answers are not subject to the laws of probability and chance. God will do what he says he will do. He requires our trust. God’s dependability is part of his character.

The person who asks trustingly does not determine how God will answer, but he or she can be confident in knowing that God will answer. The person who asks doubtfully has no right to expect anything. His or her request was not genuine. When it seems as if God hasn’t answered our prayers, we need to begin the search for a solution by asking ourselves whether we were trusting when we prayed. If our loyalties are straightened out, God’s answers to prayer are restored to us.

CAN GOD REALLY DO IT?

We can never remove the last shred of doubt. The father who came to Jesus' disciples, asking them to heal his boy (Mark 9:14–29), then said to Jesus, “if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us” (NRSV). Although this man felt the inadequacy of his faith, he was asking for help. God promises to give wisdom to those who ask for it. Instead of trying to rid yourself of all doubt, focus instead on wholehearted commitment to God (Deuteronomy 6:5; Psalm 119:2; Matthew 22:37).

1:8 He is a double-minded man, unstable. To be double-minded and unstable is to “trust” God and claim to be a believer and yet be filled with doubt, keeping other options open in case God does not prove to be dependable. A double-minded person is trying to be allied to both sides in a war. That person is a walking contradiction. Augustine confessed to this kind of thinking when he remembered one of his earliest prayers, “O Lord, grant me purity, but not yet!”

In all his ways. Instability is revealed not only in individuals' prayers, but in all they do. Our prayers reveal our view of God. But they also reveal our view of life. Life is made up of different areas—physical, mental, social, and spiritual—but it cannot be lived that way. Living comes at us as a whole. When indecisiveness marks our relationship with God, that instability will affect all of life.

The choice James presents us in verses 2-8 is clear:

- We can live a single-minded life of trust in God where every experience, including the trials we fall into, is another step in the process of becoming mature and complete persons. The single-minded person will still be capable of doubt. In fact, doubts may be some of the trials that person faces. These doubts fall into the category of the man who wisely confessed when he stood before Jesus, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24 NKJV). Single-minded persons do not dwell on whether they can find a shred of doubt in themselves; rather, they concentrate on wholehearted commitment to God.
- We can live a double-minded life where every experience will be approached with doubt and lack of trust in God. The double-minded person doubts and refuses to stop doubting.

We must ask God for wisdom to keep making the right choice.

1:11 The sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the

field. James describes a common occurrence in the Middle East.

Morning is often welcomed by colorful desert flowers, bursting from the cool night. Their death is sudden in the sun's scorching heat. This term can also refer to a sirocco, a hot southeast wind that blows straight off the desert like the wave of heat as an oven is opened (see Hosea 13:15).

The rich man also will fade away. This fading or withering is as sudden and unexpected as the death of the wildflowers. Death always intrudes. The frequent announcements of the death of well-known people are often made in shocked tones. Somehow, death is not supposed to happen to successful people. But it does. In fact, says James, a rich person can fade away **even while he goes about his business.** Life is uncertain. Disaster is possible at any moment. The word translated business (*poreiais*) literally means "goings." Death interrupts our schedule, our business, our best-laid plans. It is foolish to trust in what will not last. The psalmist gives us an appropriate prayer: "Teach us to count our days, that we may gain a wise heart" (Psalm 90:12 NRSV). Whether the number of our days turns out to be large or small, each should be lived to the glory of God.

The poor should be glad that riches mean nothing to God; otherwise poor people would be considered unworthy. The rich should be glad that wealth means nothing to God, because wealth is easily lost. We find true wealth by developing our spiritual life, not financial assets. Stewardship will not happen until wealth is seen in its proper place. The rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-24; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-30) could not follow the Lord because his wealth got in the way. He had to be willing to forsake that god before he could honestly consider the true God.

James begins his letter by making sure that believers, both poor and rich, see themselves in the same light before God (see Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). James calls his readers to find hope in God's eternal promises.

1:12 Blessed. This Greek word, makarios, in common usage described the happiness of a carefree life. The Bible deepens the meaning of blessed to include a deep joy that comes from receiving God's favor. Jesus used this word in each of what are called the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12). In that message, it is surprising to see the kind of people Jesus called "blessed." Using the lessons from James 1:2–4, we might find it helpful to express the Beatitudes in this pattern:

- The poor in spirit ought to consider it pure joy, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Those who mourn ought to consider it pure joy, for they will be comforted.
- Those who are meek ought to consider it pure joy, for they will inherit the earth.
- Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness ought to consider it pure joy, for they will be filled. And so on.

While James did not directly quote Jesus' words, many of James's expressions remind a reader of Christ's way of speaking. The content of this letter sounds very much like the Sermon on the Mount. When we are strongly influenced by someone else, we might unconsciously imitate that person's mannerisms and ways of speech. How often do people note that we speak about the same matters with the same care that Jesus expressed?

Joy-filled, then, **is the man who perseveres under trial.** As athletes persevere in training in order to improve their abilities and endurance for competition, so Christians persevere in spiritual training, enduring the trials that will bring maturity and completeness. Today's trials will seem like training when we face tomorrow's challenges. The way to get into God's winner's circle is to love him and stay faithful even under pressure. James does not exhort us to enjoy pain or even claim that our trials are fun; rather, he tells us that the trials can serve a purpose—to prove and improve our faith and to give us an attitude of joy.

Such a one has stood the test. There is a finish line. There are successes along the way—spiritual progress has its mile markers. But the trials of this life are contained in this life. Someday the test will be

over. Only then will we appreciate just how much we have needed these gifts:

- Faith in Christ
- Joy in the Lord
- Endurance under pressure
- Opportunities to pray confidently
- Wisdom from God
- Hope in a God who loves and values us

The phrase *stood the test* translates a Greek expression that literally means “having become approved.” In the end, what matters is not whether our testing has been very difficult or very easy, but whether we have become approved through the tests. Near the end of his ministry, Paul used similar imagery as he summed up his life, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7–8 NIV). James’s words speak against the emphasis on instant results. The goals that he has mentioned so far—faith, endurance, maturity, perfection—all sound wonderful if we could only have them immediately. Instead we are faced with the race of life. God offers to help us along the way. What he chooses not to tell us is how long our personal race will be, nor what obstacles we will meet. We are directed to run with finishing on our minds, whatever it takes. Our dependence on God must be constant.

Will receive the crown of life. The first chapter of James teaches us that God’s long-term goal for us is maturity and completeness, but his eternal goal for us is the crown of life. James used crown of life as the victory wreath from a Greek game, but the more essential idea is the Jewish idea of sovereignty and royalty.

The Greek term, *stephanon tes zoes* (the crown of life), is a rich expression of hope. The believer who endures trials by trusting God will have a life that, though not full of glory and honor, is still truly abundant, joyful, and victorious. Standing the tests of life gives believers even now a taste of eternity. But the struggles also lead to eternal life—the promise of glory in God’s presence forever (see

Revelation 2:10). We do not compete against each other, but against our own sins and against the course laid out for us (see Hebrews 12:1–2). So all who finish the race by keeping their faith in the face of suffering and temptation will be declared winners. Looking forward to that wonderful reward, and to the one who will present it to us, can be a source of strength and encouragement in times of trial (see also 1 Corinthians 9:24–27; 2 Timothy 4:7–8).

Promised to those who love him. Christians can consider themselves truly blessed, no matter what their outward circumstances, because they have been promised the crown of life. God helps believers undergoing trials to rest and trust in him. Not only our faith, but our love for God will deepen as we endure life’s trials. As we love God, his promises become ours.

1:13 We must have a correct view of God in order to persevere during times of trial. Specifically, we need to understand God’s view of our temptations. Trials and temptations always present us with choices. God wants us to make good choices, not evil ones. Hardships can produce spiritual maturity and lead to eternal benefits if endured in faith. But tests can also be failed. We can give in to temptation. And when we fail, we often use all kinds of excuses and reasons for our actions. The most dangerous of these is to blame God for tempting us. James turns his attention to this problem.

When tempted. As used here, the Greek word for temptation (peirasmos) stands for a direct evil impulse. It can be used to indicate a trial (1:12), a temptation from within (1:14), or a temptation from without, usually relating to Satan’s work (Matthew 4:1). In Jesus’ best-known prayer, he told his disciples to ask God, “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matthew 6:13 NKJV). It is crucial for us to remember always that God tests people for good; he does not tempt people for evil. Even during temptation we can see God’s sovereignty in permitting Satan to tempt us in order to refine our faith and help us grow in our dependence on Christ.

No one should say, “God is tempting me.” Instead of persevering (1:12), we may give in or give up in the face of trial. We might even rationalize that God is at fault for sending such a trying experience, and thus blame God for our failure. From the beginning it

has been a natural human response to make excuses and blame others for sin (see Genesis 3:12-13). Excuses include:

- “It’s the other person’s fault.”
- “I couldn’t help it.”
- “Everybody’s doing it.”
- “It was just a mistake.”
- “Nobody’s perfect.”
- “I didn’t know it was wrong.”
- “The devil made me do it.”
- “I was pressured into it.”

A person who makes excuses is trying to shift blame from himself or herself to something or someone else. A Christian, on the other hand, accepts responsibility for his or her wrongs, confesses them, and asks God for forgiveness.

For God cannot be tempted by evil. Because God cannot be tempted by evil, he cannot be the author of temptation. James is arguing against the pagan view of the gods where good and evil coexisted.

Nor does he himself tempt anyone. God does not wish evil on people; he does not cause evil; he does not try to trip people up. Our failures are not God’s fault. God may test believers in order to strengthen their faith, but he never tries to induce sin or destroy faith. God does not want us to fail, but to succeed. See these examples of God testing his followers: Abraham (Genesis 22:1); Israel (Judges 2:22); and King Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:12-19; 2 Chronicles 32:31).

At this point, the question may be rightly asked: “If God really loves us, why doesn’t he protect us from temptation?” A God who kept us from temptation would be a God unwilling to allow us to grow. In order for a test to be an effective tool for growth, it must be capable of being failed. God actually proves his love by protecting us in temptation instead of protecting us from temptation. He provides a way to resist: “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

GOD'S WAY OUT OF TEMPTATION

God gives us these resources during temptation:

- **His presence.** “He will not leave you nor forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6 NKJV see also Hebrews 13:5).
- **His model—Jesus.** “For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (Hebrews 2:17–18 NIV).
- **His guidance.** “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105 NRSV).
- **His mission for our life that keeps us directed.** “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1 NIV).
- **His other people with whom we share encouragement.** “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24–25 NIV).
- **His forgiveness when we fall and fail.** “If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9 NRSV).

1:14 Some believers thought that since God allowed trials, he must also be the source of temptation. These people could excuse their sin by saying that God was at fault. James corrects this. Temptations come from within. Here James highlights individual responsibility for sin.

But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire. Behind the idea of the evil desire is the Jewish doctrine of the two yetzers. This has to do with the Jewish belief that all people have two yetzers or

impulses—an impulse to good and an impulse to evil—and that these impulses war within them. It is possible, perhaps even likely, that James is building upon this Jewish idea.

The NIV adds the implied evil to the Greek *epithumia* (desire), which can but does not have to imply an evil craving or lust. Normal desires, such as hunger, can also be the starting point of temptation if they are allowed to control our actions. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness (Matthew 4), the temptation came through a natural desire for food after a long fast. Satan urged Jesus to satisfy that desire in an inappropriate way, at the wrong time. The temptation was real, but Jesus did not sin by experiencing it. He would have sinned if he had given in to the devil's suggestion.

Desires can be either fed or starved. If the desire itself is evil, we must deny its wish. It is up to us, with God's help. If we encourage our desires, they will soon become actions. The blame for sin is ours alone. The kind of desire James is describing here is desire out of control. It is selfish and seductive.

Does James take Satan off the hook by placing responsibility for temptation on our desires? No, he does not. We will see later (3:15; 4:7) that the role of Satan was very much in James's thinking. Part of the answer here is in the word *by* (*hupo*), which can refer to both the agent and the cause. This same dual use is present in English. We can say "He was led by his friend" or "He was led by the hand by his friend." In the former case we are speaking of the agent doing the leading; in the latter, we are referring to the means or cause used to do the leading. Likewise, we may be led by our desires, but it is the devil behind the impulse when we are going in an evil direction.

When he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. The enticement of evil is expressed in two ways—being dragged away or being lured like a fish to bait, and being enticed. Temptation comes from evil desires within us, not from God. We can both build and bait our own trap. It begins with an evil thought and becomes sin when we dwell on the thought and allow it to become an action. Like a snowball rolling downhill, sin grows more destructive the more we let it have its

way. The best time to stop a temptation is before it is too great or moving too fast to control. (See Matthew 4:1-11; 1 Corinthians 10:13; and 2 Timothy 2:22 for more about escaping temptation.)

So we meet the enemy called temptation and discover it is in us. How can we withstand the attacks we know will come?

- We must continually place ourselves under God's protection (see the spiritual resources listed under the notes for 1:13).
- We must reject the enticement, or temptation by recognizing it as a false promise.
- We must bring into our life those activities that we know God has provided for our benefit—knowledge of Scripture, fellowship with Christ and other believers, good music, appreciation of all God has made—activities that expand our awareness in life.

1:15 Then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. James traces the result of temptation when a person yields to it. Desire in itself is not sin, but assenting to its enticement eventually gives birth to sin. Note that the first two steps in the process (desiring and conceiving) emphasize the internal nature of sin. The sequence, described clearly in sexual language, represents the course any sins have taken by the time they are apparent to others. Since it begins within, the help we need the most in combating sin is internal. That help comes from God. The best time to stop sin is at the moment we realize the desire is about to become focused, before it has conceived.

It takes spiritual growth and consistent dependence on God to know when a desire can be calmly evaluated and when a desire can easily become lustful and controlling. Desires that present themselves to us in expressions that begin with "I have to have," "I can't do without," or even "I would do anything if only I could" are all ripe for conception and birth into sin. It is helpful to ask ourselves occasionally, "What reasoning do I use that tends to lead me into sin?"

And sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Life is given to those who persevere in trials (1:12); death comes to those who allow their desire to run its course. Sin is full-grown when it

becomes a fixed habit. Death is referring to spiritual separation from God that comes as the result of sin (see also Romans 6:23; 7:7-12; 1 John 2:16-17; 3:14).

When we yield to temptation, our sin sets deadly events into motion. There is more to stopping sin than just stopping sinning. Damage has been done. Deciding to “sin no more” may take care of the future, but it does not heal the past. That healing must come through repentance and forgiveness. Sometimes restitution must be made. As serious as the remedy sounds, we can be deeply grateful that there is a remedy at all. God loves us. It is his gracious love that breaks the cycle of desire-sin-death. Wherever we find ourselves in the process, we can turn to God in repentance for help. His way leads to life. (Bruce B. Barton, David Veerman, and Neil S. Wilson, James, Life Application Bible Commentary)

Resources: Rev. Brad Standfest, Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, Talk Thru the Bible, Bruce B. Barton, David Veerman, and Neil S. Wilson, James, Life Application Bible Commentary,

Sermon Notes:

Welcome to our James Challenge Series... I am very excited about this

What is the James Challenge... We will be Studying & Preaching out of the Book of James in the N.T. for the next 6 weeks

James Challenge Description

- You or Your Team will get a Challenge Worksheet out in the Foyer each Sunday
- You or Your Team will complete the Challenge Worksheet each week to Earn Maximum Points
- Name Your Team and Save Your Challenge Worksheets in a Manila Envelope (We have some or Buy your own)
- The Challenge will run from Today, February 4th through March 17th
- Return ALL Worksheets in Manila Envelope on Sun, March 17th with your points calculated

- The TOP 15 Teams will be entered into a Drawing to Win a prize

My goal is to draw individuals & families closer in a relationship to Jesus Christ. As you take this Challenge... You will dive into God's Word... You will have discussions & devotions to grow your faith. Expect Renewal & Revival to take place within your homes... In the end, it's not about the physical prizes that can be won... Rather lives & families getting closer to our Savior- that's the Real Prize... So let's dive in... The Challenge is on!

Since we are kicking off this Series let me give you some Basic Background to James to help the scriptures come alive

Let me read a wonderful summary from a Theologian I like that Sums up James:

"Faith without works cannot be called faith. It is dead, and a dead faith is worse than no faith at all. Faith must work; it must produce: it must be visible. Verbal faith is not enough; mental faith is insufficient. Faith must move into action. Throughout his epistle to Believers, James integrates true faith and everyday practical experience by stressing that true faith "works." It endures trials: it obeys God's Word: it produces doers; it harbors no prejudice; it controls the tongue; it acts wisely; it provides the power to resist the devil: it waits patiently for the coming of the Lord."

Key Facts to James

- James was Jesus' Brother (Mt. 13:55, Mk.3:31-35;6:3, Jn. 7:5, Acts 12:17; 15:13-39, 1 Cor. 15:7, Gal. 1-2)
- James didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah... And he thought he was crazy (Mark 3:21)
- After Christ rose from the dead and James saw him with his eyes, he put his faith & trust in Jesus as Lord & Savior (1 Cor. 15:7)
- James became so on fire for Christ; he became the leader of the Jerusalem Church (Acts 12:17; 21:18)
- Non Biblical Historians write about James's life & the impact he had on the Church & Christianity (Eusebius, Recognitions, Clementine, Homilies, Irenaeus, Epiphanius, Gospel of Thomas)

- James is the Author of the Book of James in the N.T. and alludes to Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" 15 times in his writing

Read James 1:1-4

That is a tough word: "Consider it pure joy... whenever you face trials of many kinds."

I'm not doing a Happy Dance when I have a day of Fishing planned & back up my boat into the water... and get out and get completely locked out of my truck... while it's still running.

Let's define the Word Trial...

Trials Defined

"The word translated Trials signifies Affliction, Persecution, or a Trial of any kind." (Clarke)

Trials are a Testing of Faith brought on by Self, Man, Satan/Demonic... or allowed by God

Here is the Key Phrase you need for the James Challenge Worksheet: Trials Build Endurance

I felt led this morning to share one of the hardest trials I have ever went through... (Pastor Brad's story of Depression & Anxiety)

I know this may sound weird... but because of that depression I became a Powerful Man of God (Not a Boast)
God prepared me to handle high levels of Stress & Problems I would have never been able to handle

James says this: "Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be Mature and Complete, not lacking anything." (James 1:4)

Friends... We can have Joy knowing that through our trials God is making us Spiritually Stronger

Read James 1:5-8

Take note of this: I quote:

“In trials, we need wisdom a lot more than we need knowledge. Knowledge is raw information we typically learn through education. Wisdom is Divine and comes from God. It’s not gained through “gnosis” ... but rather a Holy Spirit infusion into the mind.” (Pastor Brad & Guzik)

I want to conclude this morning... The First Week of our James Challenge with these Words:

Read James 1:12-15

If you would like a copy of our James Challenge Worksheets each week please email the office at secretary@almontvineyardchurch.org and we will send it to you.