

Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet

James | *Faith that Works*

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Exhortation in the book of James

For context, I have structured my presentation into:

- Who wrote the book?
- Who is the audience (who did he write it to)?
- What is the purpose of the book?

Next, I will go chapter by chapter and cover some of the key themes of the book:

Last, I will spend the last 10/15 minutes on the passage that was read today by brother

- This is the main topic that I want to exhort you on.
- For a title, I have chosen “Faith that works”.

Who wrote the book of James?

Most scholars and theologians believe the book was written by James: the son of Joseph and Mary – half-brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3) – brothers: James, Joseph, Judas, Simon. Apparently, he had sisters also, but their names are not mentioned!

A couple of details about James:

- He did not believe in Jesus, his brother until after his death and resurrection (John 7:2-5).
- Jesus appeared to him after His resurrection (1 Cor 15:7).

- He was with the disciples on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came for the first time, and he witnessed thousands of people join the church (Acts 2:14).
- After this, James began to preach the gospel and became the leader of the church in Jerusalem.
- The last thing that I want to say of James before I move on is his humility. He began the book/epistle by referring to himself as a “bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ”. He could have name dropped that he was the brother of Jesus, or the son of Mary, or the head of the church at Jerusalem. (Do you know who I am?).

Who is the audience?

James wrote to Jewish Christians dispersed abroad - **diaspora**. They may have become Christian while living in Jerusalem and then left because of persecution and were probably still facing trial/suffering because of their faith. Some may have voluntarily moved to other countries for business. Whatever the reason why they have been dispersed, it is clear that James was speaking to believers – James 1:2 he called them brothers/brethren.

Something else I want to point out is that James is writing to a wider audience, a more diverse group in contrast to the apostle Paul who mostly wrote to specific churches to address specific topic/problems in that congregation. Or to specific individuals i.e., Timothy, Titus, Philemon.

What is the purpose of the book?

The book of James is not a book with any overarching biblical doctrine, but it is a **practical manual** for Christian living. Many believers (in the days of James and in our times) have the doctrine, they are familiar with the scriptures, they have faith, but they struggle to live a holy life that God requires of us. It may be due to persecution for their faith, or trials that they are suffering. If you are here this morning and you are struggling, and suffering, and burdened by trials, and problems of various kinds, James is writing to give you assurance, and hope and strength to face those challenges. He is giving you a way to determine whether your faith is genuine.

In short, I would say, the broad purposes of the book of James are

- it is a practical manual for Christian living
- it is a way to test whether your faith is genuine. So, if you want to live a confident Christian life, read the book of James.

Now, I am going to go from chapter to chapter and touch on some key themes. I probably won't touch all because there are so many and also because this is my first time, I could not gauge how much or how long to go.

Chapter 1:

Trials: verses 1 - 4

Verse 2: **consider** it all joy when you fall into **various** trials (marital, at work, at school, at church, your business, death, sickness, emotional – betrayal/malicious rumors).

Consider it joy means that we ought to gladly and without complaint, endure troubles/trials of all kinds while **trusting God**. This is not because God enjoys seeing us suffer, or that we enjoy pain, but because God always uses troubles/trials for our benefit and for His glory. This **unique joy** is a **deep sense of well-being** that comes from knowing that God is in control.

The benefit to us is as we go thru trials, we develop endurance, and our faith gets stronger. We become more mature Christians.

Wisdom: Verses 5 – 8

Verse 5: if anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God.

James is saying that even with strong faith, mature Christians who have developed **endurance/perseverance** still face situations where they don't know what to do. Regardless of how mature you think you are, when things are happening to you that you do not understand (when you lack wisdom) ask God. Wisdom in this instance, I am defining as an ability to see things from God's perspective. Remember Proverb 3: 5-7 (do not trust what you think; ask God for help). Sound wisdom is not based on feelings. When James says ask God, he is simply encouraging us to pray.

“Lord, I do not understand what is happening in this situation I am going through, help me to see things from your point of view and give me the faith to not give up”.

The opposite of sustaining faith is doubt. When you pray for wisdom, do not doubt. (my son, James III is an example of this). The end of verse 5 says God gives **liberally** and without **reproach** – He is not going to chastise you, or reprimand you.

Rich and Poor: Verse 9-11

Verse 9-10: let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation but let the rich in his humiliation.

Most Christians in James days and in the world today are economically poor. But there will be a time when they will be exalted to a high position as a child of God. They are maybe homeless now but will live in mansions in heaven. The rich person may have a false sense of security in their possessions. But when these things are stripped away, they will be humiliated. The point is rich of poor are both the same, the difference is having a trusting relationship with God.

Temptation: verses 13-17

Verse 14: each one is tempted by his own desires and enticed.

Trial (as discussed earlier) and temptation are similar, but different. For the sake of this presentation, I would like you to think of trial as a test or putting something to the proof. Temptation I would like you to think of as a solicitation/trying to get someone to do something wrong. The book of James is saying everyone will face temptation (even Jesus did), next, temptation is not from God, temptation starts with us wanting/longing for something (lust). Once a believer has conceived this desire/lust, they let it develop in them and it leads to sin. James gives an analogy of a woman giving birth. David and the wife of Uriah are a god example of this. The believer must **pray** and ask God for wisdom to break the **temptation-sin** cycle. In 1 cor. 10:13 Paul assures believers that temptation is common to all men and God is faithful. He will not allow anyone to be tempted beyond what they can bear, and when they are tempted, God will provide a way out.

Anger: verses 19-21

Verse 20: For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

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n this section, we are encouraged to listen more & speak less – when we do speak, let us measure our words, let our words be well thought out. Let us consider how our words can show love and respect for others. Verse 20 talks about the wrath/anger of man and the righteousness of God. Anger is a normal human emotion. Everyone and anyone can get angry. I believe Jesus was angry when He overturned tables at the temple. The kind of anger I believe James is talking about is the kind that simmers, and boils, and leads to retaliation against others. Verse 20 is saying it is not possible for you to have that kind of anger in you and have the righteousness that God desires in you.

Religion: Verses 26-27

The believers in the days of James, were scattered abroad. They must have been exposed to many a variety of worldviews, philosophies, rituals, etc. that were referred to as “religion”. Just like now. In our day there are many kinds of practices that are referred to as a religion. James is saying simply that the religion that God the Father accepts is to care for the less fortunate in the society and to **not** allow these rituals and worldview to become ours as believers.

Chapter 2

Favoritism/prejudice/partiality: verses 1-4

This favoritism/partiality that James is writing about refers to judging purely on the superficial level without consideration for true merit, or abilities, or character.

All believers hold equal place among each other before God – God does not show favoritism (Lev 19: 15, Rom 2:11).

We cannot make assumptions based on outward appearance. God judges from the inside.

During Jesus's earthly ministry, he did not discriminate, he ministered to beggars, and high priest, and virtuous women, and prostitutes. On the cross, he ministered to a criminal. We ought to follow his example and stop picking and choosing.

Chapter 3

Tongue: verses 1-12

This is not the first time that James has mentioned the tongue. He compares it to bits that are used to control horses and to rudders used to control ships. The point I believe is that the tongue is a small organ in the body, but it can steer a person in the wrong direction. Speaking careless or hurtfully to others can lead to sin in our lives. Verse 9 talks about blessing God with our tongue and cursing man at the same time. Praising God is perhaps the supreme thing a person can do with his tongue. How can we curse others whom God has created in his image?

Wisdom: 3-18

Verse 17 defines true wisdom – it is peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy, bears good fruits, is unwavering, is without hypocrisy. Let us ask God to give us the wisdom we need to be faithful in all He has called us to do.

Chapter 4

Fights: 1-3

If I ask you what is the source of quarrelling/fighting? Many of you will answer and say satan/the devil. James is saying we are the cause of quarrelling and fighting. It is because of our own lust/desires. We do not get what we want because we do not ask, and when we ask, we do not receive because our heart is in the wrong place. We are not asking out of need, but out of selfish desire, or unbridled passion, or selfishness. In Matt 7:7-11 Jesus promised that if we approach Him boldly, believing, whatever we need He will give. We are supposed to ask for our needs and the needs of others.

Friendship with the world is enemy with God: 4-6

Friendship is an interesting word today. You can click a button and have thousands of friends on facebook. This is not the kind of friendship James is talking about. He is talking about a strong companionship or an allegiance to the world. James is saying simply there is no middle ground. He uses the word adulterers. The church is the bride of Christ, so if you are cozying up to the world, you are kind of committing adultery.

A call to re-commit: verse 7-10

- Swear allegiance to God.
- Resist temptations.

- Grow in our relationship with God.
- Repent.

The will of God: 13-17

In this country there are many who boast that they are the master of their own destiny. There are many self-help gurus around. I have heard the phrase “pull yourself up by the boot strap”. People tend to play God. There are many marks of a good Christian – love for God, humility, repentance, peace, prayer, but the most important is to do the will of God. In verse 13, James is saying that instead of saying that we are going to do as we like we should speak of our activities as predicated on God’s will for our lives. At first, this might seem more like a word game. After all what difference does it make if you say, “I’m moving to Texas versus if the Lord will, I will move to Texas”? I am not saying that there is something wrong with planning. But simply speaking of what we will do based on our own wishes is boasting and bragging in our own strength. There is something evil about bragging about our lives as if God is not part of it. As Christians we know that God desires to be intimately involved in our everyday lives.

Chapter 5

Wicked Rich: 1-6

The argument here is not that wealth itself is sinful, but that wealth exposes one to a great deal of sin.

Patience/endurance: 7-11

All those who preserve by obeying God while waiting for His work to come to fruition will be blessed.

Swear: verse 12

Does not mean filthy language but **oath**. Let your yes be yes and your no be no. Be honest and trustworthy so that you won't have to swear an oath to be believed.

CONCLUSION

Faith that works

Read verses 14-20

Our actions reveal who we are. A person who claims to be a follower of Christ but does not live a life that honors him is a phony/fraud. The New Testament has many examples of this kind of teaching. John the Baptist warned Pharisees to bear fruit (Matt 3:8), Jesus in the sermon on the mount said, "let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven". (Matt 5:16). It must be stressed that salvation is by grace through faith, it is a gift of God so no one can boast. (Eph 2:8-9) Verse 10 continues – for we are His workmanship created in Christ for good work. Genuine faith will produce noticeable changes that others will see. 2 Cor 5:17 – if you are in Christ, you are a new creation. For some people, that change is immediate, for others it is gradual, but there will be change. No particular work is specified. We have already mentioned some – endurance/patience under trial, wisdom, impartiality, humility, controlling anger, avoiding temptation.

Once a year we at NCBC always invite MN Teen Challenge choir to come and sing. They gave their testimonies about how their lives were destroyed by addiction and Jesus changed them. They are now a new creation.

When Zaccheus believed after Jesus stayed at his home, he said half of my wealth, I will give to the poor and if I have cheated anyone, I will return it 4-fold.

In Acts 19:18 Paul preached in Ephesus and many who practiced magic were converted and they burned their books on magic (50,000 pieces of silver worth).

To further drive home his point, James gives the illustration of a brother or sister asking for food or clothing and you saying to them “go in peace and be warm and fill but do not provide what is needed. What good is that”. The point is **genuine faith is not indifferent**. In today’s language, we often hear the phrase “my heart goes out to them”. When tragedy struck and people are in the position to do something meaningful, but all they say is “my heart goes out to them”. That is empty faith. The apostle John also expresses similar sentiment in 1 John 3:17 when he says, “whoever has this world goods and sees his brother in need and closes his heart, does not have the love of God in him”. Remember Jesus said that on that day, He will separate the sheep from the Goat and will say to the sheep, welcome for I was hungry, and you fed me, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was naked, and you clothe me, I was in prison, and you visited me. And the righteous will say, Lord, when did we see you naked and clothe you, or hungry and gave you food, etc and the Lord will say if you did for the least of my brethren, you did it for me. To those with empty faith, He will say depart from me, I know you not.

The question James is posing is, is it possible for a person to have an internal commitment to God without any external sign of that commitment? Is that faith sufficient for a right standing with God? In my opinion, **a genuine faith or commitment to God is always followed by results/evidence** which James refers to as **works**.

Faith that works.