

Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



“Every Layer True”

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Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): James/Jacob 5:12-15; Lev. 19:12, 18; Matt. 5:34-37; Mk. 6:12-13; Jas. 1:2-4; Jas. 2:14-17

What Is Beneath the Surface? There are objects that appear solid until the surface is peeled back. A fresh coat of paint may cover rotting wood. A carefully arranged exterior may hide cracks underneath. Something can look beautiful from a distance while lacking integrity beneath the surface. The same can be true of our spiritual lives. We can say the right words, pray familiar prayers, and perform spiritual actions while deeper layers of our hearts remain divided, wounded, dishonest, or untouched.

Throughout his letter, Jacob/James has been calling us toward wholeness—a life in which what is seen on the surface agrees with what is present underneath. He is confronting any separation between what we say and what we do, what we proclaim about God and what our lives actually display. In Jas. 5:12-15, James brings that call toward wholeness into three important areas: our words, our response to the changing circumstances of life, and the way we care for those who are weak. The Lord does not want to place a spiritual covering over what is false or broken. He wants to work through every layer until what is found beneath the surface is increasingly genuine, whole, and true.

1. LET EVERY LAYER OF YOUR WORDS BE TRUE

“But above all, my dear brothers and sisters, do not swear—either by heaven, or by the earth, or by any other oath. But let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes,’ and your ‘no,’ be ‘no’—so that you may not fall under judgment” (Jas. 5:12). At first, you might wonder, “What in the world does this instruction have to do with what James has just written about enduring suffering and what he is about to say concerning prayer.” But actually, this instruction continues one of the central themes of the entire letter: wholeness/simplicity/singularity rather than duplicity, integrity rather than double-mindedness, and a life in which our words agree with what is actually present in our hearts.

James is echoing both the Torah and the teaching of Yeshua. Leviticus says, *“You are not to swear by My Name falsely, and so profane the Name of your God. I am ADONAI”* (Lev. 19:12). Yeshua likewise taught, *“But let your word ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’—anything more than this is from the evil one”* (Matt. 5:37). Oaths are often used to add weight to words because ordinary words are not trusted. But people of faith should possess such integrity that additional layers of promises, guarantees, and spiritual language are unnecessary. Our yes should truly mean yes, and our no should truly mean no. What people hear from us should agree with what is actually true within us. Every layer of our speech should be honest. We don’t get to be like dishonest schoolyard children who say one thing and then declare it void because “my fingers were crossed!”

2. LET EVERY LAYER OF LIFE TURN TOWARD GOD

“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises” (Jas. 5:13). James places two people before us who appear to be standing at opposite ends of life. One is suffering hardship, carrying painful circumstances, and perhaps struggling emotionally beneath the weight of difficulty. The other is cheerful, encouraged, and in good spirits. Their circumstances are different, but James directs both people in the same direction – toward the LORD! The suffering person is to pray, and the cheerful person is to praise.

Every layer of life – from the lowest low to the highest high – belongs in our relationship with the Lord. When we suffer, we do not need to cover our fear with religious language or make desperate vows to persuade God to help us. We can honestly bring our pain, questions, weakness, and need for endurance before Him. When things are going well, we must not allow our joy to become a layer of pride or self-sufficiency. We praise the Lord because every good thing ultimately comes from Him. In suffering, prayer keeps us from becoming bitter. In the joy of experiencing blessing, praise and gratitude keep us from becoming proud. Whether the present layer of life is painful or pleasant, we turn toward the Lord.

3. LET EVERY LAYER OF FAITH BECOME REAL

“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of Messiah’s community, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (Jas. 5:14). The picture seems to be of someone who is physically weak, exhausted, and possibly unable even to come to the gathering. The elders are therefore summoned to that person. They go to the one who is weak, pray over that individual, and anoint the person with oil in the name of the Lord. The person’s weakness does not remove them from the care of Messiah’s community. When they cannot come to the community, the community goes to them.

The oil may symbolize God’s presence, attention, and care, but oil was also used practically in a medicinal way in the ancient world – as we see in the use of “essential oils” medicinally today. Is the oil pointing to a spiritual use or a medicinal use? We do not necessarily have to choose between those two layers of meaning. The elders are called to pray while also ministering to the person in a tangible, physical way. This is the same wholeness James has emphasized throughout the letter: faith and deeds working together. We do not merely say, “Be warmed, be filled, and be healed,” while leaving a weary person alone. We pray, serve, comfort, provide, and care in the name of the Lord. *“The prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up”* (Jas. 5:15). Our confidence is not in the oil, the medicine, the elders, or the strength of the sick person. Our confidence is in the Lord. Yet true faith does not remain hidden beneath spiritual words; it rises to the surface through loving, practical action.

CONCLUSION

James is showing us a faith that is whole all the way through. Our words are to be truthful without needing added layers of oaths. Our suffering is to become honest prayer, and our joy is to become humble praise. Our concern for the weak is to be more than kind words; it is to be prayerful, practical ministry. We are called to a real deal faith in which the surface agrees with what is beneath it. It speaks truthfully, turns continually toward God, and ministers to the whole person with spiritual dependence and tangible compassion.

Perhaps the Lord is revealing an area where the layers of your life do not yet agree. Your words and even deeply held beliefs may not consistently match your actions. Your suffering may have produced grumbling instead of prayer, or your blessing may have produced self-reliance instead of praise. Perhaps you are weary, sick, emotionally depleted, or spiritually exhausted, and you need to stop hiding your weakness and struggles and call upon mature believers to pray with you. Bring the whole of yourself before the Lord today—your words, body, mind, emotions, relationships, wounds, weaknesses, and sins. Ask Him to peel away what is false, heal what is broken, and make every layer true.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why should a believer's integrity make oaths, exaggerated promises, and added guarantees unnecessary?
2. How do prayer in suffering and praise in joyful seasons both reveal dependence upon God?
3. In what area of your life presently might there be a gap between what appears on the surface and what is actually happening underneath?
4. Which best describes your present season—suffering, cheerfulness, sickness, or weariness—and what response does James instruct you to make?
5. How can Messiah's community combine sincere prayer with tangible, practical care for those who are weak or suffering?

CLOSING PRAYER:

ADONAI, make every layer of our lives true before You. Remove duplicity, hypocrisy, and every division between what we say and what we do. Let our yes be yes and our no be no. When we suffer, teach us to pray honestly. When we are cheerful, teach us to praise humbly. When we are weak, give us the courage to call upon others, and when others are weak, move us to go to them with prayer, compassion, and practical care. Forgive our sins, heal what is broken, and raise us from every place of weariness. Peel away every false covering and bring Your truth into the deepest places of our hearts. Let our faith become more than words or outward actions. May the whole of our lives—our words, worship, relationships, service, bodies, minds, emotions, and spirits—become genuine pictures of the wholeness You desire to produce in us through Yeshua.

B'Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.