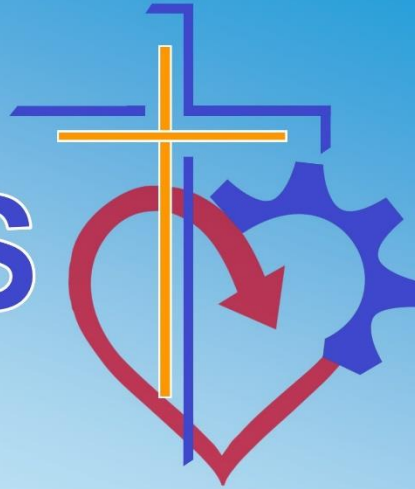


faith WORKS

The Book of James

-DEVOTIONAL PODCAST-



Not Too Low, Not Too High

James 1:9-11 The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. ¹⁰ But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. ¹¹ For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

Where do you find your worth? As flesh and blood beings our gut instinct is to find worth in the good things we have here. We find meaning in our relationships--our circle of family and friends, our connections on social media. We take pride in our possessions and property—great great grandma's antique china, our picturesque homes with manicured lawns and cozy cottages. We find security in our retirement portfolio and net assets. All of these are good gifts from the Lord that none of us have deserved for even an instant, but we sinners are so vain, so self-aggrandizing that we would twist God's generosity into an excuse to compete with each other and vie for envy in our neighbor's eyes--so that they might think something of us. We may not say it out loud, but inside we think, "Equality is fine and good for everyone else, but I need to be something more, something better!" James tells us that such a quest is not only futile in a perishing world, but it is altogether empty and unchristian because it fails to realize our equality—the equality we all share before God and the equal condition in which we all leave this world.

Where should our real worth and status come from? Not from the stuff on this world, but from the God who made us and redeemed us through our Savior. Through faith in Jesus and the sacrament of baptism we have been made children of God, forgiven heirs of eternal life. That is our enduring status in God's sight each day—no matter how the world calculates our valuation, and honestly, not even how we esteem ourselves. We belong to the Lord, and no prince or princess, no billionaire's son or daughter has it better!

So how does that truth transform how we see each other and ourselves? In the style of eastern wisdom literature, James is going to revisit this topic several times in his epistle. For now he says that the lowly, the humble, those of little means can boast that they are highly valued by God and rich in him, and conversely, those who are materially blessed should take pride in humbling themselves and remembering that there is nothing special about them that they received such abundance. Rather it is all a gift of God's grace. In that way those who have much and those who have little can rejoice in their equality of status before the Lord.

James also reminds us that death is a great equalizer. As Paul says elsewhere, "We brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out of it" (1 Tim. 6:7). Solomon, the wisest and perhaps the richest person to have ever lived, observed, "Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand" (Eccl. 5:15). Like a beautiful flower that withers and fades in the summer heat, even the most glorious and wealthy and gifted of people will finally be brought low, brought to nothing, equally humbled as they stand before their Maker and God. Regardless of our earthly status, or perceived value and worth, by God's grace, all who believe will stand before his judgment throne, equally forgiven, equally loved, and beautifully dressed in the same righteousness of Jesus. Thank God for equality!



Reflection Questions:

- 1.) Who do you know that needs to be reminded of their value and status in Christ? Reach out to encourage them today!
- 2.) Prayerfully reflect on where your own heart stands. If pride in your stuff and worldly accomplishments has crept in, ask God to give you humility. If you are struggling with despair and feelings of worthlessness, look to the cross of Jesus to see how dear and highly valued you are by God.



Prayer: *Lord and giver of all, we thank you for the many blessings you pour out on us each day. Help us to receive them with gratitude, rather than using them shore up our own status. Help us to see ourselves and each other in light of the equally exalted and glorious position we have been given in your sight through Jesus our Savior. Amen.*