

The image shows a rustic wooden book cover. The text is carved into the wood in a light, natural color. The title 'FAITH WORKS' is the largest and most prominent, with 'FAITH' on the top line and 'WORKS' on the second line. Below it, 'A STUDY IN JAMES' is carved in a smaller font. At the bottom, the author's name 'MARK DRISCOLL' is carved. The wood is dark and shows signs of use, with various tools like an axe, a knife, and a chisel scattered around. Wood shavings are also visible, suggesting the text was hand-carved.

FAITH
WORKS

A STUDY IN JAMES

MARK DRISCOLL

FAITH
WORKS
A Study in James

REALFAITH.COM

By Mark Driscoll

Faith Works: A Study in James
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ISBN: 978-1-7374103-3-1 (Paperback)
ISBN: 978-1-7374103-4-8 (E-book)

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REAL GROUPS WITH REAL FAITH

Faith that does not result in good deeds is not real faith.

James 2:20, TLB

At Real Faith, we believe that the Word of God isn't just for us to read, it's to be obeyed. And living in community with fellow believers is one of the ways God the Father allows us to learn and grow to become more like His Son Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. We do this through something called Real Groups. Here are a few tips to start your own.

1. Invite

Invite your friends, neighbors, family, coworkers, and enemies, because they all need Jesus whether they know Him or not! Whether it's a group of men, women, families, students, or singles, explain that you'd like to start a weekly sermon-based small group based on Pastor Mark Driscoll's sermons.

2. Listen to the sermon on realfaith.com or on the Real Faith app

You can host a viewing party to watch Real Faith Live and discuss it all at once, or you can watch it separately and gather to discuss it at another time that works for the group.

3. Get into God's Word

In addition to watching the sermon, make sure you and all group members have a study guide from realfaith.com for the current sermon series. There are questions for personal reflection as well as for groups that can guide your devotional times throughout the week. You can also sign up for Daily Devos at realfaith.com.

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4. Gather together

Whether at someone's house, a public place, or through something like Zoom, meet weekly to discuss the sermon and what God has taught you through it. The great thing about Real Groups is that you don't all have to be in the same location. You can talk about sermon takeaways, what stood out to you in the study guide, or what God taught you in His Word that week. Focus on personal application as much as possible.

5. Pray

When you gather, feel free to share prayer requests, pray for each other on the spot, and continue praying throughout the week. Prayer is a great unifying force that God gives us to strengthen His family.

6. Share

Send us photos, videos, testimonies, and updates of how your group is doing to hello@realfaith.com. You might even be featured on our Real Faith Live show!

There are plenty more resources to discover at realfaith.com/real-groups, as well. We will be praying for you and your group and look forward to hearing what God does through it.

INTRODUCTION TO JAMES

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?”—James 2:14

Have you ever wondered what it would have been like to share a bunk bed with Jesus as a kid?

I grew up in a big working-class family with brothers and sisters, a mom who stayed at home to raise us, and a dad named Joseph who paid the bills by swinging a hammer. Sound familiar? Jesus’ family was like that.

Being poor, maybe He shared a small room with His brothers like I did, with bunk beds packed close enough together that we could reach out and annoy each other or stay up late talking. During the day, it was all about building forts and playing ball outside.

I wonder what it was like to have Jesus as a brother. What were the conversations like late into the night? As kids, what was it like to eat all your meals, play outside, enjoy the holidays, and make memories together? Did Jesus have a decent arm in sports, and could His brothers beat Him in wrestling?

A fascinating author

One of Jesus’ brothers, James, wrote a book of the Bible bearing his name. The book of James is a short letter that’s been the source of much controversy throughout church history. Because of the scholarly debates surrounding the book, most pastors approach the content with theology at the forefront.

In my opinion, it’s much more interesting to start with the man behind the words. If I could interview anyone in the Bible about Jesus Christ, His mother Mary and His brother James would top the list.

Nobody knows you like your sibling. If anyone in all of Scripture could dish up the dirt on Jesus, surely His kid brother would have no shortage of youthful

indiscretions and sibling injustices to recount. I know my younger brothers would never mistake me for the sinless and perfect Messiah. But James grew up to preach “faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory”—a legitimate indication that there was something special happening in that family.^a

That's not to say James always believed Jesus was who He claimed to be. The Bible tells us that when Jesus first started preaching, His family “went out to seize him, for they were saying, ‘He is out of his mind!’”^b

By the time Jesus rose from the dead, however, His brothers were worshiping Him as God.^c James went on to lead the church in Jerusalem, the largest and most influential church of the first century.

James the Just

During his ministry, James earned the nickname “James the Just.” Ancient historian Eusebius wrote, “It seems that James was indeed a remarkable man and famous among all for righteousness.”¹

It also appears that James was a man of action who refused to tolerate a church that consumed the good news of Jesus but did not respond with good deeds like Jesus.

As the leader of a large, powerful church, James saw a bunch of Christians who said they loved his big brother but did not act like Him at all. Pastor James called them out for a faith that was worthless (1:26), dead (2:17), useless (2:20), unspiritual (3:15), demonic (3:15), adulterous (4:4), proud (4:6), double-minded (4:8), and self-indulgent (5:5). He was very serious about the reputation of his Big Brother, which explains his passion and pointedness.

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

-James 5:13

James turns up the temperature on lukewarm Christians. Believers looking for practical Christianity and what wisdom looks like in everyday life have repeatedly turned to this letter making it one of the most beloved and quoted books of the Bible.

The miraculous transformation of James, from faithless little brother to fiery megachurch pastor, culminated in his martyrdom around AD 62. Stoned and beaten to death for refusing to cease worshiping his brother as God, James

^aJames 2:1 ^b Mark 3:21 ^c Acts 1:14

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perished with the same courage he sought to elicit from other believers. Imagine how amazing it was for James to close his eyes in death and then open them to see the face of his brother Jesus in full glory as God on the other side! James did not regret living and dying for Jesus, and he wants us to do the same.

A life worth living

James' bold life matched his bold words. This is a letter from a passionate, frustrated, righteously angry little brother, moved by a deep concern for the eternal destiny of his friends and neighbors, because "whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins" (5:20).

James knew that Jesus was worth living for – not just believing in. The church today could use a few more men and women who care enough to get fired up like our Lord's little brother and live for the Jesus who died for them.

Jesus' Spirit-filled family

Beyond a few of their names, we know very little about Jesus' brothers and sisters except for His half-brothers James and Jude.

Although he is Jesus' brother^a, James is not a believer until Jesus appears to him following the resurrection.^b He is with the apostles at Pentecost^c and becomes a leader of the Jerusalem church.^d His two nicknames are "James the Just" for his character and "Camel Knees" from praying so much.²

In Jude 1, the author introduces himself as, "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James." In Galatians 2:9, Paul calls James a pillar holding up the church along with Cephas (Peter) and John. Both James and Jude go on to be devoted Christian pastors, worshipping their big brother Jesus and writing books of the Bible bearing their names. James also presides over the conference held in Jerusalem to welcome Gentile converts in the church.^e His work opens up the gospel beyond the Jewish people and can be credited in large part for the existence of Christianity as a global movement of the Spirit to this day.

We know that both James and Jude live by the power of the Spirit because they write Scripture. To write Scripture, you must have the Spirit.^f

In his brief letter, Jude mentions the Spirit in verses 19–20, "It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit..." Not only is Jude empowered by the Spirit, as a pastor, he teaches his people to pray in the

^a Matt. 13:55 ^b Mark 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:7 ^c Acts 1:14 ^d Gal. 1:19, 2:9; Acts 12:17, 15:12–21 ^e Acts 15
^f 2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16

Spirit as well.

The Book of James is all about wisdom. When James frequently speaks of wisdom, he is saying the same thing as when other New Testament writers mention the Holy Spirit.³

The Bible makes this connection between the presence of the Spirit and possessing of wisdom in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 34:9 says, that, “Joshua . . . was full of the spirit of wisdom.” Looking at Daniel, an ungodly leader senses something divinely distinct about him and says in Daniel 5:14, “I have heard of you that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you.” In Isaiah 11:2, it was promised that Jesus would come and “the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding...” In the New Testament, when it came time to pick leaders in the early church, Acts 6:3 reports the apostles saying, “Brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.” Lastly, in Ephesians 1:17, Paul prays “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom.” The Bible often speaks of the cause (Spirit) and effect (wisdom) with various authors stressing one or the other while speaking of both.

Jesus’ wise brother James is filled with the Holy Spirit, writes the Scriptures by the power of the Spirit, and instructs Christians that it requires wisdom from the Holy Spirit to know and follow the will of God. Additionally, James dies a martyr’s death in service to his half-brother. We read that “James the half-brother of Jesus was executed...

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?

-James 2:14

he was thrown off the temple and, still alive, was stoned to death.”⁴ Dying, James echoes his big brother Jesus from Luke 23:34 saying, “Forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

One archaeological expert says, “When James is murdered...it is Simon...who takes over leadership of the movement.”⁵ History seems to indicate that, to replace James, another one of Jesus’ brothers named Simon (sometimes called Simeon) is chosen to assume leadership. If accurate, Mary and Joseph have at least three children in significant ministry roles in addition to their son Jesus Christ. Most of us are familiar with Jesus’ ministry and its impact on history, but we often overlook the enormous role Jesus’ family played in His ministry. Jesus had no ministry without His family!

A STUDY IN JAMES

Themes in James

Weighing in at 1,742 words (depending upon which English translation you prefer), you can read the book of James in under half an hour. As you read it, three things will stand out about James:

1. Practical – Just like his Big Brother who came down from Heaven to earth, James is the book that pulls lofty theology down to practical daily life lived for God in everything from our pots and pans to dishes and discussions.
2. Pithy – As the Wisdom Literature of the New Testament, James reads a bit like Proverbs in the Old Testament with big thoughts condensed down to memorable statements.
3. Poetic – James is filled with illustrations and analogies that serve as windows to allow the light of God's Word to flood into every corner of your life.

Throughout James, there are some major themes which serve to weave the book together.

Jesus is presented as:

- Lord Jesus Christ (1:1)
- Object of faith (2:1)
- Lord of glory (2:1)
- Almighty/Lord of hosts (5:4)
- Coming King (5:7-8)
- Healer (5:14-15)

James distinguishes between the godly and ungodly as well:

Godly

- Brothers and sisters (1:2, 16; 2:1, 14; 3:1, 10, 12; 4:11 5:7, 9, 10, 12, 19)
- Beloved brothers (1:16, 19; 2:5)

Ungodly

- Foolish (2:20)
- Adulterers (4:4)
- Sinners (4:8a)
- Rich (5:1)

Showing that believers in both the Old and New Testaments live by faith, James quotes the Old Testament explicitly on numerous occasions:

- James 2:8 quotes Leviticus 19:18
- James 2:11a quotes Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18
- James 2:11b quotes Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17
- James 2:23 quotes Genesis 15:6
- James 4:6 quotes Proverbs 3:34

James also uses numerous Old Testament believers as examples of faith

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including:

- Abraham (Genesis 22; James 2:21)
- Rahab (Joshua 2:1-21, 6:24-25; James 2:26)
- The prophets (James 5:10)
- Job (James 5:11)
- Elijah (1 Kings 17:1, 18:1, 18:41-46; James 5:17)

Echoing his brother, on many occasions James gives commentary on the prior teaching of Jesus Christ:

- Blessings on the poor (Matthew 5:3; Luke 6:20; James 1:9, 2:5)
- Mercy (Matthew 5:7; James 2:13)
- The tongue (Matthew 12:34-37; 3:2, 5-6,8)
- Gehenna (Matt 5:22, 29-30, 10:28, 18:9, 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6)
- A tree and its fruit (Matthew 7:15-20; James 3:10-12)
- Peacemakers (Matthew 5:9; James 3:18)
- Warnings to the rich (Luke 6:24, 12:13-21; James 1:10-11, 5:1)
- Warnings against worldliness (Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 12:33-34; James 5:2-3)
- Letting your yes be yes, and your no be no (Matthew 5:34-37; James 5:12).

Thank you for the honor of helping you learn about living all of life with Jesus Christ from His little brother who did just that. My prayer is that your relationship with Jesus would grow deeper so that you are as close to Him as James was.

Components of this study guide

This study guide, originally published several years ago, will hopefully be a helpful resource for studying the book of James individually or with a small group. It's the result of a group effort between myself, a research team, and other staff and team members and this edition is an updated version of an earlier resource. I pray it helps you study this book about Jesus' younger brother and helps you learn more about Jesus in a personal way. You can also find the sermon series that accompanies this study guide as well as daily devotions, sermon transcripts, and a full research brief on the book at realfaith.com. There, you will also find hundreds of other free sermons and thousands of free Bible teaching resources made possible by the generosity of our financial partners who support Real Faith Ministries.

CHAPTER 1

James 1:1-8

How does faith work when you are in a trial?

James 1:1-8 –¹ James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. ² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Memory Verse

James 1:2-3 –² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

Summary

Imagine a scene where you've recently bought an old house. It's been cleared of furniture, but up in the attic, there are a few odds and ends including a dusty old box of letters dated as far back as the early 1900s. The previous owner has died, and there are no living relatives to leave the belongings to, so you feel free to peruse the letters. The correspondence you read is fascinating, and before you know it, you've spent an hour pouring over half a dozen letters. But you've read only one side of a conversation and there are old-timey turns of phrase that are hard to make sense of. Clearly, it's going to require more reading before you're able to put the pieces together and make sense of exactly what you are reading.

In order to understand this correspondence, you'll have to aim at establishing

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a few things first: what the original intention of the letter was, who the author and recipient were, and in what context the author and recipient lived. The same thing is true when we approach writings in the Bible.

Before we begin applying meaning of a biblical text to our own lives, we have to do the same kind of detective work.

First, church history tells us that this letter was penned by Jesus' half-brother James. James lived an extraordinary life. Imagine what it would've been like to grow up in the same household as Jesus. James was given a front row seat into the daily life of Jesus as He was empowered by the Spirit to fully and perfectly obey God in all of life. In Galatians 1:19, James is considered one of the most highly regarded and respected Christian leaders alive on the earth, and in humility, he uses for himself the simple title of "servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

James was also a leader in the mother Church in Jerusalem^a and was skillful in resolving conflict. He included the Gentiles as a part of God's people.^b He further went on to explain that Jewish and Gentile Christians could and should fellowship together, and that the Gentiles were not required to observe ritual law. He also urged Gentile Christians to abstain from potentially offensive behaviors to the Jews.

The intended audience of James appears to be largely Jewish Christians, the "twelve tribes in the Dispersion." The twelve tribes refer to the historical origins of Israel, descended from the twelve patriarchs.^c But the people were scattered due to the Assyrian and Babylonian military victories over the nation. The church then, appropriated the title "Dispersion," with Jesus as their Messiah who reestablished the twelve tribes^d, and Christians (Jewish or non) recognized themselves as the true heirs of the Jewish faith.^e In Christ, the instruction and exhortation of the book of James is for all in the family of God through faith in Christ.

If there is anyone in history that could legitimately name-drop, it would be Jesus' half-brother, James. Surprisingly though, James doesn't introduce himself as an apostle or even make the familiar connection as someone with the authority to write to his fellow believers. He calls himself a "servant" of God and Christ, a man bound to his Master, living his life in loving obedience no matter the cost. He isn't a volunteer or an executive in Christ's business. He is his Lord's servant, serving the Lord who served him by living, dying, and rising to save. This echoes Jesus' humble claim to do nothing on his own but only what he sees the Father doing.^f With this introduction, James appeals as an equal to his readers,

^a Acts 15 ^b see Amos 9:11,12 ^c Deut. 33 ^d Jer. 3:18; Ezek. 37:19-24; Song of Sol. 17:28

^e Rom. 4; 1 Cor. 10:18; Gal. 4:21-31; Phil. 3:3 ^f John 5:19, 30

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believing Jews who have been displaced from their homes and families.

Verses 2-8 reveal that God gives two things: trials and good gifts. Sometimes, they are one in the same.

At one time or another, everyone has either given or received gifts with strings attached. A neighbor needs help with a home project and you pitch in, expecting some sort of future reciprocity. When we give of ourselves, our selfless, loving motivation is often mingled with some sort of personal gain or at least hope for recognition. We've all learned the hard way that when the strings are attached to the gift, we get pulled into something we regret.

God is the perfect gift-giver. James 1:5 states that God "gives generously without reproach." God is a giver, not a taker. God needs us for nothing but can give to us anything.

Life is filled with pains, problems, and perils. When they inevitably come, our first response is anything but joy because these seasons are hard to enjoy. According to James, though, these are opportunities to grow in faith. In our limited understanding, health, wealth, ease, and comfort define our ideas of a full life. God, however, wants us to invest in our character and hard times can produce the holiest people.

In and through trials, God gives us both the testing of our faith to reveal where we find our true identity and stability, and the wisdom to withstand the trial. Experiencing joy at the introduction of a trial rests firmly on a deep faith in the character of God and the power of the Spirit of God. This is the example Jesus set for us as He walked through the cross before heading Home.

When James says, "trials of various kinds," he has several things in mind, which he brings up later. Many of his readers have lost family connections and are being persecuted because they now follow Christ. The trials they endure are favoritism, humiliation, abuse of power, and poverty, among others. James doesn't urge them to claim promises of happiness and success. He calls them to see the fruit in remaining faithful.

Knowing what is holy versus what is sinful is often much easier than figuring out what is wise versus what is foolish. Often, we need to make practical decisions among the hardships of life and if we get it wrong, we feel the pain. So, we need

...confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

-James 5:16

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wisdom from God to know how to walk through a world filled with landmines and James is largely written as a field guide for the journey.

Personal Study Questions

1. What can be learned about James' character from this passage?
2. Read Romans 1:1, 1 Corinthians 1:1, and Jude 1:1. What is common to each of these verses and whose authority is invoked in each? James could've easily claimed familial connection to Jesus, so why did he call himself a "servant"? What does this say about James' character and authority?
3. What is your prayer for yourself as we begin this study of the wisdom literature of the New Testament?
4. Take some time to think about how you might introduce yourself. What do you usually say? Does James' introduction help inform your understanding of what it means to be a Christian?
5. What truths (from this passage and elsewhere in Scripture) must we cling to in order to meet trials with joy?
6. Read Matthew 16:24-25. What does Jesus have to say about trials?
7. What trials in your life have tested your faith, how did you respond, and to whom or what did you turn to for comfort amid trials?
8. Are you in a trial right now? What wisdom do you need for your trial?

Group Study Questions

1. How do you view your relationship with God? Which of these words applies best: "volunteer," "citizen," "employee," "servant," "fan," or "friend"?
2. Do you see your faith as something you have to do so that God will love you, or something you get to do because God already loves you?
3. If you could pick one relationship where the pursuit of humility and service would make all the difference, what would it be?
4. Take some time as a group and share how each of you seeks and finds wisdom so that your faith guides the practical decisions of your daily life. Where do you go to find wisdom? What exactly has that looked like in your life experience?

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Notes

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CHAPTER 2

James 1:9-18

How does faith work when you are tempted?

James 1:9-18 – ⁹ Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰ and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits. ¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. ¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Memory Verse

James 1:13-15 – ¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Summary

Everyone loves being the recipient of a well-thought-out gift—the kind of gift that shows that the giver understands your interests and wants you to feel appreciated. But when you receive a gift that you aren’t exactly crazy about—

because it's the wrong size, wrong color, wrong everything—you find yourself wondering if the person even knows you or cares.

But when the gift comes from our Father who knows what we need, we need to assume it's the gift we need, even if it's not the gift we want.

There are times when God gift wraps blessing in tear-stained, cancerous, messy, brutal circumstances a bit like Jesus, who is God's gift to the world wrapped in a crucified body. The promise to us is that He gives good gifts, and sometimes they are packaged in bad circumstances, which makes their goodness hard to see. It requires faith to see that something ugly will make us beautiful, something painful will heal us, or that something that destroys us also delivers us.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

-James 1:5

Mary, the mother of Jesus and James, provides us with a powerful example of a gift well-received. In Luke 1, the angel Gabriel comes to Mary and bestows upon her the gift of favor as the mother of Jesus. She was able to withstand the confusing, terrifying, amazing events of her life from supernatural impregnation to witnessing the murder of her Son because she believed in the character of God, received His favor upon her, and trusted in the goodness of His plan. Jesus and James had a mom who was nearly divorced by her fiancée, rejected by her small religious town, and wrongly called a sexually immoral, lying woman. When this life was revealed to her, she was told by her relative Elizabeth in Luke 1:42, "blessed are you among women". Jesus was a good gift sent down from Heaven but being His mom led to some hard days.

As a pastor, I have a sacred front row seat for the best and worst days of people's lives. I have been at the hospital when a baby was born, only to then preach their funeral some months later. I have officiated a wedding, and then sat on a hospital floor with a groom as he was praying that his beloved bride would survive a brain aneurism. Life on this planet is so tough that no one makes it out alive. I am deeply and profoundly sorry for all that you have been through and whatever you are enduring today.

Trials in life are inevitable. Whether you're a casualty of downsizing and have recently lost your job, whether you're struggling with singleness and wanting desperately to have children, or you're feeling like you'll lose it if you must referee another argument between the kids, we all struggle in life, and it prompts

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difficult questions. You wonder where God is, why things are always so hard, or if God is even there.

In the Christian life, we often can forget that the Lord Jesus Himself had the same kinds of struggles and temptations that we do. James saw his own brother, Jesus, struggle perfectly through trials that were unbearable. In these verses of his book, James is trying to encourage the Christians to endure trials like Christ. When the Psalmist says we must pass through the valley of the shadow of death, it means we cannot book a flight over it or take the long way around it.

When we were kids in school, every recess, the team captains would flip a coin. If you picked the right side of the coin, you won. If you picked the wrong side of the coin, you lost.

Life is like that every day. Every day, every decision you make has a coin with the word “trial” on one side and “temptation” on the other.

If you choose sin, you are deciding that you will join Satan's team and rebel against God. Sometimes, we are most vulnerable to this when life is most painful. In those darkest days, we feel that God owes us, has failed us, or that we deserve to self-medicate with our vice of choice. That choice is faithless.

However, if you choose holiness, you are deciding that you will stick with Team Jesus and invite the Holy Spirit to supernaturally empower you to endure your trial and grow in character through it. That choice is faith.

What you go through does not determine who you become. How you respond to what you go through is what determines who you become. The good news is this – we've all chosen the wrong side of the coin and fallen into sin. Thankfully, this is Jesus' specialty and He allows us to retake our test until we pass it as a trial no matter how many times we have failed it as a temptation.

Personal Study Questions

1. What are some of God's attributes and actions that James highlights in these verses?
2. Read Romans 8:23,24. According to these verses, along with James 1:18, what is our hope? What do we already have, and what are we still waiting for?
3. Which people or verses in the Bible do you find most helpful when you are in a tough season and your faith and flesh are being tempted?
4. How has something been used of God in your life to go from what you considered an awful gift to a wonderful gift?
5. Is it a sin to be tempted or only when we give in to the temptation? Was Jesus tempted? Did Jesus sin? How are sin and temptation very different?

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6. What are your hardest temptations to resist currently? Are you willing to trust a friend to hold you accountable and do the same for them?

Small Group Study Questions

1. What is the greatest trial God has gotten you through? How exactly did you make it through?
2. Who is in a trial right now that needs prayer, encouragement, and support?
3. How has God used something you never wanted or pursued to become a great gift to you?
4. How can people in the group support and help one another when temptation comes?

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CHAPTER 3

James 1:19-27

How does faith work when you are angry?

James 1:19-27 –¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. ²⁶ If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Memory Verse

James 1:19-20 –¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Summary

From the checkout line magazine rack to radio talk shows to the comments section of that last controversial blog and hard-hitting political opinion television, our culture is saturated and obsessed with expressing the latest rage of the moment. Everyone has an argumentative inner lawyer seated on the throne of their hearts. Whether the angry words are spoken, or simmer under the surface

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of a calm countenance, we all have fallen into the trap of a loud-mouthed rant. James has a good word for us: listen up, quiet down, cool your jets, bite your tongue, and walk the talk, which means walk away before you start talking. Otherwise, your religion is worthless.

As someone who has spent a lifetime removing their foot from their mouth, James' words remind me of a lot of my words that should not have been said. How about you? Any texts, emails, social media posts, voicemails, or conversations that, once you cooled down, you wish you could go back in time and erase?

James instructed Christians how to listen, speak, express anger constructively, be pure and undefiled, and practice healthy self-examination, in order to avoid self-deception. One thing I've learned the hard way is that our first response is usually in the flesh, and to respond in the Spirit takes a little longer.

To be clear, James is not a coward who is afraid to say hard things, or a flatterer who manipulates people by only smiling and quoting motivational greeting cards. James instructs us on how to avoid turning trials into temptations with his wisdom regarding speech

and obedience. If we allow our anger to control us, we will not truly listen to people, and we will sin in our anger. As Proverbs 15:1 also tells us, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." God's goal is not that we win the argument, but that we also win the person with whom we are arguing. To do that, we need to watch what we say, when we say it, and how we say it.

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.
-James 1:19–20

Religion says lots but does little. James flips the script and says that what we truly believe is more clearly revealed by the lives we live than the words we speak. When all is said and done, far more is said than done. Judas serves as a painful example as he helped lead Jesus' ministry, praying prayers and singing songs, while stealing money.

As Christians, if we say we accept God's Word, that means we also need to live by it. Otherwise, we become hypocrites pointing out the speck of sawdust in their eye, while overlooking the lumberyard we've collected in our own. If we only listen to or read His Word but don't meditate on it and allow it to change

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us, James says our “religion is worthless.” Some people need more information – they need to read the Bible more, study more, and learn more. Many, if not most people, need more obedience – they need to act on what they already know before they learn anything else.

We may know a lot about the Bible, but our actions will show what we believe. Charles Spurgeon, the great preacher who was a bit of a sniper in the Spirit, once said, “If your religion does not make you holy, it will damn you. It is simply painted pageantry to go to hell in.”⁶

To make this as practical as possible, consider these examples. Going to the gym does you no good unless you exercise. Buying your vitamins does you no good unless you take them. Having a seatbelt does you no good unless you buckle it. And owning a Bible does you no good unless you obey it.

Personal Study Questions

1. What do you know that you need to start doing, or stop doing, and you simply need to obey and make it happen?
2. What are we asked to accept from God that helps us get rid of evil?
3. What does it mean to be a doer of the word and not only a hearer? How does the picture in verses 23-24 illustrate this?
4. What does it mean to “keep oneself from being polluted by the world”? What are the areas that are most difficult for you (e.g. food, alcohol, sex, spending, gossip, etc.)?
5. On a scale of 1 (awful) to 10 (awesome), how are you at listening to people and not ignoring them to prepare your immediate response?
6. What can you do differently to invite the Holy Spirit to help you say less and hear more? Who in your life is a good listener and what can you learn from their example?
7. When you are angry, are you more likely to respond quickly or take some time to cool down, pray, and practice self-control, which is a fruit of the Spirit? How can you improve on this?

Small Group Study Questions

1. Make sure everyone in the group shares this week and, if you are often dominant in the conversation, lovingly focus on listening more and speaking less.
2. What is the difference between weakness (no power) and meekness (power that is controlled and directed)? How was meekness manifest in Jesus' life? How can meekness be more manifest in your life?

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3. Are you a better listener or a better talker? What relationship(s) would greatly benefit if you improved in your area of weakness?
4. What's one thing that would help keep you unstained from the world?
5. Take some time encouraging one another for words each member has shared, questions they have asked, and listening they have done.

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CHAPTER 4

James 2:1-13

How does faith work with people you don't like?

James 2:1-13 – ¹ My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ² For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³ and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” ⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? ⁸ If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Memory Verse

James 2:1 - My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

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Summary

As a young pastor, my wife Grace and I started out teaching a Bible study for college-aged kids. Near the university were numerous homeless kids who intermingled with the university students in the local coffee shops and concert venues. As a general rule, the college kids looked like typical clean-cut middle and upper middle-class suburbanites. The homeless kids wore a lot of black, slept in their clothes, bathed infrequently, and smoked a lot of cigarettes.

To reach both groups, I would preach a very late-night service with no childcare in a punk rock concert venue. Every once in a while, a clean-cut Christian family would show up for church. On one occasion, we had a family with a lot of kids all dressed up in their Sunday best carrying King James Bibles and the look on their faces as they saw a small army of goth kids smoking outside the front doors using colorful language was one I will never forget.

I could see they were out of their element, so I approached them to welcome them. They asked if they had the right address and if we were a church. I explained that we were trying to be missionaries to kids who did not know Jesus and we were far more concerned about them meeting Jesus and having the Holy Spirit in them than what we were seeing on the outside. To their credit, this family overcame their awkwardness, attended a service, and stuck around for a season to serve the homeless kids. I was very proud of them as they obeyed the heart of what James 2 is encouraging.

We all imagine ourselves as impartial to outward appearances, but reality often reveals our biases. In the beginning of chapter 2, the Apostle James exhorts believers to demonstrate their faith through action by not showing preferential treatment. The Bible says that man looks at the outward, but that God looks at the inward.^a Jesus also rebuked religious hypocrites who looked good outwardly to others but looked awful inwardly to God.^b Judging someone outwardly is easy – we do not need to meet them, get to know them, or learn anything about them. Getting to know someone inwardly is harder – we need to approach them, ask questions, listen, and hear about their life journey and where they are at with Jesus Christ.

Conversation about money and status in the church are often uncomfortable, but James discusses these issues often. James, the practical theologian that he is, urges believers to only make distinctions that God Himself makes. We've all got some preferences that can become our prejudices and, if we don't take James' instruction to heart, we can discourage fellow brothers and

^a 1 Samuel 16:7 ^b Matthew 7:15, 23:7-8

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sisters in Christ, and miss out on some relationships that will help us mature as well.

Remember how James starts this letter? He calls himself a servant of God and Christ. Since then, he calls us his beloved brothers. Every Christian has been adopted into the same family with the same Father and occupies the same position of love and blessing because of the Spirit in them regardless of what we see outwardly.^a

Understanding social dynamics does not require a degree in sociology. All it takes is witnessing lunch hour at your local high school.

Preppies, jocks, nerds, punks, stoners, and the drama club kids all cloister together with their kind, and it's no mystery why. Everyone feels the need to belong, according to their interests and talents. The unfortunate side is, there are rules to who's in and out. If you don't wear the right clothes, make straight A's, perform on the field, or listen to the right music, you're excluded from one group but accepted by another. Later, in adult life, the rules may change, but the dynamics remain. You're either in, or you're out. But the church, James says, is a family where partiality is a sin.

In response to judgment, our hearts can be self-justifying. "I may not be perfect, but in the end, God will weigh the good and the bad." The problem is, to break one law is to break them all. The Christian will never achieve perfection in this life but should continually strive for progress to become more like Jesus every day.

The one unifying factor in the Kingdom of God is that all Christians have received mercy from God in Christ. Social hierarchies of rich and poor, black and white, those with status and those with none no longer apply in the family of God. In the Kingdom, it's not about what we do, what we have, or who we are but rather what Christ has done, what Christ has given, and who we are in Christ.

Our response to others through the power of the Holy Spirit is impartiality and mercy. Through Jesus, mercy triumphs over judgment.

So, as brothers and sisters in God's family, how could we judge each other by external appearances? Who are we trying to impress? James reminds us that God has blessed the poor with rich faith. Some of us, being free from worldly possessions, have leaned into Christ and learned the joy of steadfast faith. As C. S.

**Submit yourselves
therefore to God.
Resist the devil, and
he will flee from you.
-James 4:7**

^a Romans 8:14-17

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Lewis says, “He who has God and everything else has no more than he who has God only,” except the one with everything is more tempted to forget the one who gave it all to him.⁷

As Christians, we are each glad that God has chosen to give us mercy rather than judgment. In fact, without mercy we could not have a relationship with God. James is asking that we model our relationships after our relationship with God. Rather than judging people that God has saved and given mercy to, we should not judge them but join Him in giving them mercy. This looks like love, grace, kindness, and patience that helps us both become more like Jesus Christ.

Personal Study Questions

1. Read the passage carefully. James uses a hypothetical situation to illustrate his point. Now read the passage three more times, imagining yourself in the position of the rich man, poor man, and finally yourself in your own church as the story unfolds.
2. Honestly, if you had met Jesus as an unmarried, homeless, poor man around the age of 30 who wandered from place-to-place, would you have respected Him by just looking at Him, or would you have judged Him as someone you did not have much regard for?
3. Who are the people you are drawn to and who are the people you try and avoid? Why?
4. God often chose to reveal His power and glory through the poor and downtrodden in Scripture (i.e. David and Goliath, Moses and the Israelites, the disciples, etc.). Why do you think that is?

Small Group Study Questions

1. Can you remember a time where you were the person who was rejected and outcast by family or friends? How can that experience help you grow in empathy for others?
2. What are some areas of your life that someone could've judged you, but instead gave you mercy, which changed everything?
3. Why is it important to be rich in faith and not just wealth?
4. Since James quotes Jesus about loving your neighbor as yourself, who is your nearest neighbor to start with (e.g. spouse, children, close friends, coworkers, etc.)?

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Notes

CHAPTER 5

James 2:14-26

How does faith work when you are feeling lazy?

James 2:14-26 – ¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! ²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵ And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Memory Verse

James 2:14 – What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?

Summary

As a newly married couple, my wife Grace and I bought some inexpensive furniture that required that we carefully follow directions to assemble it. Quickly, it became obvious that I am no good at following directions. I kept getting the

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steps out of order, and Grace stepped in to carefully read the directions so that we did everything in the order that it was designed.

In Christian theology, there is something called, “the order of salvation”. The basic idea is that salvation gets done in an order determined by God and that the order matters. Apparently, building a Christian is a bit like building a dresser, and getting things done in the right order is a big deal.

This section of James is full of controversy. We are told elsewhere in Scripture, especially the passages written by the Apostle Paul, that God’s grace alone saves us.^a Yet James seems to be saying that good works play a role in our salvation (v. 24). God’s Word doesn’t contradict itself, so how can this be?

The fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that God works 1. for you 2. in you and 3. through you. Paul emphasizes the reality of the internal aspect of faith (1-2), whereas James emphasizes the external results of internal faith (3). These do not contradict, but rather complement one another.

Some think that Paul is completely against works, which he is not. Again, the order matters greatly as he says we are saved by grace and Jesus’ works (not our own), but that we are saved to the good works God has planned to do through us by the Spirit. Ephesians 2:8-10 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast **(God’s work for you)**. For we are his workmanship **(God’s work in you)**, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them **(God’s work through you)**.”

For a fuller explanation of this important debate, the Appendix goes into deeper detail. The summary is that faith is both internal and external according to my summary:

Faith is a Holy Spirit-empowered internal devotion to God (faith) that produces an external devotion to God (works or fruit).

Consider this: Suppose a friend was always going on and on about how wonderful their spouse is and the depth of their relationship, but you never saw relational warmth between them. You’d be correct in questioning the nature of that relationship. Simply put, love and faith in another produces action that affirms the presence of said love and faith. So it is with faith and works.

Those who truly understand what God has done for them cannot help but be moved to live a generous, worshipful life. These acts of worship are the very “works” that James is referring to.

The one thing that most religions get right is that something has gone

^a Eph. 2:8-9

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wrong, and some work needs to be done to make it right. The difference between Christianity and other religions is in regard to who does this work. In all other religions, human beings do the work to make things right with their god. In Christianity, Jesus Christ comes down to do all the work to make us right with God. He lived the perfect life we should have lived, died the death we should have died, and rose to give the gift we could not earn. When Jesus said loudly on the cross "it is finished!", He was declaring that the work was done by Him and all we needed to do was trust in His finished work!

If we could be saved by our performance of good living alone, God's gracious work for us would be unnecessary. Works with an aim toward self-salvation are acts of self-worship. Works that are worshipful are only possible through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is the acting out of the gospel in works of worship that James is encouraging us to do so that what God's done for us and in us flows through us to benefit and bless others.

James offers two dramatic examples of people acting on their faith in God. Abraham trusted God enough to put his only son on an altar. Rahab believed Israel's God was the God of Heaven and earth, and she proved it by hiding the Israelite spies. Other examples include Hannah, who gave her son, Samuel, to the temple for training; David, who fought Goliath; and Daniel's friends, who were thrown into the furnace for their faith. These acts did not save them, but they displayed their saving faith. Our faith is demonstrated primarily by obeying God, especially when the risk is that we will suffer in some form or fashion for our faith.

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.
-James 1:26

Personal Study Questions

1. In verses 14-17, James is speaking of a faith largely based on lip service without lifestyle. What does he call this kind of faith?
2. Read verses 18-19. What does this section tell us is necessary for faith?
3. Read Genesis 22 to learn more about Abraham's faith.
4. Read Joshua 2 to learn more about Rahab's faith.
5. Everyone has some area(s) of their life where they don't really live out of obedience to God, which is often a hypocrisy that we excuse or learn to live with. What are your area(s)? What can you do to have your faith transform those areas?

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Small Group Study Questions

1. Are you more familiar with God working 1. for you through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection 2. in you by the power of the Holy Spirit or 3. through you in the fruit of good works?
2. How can other group members help you learn how to grow in the area(s) you are weaker at, understanding the three dimensions of faith?
3. How would you say loving God is tied to loving our neighbors? How does loving others demonstrate our faith in God?
4. What are some of the good works God has created you to do by His power?

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CHAPTER 6

James 3:1-12

How does faith work when you want to speak your mind?

James 3:1-12 – ¹ Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. ² For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. ³ If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. ⁴ Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵ So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. ⁷ For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

Memory Verse

James 3:7-9 – ⁷ For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.

Summary

“Loose lips sink ships.” During World War II, this slogan appeared on propaganda posters created and distributed by a major American distiller. The slogan advised servicemen and other American citizens to avoid careless talk about secure military information. Speaking openly about knowledge of a ship’s course might allow the enemy to intercept and destroy American naval ships.

Consider for a moment that, in the day that James warned us to consider our communication, there was no electricity, printing press, or internet. How much more ominous are his words in our day of cell phones, emails, texts, social media, platforms, comments sections, phone calls, videos, and the innumerable other ways we can curse others with our communication?

As someone who has spent their adult life largely in the public eye communicating, there is a list of regrets that quickly comes to mind of things I have said and typed. The timeless Word of God is more timely than ever and careless and uncontrolled speech can bring much destruction unlike any other time in human history.

How many truths are twisted? How many lies are told? How many facts are buried? How many news stories are fake? How many classroom lectures are indoctrination? How many ads are false claims? How many juicy gossip stories are myths? How many social media platforms are throttling good and promoting evil? How many politicians know they are spinning facts rather than serving the Father? How many lawyers generate income by doing what Paul called suppressing the truth? How many PR firms are violating the commands against lying and false witness in favor of building and defending a narrative?

...whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

-James 4:4

In our world of click-bait and ad revenue cashing in on the emotions of anger and fear, loving God with all our tongue is like fighting gravity.

James’ point is that the communication that comes out of us starts deep in us. Like a bullet that is fired, or fire that is started, once a word is spoken, we can’t take it back. While we may not attack someone with our fists, our words can still cause major damage even from far away. Our tongue can speak blessing and cursing, life and death. Jesus tells us our mouth speaks about what ultimately fills our heart.^a A haughty heart speaks evil, a holy heart speaks life. Like water that

^a Luke 6:45

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comes from a spring, Jesus was clear that the words we communicate flow from our hearts and expose our deepest selves.

For our words to change, our heart must first change. Only the Holy Spirit has the power to change who we are and what we communicate. Things are so bad it will take a miracle to accomplish these twin tasks. Thankfully, our God specializes in miracles.

In my own failures in this area, one thing I have noticed is that my first response when I am angry, hurt, frustrated, tired, or offended is in the flesh. If I respond quickly, that response is often not the most godly. If I wait, pray, process, journal, go for a walk, and invite the Holy Spirit to change what's going on inside of me, I find that something very different comes out of me.

Personal Study Questions

1. What are three metaphors James uses to describe the tongue? What do these metaphors have in common? How are they different?
2. With our tongue, we do what two contradictory things (v. 9-10)? What imagery does James use to visualize this contradiction (v. 11-12)?
3. Double-mindedness is a common theme in James (James 1:10-11, James 4:8). In James 3:9-12, we see our ability to be "double-tongued." How do Genesis 1:26 and 1 John 4:20 elaborate on why James says "this should not be" (v. 10)?
4. Recall a recent instance where your tongue was not tamed. How did it corrupt your whole body and the course of your life (James 3:6)? After reading this section of James, how do you better understand the importance of your tongue and the words you use? Who can you apologize to, own your failures, and invite the Holy Spirit to change how you speak to or about them?
5. When tempted to use your words for evil, how can you use them for good (e.g. praying instead of arguing, worshipping instead of gossiping, journaling privately instead of posting online publicly, etc.?)

Small Group Study Questions

1. How can reminding ourselves of ways others have hurt us with their words help us to have empathy and self-control to not do the same to others?
2. What are some common triggers that get you worked up and make you communicate things you should not? How can awareness of these triggers help you practice self-control (e.g. is there a person or subject that triggers you, or are you on your phone too much, or are there certain platforms like

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- social media that get you into trouble)?
3. Who do you know that uses their tongue in an exemplary way to bless and not curse others? What can you learn from their example?
 4. How are you doing at taming your tongue by submitting it to the Spirit (e.g. prayer, worship, reading Scripture aloud, etc.)?

Notes

A STUDY IN JAMES

CHAPTER 7

James 3:13-18

How does faith work when you are frustrated?

James 3:13-18 – ¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ¹⁵ This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Memory Verse

James 3:17 – But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

Summary

When we are kids, eventually we see a cartoon where someone is granted one wish, often from a genie in a bottle. How we might answer that question reveals a great deal about who we are and what we value.

If you could have one wish granted to you, what would it be? Answer what immediately comes to mind. A pile of cash up to what Paul calls the third heaven, a supermodel spouse who never sins and memorizes books of the Bible, kids who stayed out of trouble and make parenting easy, in-laws who act like outlaws moving to another planet, perfect health, or something else?

Amazingly, King Solomon was given the opportunity to ask God for one thing (1 Kings 3). Solomon's request for wisdom was so pleasing to God that He not only gave wisdom but added to it wealth and honor to rule in power.

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Throughout the Old Testament literature, the value of wisdom is described as more profitable than silver or gold and more precious than jewels. Nothing you ever hope or dream for (including whatever that one granted wish was) can even compare with wisdom.^a How do we get wisdom? According to Proverbs 2:6, God is the only source of true wisdom, and he generously gives it for the asking.^b True wisdom isn't achieved; it's received as a gift from God.

True wisdom comes from God alone, is marked by humility, flows from life in the Spirit, and is dependent on God as the giver of every good and perfect gift (1:17). The antithesis of wisdom is pride, which breeds obsessive self-focus and self-promotion, and excludes others.

Just like a dam blocks the flow of water, so too bitterness blocks the flow of wisdom. Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition never lead to righteousness, only strife. In keeping with James' agricultural metaphors, true wisdom from God bears the fruit of righteousness and peace, both of which cause fertile ground where righteousness can grow. God, in his wisdom, gives of Himself and makes peace with us, through Jesus. In turn, we have peace with others, and the character of God is reproduced in man's heart—the very fruit that produces a harvest of righteousness.

**...let your “yes” be
yes and your “no”
be no...
-James 5:12**

One day, our Lord Jesus Christ will return and stand upon the earth to raise the dead, judge the nations, lift the curse, and bring the world under the full rule of His Kingdom. In the end, there will only be two cultures. The Kingdom of Heaven will be marked by forgiveness, grace, humility, wisdom, love, and peace as people reap what the Spirit has sown. The Kingdom of Hell will be marked by unforgiveness, judgment, pride, foolishness, hatred, and discord as people reap what they sow. Today, we live on earth between the cultures of Heaven and Hell and the daily decisions we make, including our inward thoughts and motives, either invite the culture of Heaven down or pull the culture of Hell up into our lives.

Personal Study Questions

1. What is the difference between intelligence (which comes from a high IQ), knowledge (which comes from studious effort), and wisdom (which comes from God)?

^a Prov. 3:13-15 ^b James 1:5

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2. According to verse 13, how do you know who a wise person is?
3. How have you seen bitterness (including unforgiveness, an unhealed hurt, or a jealousy of someone else) constrict the flow of the Holy Spirit and wisdom in your life?
4. According to James, what are some indicators that what is happening is “demonic”?
5. Is there unresolved conflict in your life in which God is calling you to make peace?

Small Group Study Questions

1. What are the differences between the culture of Heaven we invite down or the culture of Hell we pull up into our lives?
2. What most strikes you about this description of a wise person?
3. What do you find most challenging about this description of wise and evil people?
4. James says jealousy promotes disorder and selfish ambition promotes every vile practice. Who or what are you most envious and jealous of and how can you avoid this demonic trap?

Notes

A STUDY IN JAMES

CHAPTER 8

James 4:1-12

How does faith work in relational conflicts?

James 4:1-12 – ¹What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? ⁶But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” ⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. ¹¹Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. ¹²There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

Memory Verse

James 4:10 – Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Summary

As the parent of five children, we had to teach our kids most everything. They did not come out of the womb knowing how to speak, feed themselves, or walk.

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We had to teach them these things. The one thing we did not have to teach any of our children was how to be selfish or have conflict with others.

We human beings don't have to learn selfishness; it's already a part of who we are, hard-wired into our sinful nature. Children quickly learn the word "mine" and know how to pull a toy from another's hands without an example to go on. Though these self-focused behaviors are easy to spot in a toddler, if we're honest, not much changes in adulthood. James 3:16 says, "Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice."

James says that our selfishness shows up in "quarrels" and "fights" driven by our emotional "passions" driven by our "friendship with the world", driven by our "pride" as we "speak evil" and "judge" others, which is all a fight with "God" and aligning with "the devil". Sometimes we think of spiritual warfare as incredible supernatural activity, but the truth is when we get jealous, angry, and selfish, Team Jesus is losing, and Team Satan is winning.

This passage gets right to the heart of love for self versus love for God and others. When we love only ourselves and put our own self-interests at the forefront of our lives, we are enemies of God and others. Friendship with God is, in part, humbling ourselves, drawing near to God, and repenting of our

sinful bent toward selfishness and having ourselves and not God at the center of our lives and others alongside of us as equally loved by God and needing grace. Humility before God changes the tone of our relationships with others—from fights and quarrels to peace, from judgment and criticism to love.

In chapter 3, James highlighted the good fruit of impartiality and peace. He now warns against the bad fruit of loving the world and seeking our own passions and lusts over living like Christ did.

Having been a senior pastor for half of my life, starting at the age of 25 when I was way too young to be in that position, one thing I can report is simply this. I've seen a lot of battles between the proud and the proud, a few beatings on the humble from the proud, but never seen a brutal war between the humble and the humble. Two humble people tend to forgive one another, get over their issues, move on, try again, heal up, and enjoy their life in a way that proud people never can because they are stuck in the fight and so committed to winning that they never move on to worshipping.

You know that something is demonic when it's a lose-lose and no one wins.

**...a harvest of
righteousness is
sown in peace by
those who make
peace.**

-James 3:18

FAITH WORKS

You know that something is of the flesh when it's a win-lose and one person wins at the expense of the other. You know that something is of the Spirit when it's a win-win and both live under the grace of God in newness of life. God is a Father who does not play favorites and seeks good for each of His children. Those who seek humility put themselves in the place where He can bless them and bless others through them so that everyone wins. As someone famously said, humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less so that you can think of God and others more.

Personal Study Questions

1. In verses 1-3, what are the causes of quarrels and fights?
2. What does verse 3 expose about one's inner motives underlying much of our pains, problems, and perils?
3. What does God promise the humble (4:6, 10)? Honestly, do you fully believe this as an act of faith for the toughest parts of your own life?
4. Who should brothers not speak evil against (4:11)? If you speak evil against them, what are you also speaking evil against?
5. James chooses a strong word in verse 2 – murder – regarding our response to not getting what we want. Read Matthew 5:21-22 and 1 John 3:15. How do these verses expound on what it means to murder another person in this way?

Small Group Study Questions

1. How is this section of Scripture completely antithetical to the “world” set up by the “Devil” which explains so much of the pain on our planet?
2. What does the Holy Spirit highlight in your soul from this section of Scripture?
3. Why is it important to both resist the devil and submit to the Lord? What does this look like in a very practical area of your life?
4. James is clearly judging behavior in this section, but he refuses to judge a brother. What is the difference between pointing out an issue that is a problem and judging someone's motives, relationship with God, or even salvation?

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Notes

CHAPTER 9

James 4:13-17

How does faith work for life planning?

James 4:13-17 – ¹³ Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Memory Verse

James 4:14 - ...yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

Summary

A book I once read that is written for business leaders includes a very insightful illustration. As I remember it, two men are standing on a dock looking at a large cruise ship intended to carry people and cargo to their intended destinations. One man looks at the other and asks, “In relation to that boat, who is the most important person?”. The other man replies, “the captain”. The man who asked the question corrected him saying, “the boat builder”.

The truth is the world’s best captain is of no use if he’s at the helm of a poorly built boat. If it doesn’t float, the captain could be most anyone as it won’t make a difference.

Most people spend their time and energy working in their life – frantic, tired, and trying to keep their proverbial boat afloat. Planning is working on your life and not just in it – figuring out how to build a bigger boat. The wisdom literature, especially Proverbs and Jesus’ parables, have a lot to say about stewardship,

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planning, and building a better boat for our life.

For full confession, I'm a big fan of planning. I took one of those personality tests and I scored as an off-the-charts, high strategic planner. I enjoy trying to figure out the future, build the best boat, and sail off into the next great adventure be it for family or ministry.

The problem with planning is that it can lead to presumption. We see this every election when a candidate promises a future no one believes will come to pass, at work when the boss gives us the rousing vision talk expecting us to forget that the talk he gave last year failed so that we can naively believe that this year will be different, and in the huddle with the sports team where the coach promises we can be David and watch Goliath fall, which we believe until the final score says we are a loser and our coach is a liar.

In the Bible, faith, hope, and love often appear together. Faith says that we must live with hope for the future because of God's love for us. Faith requires that we look into the future and make plans to live for God and with God.

The problem is that sometimes we become so committed to our plan that we forget about His plan. His plan is often different than our plan. For our plan to stay consistent with His plan, two things help.

One, write your plan in pencil. The only inerrant writing on the planet is the

Bible, and whatever we write down is bound to have a few errors and need some edits. As a new husband, I wanted so badly to be a good family leader that I made a lot of plans – schedules, budgets, etc. – but what drove my wife nuttier than a jar of peanut butter was my certainty that all my plans would come

**...where jealousy
and selfish ambition
exist, there will be
disorder and every
vile practice.**

-James 3:16

true. Even worse, as a zealous new pastor I would get up and share detailed vision with utter certainty to our little flock while she shook her head trying to support me instead of shoot me.

Two, pivot from your plan to His plan. This is what James means saying that if we know we are supposed to do something then we just need to do it. Sometimes we get so committed to our plan that we do not pivot and adjust to follow His plan. Perhaps a humorous story will illustrate this point. Two young women plugged an address into the map feature on their phone and proceeded to the shore of a lake in their car. The directions said, "proceed forward" and they had a choice to make. One, they could persist in the plan or pivot from the plan. What did they do? You guessed it; they drove the car into the lake!

FAITH WORKS

We've all been guilty of bragging, boasting, and promising something in the future that only God knows and controls. Social media exists so we can post photos showing how awesome we are, even if they are carefully designed illusions to wrap our proud humble brag up in humility. Our lives are like an exhaled breath on a cold morning – visible for a moment then gone forever. We don't know what tomorrow brings for anyone, starting with ourselves.

The world is not filled with humble and proud people. The world is filled with proud people who are humble enough to know they are proud, and proud people who are too proud to know they are proud. Pride is a human problem in that it is a problem for every human. The Bible has nothing good to say about pride, as we learned in the prior section of James. Conversely, the Bible only has good things to say about humility starting with Jesus our humble King. Not only did He set the perfect example of humility doing the Father's will, He also sent the Holy Spirit to humble us and grow our character to be like Christ. This allows us to be good stewards of our lives, live with faith and vision, make plans, and be open to whatever the Lord has planned by waking up every day and doing what our faith says is right even if it was not on the to-do list for that day.

Personal Study Questions

1. In verse 13, who is making plans? What do they think they know? In verse 14, what do they not know?
2. Looking back at your life, what are some things you confidently assured others that the future held that never came to pass?
3. What is the difference for your life between planning for the future and presuming that God will follow your plan for the future?
4. Do you desire to do the will of God? Psalm 37:23-24 encourages us that when we delight in God's way, the Lord establishes our steps. Is there anything in your life that keeps you from desiring the will of God?
5. Sometimes we know what God's will is, and we do not want to obey because it seems too hard, or we have to give up something we'd rather not. Do you believe that God will provide for you as you trust in Him? Whatever change God may be calling you to is of infinitely higher value than the cost of what you long to hold onto. Do you believe this? Why or why not?

Small Group Study Questions

1. What kinds of things do you plan for? What things are hard for you to plan in pencil and not permanent marker?

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2. What are some significant ways you have had to pivot from your plans to walk in obedience to God and the circumstances of life?
3. Honestly, are you more likely to start your planning (e.g. schedule or budget) in prayer and study seeking God, or make your plan and ask God to bless it?
4. What is one area of your life that the Holy Spirit is pressing you to heed regarding 4:17?

Notes

FAITH WORKS

CHAPTER 10

James 5:1-6

How does faith work with your wealth?

James 5:1-6 -¹ Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.² Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten.³ Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.⁴ Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.⁵ You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.⁶ You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

Memory Verse

James 5:4 - Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

Summary

Several years ago, the world was outraged over the case against Bernie Madoff, a former stockbroker and investment advisor responsible for the largest, longest, and most widespread Ponzi scheme in history. Madoff's fraud totaled in the billions. At his sentencing hearing, the judge in the case condemned Madoff's crimes as "extraordinarily evil" and imposed a sentence over 10 times longer than the defense lawyers had requested – 150 years. In addition to the victims who testified against Madoff, his self-indulgent, luxurious lifestyle also testified against him: tens of millions of dollars spent in acquiring personal properties; \$45 million in bonds; \$17 million in cash; \$8.8 million for yachts; \$2.6 million in jewelry, and a whole lot more.⁸ It was an outrageous hoard gained through unthinkable fraud,

and Madoff heaped the riches upon himself.

Beginning in chapter 5, James wastes no time making his point clear. "Listen, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries coming upon you." When reading this passage, one cannot help but see a courtroom setting with the Lord seated high upon His throne, hearing the testimony of victims and carefully reviewing the irrefutable evidence (v. 4). The accused were rich landowners who were exploiting the poor by withholding wages and, like Madoff, were using the money to live in luxury and self-indulgence. James is in no way condemning all who were rich; after all, James was a devout Jew who knew God had financially blessed many believers, most notably Abraham, Job, David, Philemon, Joseph of Arimathea, and Lydia. Instead, James was condemning the way the rich accumulated their wealth and how they used it. James likened the rich to animals who were being fattened for slaughter.

**...be doers of
the word, and
not hearers
only, deceiving
yourselves.**

-James 1:22

James is not condemning wealth here. He is rebuking self-reliance and self-indulgence. These men have abused their power and built a fortune on the backs of underpaid workers and overdue bills. We can either worship wealth, or worship God with wealth. This is the heart of this section of Scripture.

When it comes to wealth, we tend to think in the two categories of rich and poor. The Bible gives us four categories and not two:

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Godly Poor | 2. Godly Rich |
| 3. Ungodly Poor | 4. Ungodly Rich |

In the Bible, the issue is not are you rich or poor, but rather are you godly or ungodly. The truth is, you can be Christ-like whether you are rich or poor as Jesus was rich in Heaven, poor on earth, and is right now rich in Heaven. 2 Corinthians 8:9 says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich." Jesus was poor on earth, but the Bible says that Heaven has streets paved with gold, which means Jesus is so loaded He's trying to find creative uses for all the extra gold and is down to making highways with it.

1. The godly poor include Job when he lost everything to a Satanic attack, Ruth and Naomi, Jesus' peasant parents, Jesus' rural ministry relatives Zechariah and Elizabeth along with their son John the Baptizer, Jesus while on the earth, and the New Testament saints in Jerusalem.
2. The godly rich include Abraham who God blessed because of his faith, Job after God restored his wealth after a Satanic attack, Joseph who

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oversaw the wealth of Egypt, Daniel who ruled Babylon through the reign of multiple godless kings, and wealthy women who funded Paul's ministry like Lydia and Phoebe.

3. The ungodly poor include Esau who traded his birth right for a meal, the sluggard in Proverbs who is lazy and wastes their wealth, Belshazzar who lost his entire kingdom when God had him ransacked, and Judas who had little but stole much of it from Jesus.
4. The ungodly rich include Zacchaeus the tax collector before he met Jesus, the rich young ruler, and a parade of tyrants from Pharaoh to Nebuchadnezzar and Herod who brutalized people to live lavish lifestyles.

The group that James is warning against are the ungodly rich in category 4. Their security, identity, and priority is in worshipping wealth as their god rather than worshipping God with their wealth.

Personal Study Questions

1. Which of these four categories was your family growing up?
2. Which of these four categories are you currently?
3. James' warning to the rich is reminiscent of Jesus' warning in the Sermon on the Mount. Read Matthew 6:19-20. What does the withholding of wages and hoarding of possessions reveal about the hearts of the rich? Read Matthew 19:16-22. How does the rich man's response to Jesus' request reveal what he treasures most?
4. Wealth is a relative term. All of us find ourselves richer than someone else, even while we may feel poorer than many others. What wealth has God blessed you with? In what ways can you better steward His money for His glory and the good of others?
5. James alludes to three times in eternity (5:1,3,5b), imploring the rich to consider the coming reconciliation to the Creator. How does remembering eternity help you practice patience in trouble and seek God for wisdom? How does it help you live generously?

Small Group Study Questions

1. Why is it vital that we think in biblical terms of godly and ungodly and not just political terms of rich and poor?
2. Why is the Christian concept of stewardship, that God is the owner of all we have, and we are His manager, a radical outlook that transforms all of life?
3. When Jesus said we should store up our treasures in Heaven and not just on earth, He was saying that our life ends with an eternal retirement

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account of rewards that last forever. Honestly, are you as concerned about your eternal inheritance as much as your earthly investments?

4. Why is it vital for Christians to look beyond this life into eternal life to have a godly perspective in all our decision-making?
5. Are there any financial changes you need to make to be a better steward who is worshipping God with wealth?

Notes

A STUDY IN JAMES

CHAPTER 11

James 5:7-12

How does faith work when you are suffering?

James 5:7-12 - ⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. ¹² But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

Memory Verse

James 5:7 - Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.

Summary

As a pastor, you get the honor of having a front row seat to the most sacred days in people's lives. On one of these days, I went to the hospital to visit an elderly saint who had lived a very painful life. She was engaged, but her fiancée ran off with her friend leaving her to never marry. Not long after being abandoned, she developed some debilitating health problems that had her in a wheelchair or hospital bed at unexpected times throughout her life. She served as the secretary at a Bible-based church until the denomination went apostate, took the building, and dismantled the church she had given her life to serving. Later in life, she and some widows built a close-knit group of friends she fondly

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referred to as the “Golden Girls”. Eventually, she buried every one of those friends and was left very much alone.

To me, she was a spiritual giant. She loved the Lord Jesus and never much complained about the hand life dealt her. Her life was hard, but her heart was soft. Her life was traumatic, but her faith was steadfast.

Before entering her hospital room, the nurse informed me she was near death and that there had not been other visitors. Though I loved her much, I did not know her well, but I was honored to be at her side before she made the final journey to Jesus’ side.

As a very young new pastor, I was unsure what to say, so I pulled up a chair so that I could look at her face, which was on the edge of the hospital bed. I will never forget the look on her face. She beamed with a radiant smile and started chuckling. To say she had a personality would be an understatement – she was a character fit for her own reality television show. She winked, looked at me, and said, “Pastor this is the best day of my life. My suffering is over, and my Savior is coming for me!” I was crying, and she was laughing. We were quite a sight.

I was a preacher, but this woman’s life was a sermon about being “patient” and making sure to “not grumble” or “judge” while “suffering” with “steadfastness”. She lived her life proving that “the Lord is at hand” and “how the Lord is compassionate and merciful” to get us through life and safely home.

Life on planet earth is so brutal that no one makes it out alive.

One of the first things most people wish as soon as God saves them is that Jesus would return – soon! Some folks get so frustrated waiting for Jesus that they get caught up in end times Bible study and trying to figure out how long

**...the Lord is
compassionate
and merciful.
-James 5:11**

they’ve got to hang on to the knot they’ve tied at the end of their rope. God is not slow, but He is patient and asks us to also be patient. He’s still got people to save and work to do before the end comes, and until then, how we live determines the harvest of rewards we have in the Kingdom.

In our Bible study, it’s often helpful to think in familial terms. The Apostle James is a concerned, loving, fatherly pastor. If we fail to see the book of James in this light, the kind of life James calls us to will seem like burdensome obligation. Theologically, these distinctions help us understand the different between the “indicative” and “imperative.”

The New Testament writers often use indicative statements to reveal a fact. Things like what God has done for his people, such as save them from their sins, in Jesus, or the things He will do for them, in the future, like give them eternal life.

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The New Testament also uses imperative statements as a way of commanding an appropriate response. Indicatives of Scripture (what God has done) make it possible for hearers to obey imperatives of Scripture (what they should do). When we misunderstand these distinctions, the believer's obligation to obey can become a cold, dutiful checklist of do's and don'ts.

James' words are saturated with the indicatives of what God has done and what God is going to do in the future. He will return, and patience comes from living a life that looks forward to this reality. James gives three examples of patient endurance—the farmer (v. 7), the prophets (v. 10), and Job (v. 11).

The humble servants of God will remain patient when worldly people indulge themselves or cause trouble, because our Lord is coming. We have seen His compassion and mercy. We know His faithfulness, and He will bless us if we remain steadfast. But this is not a return to self-reliance, as if God is calling us to faithfulness in our own strength. Jesus, the unbreakable “anchor of the soul,” has been cast into our boat to hold us steady (see Heb. 6:19). When we feel doubt or fear pulling us away from God, remember that He who holds us will not let us go.

Personal Study Questions

1. How many times does James address his hearers as “brothers” in these verses? What does this tell you both about his tone and his affection for the Christians?
2. Job was a “blameless” and “upright” man, always careful to avoid doing evil yet was afflicted in almost every way (Job 1:1). What does James remind the audience about God's character (v. 11)? How might that enable them to remain patient? How does Job's story encourage us?
3. Read James 5:7. Although James uses the word “wait,” farmers must labor prior to waiting for the rains by tilling the ground and carefully planting seeds at the correct depth. With that in mind, how does the farmer encourage us to “wait” for the Lord's return? What does Luke 12:43 call the servant who is found working when the Lord returns?
4. What circumstances tend to reveal your lack of patience? What actions or attitudes in response to difficult circumstances communicate your lack of trust in God? What lies about God do you need to confess? What Scriptures will you memorize about God's character to help you persevere in difficulties?
5. Who do you know that is suffering and would benefit from you ministering to them as James does to those who were suffering?
6. In verse 12, James says “Above all...let your yes be yes and your no be no.”

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Is it difficult for you to make and stick to commitments? If so, why? How does breaking your word distort the image of God you bear?

Small Group Study Questions

1. What suffering is hardest for you to patiently endure?
2. What lessons can you take from farmers about how to be a better Christian?
3. This passage tells us not to grumble against one another. How have you done this that you need to repent of and how can you work towards not having a grumbling attitude in the future?
4. Do you expect to see the Lord's return to earth before you die? Why or why not?
5. How does having a strong understanding of the character of Christ Jesus help us stay patient and hopeful?
6. How could this group help each other with patience and hope?

Notes

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CHAPTER 12

James 5:13-20

How does faith work when you do ministry?

James 5:13-20 - ¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. ¹⁹ My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Memory Verse

James 5:16 – Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Summary

Growing up in a working-class neighborhood next to an airport surrounded with first generation immigrants, many fleeing poverty and persecution from around the globe, I had a very unusual upbringing. Unlike nearly all my friends in the neighborhood I had two things. One, I had a dad who was still married to my mom and involved in my life, starting with coaching my baseball teams. Since I was the only kid on my first team with a dad, he ended up being our coach even

though he'd never played the game. Two, my dad worked very hard to provide for us five kids and my mom – to the point that he broke his back hanging drywall to feed us.

I knew my dad loved his family because he showed it. He stayed married to mom, got up before the sun every day to go work himself to death, and came home to spend his hard-earned money on his family – not his hobbies or addictions. My dad never wrote a book about love, but he served, doing whatever it took to provide for our family. Joseph was the father to James and Jesus, and he was a blue-collar, working class, poor man who said little but did much. He never wrote a book of the Bible, but he raised boys who did. The book of James reminds me of Jesus and James' dad as well as my dad, who is also named Joseph.

**Draw near to God,
and he will draw
near to you.**

-James 4:8

As we come to the end of our study of the book of James it has been a school of practical Christianity from beginning to end. Like His brother Christ who came down from Heaven to get His hands and feet dirty on the earth, James' version of Christianity is very earthy. For James, faith is less about the tomes you write than the deeds you do. James could care less if you can win Bible memorizing competitions in Sunday school if you live like hell the other six days a week.

In light of James' "get 'er done" attitude as the blue-collar scholar of the New Testament, it makes sense that he ends with ministry. After learning, he expects us to be doing ministry. Like a dad who teaches you how to drive by throwing you the keys, rather than giving us long complicated detailed instructions, as you would expect, he gives us some of the clearest ministry directives you will ever find, expecting the Holy Spirit to help you figure it out by doing it.

1. Suffering? Pray for them.
2. Cheerful? Sing with them.
3. Sick? Anoint and pray for them.
4. Sinning? Confess it.
5. Unhealthy? Pray for each other.
6. Powerless? Pray some more.
7. Wandering? Bring them back.
8. Don't believe me? Elijah was a regular guy like you and God used him for big things so go do something and see what God does.

The Apostle Paul reminds me of a finely tuned German sports car. James reminds me of a dented old farm truck that smells like the hound dog that sits in the passenger seat with its head hanging out the window being driven out to the

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fields for an honest day's work. This may explain why scholars love Paul, and sheet rockers like James. I kind of see James writing this letter on a lunch break eating a sandwich because:

- Faith don't need to be fancy.
- Holiness don't need to be haughtiness.
- Ministry don't need to be misery.
- Wisdom don't need be wily.
- Christianity don't need to be complicated.

What is God calling you to do? Who is God calling you to serve? Where is God calling you to work? Time to get to work...

Personal Study Questions

1. Since James mentioned it in this final section of the letter, look up the following places that tell the testimony of Elijah (1 Kings 17-18; 2 Kings 1-2; Mark 9:1-13).
2. Based upon James' seven ways to do ministry, who comes to mind and how can you minister to them? Do this ministry this week.

Small Group Study Questions

1. What has been your takeaway or highlight from James?
2. What are you most looking forward to asking James when you hang out with him in Heaven?
3. Do you tend to be more theological (things to learn) or practical (things to do)? What did you learn from James' practical approach to Christian theology?
4. What work is God calling you to in the next season? How can we be praying for you?
5. Is there anyone who know who has wandered that you need to pursue to try and bring back to Christ?

Notes

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APPENDIX

Do Faith and Paul Contradict Works and James?

The great British preacher C.H. Spurgeon was once asked how he reconciled Scriptures that did not seem to agree with one another. The question was a fair one that most likely every Christian has at some point. Anyone who's spent time reading and studying the Bible has found things that seem to contradict rather than complement one another. Spurgeon's answer was perfect, "I wouldn't try," he said; "I never reconcile friends."

One of the most hotly debated Biblical topics concerns the writings of Paul and James regarding justification, or how a sinner can be declared righteous and made right with God. At first glance, Paul seems to say we are saved solely by faith in Jesus' works, and James says that it is a combination of faith in Jesus' works and our works:

James on Justification

- James 2:17 – So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.
- James 2:20 – Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?
- James 2:26 – For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Paul on Justification

- Romans 3:28 – For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.
- Romans 5:1 – Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Galatians 2:16 – ...yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

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- Galatians 3:11 – Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”
- Galatians 3:24 – So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

As a general rule, Catholic theologians have tended to use James’ words to add some human works or religious traditions to faith, whereas Protestants have sought to retain a bright line of differentiation between faith and works. This is largely due to the Catholic monk Martin Luther whose revolutionary insights as a Bible teacher served as the axe that split Christians into two groups – Protestants, who were protesting the addition of works to faith, and Catholics.

Martin Luther's Concerns Regarding James

Martin Luther (1483-1546) is widely known as one of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation and one of the most important Christians in Church history. After a powerful encounter with God in which he was nearly struck by lightning, Luther became a priest and a monk. This included taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience for the rest of his life. Trained as a lawyer, Luther lived a tormented life. Constantly judging his life by the demands of God’s laws in the Bible with a brutal honesty and brilliant legal mind, he nearly drove himself mad seeking to make himself righteous in God’s sight out of a terrifying fear of God. His pursuit of works nearly worked him to death. This included endless prayer, severe fasting that gave him significant intestinal problems, sleepless nights, freezing cold, and even beating his own body in an effort to atone for his sin as religious works to appease the wrath of God.

But by the grace of God, Luther had an epiphany that changed not only his life but also the lives of countless others. Serving as a professor of theology in Germany at the University of Wittenburg, he was teaching on Paul’s letter to the Romans, and had a Holy Spirit epiphany in Scripture that changed the world, “I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.” This new understanding of this one verse – Romans 1:17 –changed everything; it became, in a real sense, the doorway to the Reformation. “Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise,” says Luther.⁹

God the Holy Spirit revealed to Luther that righteousness is a gift God gives by grace from and faith in Jesus Christ and not something earned or merited through human religious and moral performance, also known as works.

**Do not speak evil
against one
another, brothers.
-James 4:11**

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Theologians call this “justification by faith” for shorthand.

In his commentary on Romans, Luther wrote, “It [Romans] is the true masterpiece of the New Testament, and the very purest Gospel, which is well worthy and deserving that a Christian man should not only learn it by heart, word for word, but also that he should daily deal with it as the daily bread of men’s souls. For it can never be too much or too well read or studied; and the more it is handled the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.”¹⁰

One of the most passionate and colorful theologians in church history, Luther also struggled at times to see Paul and James as friends and not foes on the matter of justification by faith alone versus faith plus work. Summarizing this issue, one Bible Dictionary says, “In the Reformation period, Martin Luther (AD 1483–1546) found James lacking in gospel clarity. In his 1522 preface to the New Testament, Luther maintained that John, 1 John, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and 1 Peter are ‘the books that show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and salvatory for you to know, even if you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine.’ In comparison, James ‘has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it.’ That is why he characterized it as ‘an epistle of straw’ (Luther, Works, 35:362). Not all of Luther’s comments were equally negative. He also acknowledged that James was ‘a good book’ (Luther, Works, 35:395) and contained ‘many good sayings’ (Luther, Works 35:397).”¹¹

Systematic vs Biblical Theology

Different theological systems tend to read the Bible through certain assumptions. Dispensationalists see it as periods of time. Pentecostals/Charismatics see it as a succession of God’s presence and action. Those most committed to eschatology and end times speculation see it as a series of prophetic promises. Prosperity teachers see the Bible in terms of blessing and cursing. Reformed theologians see the Bible largely in the categories of Law, which are God’s commands, and Gospel, which is Jesus meeting the demands of the Law on our behalf. Theologically, I am Protestant within the Reformed tradition, but I favor biblical over systematic theology. The problem for biblical theology is that systematic approaches each fail to account for the totality of biblical types of literature.

Systematic theology takes various Scriptures out of their original context and organizes them together by subject matter or theme. Systematic theology is, “The attempt to summarize religious truth or the belief system of a religious group (such as Christianity) through an organized system of thought carried out within a particular cultural and intellectual context (see method of theology). A

common systematic order in Christian theology begins with God and God's self-revelation, followed by creation and the predicament of sin, God's saving work in and through Jesus Christ, the Spirit as the agent in personal salvation, the church as the redeemed community of God's people, and finally the goal of God's program as leading to the end of the age, Christ's return and eternity."¹²

Biblical theology seeks to keep Scriptures in their original context as much as possible. "Biblical theology is the discipline that attempts to summarize and restate the teaching of a biblical text or of a biblical author without imposing any modern categories of thought on the text. Rather, the goal is to understand the 'theology' of a biblical book or author in its original historical context. Many theologians see the work of biblical theology as logically prior to the task of systematic theology, which attempts to state the biblical teaching in ways that address contemporary concerns."¹³

To study the Bible faithfully requires both systematic and biblical theological methods. However, one thing that biblical theology tends to note more often than systematic theology is that, at times, different Biblical authors will use the same words but, in context, have different meanings. The same is true in our normal everyday conversations as various people will sometimes have a different meaning for a word depending upon the context of their conversation and their usage of a particular word.

Wisdom Literature

Regarding systematic theology, Reformed (e.g. Calvinistic and Lutheran) theologians tend to be strong on the biblical categories of Law and Gospel. This includes Martin Luther and John Calvin, who were both trained as attorneys. This fact explains why they were prone to see the Law/Gospel issue in Scripture and were so strong with Law. This is why they, and their Reformed followers, gravitate toward the works of Moses and Paul. However, they are weaker on the Wisdom Literature (e.g. Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and James). The Reformers, including Calvin and Luther, basically do not touch the Old Testament Wisdom Literature very much. They did not preach on it much, did not write commentaries on it nearly as much as the Old Testament Law and New Testament Epistles of grace, and very rarely even quote it. Why? Because it does not neatly fit into their Law/Gospel formatting.

This brings us to James. James is the Wisdom Literature of the New Testament. It is earthy, practical, and about what you should do and not do. This explains why some Reformed theologians have struggled with James.

My approach to Law/Gospel is, in summary:

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1. Martin Luther taught Law-Gospel. The Law condemns and the Gospel saves. I agree with it for justification, but not for sanctification or the totality of the gospel. The entire Gospel applied to this life prior to our glorification is God's work for you (justification), God's work in you (regeneration), and God's work through you (sanctification). For some, the focus on justification is so strong that they do not adequately emphasize regeneration and sanctification, which explains why they tend to also be lighter on teaching about the ongoing active ministry of the Holy Spirit, or even teach as cessationists downplaying the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the believer to bear fruit. James refers to God's work through us as works, or the works of the Holy Spirit in and through the believer, as opposed to human religious works devoid of the Holy Spirit.
2. John Calvin taught Law-Gospel-Law. The Law condemns, the gospel justifies, and we are then able to obey God's law as Christians. Without getting deep into a massive theological debate, not all Old Testament laws are binding on the believer. Those who consistently think this way then become Theonomists and Postmillennialists with infant baptism replacing circumcision, and a strict Sabbath keeping. The Scottish Presbyterians historically and their followers to this day continue this reasoning. This group generally focuses a lot on Jesus and His justifying work on the cross, but less so on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to empower new life and ministry in Christ, which is why they tend to also be cessationistic.
3. Law-Gospel-Holy Spirit Mission. I have taught for years that the Law convicts of sin and condemns, the Gospel justifies us when accompanied with the Holy Spirit applying the gospel to cause our new birth, and the Holy Spirit indwells and empowers us to live new lives patterned after Jesus' life on mission. The New Testament book of Acts reveals this pattern over and over. Law is preached so that sin is exposed, the gospel is presented so that people are saved, and the Holy Spirit empowers Jesus' people to live like Him and be on mission with Him. I write an entire book about all of this called Spirit-Filled Jesus. The previous two groups are often evangelistically weak because they get stuck in a rut of Law-Gospel and do not get out on Spirit-Mission. They may talk a lot about mission, but they see fewer converts than they should and tend to mainly convert religious types from Fundamentalism, Catholicism, and Islam along with the cults (Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormonism) because they have labored under religious demands and need God's grace. The people we are reaching are not living like Luther did under the great burden of the Law

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feeling condemned and unworthy of God's grace. Our mission must include happy pagans, irreligious people who think they are wonderful and proud of their sin not thinking anything in their life needs to change. These are people who do not think they are sinners and do not believe there is any Law. Not only is Law-Gospel-Holy Spirit Mission biblical it is also helpful for us to not just have church people understand the grace of God for themselves but also live by it on Mission to reach others.

Defining Faith

In light of the above, my approach to James will be simple. There are three big ideas that I hope will frame your understanding of and love for James.

One, I do not see Paul and James as in conflict on faith at all. I believe that Paul is emphasizing God's work in you, and James is also emphasizing God's work in and through you. Importantly, as I was preaching verse-by-verse through Romans it became obvious that early in his letter, Paul focused on God's work for you through work of Jesus Christ (justification). But as the book moves into its' ensuing thought units, he does speak a great deal about the ministry of the Holy Spirit and God's work in you (regeneration). He closes the final chapters talking about spiritual gifts, ministry service, and loving people in relationship as God's work through you (sanctification and mission). Furthermore, when Paul speaks of works, he is thinking mainly of the kinds of religious human works done in the flesh without the Spirit of God, the same kind of worthless life he was fully devoted to before meeting Christ (Philippians 3:2-11).

Two, when James speaks of works, he is likely referring to the works of the Holy Spirit through the believer. This is completely opposed to human religious works apart from the Spirit of God. In this way, what James refers to as "works" may be what Paul refers to as the "fruit of the Spirit".

Three, bringing this all together, Paul and James may be both building on the teaching of Jesus who said that a good tree bears good fruit.^a We become a good tree by the justifying work of Jesus Christ alone for us, with no inclusion of any human works. The true believers then bear good fruit by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in them (regeneration), and through them (sanctification and ministry for mission). Paul is concerned about reaching religious, self-righteous, works-oriented people who were like him before Jesus saved him. Some years later, James is concerned about people born into religious homes, reared in Christian schools, and so familiar with Christianity that they took Christ

^a Matthew 3:10; 7:15-19; 12:33

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for granted and were not motivated to live for God, which brings into question whether or not they are truly saved and God lives in them.

My basic summary of biblical faith is this:

Faith is a Holy Spirit-empowered internal devotion to God (faith) that produces an external devotion to God (works or fruit).

Internal devotion to God is what God sees. God alone knows who has saving faith.

External devotion to God is what we see in someone's actions. Paul stresses category 1 and James stresses category 2. Paul is addressing largely religious types who have a lot of 2 as they are Law keepers (keeping the Sabbath, tithing, avoiding sexual sin etc.) but he questions whether they understand and have 1. By way of modern analogy, imagine you were speaking to a Mormon who lived by a strict moral code, was a "good person", and did not understand the difference between their spirituality and yours and they kept asking what else they needed to do. You would try, as Paul did with the Jews, to turn the conversation from what they needed to do to trusting in what Jesus did. Most people we minister to are not like this as our world has become so enamored with self-esteem and tolerance that most folks think they are pretty wonderful and don't need to change or do anything to be right with God.

On the flip side, imagine speaking with someone who grew up in a Christian home, was well-aware of God's love and grace, claimed to have category 1, but did very little in category 2. They did not serve much, give much, share their faith much, etc. When confronted, they defend themselves by saying that they had a "personal faith" that lived inside of them, and that real Christianity is not about

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial...

-James 1:12

doing things but rather trusting Jesus. You would likely start stressing category 2 – that internal faith produces external works. In short, you would tell them they get to follow Jesus' example and should start following in His footsteps of obedience. The record of faith in the early church recorded in Acts is that their faith immediately resulted in missional action by the Spirit's power. In Acts we have not just theology, but theology in the context of a historical narrative of what happened as they were doing the work and bearing the fruit of Spirit-empowered mission.

In closing, the difference between faith and works can get in the way of us seeing that some works are acts of faith. This explains why Abram obeying God and moving to another nation in obedience to a God he just met is described

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throughout the Bible as an act of faith. For Abraham, his faith internally showed up with obedient action externally.

Perhaps some practical examples will help.

When a bride and groom show up for their wedding ceremony relaxed with a smile on their faces, their actions are works of a faith. They are showing externally that they trust God and one another internally.

When a young child is on the edge of a swimming pool and their parent is in the water with their hands outstretched, the fact that the child jumps, trusting their parent to catch them is a work of faith in the love of mom or dad.

When a grandparent is on their death bed and gathers their family members around their bed to say their goodbyes and speaks joyfully of the eternity that awaits them with Christ, then breathes their last with tears in their eyes but a smile on their face, that smile is a work of faith revealing externally their devotion internally.

James speaks of this kind of faith. As Jesus' brother, he is frankly weary of lazy Christians not living on mission, being generous, and getting things done and excusing their sin by saying it's all about internal faith and not external faith. His brother Jesus had internal faith that compelled him to do a lot of external works. Frankly, he's writing to many church members and half-hearted Christians who have a personal relationship with Jesus that should be public and his timeless message to turn the temperature up on the lukewarm is as timely as ever!

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MARK DRISCOLL & REAL FAITH

With Pastor Mark, it's all about Jesus! Mark and his wife Grace have been married and doing vocational ministry together since 1993. They also planted The Trinity Church with their five kids in Scottsdale, Arizona as a family ministry (thetrinitychurch.com) and started Real Faith, a ministry alongside their daughter Ashley that contains a mountain of Bible teaching from Pastor Mark as well as content for women, men, parents, pastors, leaders, Spanish-speakers, and more.

Pastor Mark has been named by *Preaching Magazine* one of the 25 most influential pastors of the past 25 years. He has a bachelor's degree in speech communication from the Edward R. Murrow College of Communication at Washington State University as well as a master's degree in exegetical theology from Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. For free sermons, answers to questions, Bible teaching, and more, visit **RealFaith.com** or download the **Real Faith app**.

Together, Mark and Grace have authored "Win Your War" and "Real Marriage". Pastor Mark has authored numerous other books including "Spirit-Filled Jesus", "Who Do You Think You Are?", "Vintage Jesus", and "Doctrine". Pastor Mark and his daughter Ashley Chase have also written "Pray Like Jesus" as a father-daughter project.

If you have any prayer requests for us, questions for future Ask Pastor Mark or Dear Grace videos, or a testimony regarding how God has used this and other resources to help you learn God's Word, we would love to hear from you at **hello@realfaith.com**.



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