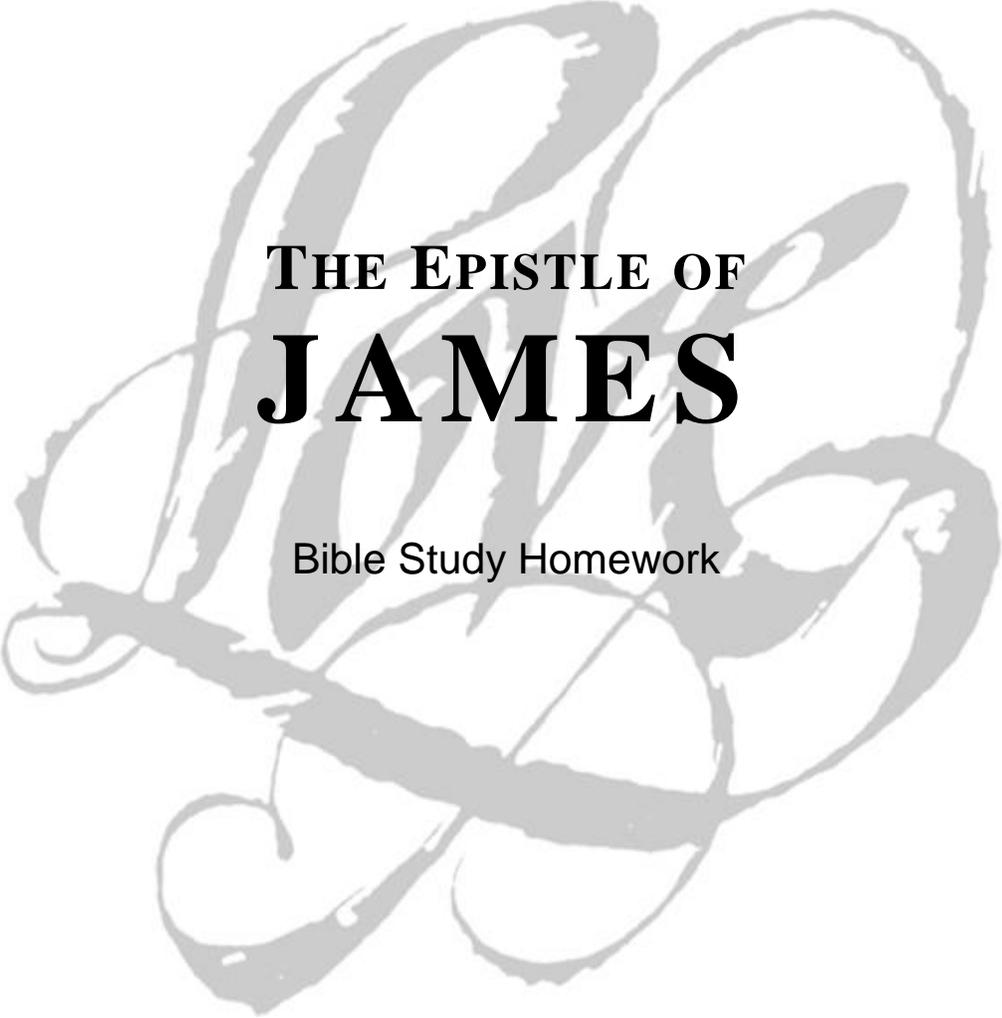


The Most Excellent Way

*The Christian Solution to Chemical Dependency
“Becoming GOD-Dependent”*



THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Bible Study Homework

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“THE EPISTLE OF JAMES”

*But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”
Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.
JAMES 2:18 NIV*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STUDY 1	OVERVIEW & INTRODUCTION
STUDY 2	JAMES 1:2-12 WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH
STUDY 3	JAMES 1:13-18 EXCUSES, EXCUSES!
STUDY 4.....	JAMES 1:19-27 JUST DO IT BECAUSE IT’S RIGHT!
STUDY 5.....	JAMES 2:1-13 PLAYING FAVORITES
STUDY 6.....	JAMES 2:14-26 NOW GET TO WORK!
STUDY 7	JAMES 3:1-12 UNBRIDLED POWER
STUDY 8	JAMES 3:12-18 WHAT DO YOU KNOW?
STUDY 9	JAMES 4:1-12 FIGHTS, QUARRELS & OTHER PASTIMES
STUDY 10	JAMES 4:13-17 TALKING ABOUT TOMORROW
STUDY 11.....	JAMES 5:1-6 WHAT POSSESSES YOU?
STUDY 12	JAMES 5:7-12 FOR THOSE WHO WAIT
STUDY 13	JAMES 5:13-20 PRAYER IS REAL POWER

“THE EPISTLE OF JAMES”

- PURPOSE:** To expose hypocritical practices and to teach right Christian behavior.
- WRITER:** James, Jesus’ brother, a leader in the Jerusalem church.
JAMES 1:1 NIV ~ James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.
- ADDRESSEE:** First-century Jewish Christians residing in Gentile communities outside Palestine, and all Christians everywhere.
- DATE WRITTEN:** Probably A.D. 49, prior to the Jerusalem council held in A.D. 50
- SETTING:** This letter expresses James’s concern for persecuted Christians who were once part of the Jerusalem church.
- KEY VERSE:** *JAMES 2:18 NIV ~ But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.*
- SUMMARY:** **Chapter 1 ~ What the Christian HAS Confident Stand**
Chapter 2 ~ What the Christian DOES Compassionate Service
Chapter 3 ~ What the Christian SAYS Careful Speech
Chapter 4 ~ What the Christian FEELS Contrite Submission to God
Chapter 5 ~ What the Christian GIVES Concerned Sharing

INTRODUCTION:

“MIRACULOUS!” ... “Greatest ever!” ... “Because you deserve the best!” We are inundated by floods of extravagant claims as we channel surf the television or flip magazine pages. The messages leap out at us. The products assure that they are new, improved, fantastic, and capable of changing our life.

For only a few dollars, we can have “cleaner clothes,” “whiter teeth,” “stylish hair,” “tastier food,” “trim and firm bodies” — just name, it’s out there just for you because you deserve it. Cars, vacations, perfume, diet pills, diet drinks, fat-free goodies, mouthwash, etc. are guaranteed to bring happiness, friends and the good life. And just before an election, no one can match the politicians’ promises. But talk is cheap, and too often we soon realize that the boasts were hollow, far from the truth.

“Jesus is the answer!” ... “Believe in God!” ... “Follow me to church!” Christians also make great claims but are often guilty of belying them with their actions. Professing to trust God and to be His people, they cling tightly to the world and its values. Possessing all the right answers, they contradict the Gospel with their lives.

With energetic style and crisp, well-chosen words, James confronts this conflict head-on. It is not enough to talk the Christian faith, he says — we must live it (2:14). The proof of the reality of our faith is a changed life, which will inevitably produce good deeds. This is the central theme of James’s letter, around which he supplies practical advice on living the Christian life. ♥

“THE EPISTLE OF JAMES”

Megathemes

THEME	EXPLANATION	IMPORTANCE
LIVING FAITH	James wants believers not only to hear the truth but also to put it into action. He contrasts empty faith (claims without conduct) with faith that works. Commitment to love and to serve others is evidence of true faith.	Living faith makes a difference. Make sure your faith is more than just a statement — it should also result in action. Seek ways of putting your faith to work.
TRIALS	In the Christian life there are trials and temptations. Successfully overcoming these adversities produces maturity and strong character.	Don’t resent troubles when they come. Pray for wisdom. God will supply all the wisdom you need to face persecution or adversity. He will give you patience and keep you strong in times of trial.
LAW OF LOVE	We are saved by God’s gracious mercy, not by keeping law. But Jesus gave us a special command: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 19:19). We are to love and serve those around us.	Keeping the law of love shows that our faith is vital and real. When we show love to others, we are overcoming our own selfishness.
WISE SPEECH	Wisdom shows itself in wise speech. God holds us responsible for the results of our destructive words. The wisdom of God that helps control the tongue can help control all our actions.	Accepting God’s wisdom will affect your speech. Your words will convey true humility and lead to peace. Think before you speak and allow God to give you self-control.
WEALTH	James taught Christians not to compromise with worldly attitudes about wealth. Because the glory of wealth fades, Christians should store up God’s treasures through sincere service. Christians must not show partiality to the wealthy or be prejudiced against the poor .	All of us are accountable for how we use what we have. We should not hoard wealth, but be generous toward others. In addition, we should not be impressed by the wealthy nor look down on those who are poor.

Jesus said:
**“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto you.”**
Matthew 6:33 KJV

The Most Excellent Way →

Faith That Works

James offers many more similarities to the Sermon on the Mount than any other book in the New Testament. James relied heavily on Jesus' teachings. And so should we!

1. When your life is full of difficulties and persecutions, be happy.	
<i>James 1:2</i> — Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ...	<i>Matthew 5:10-12</i> — Jesus said: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. “Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
2. When your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything. You are to be perfect, full and complete by faith in Jesus Christ.	
<i>James 1:4</i> — Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.	<i>Matthew 5:48</i> — Jesus said: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
3. Ask God, and He will answer.	
<i>James 1:5</i> — If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. <i>James 5:15</i> — And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.	<i>Matthew 7:7-12</i> — Jesus said: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ “For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹ “Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ “Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! ¹² “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”
4. Those who are poor (who don't amount to much by the world's standards) should be glad, for God has honored them.	
<i>James 1:9</i> — The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position.	<i>Matthew 5:3</i> — Jesus said: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
5. Watch out for your anger . . . It can be dangerous.	
<i>James 1:20</i> — For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.	<i>Matthew 5:22</i> — Jesus said: “But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

6. Be merciful to others, as God is merciful to you.	
<i>James 2:13 — Because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!</i>	<i>Matthew 5:7 — Jesus said: “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”</i> <i>Matthew 6:14 — Jesus said: “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”</i>
7. Your faith must express itself in your actions — your care for others.	
<i>James 2:14-16 — What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?</i> <i>¹⁵Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.</i> <i>¹⁶If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?</i>	<i>Matthew 7:21-23 — Jesus said: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.</i> <i>²²Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’</i> <i>²³Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!’”</i>
8. Blessed are the peacemakers; they plan in peace and a reap a harvest of goodness.	
<i>James 3:17-18 ~ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.</i>	<i>Matthew 5:9 ~ Jesus said: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”</i>
9. Friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God. You cannot serve God and money, pleasures, or evil. Friendship with evil makes you an enemy of God.	
<i>James 4:4 — You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.</i>	<i>Matthew 6:24 — Jesus said: “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”</i>
10. When you humble yourself and realize your dependence on and need for God, He will lift you up — He will come to you and encourage you.	
<i>James 4:10 — Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.</i>	<i>Matthew 5:3 — Jesus said: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”</i> <i>Matthew 5:4 — Jesus said: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”</i>
11. Don’t speak evil against each other. If you do, you are criticizing God’s law.	
<i>James 4:11 — Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.</i>	<i>Matthew 7:1-2 — Jesus said: “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”</i>

12. Treasure on earth will only rot away and be eaten by moths. Store up eternal treasures in heaven. Develop an eternal perspective.

James 5:2-3 — Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.

Matthew 6:19 — Jesus said: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.”

13. Be patient in suffering, as God’s prophets were patient.

James 5:10 — Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Matthew 5:12 — Jesus said: “Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

14. Be honest in your speech; just a simple yes or no so that you will not sin — be trustworthy.

James 5:12 — Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your “Yes” be yes, and your “No,” no, or you will be condemned.

*Matthew 5:33-37 — Jesus said: “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’
³⁴“But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne;
³⁵“Or by the earth, for it is His footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.
³⁶“And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.
³⁷“Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.*

TWO TYPES OF WISDOM

WISDOM FROM BELOW

*James 3:14-16 NIV — But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.
¹⁵Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.
¹⁶For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.*

CHARACTERIZED BY:

- BITTER ENVY
- SELFISH AMBITION
- BOASTING
- DENYING THE TRUTH
- BEING EARTHLY-MINDED
- BEING UNSPIRITUAL
- FROM THE DEVIL

RESULTING IN:

DISORDER — EVIL PRACTICES/ACTIONS

WISDOM FROM HEAVEN

*James 3:17-18 NIV — But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.
¹⁸Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.*

CHARACTERIZED BY:

- PURITY — personal transparency or holiness
- PEACEABLE — willing to sacrifice for peace
- CONSIDERATE — gentle, not seeking its own way
- YIELDING — agreeable, willing to reevaluate, open
- MERCIFUL — compassionate
- IMPARTIAL — single-minded toward God and people
- SINCERE — without hypocrisy

RESULTING IN:

GOOD FRUIT — RIGHTEOUSNESS = GOOD ACTIONS

STUDY 2
WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH
“FAITH & ENDURANCE”

James 1:2-12 NKJV

PROFITING FROM TRIALS

*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,
³knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.*

*⁴But let patience have its perfect work,
that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

*⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God,
who gives to all liberally and without reproach,
and it will be given to him.*

*⁶But let him ask in faith, with no doubting,
for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.
⁷For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;
⁸he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

THE PERSPECTIVE OF RICH AND POOR

*⁹Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation,
¹⁰but the rich in his humiliation,*

because as a flower of the field he will pass away.

*¹¹For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass;
its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes.
So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.*

LOVING GOD UNDER TRIALS

*Blessed is the man who endures temptation;
for when he has been approved,
he will receive the crown of life which the Lord
has promised to those who love Him.*

STUDY 1 ~ “FAITH AND ENDURANCE”

James teaches that God’s purpose is to develop Christians who are mature and complete. If it were up to us, that process probably wouldn’t include times of stress, hardship, or testing. But God knows us well, and as our loving Father, He knows that our faith and character are developed only through trials and testings.

The apostle Paul’s teaching in Romans 8:28 makes such a practical difference when we face difficult trials. **“*And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them.*”** Although we might be tempted to run away from God during our trials, knowing God’s love and remembering His purpose in them can help us to trust Him even more.

- **PERSONAL REFLECTION** – Write a quick, brief answer to the following questions on the back.
- 1. **Describe a moment of pure joy in your life. What did you do? What happened? How did you react?**
- 2. **How would you respond to someone who tells you that good can come from the trials which you are experiencing?**
- 3. **What doubts about God and prayer does the average person usually experience?**

- **STUDYING THE WORD**

- 4. **What attitude did James tell people to exhibit when they are facing trials? (1:2)**

- 1:2 – The word *temptation* as used in TLB refers to trials or testing. It does not mean an enticement to do evil. While God tests us, He never provokes us to sin.
- 1:2, 3 – James doesn’t say *if* we face trials, but *when* we face them. He assumes we will have trials and that it is possible to profit from them. We are not required to pretend to be happy when we face pain, but to have a positive outlook because of the results trials will bring. James tells us to turn our hardships into times of learning. Rough times can teach us patience.
- More Scriptures dealing with patience, also called perseverance and steadfastness:

ROMANS 5:3-4 NIV – *Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*

ROMANS 8:24-25 NIV – *For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*

2 CORINTHIANS 6:3-7 NIV – *We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left;*

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2 PETER 1:2-9 NIV – *Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.*

5. What is produced when our faith is tested? (1:3-4)

- 1:2-4 – We can’t really know the depth of our character until we see how we react under pressure. It is easy to be kind when everything is going well, but can we still be kind when others are treating us unfairly? God desires to make us mature and complete (“perfect”), not to keep us from all pain. Instead of complaining about our struggles, we should see them as opportunities for growth. Thank God for promising to be with you in rough times. Ask Him to help you solve your problems or give you the strength to endure them. Then be patient. Jesus will not leave you alone with your problems; He’ll stay close by and help you grow.

6. What is God’s response when we ask for wisdom? (1:5)

- 1:1-5 – By “wisdom,” James is talking not only about knowledge, but the ability to make wise decisions in difficult circumstances. If we need wisdom, we can pray to God and He will supply what we need. Christians need never grope in the dark, hoping to stumble upon answers. We can ask for God’s wisdom to guide our choices.
- 1:5 – When James speaks of wisdom, he means practical discernment. Wisdom begins with respect for God, leads to right living, and results in increased ability to tell right from wrong. God is willing to give us this wisdom; but we will be unable to receive it if our goals are self-centered instead of God-centered. To learn God’s will, we need to read God’s Word, ask Him to show us how to obey it, and then we must do what He tells us.

7. What effect does doubt have on a person when he or she prays? (1:6-8)

- 1:6 – God does not grant thoughtless or selfish requests. To “ask in faith” means asking with confidence that God will align our desires with His purposes.

[Jesus said:] “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.” Matthew 21:22 NIV

Jesus does not guarantee that we can get *anything* we want simply by asking Him and believing. God does not grant requests that would hurt us or others, or that violate His own nature or will. Jesus’ statement is not a blank check. To be fulfilled, our requests must be in harmony with the principles of God’s Kingdom. The stronger our belief, the more likely our prayers will be in line with God’s will, and then God will be pleased to grant them.

- 1:6 – A mind that wavers is not completely convinced that God’s way is best. It treats God’s Word like any human advice retaining the option of disobedience. It vacillates between feelings, the world’s ideas, and God’s commands. If your faith is new, weak, or struggling, remember God is trustworthy. Be loyal to Him. To stabilize your wavering or doubtful mind, commit yourself wholeheartedly to God.
- 1:6-8 – If you have ever seen the constant rolling of huge waves at sea, you know how restless they are — subject to the forces of wind, gravity, and tide. Doubt leaves one as unsettled as the restless waves. If you want to stop being tossed about, rely on God to show you what is best for you. Ask Him for wisdom and trust that He will give it to you. Then your decisions will be sure and solid.

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8. What will eventually happen to the wealth of a rich person? (1:10-11)

- 1:9 – Christians who aren’t exalted in this world should be glad, because they are great in the Lord’s eyes. The Christian who is not recognized by the world is a person of humble circumstances, without wealth or status. Such people are often overlooked, even in our churches today, but they are not overlooked by God. Strive to treat each person as Christ would treat him or her. Remember the “Golden Rule.”
- 1:9-11 – The poor should be glad riches mean nothing to God, otherwise they would be considered unworthy. The rich should be glad wealth means nothing to God, because wealth is easily lost. We find true wealth by developing our spiritual life, not our financial assets. God is interested in what is lasting (our souls), not in what is temporary (our money and possessions).

[Jesus said:] “. . . but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.”
MARK 4:19 NIV

- 1:10-11 – If wealth, power, and status mean nothing to God, why do we attribute so much importance to them and so much honor to those who possess them. Do your material possessions give you goals and your only reason for living: If they were gone, what would be left? What you have in your heart, not your bank account, matters to God and endures for eternity.

9. What reward awaits you if you persevere under trial? (1:12)

- The crown of life is like the victory wreath given to winning athletes (see 1 Corinthians 9:25). God’s crown of life is not glory and honor here on earth but the reward of eternal life—living with God forever. The way to be in God’s winners’ circle is by loving Him and staying faithful even under pressure.

• **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

10. What trials and difficulties have you experienced during your life?

11. Why does God allow people to go through trials and difficulties?

12. What good has ever come out of a difficult situation in your life?

13. How does a person's relationship with God change as he/she goes through trials and problems?

14. When do you find it hardest to pray?

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15. With what doubts have you struggled concerning God and prayer?
 16. How can doubting affect a person's prayer life?
 17. How can a person who pursues wealth and riches be disappointed?
 18. In what way have material possessions disappointed you once you possessed them?
 19. What is the difference between having a short-term or a long-term perspective on trials?
- **DOING THE WORD**
20. Think of someone who has had a difficult life. What has helped that person persevere? What did that person learn through it? What did that person's experience teach you?
 21. Responding to trials can be difficult when you are alone. Who could meet with you regularly to encourage you and pray for you during a difficult time in your life? When will you ask her?
 22. What do you believe God is trying to teach you this week through the trials and situations you are experiencing?
 23. In what specific areas do you need to ask God for His wisdom this week?
 24. What temptations do you need God's help to resist this week?

May our Lord and Savior richly bless you as you continue to grow in Him!

STUDY 3
“EXCUSES, EXCUSES!”

James 1: 13-18 NKJV

*Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”;
for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.
¹⁴But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.
¹⁵Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin;
and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.*

*¹⁶Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.
¹⁷Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,
and comes down from the Father of lights,
with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.
¹⁸Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth,
that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.*

-
- **PERSONAL REFLECTION** – Write a quick, brief answer to the following questions.
1. What is one of the funniest excuses that you have heard a small child try to use?
 2. Describe a time in you childhood when you tried to blame someone else for a problem you caused.
 3. Describe a time as an adult when you blamed someone else for a bad choice you made.

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- **STUDYING THE WORD**

4. From where does temptation come? (1:13-15)

- 1:12-15 – Temptation comes from evil desires within, not from God. Temptations come from our own sinful desires as we are attracted and inflamed by the world’s values, people, and pleasures. It begins with an evil thought. It becomes sin when we dwell on the thought and allow it to become an action. Like a snowball rolling downhill, sin grows more destructive the more we let it have its way. The best time to stop a temptation is before it is too great or moving too fast to control. (Read how Jesus escaped temptation – Matthew 4:1-11.)

1 CORINTHIANS 10:13 NIV – *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

2 TIMOTHY 2:22-23 NIV – *Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.*

5. How does sin start and end? (1:13-15)

- 1:13-15 – It is easy to blame others and make excuses for evil thoughts and wrong actions. Excuses include:
 - (1) It’s the other person’s fault;
 - (2) I couldn’t help it;
 - (3) Everybody’s doing it;
 - (4) It was just a mistake;
 - (5) Nobody’s perfect;
 - (6) The devil made me do it;
 - (7) I was pressured into it; and
 - (8) I didn’t know it was wrong.A person who makes excuses is trying to shift the blame from himself to something or someone else. A Christian, on the other hand, accepts responsibility for his wrongs, confesses them, and asks God for forgiveness.
- 1:13-14 – People who live for God often wonder why they still have temptations. Does God *tempt* us? No, God *tests* us, but He does not tempt us by trying to seduce us into sin. However, He *allows* Satan to tempt us in order to refine our faith and to grow in our dependence upon Christ. We can resist the temptation to sin by turning to God for strength and *choosing* to obey His Word.

5. From where do all good and perfect gifts come? (1:16-17)

- 1:17 – The Bible often compares goodness with light and evil with darkness.

PSALM 27:1 – *The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life of whom shall I be afraid?*

ISAIAH 60:19-22 – *“The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end. Then will all your people be righteous and they will possess the land forever. They are the shoot I have planted, the work of my hands, for the display of my splendor. The least of you will become a thousand, the smallest a mighty nation. I am the LORD; in its time I will do this swiftly.”*

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6. How did James describe God’s relationship with the people He created? (1:17-18)

- 1:18 – First-century Christians were the first generation to believe in Jesus as Messiah. James calls them “a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”

• **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

7. How would you explain to a ten-year-old why a person does something wrong or evil?

8. If God really loves us, why doesn’t He protect us from temptations?

9. When temptation comes, why do people tend to blame others and excuse themselves instead of taking responsibility for their sin and their actions?

10. Why do we often blame God for tempting us when we sin?

11. Other than blaming God when we are tempted, what are some other ways we avoid taking responsibility for our own decisions and actions?

12. What specific activities awaken and encourage your sinful desires and lead to temptation? (For example, for some people it may be browsing at a magazine rack, watching certain television shows or movies, visiting dangerous people or places of our pasts, or envying others.)

13. What can a person do to stop an evil desire from becoming an actual evil act?

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- **DOING THE WORD**

14. What temptations do you need God’s help to resist this week?

15. When tempted, how can you stop excusing yourself? What will you do to prevent this from happening?

May our Lord and Savior richly bless you as you continue to grow in Him!

STUDY 4
“JUST DO IT BECAUSE IT’S RIGHT!”

James 1:19-27 NKJV

QUALITIES NEEDED IN TRIALS

*¹⁹So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear,
slow to speak, slow to wrath;
²⁰for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*

DOERS — NOT HEARERS ONLY

*²¹Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness,
and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.
²²But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.
²³For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer,
he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;
²⁴for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.
²⁵But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it,
and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work,
this one will be blessed in what he does.*

*²⁶If anyone among you thinks he is religious,
and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart,
this one’s religion is useless.*

*²⁷Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this:
to visit orphans and widows in their trouble,
and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*

“LISTENING AND DOING”

As important as it is to read the Bible, James teaches us that it is not helpful unless we do what it says. It’s been said that it’s not enough to “*talk* the talk” — we must “*walk* the talk.” That’s the concern James has for us. As important as it is to know God’s Word, to be eager learners in personal Bible study and in church, it is equally important to be living out what we believe. Genuine faith will evidence itself in some very practical ways: (1) righteous living, (2) godly speaking, and (3) compassion for others.

Does your lifestyle reflect your Christian faith? Whether you are at church, in your home, at a neighborhood gathering, or in the marketplace, people should see a consistency between what you say and how you live. Revelation demands response! Don’t fall into the trap of reading or listening to the Bible and then not putting it into practice.

- **PERSONAL REFLECTION** – Write a quick, brief answer to the following questions.

1. **When have you given someone advice only to have that person completely ignore it to her own peril?**
2. **How does it affect you when a person is caught doing what he or she tells others not to do?**
3. **Think of a time recently when you looked as though you were listening to someone but the words were going in one ear and out the other. What were you thinking about at that moment?**
4. **When are you most likely to lose your temper?**

- **STUDYING THE WORD**

5. **What instruction did James give about the relationship between speaking, listening, and anger? (1:19)**

1:19 – When we talk too much and listen too little, we communicate to others that we think our ideas are much more important than theirs. James wisely advises us to reverse this process. Put a mental stopwatch on your conversations, and keep track of how much you talk and how much you listen. When people talk with you, do they believe their viewpoints and ideas have value to you?

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6. What is the relationship between anger and righteous living? (1:20)

- 1:19-20 – These verses speak of anger that erupts when our ego is bruised: “I am hurt;” “*My feelings are hurt;*” “*My opinions are not being heard.*” When injustice and sin occur, we should become angry because others are being hurt. But we should not become angry when we fail to win an argument or when we feel offended or neglected. Selfish anger never helps anyone.

7. What should a Christian clean out of his or her life? (1:21)

8. What is the relationship between listening to God’s Word and doing it? (1:22)

9. What analogy did James use to describe a person who does not do what the Bible says? (1:23-24)

10. What promise did James give to the person who studies God’s Word and practices it? (1:25)

11. What does the Bible give to us? (1:25)

- 1:22-25 – It is important to listen to what God’s Word says, but it is much more important to obey it and to do what it says. We can measure the effectiveness Bible study time by the effect it has on our attitudes and behavior. Do you put action into what you have studied?
- 1:25 – It seems paradoxical that a law could give us freedom, but God’s law points out sin in us and gives the opportunity to ask for God’s forgiveness. (ROMANS 7:7-8 – *What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.” But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead.*) As Christians, we are saved by God’s grace, and salvation frees us from sin’s control. As believers, we are free to live as God created us to live. Of course, this does not mean that we are free to do as we please (1 PETER 2:16 – *Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.*) We are now free to obey God.

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12. How is a person’s speech related to the credibility of his or her faith? (1:26)

13. What did James describe as pure religion? (1:27)

14. What is pure religion? (1:27)

- 1-27 – In the first century, orphans and widows had very little means of economic support. Unless a family member was willing to care for them, they were reduced to begging, selling themselves as slaves, or starving. By caring for these people, the church put God’s Word into practice. When we give with no thought of receiving, we show what it means to truly serve others.
- 1-27 – To keep ourselves from letting the world corrupt us, we need to commit ourselves to Christ’s ethical and moral system, not the world’s. We are not to adapt to the world’s value system, which is based on money, power, possessions, and pleasure. True faith means nothing if we are contaminated with worldly values.

- **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

15. What makes it hard for us to be good listeners?

16. How can being quick to speak and quick to anger get you into trouble?

17. How do displays of anger and temper affect the witness of a Christian?

18. What attitudes and habits can inhibit our growth as disciples of Christ?

19. What makes it hard for us to practice what we know to be good?

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20. How does our speech reflect our relationship with God?

21. How have you experienced freedom by doing the Word of God?

22. In what ways can the world pollute us?

23. How can we keep ourselves from being polluted by the world?

• **DOING THE WORD**

24. What will you do to put Bible truths into practice?

25. Who will you listen carefully to this week? Your child? Your mate? Your friend? Your employer? A coworker? Your pastor? Explain why and how:

26. Is there a “widow” or “orphan” you know who needs your compassion this week? What will you do?



May our Lord and Savior richly bless you as you continue to grow in His strength!

STUDY 5
PLAYING FAVORITES
“A WARNING AGAINST PREJUDICE”

James 2:1-13 NKJV

BEWARE OF PERSONAL FAVORITISM

¹*My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Lord of glory, with partiality.*

²*For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel,
and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes,*

³*and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him,
“You sit here in a good place,”*

and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,”

⁴*have you not shown partiality among yourselves,
and become judges with evil thoughts?*

⁵*Listen, my beloved brethren:*

*Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and
heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?*

⁶*But you have dishonored the poor man.*

Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?

⁷*Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?*

⁸*If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture,
“You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well;*

⁹*but if you show partiality, you commit sin,
and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*

¹⁰*For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point,
he is guilty of all.*

¹¹*For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.”*

*Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder,
you have become a transgressor of the law.*

¹²*So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.*

¹³*For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.
Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

“A WARNING AGAINST PREJUDICE”

Jesus is echoing the consistent teaching of the Old and New Testaments in this passage — that God has a heart of compassion for the poor and destitute. He is a God rich in mercy who delights in caring for those who don’t count for much in the world’s eyes. All Christians have received undeserved mercy from God and are called by God to express mercy to those in need. That’s why favoritism to the rich is so unacceptable: It values that which God says is unimportant. Be very careful in your personal life and in your church to treat people according to God’s values rather than by the values of the world.

Showing favoritism is wrong for several reasons:

1. It is inconsistent with Jesus’ teachings.
2. It results from evil thoughts.
3. It insults people made in God’s image.
4. It is a by-product of selfish motives.
5. It goes against the Biblical definition of love.
6. It shows a lack of mercy to those less fortunate.
7. It is hypocritical.
8. It is a sin.

- **PERSONAL REFLECTION** – Write a quick, brief answer to the following questions.

1. **Describe a time when a teacher showed favoritism in class. How did the class know about it? How did you feel about it?**

2. **In what ways do adults continue to play favorites at home, at work, or in government?**

3. **How much money would it take to make you consider yourself rich?**

4. **For what reasons might a person think he or she is more important than another person?**

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5. Where do you see prejudice being practiced?

- **STUDYING THE WORD**

6. What example did James use to illustrate how favoritism was practiced in the church? (2:1-4)

- 2:2-4 – Why is it wrong to judge a person by his or her economic status? Wealth may indicate intelligence, wise decisions, and hard work. On the other hand, it may only mean that a person had the good fortune of being born into a wealthy family. Or it may be the sign of greed, dishonesty, or selfishness. By honoring someone just because he or she dresses well, we are making appearance more important than character.
- Sometimes we do this because (1) poverty makes us uncomfortable; we don't want to face our responsibilities to those who have less than we do; (2) we want to be wealthy, too, and hope to use the rich person as a means to that end; (3) we want the rich person to join our church and help support it financially. All these motives are selfish, stemming from the view that we are superior to the poor person. If we say that Christ is our Lord, then we must live as he requires, showing no favoritism and loving all people regardless of whether they are rich or poor.
- 2:2-4 – We are often partial to the rich because we mistakenly assume that riches are a sign of God's blessing and approval. But God does not promise us earthly rewards or riches; in fact, Jesus calls us to be ready to suffer for Him and give up everything in order to hold on to eternal life (Matthew 6:19-21; 19:28-30; Luke 12:14-34; Romans 8:15-21; 1 Timothy 6:17-19). We will have untold riches in eternity if we are faithful in our present life (Luke 6:35; John 12:23-25; Galatians 6:7-10; Titus 3:4-8).

7. What has God promised to the poor of this world? (2:5)

- 2:5 – When James speaks about the poor, he is talking about those who have no money and also about those whose simple values are despised by much of our affluent society. Perhaps the “poor” people prefer serving to managing, human relationships to financial security, peace to power. This does not mean that the poor will automatically go to heaven and the rich to hell. Poor people, however, are usually more aware of their powerlessness. Thus, it is often easier for them to acknowledge their need for salvation. One of the greatest barriers to salvation for the rich is pride. For the poor, bitterness can often far the way to acceptance of salvation.

8. What does the church do to the poor person when it shows favoritism toward the rich? (2:6)

9. What do rich people have a history of doing to people in the church? (2:6-7)

- 2:1-7 – James condemns acts of favoritism. Often we treat a well-dressed, impressive-looking person better than someone who looks shabby. We do this because we would rather identify with success than with apparent failure. The irony, as James reminds us, is that the supposed winners may have gained their impressive life-style at our expense. In addition, the rich find it difficult to identify with Jesus, who came as a humble servant. Are you partial to the “haves” while ignoring the “have nots”? This attitude is sinful. God views all people as equals. We should follow His example.

10. What is the royal law found in Scripture? (2:8)

- The “royal command” is the law of our great King, Jesus Christ, who said, “*Love each other in the same way that I love you*” (John 15:12). This law, originally summarized in Leviticus 19:18, is the basis for all the laws of how people should relate to one another. Jesus reinforced this truth in Matthew 22:37-40, and Paul taught it in Romans 13:8 and Galatians 5:14.

11. What does practicing favoritism do to a person who is trying to keep the law? (2:9)

- We must treat all people as we want to be treated. To ignore either the rich or the poor would be to withhold Christian love.

12. What does a person have to do to be considered a lawbreaker? (2:10-11)

- Christians must not use this verse to justify sinning. We dare not say, “Because I can’t keep every demand of God, why even try?” James reminds us that if we’ve broken just one law, we are sinners. We can’t decide to keep part of God’s law and ignore the rest. You can’t break the law a little bit; if you have broken it at all, you need Jesus to pay for your sin. Measure yourself, not someone else, against God’s standards. Ask for forgiveness where you need it, and then renew your effort to put faith into practice.

13. By what standards should a person speak and act? (2:12)

- 2:12 – As Christians, we are saved by God’s free gift (grace) through faith, not by keeping the law. But as Christians, we are also required to obey Jesus. The apostle Paul taught that “we must all stand before Christ to be judged” (2 Corinthians 5:10) for our conduct. God’s grace does not cancel our duty to obey Him; it gives our obedience a new basis. The law is no longer an external set of rules, but it is a “law that sets you free” — one we joyfully and willingly carry out, because we love God and have the power of His Holy Spirit.

14. What promise is made to people who judge without mercy? (2:13)

15. Why should we be merciful? (2:13)

- 2:13 – Only God in His mercy can forgive our sins. We can’t earn forgiveness by forgiving others. But when we withhold forgiveness from others after having received it ourselves, we show that we don’t understand or appreciate God’s mercy toward us:

MATTHEW 6:14-15 NIV – *For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

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MATTHEW 18:21 NIV – *Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”*

EPHESIANS 4:31-32 NIV – *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

- **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

16. In what ways have you been a victim of favoritism or prejudice?

17. How have you shown favoritism or prejudice toward other people?

18. Why do we often treat rich people as more important than poor people?

19. How do we use physical appearance, job status, and athletic ability to show favoritism toward people?

20. How can we welcome poor people in our church?

21. Why does God have a special concern for poor people?

22. In what practical ways can we show genuine love to people of different races, cultures, and economic standing?

23. Why is favoritism or prejudice often overlooked as a sin?

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24. Why would God condemn us as lawbreakers if our sins are only “minor” ones, such as prejudice?

• **DOING THE WORD**

25. Think of someone whom God has brought into your life who is unattractive or seems to have little to offer you. Perhaps you have been guilty of ignoring this person in the past. Ask Jesus to help you see this person more clearly from his/her perspective, and from His perspective. List at least three specific actions you can take to reach out to him/her with Jesus’ love.

(1)

(2)

(3)

✠

May our Lord and Savior richly bless you as you touch others with His Love!

STUDY 6
“NOW GET TO WORK!”

JAMES 2:14-26 NKJV

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD

¹⁴*What does it profit, my brethren,
if someone says he has faith but does not have works?
Can faith save him?*

¹⁵*If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,
¹⁶and one of you says to them,
“Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,”
but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body,
what does it profit?*

¹⁷*Thus 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 without your works,
and I will show you my faith by my works.*

¹⁹*You believe that there is one God. You do well.
Even the demons believe — and tremble!*

²⁰*But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?*

²¹*Was not Abraham our father justified by works
when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?*

²²*Do you see that faith was working together with his works,
and by works faith was made perfect?*

²³*And the Scripture was fulfilled which says,
“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”
And he was called the friend of God.*

²⁴*You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.*

²⁵*Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works
when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?*

²⁶*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*

“FAITH WITHOUT GOOD DEEDS IS DEAD FAITH”

In this lesson James argues for the necessity of good deeds. He presents three principles of faith:

- (1) Commitment is an essential part of faith. You cannot be a Christian simply by affirming the right doctrines or agreeing with biblical facts (2:19).
- (2) Right actions are the natural by-products of true faith. A genuine Christian will have a changed life (2:18).
- (3) Faith without good deeds doesn't do anyone any good—it is useless (2:14-17).

James' teachings are consistent with Paul's teaching that we receive salvation by faith alone. Paul emphasizes the PURPOSE OF FAITH: to bring salvation. James emphasizes the RESULTS OF FAITH: a changed life.

The relationship between faith and deeds is a very important theological topic. This was a major area of contention during the Reformation. The Bible clearly teaches that we are saved by faith in Christ alone (Romans 3:28; Ephesians 2:8-9; Galatians 2:15-16). When James says that a person is not justified by faith alone (2:24), he isn't contradicting Paul's teaching in Romans 3:28 (“*So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law*”).

James passionately challenges, stirs up, and admonishes all those who believe in Christ to put their faith into practice. Anything less would not be worthy of the God we serve and would not be genuine faith. When we become God's children by faith, God gives us a new heart (Ezekiel 36:25-26), and we become joined to Jesus (John 15:5). Because of this, genuine faith in Jesus will always produce thoughts, words and deeds that reflect God's character and His lordship.

The relationship between faith and lifestyle is inseparable. It isn't that we are saved on the basis of what we do. Rather our deeds are the inevitable result and evidence of God's redeeming work in us.

- **PERSONAL REFLECTION** – Write a quick, brief answer to the following questions.
1. **If you were 100 miles from home with no money, no credit cards, no friends, no transportation, and no place to stay, what would you do to survive and make it home?**

 2. **What is the difference between someone who talks about a problem and someone who does something about the problem?**

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- **STUDYING THE WORD**

3. What is the relationship between faith and deeds? (2:14)

- 2:14 – When someone claims to have faith, what she may have is intellectual assent—agreement with a set of Christian teachings—and as such it would be incomplete faith. True faith transforms our conduct as well as our thoughts. If our life remains unchanged, we don’t truly believe the truths we claim to believe.

4. What illustration did James use to explain how real faith affects a person's deeds? (2:15-17)

5. How did James describe faith that has no accompanying deeds? (2:17)

- 2:17 – We cannot earn our salvation by serving and obeying God. But such actions show that our commitment to God is real. Deeds of loving service are not a substitute for, but rather a verification of, our faith in Jesus.

6. What is wrong with having faith without deeds? (2:18-26)

- 2:18 – At first glance, this verse seems to contradict Romans 3:28: *“We are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law.”* Deeper investigation, however, shows that the teachings of James and Paul are not at odds. While it is true that our good deeds can never earn salvation, true faith always results in a changed life and good works. Paul speaks against those who try to be saved by deeds instead of true faith; James speaks against those who confuse mere intellectual assent with true faith. After all, even demons know who Jesus is, but they don’t obey Him (2:19). True faith involves a commitment of your whole self to God.

7. What do the demons believe about God? How does it affect them? (2:19)

8. What did Abraham do to show his faith? (2:21-23)

9. What made Abraham righteous? (2:23)

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10. How is a person justified before God? (2:24)

- 2:21-24 – James says that Abraham was “declared right with God” for what he *did* because he *believed* God (Romans 4:1-5). James and Paul are not contradicting but complementing each other. Let’s not conclude that the truth is a blending of these two statements. We are not justified by what we do in any way. True faith always results in good deeds, but the deeds do not justify us. Faith brings us salvation; active obedience demonstrates that our faith is genuine.

11. What did Rahab do? How did she show faith? (2:25)

- 2:25 – Rahab lived in Jericho, a city the Israelites conquered as they entered the Promised Land (Joshua 2). When Israel’s spies came to the city, she hid them and helped them escape. In this way she demonstrated faith in God’s purpose for Israel. As a result, she and her family were saved when the city was destroyed. Hebrews 11:31 lists Rahab among the heroes of faith.

12. How are faith and deeds like the body and the spirit? (2:26)

- **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

13. How is being a Christian supposed to change the way we live?

14. What can a Christian do to help the people around him or her?

15. What is one way to tell if a person has a real, living faith?

16. What is difficult about applying what we hear in church to our everyday lives?

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17. What are some of the biblical commands which are hard for you to live out?

18. If God has forgiven us and promised us eternal life, what motivation do we have to live in obedience to Him today?

19. Which is easier for you—talking about your faith with others, or demonstrating love toward them?

20. In what areas of your life do you want to begin acting more like a Christian?

DOING THE WORD

21. In what home, work, or neighborhood situations might you be able to show faith in God this week? How?

22. How can you show greater faith in God by what you do this week?

23. Each evening this week, remind yourself that you are saved by faith, not by what you do. Consider how you lived out your faith during the day (how did your faith make a difference in what you did?). Then thank the Lord for your victories, and ask Him to continue strengthening your faith.



May our Lord and Savior richly bless you as you live victoriously by faith!

STUDY 7
“UNBRIDLED POWER”

James 3:1-12 NKJV

THE UNTAMABLE TONGUE

*My brethren, let not many of you become teachers,
knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.*

²*For we all stumble in many things.*

*If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man,
able also to bridle the whole body.*

³*Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us,
and we turn their whole body.*

⁴*Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds,
they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires.*

⁵*Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.
See how great a forest a little fire kindles!*

⁶*And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.*

*The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body,
and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.*

⁷*For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea,
is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.*

⁸*But no man can tame the tongue.*

It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

⁹*With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men,
who have been made in the similitude of God.*

¹⁰*Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing.*

My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

¹¹*Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?*

¹²*Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs?*

Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

“TAMING THE TONGUE”

Will we *ever* be able to control what we say? James says that the tongue corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of life on fire, is a restless evil, and cannot be tamed. Yet we should not give up trying.

The difficulty with the tongue is that it is connected to the heart!

Jesus said in Matthew 12:34-35: “*You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.*” A tongue problem is really a heart problem! God specializes in heart problems — giving each Christian a new heart, one that is alive to God and sensitive to His leading. As we continually turn from sin and learn to turn to God in faith and trust, God changes us on the inside — the heart.

*“May the words of my mouth and meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight
O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.” Psalm 19:14 NIV*

• **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

- 1. If you could hear a tape recording of everything you said last week, what would you want to edit out?**

- 2. How do you react when you hear someone cursing and using abusive language?**

- 3. How can a person be hurt by the words of others?**

- 4. What can you learn about a person by listening to him or her speak?**

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- **STUDYING THE WORD**

5. What unique responsibility does a teacher bear? (3:1)

- 3:1 – Teaching was a highly valued and respected profession in Jewish culture, and many Jews who embraced Christianity wanted to become teachers. James warned that although it is good to aspire to teach, teachers’ responsibility is great because their words and example affect others’ spiritual lives. If you are in a teaching or leadership role, how are you affecting those you lead? *If you are a parent, how are you teaching and leading your own child(ren) by what you say?*

6. If a person were never at fault in what he or she said, what would that show about the person? (3:2)

7. What is significant about the way we talk? (3:2)

8. What is the purpose of a bit in the mouth of a horse? (3:3)

- 3:2-3 – What you DO say and what you DON’T say are both important. To use proper speech you must not only say the right words at the right time, but also not say what you shouldn’t. **Examples of an untamed tongue include gossiping, putting others down, bragging, manipulating, false teaching, exaggerating, complaining, flattering, filthy language and cursing, teasing, and lying.** Before you speak, ask: “Is what I want to say true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?”

9. What is the purpose of the rudder of a ship? (3:4)

10. What damage can a small spark cause to a great forest? (3:4)

11. What similarity does a person’s tongue have to a horse’s bit, a ship’s rudder, and a spark of fire? (3:5)

12. How did James describe the tongue? (3:6-8)

13. What damage do our tongues do to us? (3:6)

14. What is so difficult about taming the tongue? (3:7-8)

- 3:6 – James compares the damage tongue can do to a raging fire—the tongue’s wickedness has its source in hell itself. The uncontrolled tongue can do terrible damage. Satan uses the tongue to divide people and pit them against one another. Idle and hateful words are damaging because they spread destruction quickly, and no one can stop the results once they are spoken. We dare not be careless with what we say, thinking we can apologize later, because even if we do, the scars remain. A few words spoken in anger can destroy a relations that took years to build. Before you speak, remember that words are like fire—you can neither control nor reverse the damage done.
- If no human being can control the tongue, why bother trying? Even though we may not achieve perfect control of our tongues, the Holy Spirit will help us learn self-control. Remember that we are not fighting the tongue’s fire in our own strength. The Holy Spirit will give us increasing power to monitor and control what we say, so that when we are offended, the Spirit will remind us of God’s love, and we won’t react in a hateful manner. When we are criticized, the Spirit will heal the hurt and help us to not lash out.

15. Of what inconsistencies are we capable? (3:9-10)

16. In what ways are we inconsistent? (3:9-10)

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17. What illustrations from nature did James use to condemn cursing? (3:11-12)

18. What can a spring or a fruit tree teach us about speech? (3:11-12)

- 3:9-12 – Our contradictory speech often puzzles us. At times our words are right and pleasing to God, but at other times they are violent and destructive. Which of these speech patterns reflects our true identity? We were made in God’s image, but the tongue gives us a picture of our basic sinful nature. God works to change us from the inside out. When the Holy Spirit purifies our hearts, He gives self-control so we will speak words that please God.

- **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

19. What motivates a person to teach others? How is a teacher in the church supposed to be different from the average member?

20. Why will God judge teachers more strictly than other people?

21. Do you believe parents have a duty as “teachers?”

22. What are the ways we sin with our speech?

23. Why are sins of speech often overlooked as not serious?

24. How is our speech influenced by others around us?

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25. What weaknesses in our lives does our speech often expose?

27. In what times or places can your tongue be used for good?

28. As a Christian, in what ways do you struggle with the tension between “the old person” and “the new person?”

29. How should knowing that people are made in the image of God influence how you speak to them?

• **DOING THE WORD**

30. What will you remove from your speech habits this week to make your words more pleasing to God?

31. What positive words do your family and coworkers need to hear from your mouth this week?



May our Lord richly bless you as His Spirit guards your heart and guides your speech!

STUDY 8
“WHAT DO YOU KNOW?”
“TWO KINDS OF WISDOM”

JAMES 3:13-18 NKJV

HEAVENLY VERSUS DEMONIC WISDOM

¹³*Who is wise and understanding among you?*

Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.

¹⁴*But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts,
do not boast and lie against the truth.*

¹⁵*This wisdom does not descend from above,
but is earthly, sensual, demonic.*

¹⁶*For where envy and self-seeking exist,
confusion and every evil thing are there.*

¹⁷*But the wisdom that is from above is first pure,
then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits,
without partiality and without hypocrisy.*

¹⁸*Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

“TWO KINDS OF WISDOM”

The world praises those with ambition, and sometimes we admire them too. Most people think it's smart to be ambitious. Yet James draws a clear contrast between this kind of earthly wisdom and God's wisdom. They have dramatically different characteristics, orientations, and results.

The world does a great job of packaging and marketing its own wisdom, without apology, proudly, and insistently. That's the reason Paul's warning in Romans 12:2 to not “*copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.*”

- **PERSONAL REFLECTION** – Write a quick, brief answer to the following questions.

1. **What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?**

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2. **Where do people often go to get wisdom?**

3. **List some of the wisest people you know. What evidence of wisdom have you seen in their life. What are their goals?**

- **STUDYING THE WORD**

4. **How can a person demonstrate wisdom and understanding? (3:13)**

5. **How can we tell when a person is wise? (3:13)**

6. **What common attitudes do we need to avoid boasting about? (3:14)**

7. **What is wrong with the “wisdom” of a selfish and bitter person? (3:14-15)**
 - 3:14-15 – Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition are inspired by the Devil and are expressed through the “old man.” It is easy for us to be drawn into wrong desires by the pressure of society and sometimes even by well-meaning Christians. By listening to the advice: “Assert yourself,” “You deserve it!” “Go for it,” we can be drawn into greed and destructive competitiveness. Seeking God’s wisdom delivers us from the need to compare ourselves to others and to want what they have.

8. **How is a person's character related to his or her ability to discern? (3:14-16)**

9. **From where does the "wisdom" of a selfish and bitter person come? (3:15)**

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10. To what do envy and selfish ambition lead? (3:16)

11. What are the qualities of the wisdom that comes from heaven? (3:17)

12. How does a wise person act? (3:17-18)

13. What happens when people “plant seeds of peace”? (3:18)

- 3:13-18 – Have you ever know someone who claimed to be wise but who acted foolishly? True wisdom can be measured by a person’s character. Just as you can identify a tree by the type of fruit it produces, you can evaluate your wisdom by the way you act. Foolishness leads to disorder but wisdom leads to peace and goodness. Are you tempted to escalate the conflict, pass on the gossip, or fan the fire of discord? Careful, winsome speech and wise, loving words are the seeds of peace. God loves peacemakers. *Matthew 5:9 – [Jesus said:] “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”*

- **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

14. What is the best way to make a lasting positive impression on others?

15. What is the difference between earthly wisdom and God's wisdom?

16. What life experiences increase our wisdom?

17. What are the marks of humility in a person?

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18. What damage can bitter envy or selfish ambition do to a person?

19. How can we get or experience heavenly wisdom?

20. What are practical ways we can sow seeds of peace during our life?

21. What godly characteristics are present in our speech when we are pursuing God's wisdom?

23. What kind of bitter envy or selfish ambition do you tend to hold in your heart?

• DOING THE WORD

24. What will you do this week to plant peace in a relationship or situation which has been troubling you?

25. What will you do this week to seek God's wisdom?



May our Lord richly bless you as you “put on” the wisdom of God!

STUDY 9
“FIGHTS, QUARRELS & OTHER PASTIMES ...”

JAMES 4:1-12 NKJV

PRIDE PROMOTES STRIFE

*Where do wars and fights come from among you?
Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?
2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain.
You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.
3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss,
that you may spend it on your pleasures.
4 Adulterers and adulteresses!
Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?
Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.
5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain,
“The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”?
6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:
“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*

HUMILITY CURES WORLDLINESS

*7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.
Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.
9 Lament and mourn and weep!
Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.
10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.*

DO NOT JUDGE A BROTHER

*11 Do not speak evil of one another, brethren.
He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother,
speaks evil of the law and judges the law.
But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.
12 There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy.
Who are you to judge another?*

“SUBMIT YOURSELVES TO GOD”

James doesn't paint a pretty picture of life in the church. It sounds much like life anytime people are together: quarreling, fighting, slandering, judging. The difference is that there's hope for real change in people, their relationships, including within the church.

Problems arise when we exchange friendship with God for friendship with the world. As with all of the devil's treacheries, the world's friendship might sound good at first, but it will soon bring a harvest of sin, jealousy, hatred, and self-centeredness.

The good news is that Christians have an alternative—to return to God in confession and dependency. God never tires of welcoming home His wayward children and of lifting them up when they humble themselves before Him.

If you find yourself constantly embroiled in disagreements and arguments, take a close look at your heart ... and come home to friendship with God.

- **PERSONAL REFLECTION** – Write a quick, brief answer to the following questions.

1. If you could ask God for anything, what would it be?

2. What do families and friends commonly fight about?

- **STUDYING THE WORD**

3. What are the battles going on inside a person? (4:1-2)

4. What is the root cause of fights and quarrels between people? (4:1-3)

- 4:1-3 – Conflicts and disputes among believers are always harmful. James explains that these quarrels result from evil desires battling within us: We want more recognition, more money, more possessions, more status. When we don't get what we want (*when our expectations are not met*), we angrily fight to get our way. Instead of aggressively grabbing what we want, we should submit ourselves to God, ask God to help us get rid of our selfish desires, and trust Him to give us what we really *need*.

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5. Why don't people have what they want? (4:2)

6. Why doesn't God give some people what they ask for? (4:3)

- 4:2-3 – James mentions the most common problems in prayer: not asking, asking for the wrong things, or asking for the wrong reasons. Do you talk to God at all? When you do, what do you talk about? Do you ask only to satisfy your desires? Do you seek God's approval for what you already plan to do? Your prayers will become powerful when you allow God to change your desires so that they perfectly correspond to His will for you.

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

1 JOHN 3:21-22 NIV

7. What does friendship with the world do to our relationship with God? (4:4)

- 4:3-4 – There is nothing wrong with wanting a pleasurable life. God gives us good gifts that He wants us to enjoy.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

JAMES 1:17 NIV

For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

1 TIMOTHY 4:3-5 NIV

- Having friendship with the world involves seeking pleasure at others' expense or at the expense of obeying God. Pleasure that keeps us from pleasing God is sinful; pleasure from God's rich bounty is good.

8. Whom does God oppose and favor? (4:6)

9. When does God give us grace? (4:6)

- The cure for evil desires is humility. Pride makes us self-centered and leads us to conclude that we deserve all we can see, touch, or imagine. It creates greedy appetites for far more than we need. We can be released from our self-centered desires by humbling ourselves before God, realizing that all we really need is His approval. When the Holy Spirit fills us, we see this world's seductive attractions are only cheap substitutes for what God has to offer.

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.

PROVERBS 16:18-19 NIV

The Most Excellent Way ~ “Becoming GOD-Dependent”

*Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older.
All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,
“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”
Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand,
that He may lift you up in due time.
1 PETER 5:5-6 NIV*

10. How does the devil react when a person resists him? (4:7)

- Although God and the devil are at war, we don’t have to wait unto the end to see who will win. God has already defeated the devil, and when Jesus returns, the devil and all he stands for will be eliminated forever. Our enemy is here now, however, and he is trying to win us over to his evil cause. With the Holy Spirit’s power, we can resist the devil, and he will flee from us.

11. How did James describe the way we should come to God? (4:7-10)

- How can you draw near to God? James gives five ways:
 - 1) *Humble yourself before God* (4:7). Yield to His authority and will, commit your life to Him and His control, and be willing to follow Him no matter what.
 - 2) *Resist the devil* (4:7). Don’t allow him to entice and tempt you.
 - 3) *Wash your hands . . . and purify your hearts* (that is, lead a pure life) (4:8).
 - 4) *Let there be sorrow and deep grief* for your sins (4:9) Don’t be afraid to express deep heartfelt sorrow for what you have thought, said or how you have behaved.
 - 5) *Bow down before the Lord*, and He will lift you up (4:10, 1 Peter 5:6).

12. What does God do to us when we have an attitude of humility before Him? (4:10)

13. How are we to speak to one another? (4:11)

14. When we speak against a person, what attitude are we having toward God and His law? (4:11-12)

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- 4:11-12 – James summarized the law as love for God and neighbor, and Paul said that love demonstrated toward a neighbor would satisfy the law. When we fail to love, we re actually breaking God’s law. Examine your attitude and actions toward others. Do you build people up or tear them down? When you’re ready to criticize someone, remember God’s law of love and say something good instead. Saying something beneficial to others will cure you of find fault and increase your ability to obey God’s law of love.
- **Memorize the following two Scripture passages to fortify your heart:**

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

MATTHEW 22:37-40 NIV

This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing.

Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue;

if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another,

for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,”

and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule:

“Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

ROMANS 13:6-10 NIV

- **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

15. What do most people think God wants from them?

16. How has your belief about what God wants from you changed over the years?

17. How does pride show up in our work? home? church? community?

18. Why does God oppose people who are proud?

19. What is the difference between pride and a sense of accomplishment?

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20. How can a person tell when he or she has become proud?

21. How can we reduce or remove the pride from our lives?

22. What do we want from God most of the time?

23. Why do we hesitate to give our lives to God?

• **DOING THE WORD**

24. What sins of action and attitude do you need to confess to God today?

25. What can you do this week to draw near to God?

26. In what situations do you need to resist the devil this week?

27. What can you do this week to help you bring more humility into your life?



May the Lord richly bless you as you submit yourself to Him more and more . . . day by day!

STUDY 10
“BOASTING ABOUT TOMORROW”

JAMES 4:13-17 NKJV

*Come now, you who say,
“Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city,
spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”;
¹⁴whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow.
For what is your life?
It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.
¹⁵Instead you ought to say,
“If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.”
¹⁶But now you boast in your arrogance.
All such boasting is evil.*

¹⁷Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

“BOASTING ABOUT TOMORROW”

Many people say they believe in God but are really “practical atheists.” In the way they approach basic decisions and plan for the future, they live as if God didn’t exist. They take no account of God’s sustaining care or grace. They act as if they are self-sufficient and in control. They take credit for all the good things they experience. Listening to them speak or watching them work, one would have no idea that God is a factor in their life.

James, in his usual candid way, simply calls this attitude foolish, sinful, and evil. How much better to actively recognize God’s divine right to order and direct our life as He pleases.

If you have given your life to Jesus, have you also given Him your future?

- **PERSONAL REFLECTION** – Write a quick, brief answer to the following questions.

1. To where in the world would you like to travel?

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2. **If you could start your own business, what would it be?**

3. **If you knew you had just three months to live, what are some things you would want to do?**

- **STUDYING THE WORD**

4. **Whose attention did James want to get? (4:13)**

5. **What warning did James give to those who make plans for the future? (4:13-14)**

6. **What could happen to destroy even the best laid plans? (4:14)**

7. **To what did James compare our lives? (4:14)**

 - 4:14 – Life is short no matter how many years we live. Don’t be deceived into thinking you have lots of remaining time to live for Jesus, to enjoy your loved ones, or to do what you know you should. Live for God today! Then, no matter when your life ends, you will have fulfilled God’s plan for you.

8. **What is the best way to plan ahead? (4:15)**

9. What should we say when we are making plans? (4:15)

10. What outlook toward the future does God want us to change? (4:16)

11. What sinful attitudes often accompany the act of making plans? (4:16)

- 4:13-16 – It is good to make plans, but they will disappoint us if we leave God out of them. There is no point in making plans as though God does not exist, because the future is in His hands. What would you like to be doing 10 years from now? One year from now? Tomorrow? How will you react if God steps in and rearranges your plans? Plan ahead, but ask for God’s guidance. Seek god’s will in our planning; He will never disappoint you.

12. How did James define sin? (4:17)

13. How do we sin? (4:17)

- 4:17 – We tend to think that doing wrong is sin. But James tells us that sin is also *not doing right*. (These two sins are sometimes called sins of commission and sins of omission.) It is a sin to lie — it can also be a sin to know the truth and not tell it. It is a sin to speak evil of someone — it is also a sin to avoid that person when you know he or she needs your friendship. You should be willing to help as the Holy Spirit guides you. If God has directed you to do a kind act, to render a service, or to restore a relationship, do it! You will experience a renewed and refreshed vitality you Christian faith.

• **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

14. What’s wrong with planning out our lives?

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15. What responsibility does God want us to take in planning our lives?
 16. What is the best use we can make of our lives?
 17. How can we make plans for business or living which are pleasing to God?
 18. Given how long you think you could live, how can you plan for the future with humility and faith?
 19. What would you like to accomplish before you die?
 20. What accomplishment from your life do you want to present to God?
 21. How can you determine in your daily life what is sinful and what is pleasing to God?
- **DOING THE WORD**
22. What aspects of your life plans do you need to present to God in prayer this week?
 23. What will you do this week to place your plans for the future in God’s hands?
 24. What do you need to do this week in order *to do the good you know you ought to do*?



May the Lord richly bless you as you express your faith in good works!

STUDY 11
“WHAT POSSESSES YOU?”

JAMES 5:1-6

RICH OPPRESSORS WILL BE JUDGED

*Come now, you rich,
weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!*
²*Your riches are corrupted, a
nd your garments are moth-eaten.*
³*Your gold and silver are corroded,
and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire.
You have heaped up treasure in the last days.*
⁴*Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields,
which you kept back by fraud, cry out;
and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of [Hosts].*
⁵*You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury;
you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.*
⁶*You have condemned, you have murdered the just;
he does not resist you.*

“MISUSE OF BLESSINGS”

Jesus spent a lot of time talking about money because there is a close connection between the heart and material possessions. In Matthew 16:26, Jesus asked what it would benefit a man if he gained the whole world but lost his soul. In this passage, James makes the same point using powerful and dramatic images.

It is nothing less than folly to value and pursue things that don't satisfy and won't last beyond the grave. The rich people were James addressed in this letter were compounding that error by exploiting and manipulating people in pursuit of wealth. We too need the admonition not to misuse our blessings.

If you have been blessed with riches, guard you heart so they don't become your god. If you find yourself being caught up in the pursuit of material possessions, hear the words of warning and perspective offered by James. Finally, if you have suffered under the hand of rich oppressors (even other Christians), know that God has heard your cry and will dispense judgment in *His time*.

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- **PERSONAL REFLECTION** – Write a quick, brief answer to the following questions.

1. **How much does it take to be considered rich in your community?**

2. **If you won \$1 million, what would you do with it?**

3. **How does money change people?**

- **STUDYING THE WORD**

4. **Whom did James address in this passage? Why? (5:1)**

5. **What warning did James give to rich people? (5:1-3)**

6. **What misfortune lies ahead for the wealthy? (5:1-3)**

7. **Who should “weep and wail?” Why? (5:1-6)**

- 5:1-6 – James proclaims the worthlessness of riches, not the worthlessness of the rich. Today’s money will be worthless when Jesus returns, so we should spend our time accumulating the kind of treasures that will be worthwhile in God’s eternal Kingdom.

Money is not the problem. Christian leaders need money to live and to support their families. Missionaries need money to help spread the Good News. Churches need money to do their work effectively. It is the *love* of money (1 Timothy 6:10) and causes some people to oppress others in order to get more.

This is a warning to all Christians who are tempted to adopt world standards rather than God’s standards (Romans 12:1-2), as well as an encouragement to all those who are oppressed by the rich.

*[Jesus said:] “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,
where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.
But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy,
and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*
MATTHEW 6:19-21 NIV

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8. **What will happen to all the possessions of the wealthy? (5:2-3)**

9. **What attitude does God have toward hoarding wealth? (5:3)**

10. **For what reasons will the rich be punished? (5:4-6)**

11. **Who have been the victims of rich people? (5:4-6)**

12. **How have rich people hurt others? (5:4-6)**

13. **What do luxury and self-indulgence have to do with the trouble that lies ahead for rich people? (5:5)**

- **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

14. **How do money and riches affect our relationship with God?**

15. **What does God think about people who are rich?**

16. **What problems are solved by being rich?**

17. **What problems are not solved by being rich?**

18. **How does God want us to handle money?**

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19. What does it mean to live in “luxury and indulgence”?

20. What common business and financial practices are different from God's standards?

21. How should a Christian business owner or employer be different from others who do not follow Christ?

22. How does a person's use of money reflect what is important to him or her?

23. How can we use money to reflect what is important to God?

24. What material possessions would you find it difficult to give up to help someone else?

25. What do you possess that money cannot buy?

• **DOING THE WORD**

26. What will you do with your money this week to demonstrate your love for God?

27. What changes will you make in your habitual use of money to please God?

28. What do you do that reflects God’s concern for the poor?



May the Lord richly bless you as you seek to bless others.

STUDY 12
“FOR THOSE WHO WAIT”

JAMES 5:7-12 NKJV

BE PATIENT AND PERSEVERING

*⁷Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.
See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth,
waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.*

⁸You also be patient.

Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

⁹Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned.

Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!

*¹⁰My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord,
as an example of suffering and patience.*

¹¹Indeed we count them blessed who endure.

*You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord
— that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.*

¹²But above all, my brethren, do not swear,

either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath.

But let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No,” lest you fall into judgment.

“PATIENCE IN SUFFERING”

This lesson continues some themes that James has already expressed in this letter — Christians are to live in light of eternity, that God can be trusted to give good gifts to His children, and that problems are to bring us to God rather than turn us against other people, including Christians. These truths have great value as we experience injustice and as we suffer in an evil world.

While the world might counsel self-will, self-defense, vengeance, and warfare, God counsels patience. The patience described here is rooted in an assurance of better things from God — it is confident that God is in control and is for us; it sees all the experience in this life in light of eternity. Whenever you feel discouraged, ready to do battle, or bitter — slow down and offer it all to God. Ask Him to help you persevere in your faith.

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- **PERSONAL REFLECTION** – Write a quick, brief answer to the following questions.

1. **What kinds of experiences try your patience?**
2. **What good things in life are worth waiting for?**
3. **How can you tell if a person is telling the truth or making a promise that he/she will keep?**

- **STUDYING THE WORD**

4. **What do we need to do as we wait for the Lord’s return to earth? (5:7)**
5. **What illustration did James use to describe the kind of patience we need? (5:7)**
6. **When will the Lord’s coming occur? (5:8)**
7. **Why should we be patient about Christ’s return? (5:8)**

- 5:7-8 – The farmer must wait patiently for his crops to grow; he cannot hurry the process. But he does not take the summer off and hope that all goes well in the fields. There is much work to do to ensure a good harvest. In the same way, we must wait patiently for Jesus’ return. We cannot make Him come back any sooner. But while we wait, there is much work that we can do to prepare ourselves for eternity. Both the farmer and the Christian must live by faith, looking toward the future reward for their labors. Don’t live as if Jesus will never return. Work faithfully to build His Kingdom. The King *will* come when the time is right.

8. **Why should we avoid judging others or grumbling against them? (5:9)**

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9. What will happen to Christians who grumble against their fellow believers? (5:9)

- 5:9 – From the beginning of time, people tend to grumble against and blame others for their miseries. When God asked Adam about his sin, Adam blamed Eve, and grumbled that God had given him Eve — then Eve blamed the serpent (Genesis 3:11-13). Blaming others is easier than owning our share of the responsibility, but it can be both destructive and sinful. Before you judge others for their shortcomings, remember that Jesus the Judge will come to evaluate each of us. He will not let us get away with shifting the blame to others. (Read Matthew 7:1-5 and Matthew 25:31-36.)

10. What people serve as good examples to us? How? (5:10-11)

11. In what ways does God help us when we must endure suffering? (5:11)

12. What warning did James give concerning swearing? (5:12)

13. What is the alternative to swearing? (5:12)

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

• UNDERSTANDING THE WORD

14. How does God use others to build patience in our lives?

15. What makes it hard to wait on God's timing?

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16. What kind of changes does God want to make in us over an extended period of time?

17. How have you suffered as a Christian?

18. What blessing or reward came to you for suffering as a Christian?

19. How will God reward us if we are patient?

20. What does it mean to stand firm as a Christian?

21. What lessons from Job's experience can we apply to our lives?

22. For what kinds of reasons do Christians judge each other?

23. What causes us to grumble against each other?

24. What does God think about Christians fighting among themselves?

25. What can a Christian do to be trusted with his word and promises?

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• **DOING THE WORD**

26. With what situation or problem can you ask God for help and patience this week?

27. What steps will you take this week to avoid judging others in your home? workplace? church?

28. What promise do you need to keep? How?



May the Lord richly bless you as you surrender to His perfect timing!

STUDY 13
“PRAYER IS REAL POWER”

JAMES 5:13-20 NKJV

MEETING SPECIFIC NEEDS

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.

Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.

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 sick, and the Lord will raise him up.

And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.

18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

BRING BACK THE ERRING ONE

¹⁹Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back,

²⁰let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

“THE PRAYER OF FAITH”

James describes *believing prayer* as a dynamic and powerful activity of the Christian life. It is an instrument of healing and forgiveness and a mighty weapon for spiritual warfare. However, for some Christians, prayer is little more than a comfortable ritual that has few demands and offers even fewer rewards. People with this perspective need to read James with fresh eyes and an open heart.

Other people mistakenly view prayer as a way to obligate God to give them whatever they *claim* in faith, as if God were a heavenly vending machine!

We need to remember that though God is pleased to use our prayers to accomplish His purposes. And though He delights in responding in love to our requests, He is never bound by our prayers. As you come to the Father in faith, praying in accordance with His will, prayer will be the single most effective ministry you can have. Never apologize to someone for *just* being able to prayer. When you pray, you give the best you have to give.

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- **PERSONAL REFLECTION** – Write a quick, brief answer to the following questions.

1. **What are some of the most memorable moments of your life?**

2. **What are some situations in life when most people pray?**

- **STUDYING THE WORD**

3. **What should a person do when he or she is in trouble? Why? (5:13, 15)**

4. **What should a person do when he or she is happy? Why? (5:13, 15)**

5. **What should a person do when he or she is sick? Why? (5:14-15)**

- 5:14-15 – James is referring to someone who is physically ill. In Scripture, oil was both a medicine (see the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37), and a symbol of the Spirit of God (as used in anointing kings, see 1 Samuel 16:1-13). Thus, oil can represent both the medical and spiritual spheres of life. Christians should not separate the physical and the spiritual. Jesus is Lord over both the body and the spirit.

6. **Why is prayer important? (5:15)**

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7. What are the elders of the church to do for someone who is sick? Why? (5:14-15)

8. How can prayer affect a person’s health? (5:15)

- 5:14-15 – People in the church are not alone. Members of Christ’s body should be able to count on others for support and prayer, especially when they are sick or suffering. The elders should be on call to respond to the illness of any member, and the church should be sensitive to the needs of all its members.

9. How can a person have his or her sins forgiven? (5:15)

- 5:15 – The “prayer offered in faith” does not refer to the faith of the sick person but to the faith of the people praying. God heals, faith doesn’t, and all prayers are subject to God’s will. But prayer is part of God’s healing process.

10. Why should we confess our sins to one another? (5:16)

- 5:16 – Jesus has made it possible for us to go directly to God for forgiveness. But confessing our sins to each other still has an important place in the life of the church.
 - 1) If we have sinned against an individual, we must ask him or her to forgive us.
 - 2) If our sin has affected the church, we must confess it publicly.
 - 3) If we need loving support as we struggle with a sin, we should confess that sin to those who are able to provide that support.
 - 4) If we doubt God’s forgiveness, after confessing a sin to Him, we may wish to confess that sin to a fellow believer for assurance of God’s pardon. In Christ’s Kingdom, every believer is a priest to other believers.

11. What is the effect of a righteous person’s prayers? (5:16)

12. Who is a good example of how God answers prayer? How? (5:17-18)

- The Christian’s most powerful resource is communion with God through prayer. The results are often greater than we thought possible. Some people see prayer as a last resort to be tried when all else fails. This approach is backward. Prayer should come first. Because God’s power is infinitely greater than ours, it only makes sense to rely on it — especially because God encourages us to do so.

13. What is our responsibility toward a fellow believer who has wandered away from the truth?
(5:19)

14. What is the benefit of helping a person get back into following the truth? (5:20)

- 5:19-20 – Clearly this person who has wandered from the truth is a believer who has fallen into sin — one who is no longer living a life consistent with his or her beliefs. Christians disagree over whether or not it is possible for people to lose their salvation, but all agree that those who fall away from their faith are in serious trouble and need to repent. James urges Christians to help backsliders return to God. By taking the initiative, praying for the person, and acting in love, we can meet the person where he or she is and bring him or her back to God and His forgiveness.
- 5:20 – **The book of James emphasizes faith in action. Right living is the evidence and result of faith. The church must serve with compassion, speak lovingly and truthfully, live in obedience to God’s commands, and love one another. The body of believers ought to be an example of heaven on earth, drawing people to Christ through love for God and each other. If we truly believe God’s Word, we will *live* it day by day. God’s word is not merely something we read or think about, but something we do. Belief, faith, and trust must have hands and feet — yours!**

- **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

15. How can we use prayer to help someone who is sick?

16. When have you had the opportunity to pray specifically for someone or for a special need?

17. How have you seen prayer bring changes in people or circumstances?

18. What hinders Christians from praying with confidence?

19. What hinders Christians from confessing sins and praying for each other?

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20. If we confess our sins to God, why should anyone else have to know about it?
21. What circumstances beyond our control can we affect through prayer?
22. What causes Christians to stumble and fall away from their faith?
23. How could you help someone who has drifted away from his or her relationship with Christ?
24. How have others helped you when you were drifting in your relationship with Christ?
- **DOING THE WORD**
25. What situation or person will you pray for in faith this week?
26. What personal needs can you ask others to pray for through the coming week? Whom will you ask?
27. Whom do you know who has been drifting away from the Lord and who needs an encouraging word from you this week?



May GOD BLESS YOU in the most excellent way!