

Time To  
Grow Up!



I am excited to be on this journey with you! For the next 5 weeks we are going to grow together through the extraordinary book of James. This book is one of the most challenging and convicting books in the entire Bible. While reading through James, we will purposefully dissect it to discover how we can learn and grow. As Christ followers, it is important that we continually challenge ourselves to grow. If we are not growing we are dying.

Before we start this journey I want to give us a basic overview of the book of James. The who, what, and why if you will. James was the brother of Jesus. Early on in Jesus' ministry, he was a skeptic and embarrassed by some of the things that Jesus claimed about himself.

Jesus appeared to James, as well as others, after the resurrection. It was then that James believed. He was an apostle to the Jewish Christians who converted from Judaism to Christianity, the main leader of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) and instrumental in building the early church. He was a contemporary of Paul as well as the disciples.

James is believed to be the oldest book in the New Testament, written in 45 AD. The book of James was written to encourage and challenge the early church. James wanted to encourage Christ followers in the early church, to "walk the walk," as well as, "talk the talk." James was martyred in 62 AD.

Are you ready to begin our journey?! Me too! Let's dive in!

~Pastor Troy Asher

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## — Perseverance Through Crisis —

<sup>1</sup>This letter is from James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am writing to the “twelve tribes”-Jewish believers scatter abroad. Greetings! <sup>2</sup>Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. <sup>3</sup>For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. <sup>4</sup>So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. <sup>5</sup>If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. <sup>6</sup>But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup>Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. <sup>8</sup>Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.

~James 1:1-8

**W**ow! What a way to start off a letter! James starts out with a statement that is hard hitting and challenging, right from the get go! How do you respond when troubles come your way?

I can't speak for you but as for me my first carnal instincts are, fear, anger, worry, anxiety and blame. I find it interesting that James does not make a distinction of the kinds of troubles by saying, “when troubles of any kind come your way.” Often times we look at troubles as large calamities that come at us, but James uses the term “any kind,” meaning just that. Any type of problem, distress, difficulty is an opportunity for great joy! It doesn't matter how great or small the challenge is.

If we are not looking at this the correct way, we can think James is telling us to be happy, to feel good about our troubles, and that is not what he is saying at all. What this does mean is that we should be joyful as we walk through the trials. Why? Because we know our faith muscles are growing through the exercise of endurance and the by-product of this endurance, is joy.

Growing is often painful, yet always beautiful. It draws us closer to becoming the person God created us to be. As we learn to endure any kind of trial, we become more complete and that puts us in the prime position to be used by God.

During our lives we will go through times in which we feel less than confident, like we are in over our heads. It is during these times we must choose to trust God, relying on Him and His guidance. It is important that we are confident in God's willingness and ability to guide our steps. We can find comfort in knowing that God never rebukes us when we ask for guidance. When we choose to view our situations through our limited perspectives, we choose a worldly view instead of a godly one. There is no in between. We either trust Him or we don't.

### POINTS TO PONDER

1. In what area of your life have you given up? Ask God to help you to endure even though it is hard.
2. In what area of your life do you need God's direction and wisdom? Was your first instinct worry, fear, anger or prayer? Take time right now to give God your undivided confidence and ask him for His direction in the situation.
3. How do you want to grow in the next 30 days? Let God know that you give Him permission to change you and grow you in the next 30 days. Now seek out accountability.

NOTES/PRAYER:

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## — Perspective Shift: Rich or Poor? —

*<sup>9</sup>Believers who are poor have something to boast about, for God has honored them. <sup>10</sup>And those who are rich should boast that God has humbled them. They will fade away like a little flower in the field. <sup>11</sup>The hot sun rises and the grass withers; the little flower droops and falls, and its beauty fades away. In the same way, the rich will fade away with all of their achievements.*

*~ James 1:9-11*

I believe that being rich or being poor is all relative. For example, the “poorest,” monetarily speaking, in the U.S. are among the richest in 3rd world countries. Statistics tell us that middle class America is among the top 1% richest people in the world. Think about that for just a minute. We so often complain about our circumstances financially, when in reality, we are the “rich” that James is referring to in today’s reading.

When I say, “being rich or poor is relative,” I see it in another way as well. How do you define being rich? We automatically think, “financial” when it comes to being rich. Personally, for me, being rich means so much more. I am rich with love in my family. I am rich in health. I am rich in relationships. These types of “riches” are more than monetary. I would much rather be rich in these other areas than monetarily.

If you asked a billionaire with a terminal illness what he would give up for a new lease on life, I would be willing to bet that he would say everything! He would envy a young person with great health, and covet the young person, much in the same way so many may have coveted his life.

But no matter if you are rich monetarily, health wise, or relationship wise, James points that we should not get too fond of any of it because it will all go away. Nearly 2000 years ago, he conveyed to the church that they should boast only in their salvation in Jesus Christ, and that is the same message being conveyed to us today! In essence he is saying, “If you are poor boast that you are saved by grace through faith! If you are rich boast in the fact that all you have on this earth means nothing compared to the blessed assurance you have in Jesus Christ.” How’s that for a perspective shift?!

### POINTS TO PONDER:

1. In what area of your life do you consider yourself rich? Pause for just a moment and thank God for all of the riches in your life.
2. How do you know that you can be secure in your eternal salvation? If you don’t know the answer to this question read Romans 10:9. Take some time right now and tell God that you believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God. Ask God to come into your life and to be the Lord of your life.
3. How often do you thank God for your eternal salvation? Take time right now in prayer and just thank Him for the assurance that you have in Jesus Christ.

### NOTES/PRAYER

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## — Toughness Through Trials —

<sup>12</sup>God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

<sup>13</sup>And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, “God is tempting me.” God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. <sup>14</sup>Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. <sup>15</sup>These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.

<sup>16</sup>So don’t be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. <sup>17</sup>Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. <sup>18</sup>He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession.

~James 1:12-18

**O**n day one, James addressed the type of attitude that we should have during the trials in our lives. Today he addresses the type of attitude we need to choose when dealing with testing and temptation.

When I was a young child back in the 70’s there was a comedian named Flip Wilson. My dad used to watch him faithfully every week and I would join him. Flip had a variety show and one of the characters he would portray was a lady named Geraldine. One of Geraldine’s most famous lines was, “The devil made me do it.” Geraldine would explain away all of her mistakes and bad behavior by blaming the devil.

As funny as the skit was, and as ridiculous as that sounds, this is sometimes the way we think about life or the way we view the temptations and trials that come our way. James, once again, puts his finger squarely in our chest and says, “Nope! I’m not buying it.” Our temptations come from our own desires.

Now can the enemy use the lusts and the desires of this world to entice the desires that are already within us? You bet he can. Remember his desire is to get you to focus on ANYTHING that is not God. If he can get your attention off of God by getting your heart, mind, and soul lured away to things that ultimately destroy you, then he has succeeded.

The good news is, we have a weapon more powerful than our own sinful desires or anything the enemy can throw at us, it is the Holy Spirit. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to us! (Ephesians 1:19-20)

The words James uses in verse 12 are, “patient in trials and persevering through temptation.” When we rely on God to be our strength we can be more than conquerors!

What is even more perplexing to me is when people blame God for the things that go wrong in their lives. As I was scrolling through social media the other day a young lady explained how she was feeling, “forgotten by God.” When I saw it, I wanted so badly to explain to her that no matter what she has done or will do, regardless of her circumstances in life; God can not forget her. It would be like a parent forgetting his/her child. As a parent, your children are always on your heart and so it is with God.

James finishes up with a beautiful reminder, that we are God’s prized possession! He is so in love with His prized creation! What an Awesome Father!

POINTS TO PONDER:

1. What are you being tempted or tested with in your life? What are you doing to be patient and persevere?
2. How do you think God sees you? Tell yourself right now that you are God's prized possession!
3. Who can you pass this truth on to today? Let someone know how God feels about them.

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## — Cool In Conflict —

*<sup>19</sup> Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. <sup>20</sup> Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. <sup>21</sup> So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.*

*~James 1:19-21*

**A**s I read through the first sentence of our scripture for today, I was very convicted. There have been so many times in my life when I didn't want to hear anything the other person was saying. If I am honest, it is something I still struggle with. I can't wait to get my point across and if you don't see it my way I get angry! In short, I do the exact opposite of what James is instructing us to do.

James tells us that our human anger, "Does not produce the righteousness God desires." So I thought to myself, what does our "human anger" produce? It produces selfishness, harsh words, bitterness, and division. There are so many conversations that I have with people where they are unwilling to forgive family members because of hurtful conversations that have erupted out of anger and have led to years of division.

James seems to switch gears for a moment. He tells us to get "rid of the filth and evil in our lives." After pondering this for a while I realized that James is not switching gears at all! He is pointing out the by-product of our anger. He is telling us that we have built up a storehouse of filth and evil that has come from the anger that has been in our hearts.

It's time that we get rid of the filth and anger. It's time that we accept the word that God has planted in our hearts. When we have a heart full of anger, bitterness, and filth, it leaves no room for the Holy Spirit. And, if we are not careful to fill our hearts with the goodness of God, that void will be filled back up again with the evil that the world brings to us.

This "word" that James is referring to is not some milk toast, namby-pamby words that we sometimes use to flatter. No this word is powerful! It is the Word that will save our souls, when we rely on it and let it in! What an Awesome God we serve!

#### POINTS TO PONDER:

1. What is your first response when you are in conflict? Anger? Or understanding and self-control?
2. What areas of filth and evil do you need to "rid" your soul of? Here are a few; anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, gossip, slander, malice, lust, or greed. Ask God to remove these things from your soul today.
3. Who is the one person in your life that you struggle with the most? Today, make it a point to pray blessings for them. If you can, reach out to them and give them some encouragement.

#### NOTES/PRAYER

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## — Religion Isn't A Bad Word —

BY LINA ASHER

*<sup>22</sup> But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. <sup>23</sup> For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. <sup>24</sup> You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. <sup>25</sup> But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.*

*<sup>26</sup> If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.*

~James 1:22-27

I grew up religious. I had religion. I went to church every Sunday, celebrated all the religious holidays and even served during church services. I was told that I needed to do this, do that, be this, be that...to be loved and accepted by God. My “works” would get me into heaven.

As we look in today's reading, that's not what this scripture is saying at all. Verse 22 says, “But don't just listen to God's Word. You must do what it says. Otherwise you are only fooling yourselves.” This isn't about works, it's about obedience.

The way I was raised in “religion” made me rebel against it and become disobedient. I couldn't measure up! So, I gave up! I walked in this world, being of the world. I was so very lost.

Then, I met some amazing people who took me to a church service that was different. I couldn't explain it, but it “felt”



different. I wasn't just having the word read to me, they encouraged me to read it for myself.

“But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free....”.

Sets me free? That's what I was missing! I had been enslaved to rules and “religion” so deeply and for so long that I wasn't free to see the truth about “religion” and walk in that victory.

You see, it's not about religion, it's about a relationship! God was calling me into His word, so He could speak directly to my heart. He was calling me into an intimate and beautiful relationship with Him. I began a relationship with Him the moment I accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior. As I learned about His love for me, personally, through His word, I was able to get a healthier perspective on “religion.”

“Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans or widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.”

God has created us to SERVE. And when we serve, we are walking in obedience to Him. It's not the service of “doing” like my former religion made me believe. I'm already saved! I will be in heaven for eternity. It's about Jesus, who became flesh, who had all the right to be served by us, yet He came, humbly, to serve others! (Matthew 20:25-28)

He was so obedient to the Father, that it nailed Him to a cross. For you....for me.

He did not allow the pleasures or desires of this world to corrupt Him. He was in this world, but not of this world! That is the same call we have for our lives. We are called to be obedient to His Word!

Obedience, humility, serving. That's what we were created for and that's what we were created to do! And, those are the good works of God that I desire.

POINTS TO PONDER:

1. How have you been deceived by religion? How has this changed for you?
2. How do you serve others? What can you do to serve others better and be a blessing to them?
3. Take time right now to thank Jesus for His obedience to the Father and the cross. We are free from the law of religion and works because of His sacrifice.

NOTES/PRAYER

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## — *Motives* —

<sup>1</sup>*My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others?*

<sup>2</sup>*For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes.* <sup>3</sup>*If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, “You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor”—well,* <sup>4</sup>*doesn’t this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?*

~James 2:1-4

In today’s reading, James challenges us on the subjects of prejudice and discrimination against others. James was writing to the Jewish community and uses examples that were prevalent to his audience. Favoritism and prejudice are still common issues for our time as well.

In our society there are still people who look down on others based on their race, class, or gender. The topics of racism, classism, and sexism are some of the same issues that James was addressing. For years, people have been looking down on others. James is direct in his approach by asking a straightforward question. He’s basically asking, “How can you act this way and still claim to be a Christ follower?” The math just doesn’t add up.

I was at my niece’s birthday party a couple of months ago and I observed these two young girls playing together. One of

the little girls was black the other was white. They laughed, sang and even danced together as the Troll's soundtrack played in the background. They were inseparable! A little later it was time for the birthday girl to open her presents so all of the children, including these two little girls, sat down to watch my niece open her gifts. I looked down and noticed the little black girl started touching and stroking the blonde locks of the little white girl. The little blonde girl looked over and said with a smile and a giggle, "we have different hair" as she reached up to touch her new found friends hair in return. They both giggled, held each other's hand and engaged in the activities.

What a beautiful picture of acceptance! What I learn from this beautiful picture is that prejudice and discrimination are actions that can be taught and caught, but they are not actions that come naturally.

At the end James points out the root cause and that cause is our motives. The short definition for motives is, "the goal or object of a person's actions." Our motives should always be to include and embrace others no matter what. After all, that is what Christ modeled for us while He was here on earth.

#### POINTS TO PONDER:

1. Why, do you believe people discriminate against others?
2. How do you look at people who are different than you?
3. Do your best today to reach out to someone who is different than you. Try to get to know them better.

#### NOTES/PRAYER

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## — *The Royal Law* —

*<sup>5</sup>Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? <sup>6</sup>But you dishonor the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? <sup>7</sup>Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?*

*<sup>8</sup>Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>9</sup>But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law.*

*~James 2:5-9*

**“L**ove your neighbor as yourself.” “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” “Treat others the way you would like to be treated.” “Think before you act.” “If you can't say something nice don't say anything at all.” These are all sayings that we have heard our entire lives. They all seem pretty simple don't they? How can something so easy to understand be so hard to do? Why is it so much easier to just lash out than to keep our mouths shut? Why do we expect so much from others and so little from ourselves?

Today James continues on the topic of favoritism. He points out that we give so much respect and honor to those with wealth and power yet so little value to those who are less fortunate than us. This is still the case today in our society. We will cheer on our favorite athlete or support our favorite celebrity despite the values they hold. James points out that these individuals that we hold in such high esteem are often the ones that are slandering the name of Jesus.

James goes on though, he doesn't stop there. Not only are we pointing adoration and worship in the wrong direction, we are disrespecting and devaluing the people in our lives that we are in contact with everyday.

James is telling us that we should be showing love, honor and respect to those around us just as we would want them to love us. Once again it's a simple concept but not an easy one.

Jesus is asked about this concept in Luke chapter 10. He is asked the question, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus goes on to tell the very familiar story of the good Samaritan. He tells the story and paints the hero of the story as the hated Samaritan. You see Samaritans were looked down upon by the Jews. Jesus makes it clear that we are to love and respect all people regardless of who they are.

In conclusion James calls it out for what it is...Sin! He says that we are, "guilty of breaking the law." Wow! When we really get down to it, it all boils down to our own sinful nature. We can break these patterns by putting others ahead of ourselves, however the key is having a heart of surrender and humility. It requires us to live like Jesus.

#### POINTS TO PONDER:

1. How do you respond when you feel that you have been disrespected?
2. Read the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. What do you take away from this parable?
3. Who can you be a "Good Samaritan" to today?

#### NOTES/PRAYER

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## — Why Try? —

*<sup>10</sup>For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God's laws. <sup>11</sup>For the same God who said, "You must not commit adultery," also said, "You must not murder." So if you murder someone but do not commit adultery, you have still broken the law. <sup>12</sup>So whatever you say or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law that sets you free. <sup>13</sup>There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you.*

*~James 2:10-13*

**T**oday we look at a passage of scripture that, if we aren't careful, can leave us in a state of hopelessness. Today James tells the Jewish Christians that if you've broken one law you've broken them all. Right? So what is the point in trying? I mean, why should we put in any effort to obey God's Word when, at the end of the day, we're all going to fail and fail miserably.

If this is how we read it, we are missing the whole point of what James is saying. What James is telling us is that we are all guilty of being sinners. None of us has the right to look down upon someone else in a judgmental, condescending way. Instead, we should look at others the way we want Jesus to look at us.

The Jewish Christians were used to being on the receiving end of this judgmental mentality. They had been part of a

religious system that said, “We are better than you because we obey God better than you.” The religious leaders constantly beat them down with the law of Moses. They made it a point to let the Christians know how unworthy they were by telling them they had no chance of reconciliation with God because they had committed too many sins.

In the last verse James says, “If you are merciful, God will be merciful to you.” As Christ followers we are saved by God’s free gift (grace) through faith in Jesus not by keeping the law. However, Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5 that we will all stand before Christ to be judged for our conduct. I believe that Christ will be more concerned with how we have treated one another while here on earth more than anything else.

When I stand before Jesus Christ I know that I will need His mercy more than I even realize now. I want to make sure that I am able to receive that mercy from Jesus so I will show others mercy every chance I get. After all they are just as loved by Jesus as I am.

#### POINTS TO PONDER:

1. What does mercy look like to you?
2. Who do you need to show mercy to?
3. Take some time to thank Jesus for the mercy that he shows to you and ask him for forgiveness for the times you have not been merciful to others.

#### NOTES/PRAYER

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## — Faith And Works (Part 1) —

*<sup>14</sup> What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? <sup>15</sup> Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, <sup>16</sup> and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? <sup>17</sup> So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless. <sup>18</sup> Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." But I say, "How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds." <sup>19</sup> You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. <sup>20</sup> How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless?*

*~James 2:14-20*

**E**phesians 2:8-9 says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." (NIV) Often times people try to discredit the Bible by comparing this verse (written by Paul) with the passage that we are looking at today that is written by James. They claim that the two heroes of the early church were at odds with one another and some even claim that James was written to refute Paul. When you read what James writes and really look to understand, you realize that nothing can be further from the truth. What James is NOT saying is that your good works save you. What he IS saying is that good works should be a product of your faith in Jesus.

James is encouraging us to act on what we learn from the model that Jesus left us. If we claim to have faith in Jesus yet we don't live our lives in a way that honors Him, it is hard to believe that we actually have faith.

Let's say I were to tell you how much I love prime rib. I love it so much that I live for it. Every time we go out to eat, I sit down and look at the menu and yet, I never order it. Wouldn't you start to question how much I really love prime rib?

Let's imagine, one day as we are talking, the topic of prime rib comes up. I once again tell you how much I love prime rib.

You stop me and say, "So what do you like so much about prime rib?"

I turn to you and say, "Oh I've never eaten prime rib, I'm a vegetarian."

Wouldn't that seem odd to you? Wouldn't you immediately question my love for prime rib, as well as my sanity?

When we profess that we are faithful followers of Jesus Christ there should be change. One of those changes should be the way we look out and care for one another. If we are not, then we have a dead faith!

#### POINTS TO PONDER:

1. What contrasts do you see between what Paul wrote in Ephesians and what James wrote?
2. What "good deeds" can people see in your life that show your faith in Jesus?
3. Do a good deed for a total stranger today. Ask God for direction in your life to get involved in a ministry where you are serving others.

NOTES/PRAYER

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## — Faith And Works (Part 2) —

BY VASNTI MAKUPSON

*<sup>21</sup> Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. <sup>23</sup> And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." He was even called the friend of God. <sup>24</sup> So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.*

*<sup>25</sup> Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. <sup>26</sup> Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.*

*~James 2:21-26*

**A**s we pick up where Troy left off yesterday, we continue reading about faith and works. I love how James starts out by saying, "Don't you remember!" You see Abraham was a perfect example of faith in action. If you aren't familiar with his story, prior to Abraham having any offspring, the Lord made a covenant with him making him the "father of all who believe" (Romans 4:11). What makes this so significant? Well, remember, this covenant was made BEFORE he had any offspring and ultimately Jesus would come through the very lineage of Abraham.

God basically told Abraham, "your offspring will be as numerous as the stars." I could only imagine what Abraham was thinking. The aging process wasn't slowing down for him

or his wife, they weren't getting any younger and his wife had never been able to conceive. From a natural perspective, there is no way they'd be having children. Despite the very real circumstances he faced, his response was one of faith. Genesis 15:6 says, "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (NIV). Before Isaac was even a twinkle in his daddy's eyes, Abraham chose to believe by faith, that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars.

It wasn't until after Isaac was born that "his faith and actions worked together" (v.22). His faith was demonstrated in actions when he made the journey to mount Moriah to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice (Genesis 22). Can you imagine what that journey must have been like?! I can only imagine the heartache he felt, the thoughts that ran through his mind as they made the 3 day journey. "Will God come through?" "Surely, there will be another way. But what if there isn't?" "What will I tell my wife?" The doubt. The fear. The anxious thoughts, that must have plagued their journey. Yet he continued this act of faith. Abraham's willingness to give all, was proof of the genuineness of his faith. Faith and action are what made him righteous.

Before Danny and I got married, I clearly recall my "Isaac" moment. The moment I had to put our relationship on the "altar." I had to choose to step away, not because things were going bad, but because I sensed God saying, "Will you trust me with the outcome of this relationship?" I was scared and heartbroken as I made the phone call, telling him we needed space. I cried and even doubted but I knew at that moment it was the right thing to do. What that looked like for me was letting him go, trusting God with the results.

I would venture to say that you could relate to Abraham. Perhaps there is something that God is asking you to put on the altar as a sacrifice. A dream. A hope. A relationship. It's not enough to say, "I have faith that God will come through."



He is desiring actions to demonstrate your faith. God is not our genie in a bottle, He is our loving Father, who desires to partner with us. As we move forward, step by step in faith, He will do the heavy lifting by moving mountains. Will you surrender that desire and trust Him by taking that first step of obedience?

POINTS TO PONDER:

1. Is there something in your life God is asking you to trust Him with? A relationship, a dream, a hurt, finances? Take some time to declare your trust and surrender it by faith.
2. Ask God to show you what your "first step" is, what act of faith is He calling you to? It could be showing kindness to a stranger, stepping up to serve/volunteer in a new way, or letting go of an offense.
3. Pray and ask God to lead you in this step of faith. Seek out a trusted accountability partner who will pray with you for courage and obedience.

NOTES/PRAYER

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## — Influence —

*<sup>1</sup>Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. <sup>2</sup>Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.*

*~James 3:1-2*

When I first became a pastor and read this passage of scripture, it made me stop and think. As I thought about these verses, I realized the words I speak are affecting people's spiritual lives. I took these words to heart because I want to always honor God with my life. You see, being a pastor is the 3rd most important thing to me on this earth behind being a husband and a father.

Now I know that most of you reading this are not pastors, but many of you may have the opportunity to speak or teach others at times. Whether it be children, youth, leading a Bible study, or even facilitating a small group. You may even be asked at some point to deliver a message. I believe that James' words ring equally true to you if you are leading in any of the aforementioned ways.

Anytime you are influencing a group of people spiritually, it shouldn't be taken lightly. The words that we speak should reflect God and His promises, not support our personal beliefs or agenda. The reality is, we each have some level of influence. There's always someone who is watching or listening. When we profess to be Christ followers, we have a responsibility to speak words of truth, love and encouragement to a hurting world.

As I continued to read these first two verses I felt a bit of relief when I got to verse 2, “Indeed we all make MANY mistakes.” Okay it is clear to me that God already knows we are going to make mistakes. We are all going to blow it. God is not expecting perfection, but He does want us to recognize that our words matter.

### POINTS TO PONDER

1. Who do you influence spiritually in your life?
2. What would they say is the best advice you have given them?
3. How do you want to influence others spiritually in the future?

### NOTES/PRAYER

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## — *Taming the Tongue (Part 1)* —

*<sup>3</sup>We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. <sup>4</sup>And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. <sup>5</sup>In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. <sup>6</sup>And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.*

*~James 3:3-6*

**I**n our reading today, we see 3 different illustrations. The first two James uses are positive, “a small bit that controls a large horse” and, “a small rudder turns a large ship.” These two show the positive impact a small part of the body, our tongue, can have on our direction.

The third illustration, however, is not positive at all. He says that a small spark can set a great forest ablaze! This shows the irreversible damage the tongue can have if we are not careful. I believe that God wants us to do our best to control our tongues.

The first area we are to control is the words we speak. We should always strive to control our speech 100% of the time. When we speak to people, we should be mindful of their circumstances, personality and feelings. For example, there were things I could say to my wife when she wasn't pregnant that I could NOT say when she was pregnant. Especially if I wanted to keep my smile intact. The words we speak should always take these things into account.

The second area we are to control is the words we DON'T speak. In other words, there are times when we should just not speak at all. The less we say the better. Proverbs 17:28 says, "Even fools are thought wise when they keep silent; with their mouths shut, they seem intelligent." Abe Lincoln and Mark Twain said it like this, "Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt." However you want to say it, the idea is the same, sometimes it's just better to keep our mouths shut.

James ends this paragraph with a warning. He says your words can set your whole life on fire. I don't know about you but I want my words to honor God and honor others. The alternative is a life full of pain and agony.

#### POINTS TO PONDER:

1. When was the last time your words got you in trouble?
2. How did you respond after you spoke these words?
3. What area of your speech do you need to change? Ask God to help you in this area today.

#### NOTES/PRAYER

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## — *Taming the Tongue (Part 2)* —

*<sup>7</sup> People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, <sup>8</sup> but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup> Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. <sup>10</sup> And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! <sup>11</sup> Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? <sup>12</sup> Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring.*

*~James 3:7-12*

I must confess, there have been times in my life, when I would drive to church with my wife and children while we were at each other's throats. We would argue, yell, put each other down, even call each other names. I would turn the car off, we would step out of the car and into the church parking lot. Then, we would immediately put on our happy faces when we walked into church.

When worship began, we would stand and sing songs of praise to God! Worshipping Him! Giving Him the glory and the honor that He and He alone deserves! Then, we would listen to a sermon from God's Word telling us that we need to love one another. But, as soon as the sermon ended, life began again. We went back to the same attitude. We went back to the same disdain for each other and yes even spoke the same ugly words. Yes, I admit it, I've been guilty. Surely you can relate?!

In Matthew 5:23-24 Jesus addresses this. He says before you offer your praise to God, make sure that you are right with



others. John says in 1 John 4:20 that anyone who says, “I love God,” but hates a fellow believer is a liar. Pretty strong words!

James tells us that fresh water and bitter water cannot flow from the same stream. He says that fig trees do not produce olives and grapevines do not produce figs. In other words we should not be double minded people! Our contradictory speech is something that ruins our testimony and pushes people away from God. If you claim to be a Christ follower and talk badly to your spouse or about your spouse, or anyone for that matter, you are dishonoring yourself, the person you are speaking badly about, and most importantly, you are dishonoring God.

In verse 8, James says, “NO ONE can tame the tongue.” So what does that mean? Does it mean that we give up? That we stop trying? Absolutely not! It means that we will never completely control what we say, but we can always strive to get better. The only way we do that is through prayer and walking with the Holy Spirit. When we allow Jesus to be the Lord of our speech, we will see significant improvement. Not perfection, but improvement.

### POINTS TO PONDER

1. What area do you need to work on controlling when it comes to your speech? Cursing, Slander, Gossip, etc?
2. How, do you believe, this affects your testimony?
3. When is the last time you prayed and asked God to help you control your tongue?

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## — Wisdom And Humility —

*<sup>13</sup>If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. <sup>14</sup>But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying. <sup>15</sup>For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. <sup>16</sup>For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.*

*~James 3:13-16*

**H**umility comes from wisdom. Interestingly enough, I have never caught that before when reading the book of James. I find myself often reading God's Word and saying to myself, "when did God put THAT in there?" As we grow older we should become wiser and as we become wiser we should become more humble. As a matter of fact, based on what James has written, I can argue that you can test your "wisdom level" by how humble you are, as they seem to be synonymous.

The problem being, often times selfish people don't realize that they are selfish because they have been that way their whole life! As with any habitual sin, selfishness and jealousy are very hard to recognize when they have been practiced for so long. James refers to selfishness and jealousy as, "earthly, unspiritual and demonic!"

At one point in my life, I could say this was true of me. I was proud, arrogant and full of myself. I didn't listen to

advice from others. I always thought I was better than others. I wanted my own way. I wanted my opinion to be heard at any cost. I was what we would call, “A hot mess.”

So, how can we tell if we are selfish, arrogant people who need God’s wisdom to humble us? James gives some good clues for us to learn from in today’s passage. First he says, “Don’t cover up the truth with boasting and lying.” If we find ourselves having to always tell others about how great we are or all of the things that we have done then we have a pride issue. If we have to lie to cover up our faults and make up stories about ourselves so we sound better than we are, we should take a long look in the mirror.

The second thing that James points out is even more telling. James says selfish people will be surrounded by, “disorder and every kind of evil.” The word disorder here is defined as disharmony, unrest and confusion. If you are surrounded by chaos, unrest and you can never seem to find peace in your life, you may be a person who needs to wise up and become humble.

I know that today’s reading was not exactly uplifting. It may even be a bit convicting, but God loves us too much to allow us to lead a life of disorder. We all have areas of growth. Embrace the change that God wants to make in you. Remember His plan is always to help you not to harm you.

#### POINTS TO PONDER:

1. Based on what we read today, rate yourself on the wisdom scale. 1- (Terribly unwise) 10- (Wise as an owl)
2. What areas of your life do you feel are in disorder?
3. How can you humble yourself today to move up the wisdom scale?
4. Pray now and ask God to reveal the areas of your life that need changing. Ask Him to help you on this journey.

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## — *The Right Choice* —

BY RAY FRALEY

*<sup>17</sup> 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.*

*<sup>18</sup> Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.*

*~James 3:17-18 (NIV)*

**K**nowing that there are two sources of wisdom, earthly and heavenly, it's safe to say, we would want to choose from "heavenly." But do we always? Of all the epistle writers in the New Testament, we can depend on James, Jesus's brother, to be the most practical. A good old "how to" guy. He concentrates on a practical guide to Christian conduct. His answer to the question of which source of wisdom do we choose, is a little bit like "just do it!" Reminds me of First Lady Nancy Reagan's advice years ago to the youth of America on drug use. She said, "Just say no!" Pretty good advice, I thought!

Can we simply just choose a certain behavior over another, ignoring our instincts of wanting to choose badly? The answer to that for us may lie in the last line of the scripture above... look at the reward! "Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness!" Now, who doesn't want that? Praying for and then choosing the wisdom from heaven that is pure, peace loving, full of good fruit, can and will change our lives and those around us!

So, how do we achieve this? How do we discern heavenly wisdom from worldly wisdom? The answer from James is, first, pray for heavenly wisdom, then, as decisions and choices arise, think what is pure, what is considerate, what is peace loving, submissive and sincere. Ask God at these moments to provide you with the best choices. Then, as you choose heavenly wisdom, you will sow goodness all around you!

POINTS TO PONDER:

1. Thinking back, do you find it easy to recognize earthly versus heavenly wisdom?
2. Think of a time that you made the wrong choice. In that instance, what would have changed if you had chosen differently?
3. What do you need to do to be sure that you always chooses heavenly wisdom?

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## — *Me Jealous?* —

*<sup>1</sup>What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? <sup>2</sup>You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. <sup>3</sup>And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.*

*~James 4:1-3*

Imagine with me for a moment that your church received a letter from James and you were asked the question that James opens with, “What is causing the quarrels among you?” What would you say? James wrote this letter to a specific group of people at a specific time period to address some things that he had seen and heard. Don't you think that what James surmises about fights among the Jews in the early church would ring true today in our churches?

Now, I recognize that James uses some pretty strong words here, words like “war,” “kill” and “fight”. We can mistakenly discount this portion of Scripture by thinking, “Well, that doesn't apply to me!” I would challenge us to take a closer look at how this does apply to our lives.

What kind of jealousies do we have in our lives? How do we respond when people receive recognition that we don't? What do we think when we find out that people are hanging out with a friend that we are close to? Are we excited for people when they are blessed financially? What about when someone gets promoted into a position that we were wanting? Is there

a “war” inside us that is waging? A war that tries to justify our jealousy and envy?

James tells us that we don’t have what we want because we don’t ask God and then when we get around to asking Him, we are asking with a discontent heart, with bad motives, and we are asking for the wrong things!

Over the years God has really helped me to change my prayer life. I very rarely find myself asking for anything that has to do with me. God has taught me that the biggest gifts that I can ever receive on this earth are peace, joy, and contentment. Once we learn how to be content with what we have, and with where we are, then we put ourselves in a win-win situation.

What I mean is, when we are content with what we have, who we are and where we are, then anything good that comes our way is just a bonus! When we change our prayers from self-centered to God-centered we start to see life in a whole new and wonderful way!

#### POINTS TO PONDER:

1. What is causing the quarrels and fights in your relationships?
2. What types of things do you find yourself getting jealous about?
3. Spend some time in prayer today just focusing on the goodness of God. Thank him for all of the blessings in your life, and give Him praise for His Holiness.

#### NOTES/PRAYER

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## — *Light in Darkness* —

*<sup>4</sup>You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God. <sup>5</sup>Do you think the Scriptures have no meaning? They say that God is passionate that the spirit he has placed within us should be faithful to him.*

*~James 4:4-5*

**A**t first glance, it would seem that James is contradicting what Jesus stood for. Let me explain. Often, Jesus is referred to as the “Light of the world.” He was also known as a friend of sinners and was ridiculed by the religious leaders for hanging out with prostitutes, tax collectors and sinners. Many times Jesus was found on the periphery of society.

For example, in Luke chapter 7 we find Jesus sitting and eating with a bunch of religious leaders and other dignitaries. A woman comes in who knew Jesus well. She had a great deal of respect, admiration, and reverence for Him. We don't know the backstory, but we do know that this woman felt she owed Jesus a great debt. We know this because she broke open a very expensive bottle of perfume and anointed His feet with it. She didn't stop there. With tears streaming down her face and onto His feet, she wiped her tears and His feet with her hair.

How did the leaders respond? Well, one of the leaders, named Simon, questioned Jesus' morality, even his status as a prophet and teacher. Jesus didn't blink an eye, and goes on to challenge all of them with an illustration, pointing out

that those who owe the largest debt are always the most grateful when they are forgiven. Then he makes the bold announcement that her sins are forgiven!

This is one of my favorite pictures of our Lord and Savior! It is the beautiful illustration of Jesus' love and compassion for people, even those who believe they don't deserve it. But, it seems to firmly oppose the passage of scripture that we read in James today. In fact James says twice, "Do not be friends with the world." So what does it all mean? Is James contradicting the words of Jesus?

Absolutely not! James is not referring to loving or helping people who are living a lifestyle that opposes God's Word. Rather, he is saying that we aren't to become like the world by falling in love with the things of the world. Jesus says the same thing in John 17 saying, "they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world." (v. 14)

God has called us "to be a light." How are we "to be a light?" In every situation and relationship, we are to bring peace and joy. People will get to a place in which they begin to recognize that what the world has to offer is empty and unfulfilling. This is our opportunity to shine our light and show them Way, the Truth and the Life!

#### POINTS TO PONDER:

1. How do you balance being around non-believers but not conforming to their lifestyle?
2. When was the last time you were in a situation where you were tempted to compromise your integrity or morality?
3. What would you tell someone who is struggling with this balance?

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## — *Humble Yourself Before God* —

*<sup>6</sup>And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” <sup>7</sup>So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup>Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. <sup>9</sup>Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. <sup>10</sup>Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.*

*~James 4:6-10*

**Y**esterday we talked about being in the world but not conforming to the world. We also talked about the importance of being effective as Christ followers. We do this by helping others see the goodness of God and the love He has for His people. Also, we can make sure that we do not get caught up in the temptations this world has to offer.

If we are honest, this is easier said than done. We can so easily get caught up in conversations or in the moment and find ourselves behaving exactly like the people we are supposed to be an example to.

I have a good friend who came to me dejected, defeated and in tears. He had gone back to his home town and met up with some of his old friends. He was attending our church and had given his life to Jesus. For the past couple of years he had

been living a life of integrity and really turned his life around. When he went back home, surrounded by the influence of his old friends, he fell right back into the things he used to do. He felt like a failure.

I encouraged him and prayed with him. Since that time, he has become a loving husband, father and faithful follower, who continues living his life for Jesus. I am very proud of the man that he has become. That time in his life, the temptation was real and the struggle was more than he could bare.

What I love about the passage today is how practical James is. He gives us some great tools to help us overcome the things of this world:

1. Humble ourselves before God.
2. Resist the devil.
3. Come close to God.
4. Purify our hearts.
5. Repent for our sin.
6. Humble ourselves before God....Again!

When we do these things purposefully, we will experience victory and enjoy the life that God has designed for us. A life of abundant joy and unexplained peace.

#### POINTS TO PONDER:

Today I want us to spend some time in prayer and repentance. Pray through the 6 steps that are given above then ask God for guidance and strength on how to apply them to your life.





## — *Mind Your Own Business* —

*<sup>11</sup> Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you. <sup>12</sup> God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor?*

*~James 4:11-12*

When I was a young child I got into mischief every once in awhile. Much of my mischief was caused by curiosity. I would often do things that I knew were probably not the right thing to do but something in me pushed me to do them anyway. There was the time I pushed the big red STOP button on the escalator at JCPenny, and the time I threw a “dud” firecracker into my grandmother’s fireplace, only to find out that it wasn’t a “dud” at all. There was also the time when my neighbor friend and I needed to test out our homemade parachute, so I talked him into using his moms barstool. Let’s just say the parachute was not quite ready to put be into action and may the barstool rest in peace. No matter the motivation, my mom would often end our conversations with, “Heavens to Betsy Troy!”

I grew up with two older sisters that I love dearly. I also have two younger siblings, but they did not come along until I was 19 years old. Through my childhood and teen years it was my two older sisters and I. My oldest sister Cheryl was a typical older sister. She believed that she was in charge of helping mom parent. Often times she would tell on me, foiling many of my master plans, getting me into trouble, which I usually deserved.

Every so often something different would happen. I would take joy in and absolutely love when mom would be on my side. She would tell my sister, “mind your own business.” To which my sister would respond, “but, Mom!” My mother would follow up with some very wise advice. She would tell my sister, “You take care of Cheryl and I will take care of Troy.” I remember feeling a sense of vindication and small victory. “Mom is the boss not you,” I would think to myself!

In our reading today, James talks to us about slandering, judging and criticizing one another. In other words...”mind your own business!” James makes it clear that God is judge and jury. He is the one who is responsible for deciding what is right and what is wrong. He alone is the holy standard. In Romans 3:10, Paul tells us, “none of us is righteous no not even one.”

However, what we need to understand is that James is not talking about confronting in love with the right motives. We will talk about that next week as we go through chapter 5. You see the truth is, we need each other. We need to be accountable to one another. We need correction. That is much different than slandering and judging.

Trust begins when we start to get rid of judging, slandering and criticizing one another. When we start to trust one another we can start the healing and restoration process.

#### POINTS TO PONDER:

1. In what area are you most critical of others?
2. How should you respond when you feel criticized or judged?
3. Who is one person in your life that you have been critical of? Contact them today and ask them for forgiveness.



## — Warnings About Self-Confidence —

BY JESSE HOLCOMB

*<sup>13</sup> Look here, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit.” <sup>14</sup> How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it’s here a little while, then it’s gone. <sup>15</sup> What you ought to say is, “If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that.” <sup>16</sup> Otherwise you are boasting about your own pretentious plans, and all such boasting is evil. <sup>17</sup> Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.*

~James 4:13-17

**W**hen I talk to people, while wearing my pastor hat, I often hear the phrase, “I just want God’s will for my life.” On the surface this seems like a very complicated phrase. What people are really saying is, “I’m not sure what I should do with my life.” When things get complicated we often pull the “I don’t think it’s God’s will,” card. We do this to get out of doing the things we really don’t feel like doing or facing.

If we don’t like a job we say, “I just don’t think that job was in God’s will.” When we are asked to serve in a ministry we don’t want to serve in we say, “I don’t think that’s the gifting God has given me.” When someone wants to get out of a relationship rather than telling their boyfriend or girlfriend that they don’t want to be with them anymore, that’s right, you guessed it, they say “I don’t think this is God’s will.”

The older I get the more I believe that God’s will is not complicated at all. It is a lot simpler than we make it out to be. Simple—but not easy. God’s will is simply being obedient to

His Word. That's all. We can spiritualize it and make it more difficult than it is, but it's really that simple.

There have been times when I have prayed for clarity in decision-making and God has made it clear to me. There have been times when I have prayed for direction in my life and God has given me direction. However, I believe those things are different than God's will. God's will is simply obeying the commands that He has given us.

Paul speaks of a prayer that his good friend Epaphras has been praying for the Colossians. Part of that prayer states that Epaphras is fully confident they are following the "whole will of God." Wow! That is quite the compliment. Being wholly obedient to God is something that we strive for but often times fall short of.

I want us to be a church that strives to follow the whole will of God. I want us to be a church that never stops pursuing God and His commands. David says in the book of Psalms that he delights in following God's law and he loves God's discipline. That's what I want for me and the church I pastor. I want to be a man that delights in God's Word, a man who loves His discipline in my life. All that really requires is obedience, humility and willingness to learn and grow.

Are there areas of your life that you need to turn over to God? Are there things you say and do that go against God's will for you and His best for your life? If so, confess those things today and ask God to help you to follow His will, His good and perfect will for your life.

POINTS TO PONDER:

- 1. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being you worry about everything, 10 being you worry about nothing, how much do you trust God with your tomorrow?
- 2. What plans have you made in life that didn't come to fruition? Have you missed any God given opportunities because of pride or ego?
- 3. When thinking about your future, are you excited with how God is going to use you to change the world? How do you feel knowing that you may be pushed out of your comfort zone?

NOTES/PRAYER

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— *Love God Love People* —

*<sup>1</sup>Look here, you rich people: Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. <sup>2</sup>Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. <sup>3</sup>Your gold and silver are corroded. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fire. This corroded treasure you have hoarded will testify against you on the day of judgment. <sup>4</sup>For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The cries of those who harvest your fields have reached the ears of the Lord of Heaven's Armies. <sup>5</sup>You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every desire. You have fattened yourselves for the day of slaughter. <sup>6</sup>You have condemned and killed innocent people, who do not resist you.*

*~James 5:1-6*

**O**ur reading today is a bit pointed, aggressive and angry sounding isn't it. This passage of scripture will not make it on a bumper sticker or refrigerator magnet, that's for sure.

James' words are directed at Jewish non believers who were oppressing and taking advantage of Jewish believers, who were the recipients of his letter. The Jewish believers were outcasts for standing up for their faith in Christ, and this made them vulnerable to this type of treatment. They were often cheated out of their pay and condemned for things they did not do. James was letting his readers know that those who were oppressing them would soon be dealt with.

Less than 10 years after James writes his letter, Rome destroys the great temple in Jerusalem and James' prophecy



comes true. The Jews were scattered. Their city was destroyed and left in ruins.

So what can we learn from what we have read today? To be honest, this has been the most difficult passage of scripture for me to write about, difficult to find an application for us. What does God want us to learn from such negative Scriptures? After much prayer, God showed me two things we can learn from this passage.

First, we can learn that we must always put our trust in God, not worldly things such as money, status, occupation, etc. We must never rely on the comfort of wealth and our position in society to be our security. God alone is our security.

Psalm 28:7 says, “The Lord is my strength and shield. I trust him with all my heart. He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy. I burst out in songs of thanksgiving.” We should always trust Him with ALL of our heart!

The second thing we can take from this passage of scripture is how we treat others. Particularly those that are different than us. James talks about oppressed workers here, but we can apply this to people from all walks of life. For example, those who have a different skin color than you or someone who has a different political stance. Do you treat them differently? Do you think about them differently? What about someone who’s not very attractive physically? Do you give them less attention than someone who is more attractive?

One last thing I want us to think about is those in the service industry. Waiters, waitresses, store clerks, bank tellers, etc. How do we respond to them? How well do you tip? I believe as Christ followers we should be the most generous people around!

The way we trust God and rely on Him should reflect in the way that we treat others. It makes for a great vision statement... Love God and Love People!

POINTS TO PONDER:

1. Who or what do you put your trust in? Explain the rationale behind your answer.
2. Think about the ways that God has helped you and the things He has brought you through. Allow your heart to be filled with joy!
3. Sometime this week bless someone in the service industry. Give them a note or write a review about them on the company's website. And leave a very LARGE tip for a server this week. 50% or more!

NOTES/PRAYER

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## — Suffer Well —

BY VASHTI MAKUPSON

*<sup>7</sup>Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen.*

*<sup>8</sup>You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near. <sup>9</sup>Don't grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. For look—the Judge is standing at the door! <sup>10</sup>For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup>We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy.*

*<sup>12</sup>But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned.*

~James 5:7-12

**A**t first glance, one can look at today's passage and be completely checked out. I mean, in all fairness, no one wants to experience suffering, let alone do it patiently. I'm not sure about you, but there have been moments in which I wanted my suffering to stop TA-NOW, as in today! Right now!

But, let's take a step back and discover the beauty and encouragement that is found in today's reading. After all, we can learn a lot from Job's example on how to suffer well, albeit not perfect. Don't take my word for it, read the book of Job and

discover it for yourself. In my own experience, I have come to appreciate the painful lessons gleaned in seasons of suffering. So, let's look at some ways we can suffer well by clarifying what James means when he tells us to be patient.

Patience is not passive, it's descriptive of an action, a "quiet, steady perseverance." The Strong's dictionary defines it this way, "to persevere patiently and bravely in enduring misfortunes and troubles." Patience requires active surrender, it requires actively receiving grace to take the next step. Patience requires courage to do hard things in the face of wanting to give up. There is nothing passive about patience. What are some of the things James is telling us to be patient in?

First, we are to be patient in cultivating godly character. Notice that James starts out with a farming analogy. Farmers know when they plant a seed, it takes time to see the fruit. So, why is it that we expect instant results when we have yet to prepare the soil of our hearts to even plant a seed?! Don't lose heart on that dream you're waiting for, that weight you're trying to lose, that debt that you're slowly paying off, or that bad habit you're wishing was gone. Just as the farmer eagerly waits for that harvest by patiently tending his garden, we should too.

Second, we are to be patient towards each other. I find it kind of interesting that right in the middle of talking about patience and suffering, James tells us, rather directly, "Don't grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged." What does this have to do with patience?! EVERYTHING! Differences and conflict have a way of opening the door for all sorts of grumbling! Before you know it, all sorts of backbiting and devouring consumes your energy and destroys relationships (Galatians 5:15). Remember, patience is "bravely enduring troubles." There is safety and freedom found in being patient towards each other. Make the choice to be kind to the EGR's (extra grace required) in your life.

Finally, we are to be patient in suffering. This manner of suffering may include loss. Loss of a dream, loss of a relationship, or loss of finances. When we look at the life of Job we see someone who patiently endured through suffering. He experienced every type of loss, yet he desired to glorify God through it all. He endured misery and demonstrated fortitude. He was resolute yet meek. In the midst of his suffering, he was brutally honest with God. He grieved, and he complained, but he did not stay there.

I'm not sure what kind of suffering you are experiencing, but let me encourage you with this, God is near to those who are meek in spirit. Meaning that when we choose to suffer well, with hearts of humility, we can experience the blessing of His Presence. We can be certain of the blessing of comfort, the blessing of grace, the blessing of a peace that surpasses all understanding. Let's choose to suffer well!

#### POINTS TO PONDER:

1. What are you suffering with right now?
2. Who or what do you need to show patience toward?
3. Take time today to thank God for the suffering in your life. Ask Him to reveal to you what you can learn through this hardship.

#### NOTES/PRAYER

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## — Prayer Life —

BY RAY FRALEY

*<sup>13</sup> Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises.*

*<sup>14</sup> Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven.*

*~James 5:13-15*

James nears the conclusion of his letter by pointing out, in typical James fashion, that we are to “pray continually.” These same words are used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18.

Notice the question James asks, “Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.” Consider our circumstances in the USA compared to the “well to do” in the rest of the world. There is much cause for praise among us. But, do we praise God regularly? With enthusiasm? The guilt starts with me as it doesn’t occur to me often enough to praise God in all my blessings. How about you? Now think of a blessing you have. Praise God for it.

Let’s look at a verse that some may find troubling, “the prayer in faith will make the sick person well.” This actually is misunderstood in its translation of the word sick. In the Greek translation the word sick also means “to be weak.” Other Biblical references refer to “weak faith” or “weak conscience,” and even “to be weary.” James is referring to those who have become weak physically, morally and spiritually. They were

suffering for their faith. In that case, we can imagine calling on the elders of the church for prayer support. Cornerstone Community Church is a praying church living by this principle. Don't hesitate to call on them, or encourage others to seek prayer.

Let's summarize with this: God wants to be involved in your life. He wants success for you. He wants a relationship with you. He is waiting to hear from you. Now look at the questions and see how you are doing.

#### POINTS TO PONDER:

1. What situation/circumstances do you pray for or give thanks for most frequently?
2. How often do you pray?
3. If your prayer life needs to be better, what is the first step for you?

#### NOTES/PRAYER

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## — *Reveal It To Heal It* —

BY LINA ASHER

*<sup>16</sup>Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.*

*<sup>17</sup>Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! <sup>18</sup>Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.*

*~James 5:16-18*

I have the privilege and honor of co-leading C3's healing class, Restore & Renew. I'm blessed to be able to walk alongside many women as they go through a process of confessing their sins to one another. As they bring these areas of hurt, sadness and pain to light, I have seen God answer their prayers.

Like Elijah, I believe in the power of prayer. Truly and deeply I do. I have seen God's faithfulness through prayer in my own life. Especially in my areas of sin, shame, and sadness. As I was vulnerable and humble enough to confess my sins to others and seek Him earnestly in prayer, He freed me to live a healed and victorious life. Sometimes those prayers weren't answered exactly as I thought they would be, but they "yielded great crops." Meaning, the result was a beautiful message from my mess; a great testimony from my testing; triumph from my trial and victory over my victim thinking. Beauty for ashes!

Because of all that He has done for me, it's like a fire in my bones, pushing me to encourage others on how to "reveal it to heal it" through confession and prayer. When they make the choice to confess they, too, can be all that God has created them to be, with no lies and fears holding them back! They can be free and live the victorious life that is meant for them. So that they too will reap a beautiful harvest! The same is true for you my friend.

### POINTS TO PONDER:

1. Confession to others and prayer are necessary in the Christian walk. Do you have something you need to confess to be free? If so, go to that godly person in your life and ask them to pray through it with you.
2. Seek God right now. Ask Him to reveal any areas in your life you may need to confess and get accountability in.
3. Thank the Lord for all that He has healed you from and the prayers that He has faithfully answered in your life.

### NOTES/PRAYER

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## — Confrontation —

<sup>19</sup>My dear brothers and sisters, if someone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back,  
<sup>20</sup>you can be sure that whoever brings the sinner back from wandering will save that person from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.

~James 5:19-20

Today we wrap up our journey through the book of James. I have learned a lot through this study. I hope you have as well. It has been great to be challenged by Jesus' brother and loyal follower to live a life that is honoring to God. When we are pushed to step back and look at ourselves, God can do a transforming work in us that we may have never thought possible.

With that being said, James ends this letter with the biggest challenge of all. He finishes with challenging us to confront others in love. Now James doesn't use those words, but in order to "bring someone back" you have to go and confront them so that they will know what they have done. Today we are going to look at what the Bible teaches us about confrontation and how we can do it in a way that honors them and most importantly honors God.

In Matthew 18:15 Jesus tells us that we should confront. He makes it clear that we have a responsibility to one another. We need to care enough about one another to confront. Jesus also makes it clear that this needs to be done in private, to the individual one on one. When we talk to a third party about someone's shortcomings we are engaging in nothing less than gossip and slander.

In Galatians 6:1 Paul tells us that we should confront with love and gentleness. I love that the Bible uses the word “restore”. Restoration is such a powerful action. It is a slap in the face of our enemy the devil. When we are restored with one another or restored with God it is a beautiful thing. When we confront others it should always be with the motivation of restoration and love.

At the end of Galatians 6:1, Paul says something that is very interesting. He says, “ but watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.” Paul is telling us that if we are not strong in our faith, not in tune with God and His Word, we too, can be drawn into the very same sin that we are trying to bring our brother or sister out of.

In our society today we have to make sure that we understand what we believe and why we believe it. Otherwise, we may have a hard time even recognizing what needs confronting.

I love that James reminds us what is at stake here. Eternal death and eternal life. We have a job to do. Jesus commissions us to go into the world and let them know that there is a God and He loves them dearly!

May God Richly Bless You!

#### POINTS TO PONDER:

1. What is one thing that has stuck out to you through this study?
2. How has God changed you in the last month?
3. Send Pastor Troy an email at [troyasher@icloud.com](mailto:troyasher@icloud.com) and give us some feedback on this devotional. Positive or negative, we would like your feedback.

