

Retro Faith: A study of the book of James

Faith from the Fifties A.D.

Retro

The word "retro" derives from the Latin prefix *retro*, meaning "backwards" or "in past times" It implies a movement toward the past as a part of progressing toward the future. Retro is a term often used to describe culturally outdated or aged trends, modes, or fashions from the past that have once again become functionally or superficially the norm. Retro movements emphasize a throwback to the past, bringing elements of an earlier time to the present and breathing new life into them.

Retro-Faith

Today, the word "retro" is most often used in a positive sense, referring to quirky or attractive products or trends that are no longer available. Retro-faith seeks to explore faith as James understood it back in the 50s...A.D. The practical outworking of our faith has changed since James wrote his letter—and not all for the better. A spiritualized culture with an ambiguous "faith in God" has bled over into a once distinct faith in Jesus Christ. Christianity is not lived out by Christians and therefore not viewed by Non-Christians as radically life-changing. If we're honest, Christians rarely think, look, or sound much different than non-Christians in how they live, separated more by their tribal language and cultural traditions than by their lifestyle. In the pursuit of cultural relevance to the world and personal liberty, Christians have abandoned the basics of godly living, actions which confirm true faith, as old fashioned or outdated.

In this study, we intend to re-establish the essential practices of what it means to be called a Christian. We will not develop new spiritual disciplines for a more progressive Christian faith, rather, we will look backward and make that which is old new again—a Retro faith.

The Purpose

The book of James is exceedingly practical for the Christian faith. It provides vivid instructions about what it means to practice a life of godliness. Much like the Old Testament books of wisdom such as Proverbs or Ecclesiastes, James offers concrete counsel about issues that all Christians face daily: Trials, wisdom, poverty, riches, favoritism, social justice, the tongue, prayer, illness, and more. While the book is highly instructive and helpful, it is equally convicting, as Christians are charged to live in such a way as to authenticate the faith they have confessed in Jesus.

With 59 commands in 108 verses, the book can look and feel like a checklist of righteousness. Misunderstood, a study of the Book of James can fail to lead to the gospel and, instead, produce feelings of pride or despair. If James is read only a series of commands, it would be easy for any reader to leave feeling like a moral failure. Without question, James emphasizes obedience, charging Christians to do what they know and say. And while James does lack formal statements of the gospel, and though he only mentions the name of Jesus twice, and though he never directly quotes Jesus, the words of this pastor are saturated in the same themes and language that Jesus himself used, especially in the Sermon on the Mount. The gospel according to James is not one that seeks to enlarge the work of men while diminishing the work of Jesus. On the contrary, James seeks to identify the works of men that naturally pour out from a heart transformed by the work of Jesus.

The Setting – Jerusalem A.D. 50

40 days after Jesus rose from the dead, right before he ascended to heaven, he gathered his disciples atop the Mount of Olives just outside of Jerusalem. There he told his disciples that they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit and that they would be His "witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." They returned to Jerusalem where they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). For a time, the disciples proclaimed Jesus throughout the city, but they did not

leave Jerusalem. Word spread, and soon persecution began to take place against Christians. One of the earliest followers of Jesus, Stephen, was stoned by the religious aristocrats of that day and the Christian Jews began to scatter across the country.

Christians were hated by their fellow Jews, especially the poor who were economically oppressed, culturally slandered, and judicially condemned. Without money or power, the poor began to break under the weight of the Jewish aristocracy. After the death of Herod Agrippa in AD 44, riots and violence began to break out in the city of Jerusalem. The poor began to strike back, even hiring hit men to kill both the rich oppressors and the Roman leaders. Eventually, the conflict culminated in a large-scale revolt in AD 66 which eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70. James is writing this sermon to those Christians Jews who are scattered across the world just as this tension began to rise. As he condemns the actions of the rich oppressors, he commands Christians to live out their faith through peace and love, despite the mistreatment they are receiving.

Since there is no mention by James of the Jew and Gentile conflicts that are discussed by Paul (Galatians 2, Acts 15), it would seem that the book was written before the Jerusalem Council which took place in AD 49. This would place the date of the book between AD 44 and AD 49.

The Writer - James the Just

The writer of the book of James simply calls himself “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” No further identification implies that the audience is familiar with the writer and knows his credentials well. Most scholars agree that the writer of this book is James, the brother of Jesus. There are three notable men named James in the New Testament. First, is James of the apostles included in the trio of Peter, James, and John. He suffered martyrdom at the beginning of the Christian era (Acts 12.1-3). The second apostolic James is the son of Alphaeus. We hear of him occasionally in the gospels, but know nothing of him following the resurrection (Luke 6.15, Acts 1.13).

The third apostolic candidate, and most likely the author, is James the brother of Jesus. After Jesus was born, Mary had other children (Matthew 12.46, 13.55). Although James was Jesus’ brother, like much of his family, he did not believe in him as Christ before Jesus died (John 7.5). In fact, James didn’t accept his brother as Lord and Savior until a resurrected Jesus appeared to him (1 Corinthians 15.7). Around AD 44, shortly after the martyrdom of James (of the trio) and the release of Peter from prison, James the brother of Jesus took a prominent position in leading the church. When Herod Agrippa died, James became the head of the Jerusalem church (Acts 12.23).

James’ weaknesses of faith during Jesus’ life were overshadowed by his faith in a resurrected Jesus later in life. His encounter with Jesus was so life-altering that his entire way of living was changed. Historians identify James as “the Just” because of his incredible piety and godly living. One historian, Jerome, gives an account of James as one who prayed so often for people in the temple that his knees became calloused like “camel’s knees.” Accounts vary about his death, but it seems that at some point James was thrown from the top of the temple, then stoned and clubbed to death as a result of an accusation by the high priest of the day, Annas. The death of James so upset the people that it caused an uprising resulting in the Roman prefect deposing Annas.

James is written as a letter from a pastor. As it urges people to practice what they confess to be true, the letter also possesses the characteristics of a sermon. James constantly engages those who hear the letter with rhetorical questions, raising objections, and giving answers. He provides colorful illustrations and vivid images. Though many find it difficult to identify form and structure within the letter, the unifying theme is clear: to promote a life consistent with faith in Jesus.

The Issues

- **Trials and Temptations:** James begins his sermon speaking about the trials. It is never a matter of “if” a trial will come, but when. Trials take all kinds of shapes and sizes. Because we desire comfort so much, all too often we are consumed with getting out of the trial. James challenges us to find joy in the trial, not in some sort of masochistic way, but embracing the trial for how it is shaping our character. We often fail to see the joy of the trial as we fall for the temptation to get mad at God. There are always two forces at work when we experience trials or temptations. The same Greek word is used for both. James focuses on distinguishing the two forces based on who is behind it and what the ultimate purpose is. Namely, God brings, ordains, or sends trials to strengthen our faith. Satan tempts us to destroy our faith.
- **Wisdom and Foolishness:** Part of James’ sermon is to emphasize our need for and dependence upon God in our daily lives. There is a difference between knowledge and wisdom. Unfortunately, we often confuse the two as we grow in knowledge and wrongly assume we naturally obtain wisdom. Men’s “wisdom” works until it doesn’t, in other words, until we experience something we don’t understand or can’t handle—like trials and temptations. James makes a distinction between wisdom that comes from above and below. Earthly wisdom is selfish and self-glorifying, seeking satisfaction apart from God. Wisdom from God, is selfless and God-glorifying, seeking contentment in God. James makes a point to remind believers that true wisdom resides with God.
- **Law and Law:** The new Covenant faith was exciting for Jews. They were grateful for the freedom they now had in Christ as opposed to the rigorous detail of the Mosaic Law that Christ had fulfilled perfectly. James reminds them that while they were freed from the judicial obligations, they were not free to ignore the moral obligations of the law.

At first glance it would seem that James’ view of the Law is completely opposite of the Apostle Paul’s. James describes the law as that which gives “freedom” (James 1.25; 2.12). Conversely, Paul says the law makes us guilty (Rom 3.20), and brings nothing but bondage and condemnation (Roman 4.15). The difference is that Paul is referring to the Mosaic Law while James is referring to the Royal Law—the Law of Christ (James 2.8). This is the command by Jesus to “Love your neighbor as yourself which is the second greatest commandment” (Matt 22.37-39, Deut 6.5, Lev 19.18, John 13.34, 1 John 2.7-8). There is a difference between the Royal Law and the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law did bring guilt and the reason for obeying the law was primarily out of duty for fear of expulsion from the covenant community. The Royal Law brings freedom because the motivation for obeying this law is love for Christ, and blessings that result from keeping it.

- **Poverty and Wealth:** Poverty is not something anyone necessarily strives for. While we may choose to live with less, most people do not want to live in poverty. Ironically, a life of poverty is perhaps a life that keeps us closer to God. It is a trial that shapes us as we find sufficiency and contentment in God before stuff. Riches can also be a trial of sort. Though wealth is never directly condemned by James, he does warn the church about problems that riches often produce. With riches often comes personal pride, a false sense of security, as well as preferential treatment for those in and outside the church. Our faith can be shaped whether we are rich or poor. James warns the rich about how greed can easily lead to particular actions, or lack thereof, which often confirm whether or not someone is in fact a Christian at all.
- **Faith and Works:** James writes directly to people who claim to be Christians but were committing tremendous sins. People’s tongues were slandering, the poor were overlooked, some refused to pay their employees, and others were going crazy with lawsuits. James challenges his audience to consider the authenticity of their faith. In fact, he tells them directly that they are fools if they think that genuine faith stands without works. Some have mistakenly believed that James teaches doctrine contrary to Paul. Further confusion is created by the fact that they both use Abraham (James 2,

Romans 4) as an example of faith. One is saved by faith alone while James appears to imply faith in addition to works. These should not be viewed as contrasting views of faith, rather, as complementary ones. James is reacting to the hypocrisy of so called Christians who do not live as if their lives have been transformed by the gospel. In other words, he speaks to the works that affirm one's heart has been changed by God.

Assignment:

In order for this study of James to be most effective, it would benefit every person to read and pray through James at least one time through this series. Additionally, reading Leviticus 19 and Matthew 5-7 will provide some context for the passages that James references often in his teaching.

Week 1 James 1.1 – loving and serving

**1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.**

Summary:

James begins his letter by establishing for whom he speaks and how he views himself. He speaks for the Lord Jesus Christ. Though neither the 'gospel proper' nor Christology (nature of Jesus) is detailed in this book, the teachings of Jesus are at the heart of the teaching of James. James does not claim authority because of his familial relationship with his half-brother Jesus; rather, he identifies himself simply as James, the "servant" of his Lord Jesus Christ. James is a pastor at heart, using the term "brothers" 14 times as an affirmation of his pastoral love for his audience. He writes the letter to the 12 tribes in the Dispersion (i.e. scattering). This scattering could be a reference to the historic deportation of the ten tribes from Israel to Assyria (II Kings 17:6) and the exile of the two tribes to Babylon (II Kings 25:11). It may also refer to Jewish Christians who have scattered because of present persecution, or possibly expresses James's intent to emphasize the one church founded in Judaism, which includes Jewish and Gentile Christians dispersed throughout the world.

Personal Application:

1. What do you hope to learn from our study in the book of James?
2. In his pastoral letter to the church, James doesn't discuss believing the truth of the gospel as much as what it looks like to live the truth of the gospel. In what ways is today's church struggling with this too? Where do churches love the gospel but not live it; where do churches live the gospel but not love it?
3. In what ways does the Christian faith need a retro-movement? What beliefs, practices, or elements of your faith would you like to breathe new life into again?

Family Discussion:

1. Did Jesus have any brothers or sisters? Read Mark 6.1-6
2. What changed his half-brother James' mind about Jesus? Read 1 Cor. 15.7. How does anyone become a believer in Jesus?
3. What does it mean to be a believer in Jesus? Is that different than being a servant of Jesus?

Week 2 James 1.2-4 fleeing, fighting, and meeting

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Summary:

The Jewish Christians of the day were suffering. Many experienced hardships such as famines and disease in addition to troubles related to various outbreaks of violence. The poor in particular were being exploited by the rich as they were dragged into court and slandered for believing in Jesus. Unpredictably, James begins his letter by encouraging his brothers to respond with “joy” to their various trials. (Joy is not the same as happiness which is dependent upon circumstances). He does not encourage them to hold this attitude ‘if’ trials come but “when” they do, implying that trials in the life of the Christian are all but guaranteed—we live out our faith in the meat grinder of life. James reminds us that trials of all kinds have a purpose—to strengthen our faith through testing. Whether we say God ordains, allows, or sends these tests, the fact is God uses trials to strengthen our faith and make us steadfast. Steadfastness does not imply passivity; it is an active term signifying fortitude and staying power. Steadfastness that comes from hardships such as accidents, poverty, sickness, prosperity, knowledge, high position, when fully realized, results in spiritual maturity. Trials are not random evils that fall upon us but opportunities to live out what we profess to believe.

If not careful, we can foolishly twist James’s instruction to say that hardships should be enjoyed. James does not expect us to take joy over the trial itself or to pretend that it is not painful. Too often Christians are directed toward these first few verses in a moment of crisis, told to “take joy”, and “have faith.” Their faith is crushed by the weight of their hardship and further hurt by the fact they are not enjoying it. James is not a masochist; he does not want us to find joy in the trial itself. Instead, we are to exercise our faith as we look past the adversities of the process, like an athlete getting in shape, or a farmer working his field, or even a woman who is pregnant and about to give birth, to see the joy of the end goal like Jesus did (Heb. 12.1-2). Instead of avoiding, ignoring, or discounting the purpose and value of trials, we are to accept, embrace, and learn from the trials, that it might have its “full effect”. Persevering through trials is more than gritting your teeth and getting through; it is remaining faithful, even joyful, within them.

Personal Application:

1. What is a trial? What kinds of trials have you experienced?
2. Read Hebrews 4.15 & 1Peter 2.23. Does the fact that Jesus was sinless mean he never experienced trials? If our life is going to be like Jesus’, what will it include? If we are to live like Jesus, how are we to respond to that kind of life?
3. How have movements that preach a prosperity gospel, a message of comfort, and of a ‘name it claim it’ spirituality, wrongly influenced our view of trials?

Family Discussion:

1. What is the difference between a trial and a temptation? Does God ever tempt us? Why not?
2. Read 2Cor. 1.3-4. In addition to building our faith, what do trials also equip us to do?
3. Trials can be both a lack and an abundance of something. Sometimes God tests our faith by taking away our health or something we love, and other times by giving us too much time, money, etc. What is your greatest trial right now? What are you learning about yourself and God?

Week 3 James 1.5-8 asking and doubting

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Summary:

The goal of trials is to make the Christian mature, lacking in nothing. Unfortunately, this doesn't happen naturally. We live in a world of constant testing and these trials often lead us to despair, weakening our faith, because we don't understand. But God gives us wisdom so that our faith will be strengthened as we gain from each trial. Wisdom is more than understanding. Wisdom has to do with skillfully living, not skillfully knowing. James encourages his readers to ask God for wisdom, promising not only that he will give generously to all, but that he will give no matter how many times you ask, even if you haven't asked him before. Wisdom is a very important virtue to James and he pulls much of his teaching from Jewish and Hellenistic wisdom literature. Wisdom is a virtue that Proverbs labels as the most important possession a person can have (Prov. 3.13; 4.7; 8.11; 16.16). When we experience a trial, James does not instruct us to ask so that we might find a way out of the trial, for that would not develop a persevering faith. What we are to do is ask for wisdom to cope with the suffering and to gain what we are meant to.

James instructs us to ask in a particular way, in faith, whole heartedly, without doubting. Jesus also taught that faith is essential to effective prayer (Matt. 21.21-22). God wants us to trust him consistently and not live a life of paralysis, afraid to make a decision. When we ask God for wisdom, believing that he will reveal his will through Word or conscience, we shouldn't expect a strong wind to blow, a flash to appear, or a hand to write on the wall. We ask for wisdom without doubting, believing in the final decision made. We mustn't be overwhelmed with anxiety about whether God really gave us wisdom or not. James warns those who ask for wisdom without expecting that they will actually receive it—he describes it as “double-minded.” A double-minded person won't receive what he asks for because they don't actually believe suffering has any redeeming value and/or that God is big enough to direct all things for ultimate good. Instead of depending on God's infinite wisdom, they dwell on what they think, feel, and experience asking, “Why is this happening to me?” “Where did I go wrong?” “Why does God hate me?” “Is He punishing me?” “Does God love me?” The proper response is to remain joyful as God gives you wisdom to know and see how He is making us spiritually strong and healthy.

Personal Application:

1. Why is it our tendency to pray for freedom from the trial as opposed to wisdom in the trial? How does God want us to pray? Why?
2. What does it mean to ask in faith without doubting? What role does our faith play in anything we pray for? Consider verses Matt. 7.8; 21.22; Luke 11.10; John 16.24
3. Read Proverbs 3.5-6. Are we supposed to simply, “Let go and let God?” Should we refuse to make plans or decisions until we feel the Holy Spirit “move us”? What type of balance do the Proverbs and James want us to achieve?

Family Discussion:

1. Why do we pray? What kinds of things are we supposed to pray for?
2. Read Luke 11.1-12; Matthew 6.9-13. How does Jesus teach his disciples to pray?
3. What are some different ways that God answers our prayers?

Week 4 James 1.9-11 poverty and riches

9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, **10** and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. **11** For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

Summary:

In a culture of extreme haves and have-nots, it is easy for the poor to feel helpless and unloved. Here James does more than comfort the poor, but charges them to hold a particular attitude in their poverty. He tells them to “boast in their exaltation”, echoing the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5.33ff) where he ascribes the kingdom of God to the poor. James is more concerned with his readers taking “pride” in their position in Christ, not their position in the world. Poverty often leads people into a trial of discontentment. Sometimes we choose poverty through our own sinful choices and, it seems, sometimes poverty chooses us. Regardless of how it happened, the impoverished are tempted to sin in many ways: to forgo spiritual value for worldly value, to deny that God loves and provides for them, to covet what others have, or to actively break God’s law to get ahead, or just get their next meal. Ironically, it is poverty that God often uses to bring us closer to the kingdom, closer to a life like Jesus, as we are forced to deny what we want and depend on God for all that he knows we need.

A cursory reading of this passage of Scripture may tempt the reader into believing that the poor man is a believer destined for heaven, while the rich is a pagan bound for Hell. This perspective may be emphasized by the fact that James calls the former “brother” while the latter is simply described as a “rich man.” The poor man is not the good guy and the rich man is not the bad guy—they are both believers with different trials. We don’t often view having wealth as a trial. Anything that tests our faith in God is a trial. Riches often lead us away from God. Wealth, education, and other forms of prosperity often lead us into pride and feelings of self-sufficiency. Those who have much or just a little more than most, often find their identity wrapped in their “stuff”, worshipping a new idol every week. Contrary to some popular “Christian” movements, earthly success does not equal spiritual success. The wealth of a rich man will disappear along with everything else in their life. Those who follow Jesus do so with their wealth because they love Jesus who gave up everything to save them. But those who are rich find it very difficult to follow Jesus because they love their wealth and believe it will save them (Luke 12.20-21).

Personal Application:

1. In your opinion, would it be more of a trial to be rich or poor? Why?
2. What are the many reasons why people are poor? Who is to blame for poverty?
3. Read Mark 10.21-27. What did the disciples assume about the rich? Why? In verses 25-27, why do you think Jesus makes such a point about the rich? Is it wrong to have wealth?

Family Discussion:

1. How do you think more (or less) money or “stuff” changes you, in good and bad ways?
2. Read Matthew 6.19-34. How do we get the things we need...even some we want?
3. Read Job 1.1-22. What was most important to Job? How did Job view his wealth? How did he view God after it was taken away?

Week 5 James 1.12-18 it testing and tempting

¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. ¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Summary:

These verses offer some challenges as the words "trial", "test", and "temptation," come from the same word in the original Greek. The context determines what the author has in mind, either a test to prove faith or a temptation to destroy it. There are always two forces at work in a trial—Satan and God. God intends the trial to build our faith and endurance while Satan intends for it to weaken our faith and lead us to sin. God wants us to turn toward him for aid that we might persevere. Satan wants us to turn us toward sin so that we might despair. God can and does test his children in order to strengthen them, but he never sends testing for the purpose of enticing anyone to do evil (2Cor. 10.13; 2Peter 2.9). God is not ever tempted by evil to do evil, as he has nothing in himself to desire or perform evil (1 John 1.5). But the Bible does say that God can be tested by the sins of men (Psalm 78.41; Psalm 106.14). It isn't wrong to test God's faithfulness, but it is wrong to test God's mercy by sinning (Matt.4.7; Deut. 6.16; Jdg. 6.39).

When Adam and Eve were caught breaking God's law, they refused to take responsibility for their sin. Instead, when God asked Adam if they had sinned, Adam blamed the woman and ultimately God himself. When God asked Eve, she blamed the serpent. We cannot blame anyone but ourselves for our sin. Desires to eat, drink, or enjoy sex are not wrong in the right context. It is easy to blame Guinness for a drinking problem, the way a person dresses for a lust problem, the internet for a pornography addiction, or the donuts in the lunchroom for a struggle with weight. We don't sin because we desire bad things; we sin because we desire things so badly. James wants his readers to understand that our "sin problem" is not an external one with others, but an internal with our heart. He uses two images that speak most prominently in our world today, sports and sex. The word "entice" is a fishing term. Fish don't bite bare hooks; they see a baited hook and are lured by their desires which lead to their death. The occasion of the trial isn't "wrong", the desire isn't even wrong, but once we take the bait and act out of the desire in either our thoughts or actions, it becomes sin. If such desires of our hearts (Jer. 17.9) remain unchecked, we may as well be sleeping with Satan as we conceive and give birth to a "child" called sin—a child that will grow and destroy all that we love.

So how can we fix an internal problem? Is there an escape from sin? Yes. God only wants our good and won't allow us to be tested beyond what we are able to handle (1Cor. 10.13; Matt. 6.13). God tests men for the purpose of sifting out what is really in their hearts (Deut. 8.2; Deut. 13.13; Jdg. 2.22, 3.4; Ps. 11.5, Prov. 17.3). A trial that leads to sin only reveals what was in our hearts. In order for a trial to lead to perseverance and maturity, we must see the problem more personally. We mustn't despair or be "deceived" to believe God is playing games with us, rather, we must take hope in the God of the Universe who possesses the power to keep us from being controlled by sin, addiction, and idolatry. As God's "first fruits" genuine Christians are set apart as special to God and gives us power to overcome sin in the world (1John 5.4-5).

Personal Application:

1. Read Romans 7.14-25 and Galatians 5.16-18. How does this describe the life of a Christian? What is the difference between a Christian and a Non-Christian in their approach or reaction to sin?
2. You have a great job. Your boss approaches you with an opportunity to travel, which will mean greater pay, but will take you away from your family more. You decide to take the opportunity, and you are gone 2 weeks of every month. After 5 years of this, your family is in ruins – your wife is frazzled and alone, your kids are misbehaving and their infractions are becoming more serious, and you are seriously tempted to have an affair with the coworker who you see more of than your wife. Who do you blame for this mess? Your boss? Your company? Your kids? Your wife? Or you? Why do we struggle with this?
3. You are overcome by a sin that seems to have a powerful hold on you. You've tried to kick it by just gritting your teeth and working harder, by replacing it with something good, and by praying that God will just take away the temptation. What does James advise you to do?

Family Discussion:

1. Read Romans 5.12. Where did sin come from and what did it do to us?
2. Read 1Cor. 10.13. Will God allow us to be tempted beyond what we can handle?
3. Read Romans 6.5-11; 1Tim 2.22; 6.11ff. Can we fight sin and temptation? Can we win? (See also Psalm 119.11-12, James 4.8, 1John 1.9).

Week 6 James 1.19-21 quick and slow

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Summary:

Anger is one of the many emotions God himself manifests. Anger in itself is not wrong. When we see or experience injustice in our lives, it is natural for us to be angry. Anger is always a secondary emotion, rooted in a reaction to these feelings of injustice, feelings of insecurity, or some other passion. The sin within us easily and often perverts good anger into evil anger. Evil anger causes us to lose control of our thoughts and actions to the extent that we abuse with our fists and our tongues. James goes beyond moralistic commands to “just stop.” Instead, he charges his readers to work toward meekness in listening more and saying less all together. True wisdom is always evidenced by the ability to know when to speak and when to remain silent (Prov. 10.19; 17.27-28).

We are called to hate sin, we are called to be angry when we experience sin, but we are not to sin ourselves as we do (Ps. 4.4; Eph 4.26; Matt 5.22). Being a zealot for God is not the same as being a militant for moralism. Anger rooted in men's sin will not change hearts even if it does change behavior. The people of James' day were being oppressed. Many resorted to using their tongues to incite anger and violence in Jerusalem. Like anyone who feels hurt by someone, they were more interested in striking back at their oppressors than in glorifying God by their behavior. James instructs his readers to “put aside” such self-serving anger. The picture is one of one taking off a dirty garment and putting on a clean garment (Zech. 3.3-4). The garment we put on is Jesus (Romans 13.14). We cannot fix our own anger problem, though we could probably stop our angry outbursts for a time. The problem is still internal and the remedy is to receive “the implanted word” which is able to save us. We must confess our weaknesses and submit all of our actions, thoughts, and attitudes to the Lordship of Jesus who,

though God, with all the right to be angry, came to earth, lived a self-denial, humbling himself as he died at the hands of the men whom he came to save (Phil. 2.1-8; 1 Peter 2.23).

Personal Application:

1. Whenever you have a conversation with someone about a topic you are passionate about, how often are you thinking about what you are going to say instead of listening? Is “slow hearing” and “quick speaking” the result of bad communication skills or a heart issue or both? How is this fixed?
2. Read 1 Timothy 3.3. Why do you think this is a qualification for eldership?
3. A ministry that you are involved in at church is being criticized by people who are divisive and harmful. You are just trying to serve God, and you are furious that people would question your motives or your methods. You feel like retaliating in order to set the record straight. According to James, what should you do?

Family Discussion:

1. Read John 2.14-16. Is getting angry wrong? When is it wrong and when is it right?
2. Read Matthew 5.21-22. What does Jesus teach us about anger?
3. Read Galatians 5.21-22. “Fits of anger” is a fruit of the flesh. What fruit of the Spirit should we pray for to help us be angry and yet not sin?

Week 7 James 1.22-27 hearing and doing

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

²⁶ If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Summary:

After charging his readers to “put aside” filthiness and wickedness, he is concerned that they are hearing him but not actually listening. James wants his brothers to go beyond hearing the Royal Law of Christ to, “love thy neighbor” (1.22) and actually *do* what it says. Confessing *and* living out the Royal Law is an affirmation that one has it written on their heart. He uses an illustration about mirrors to demonstrate the difference between a genuine Christian and someone who says they are a Christian. Mirrors in the first century were quite rare and only owned by the rich. They were made of polished metal and rested horizontally on tables. If someone wanted to see their reflection they had to lean over the table and look down. The emphasis is not on the quality of the reflection, rather, but on comparing two different ways of looking at the mirror. One individual casually glances at a true picture of themselves and walks away quickly—forgetting everything he saw. This one is passive, not changing anything. The other stares intently, regularly searching for blemishes in their reflection that they might actively make the necessary changes, even difficult ones.

James doesn't expect us to analyze ourselves into perfection or to despair when we don't obey perfectly. The changes we make are not to appease God or impress men. The Law of Christ, the Royal Law, brings freedom not guilt; it is a law of liberty not oppression because of the gospel. Making

changes in our lives is a response to God's love for us. We do not obey to be accepted, we are accepted so we obey. Our motivation for living correctly is out of love for Christ, as we desire to be free of sin and live the "blessed" life God promises for those who live according to His Way. In the end, James warns against those who abuse the Royal Law. While they say they love others, their lives do not match the boasts of their sinful tongues. Instead of repenting in humility, these supposed Christians were arrogantly claiming to be "spiritual" or "religious." James takes it back to basics by condemning those who passively play "religious" games" as they refuse to actually live out what they confess to believe with what they do with their hands and mouths. In doing this, James summarizes the primary tenants of Christianity—helping "widows and orphans" (Ps. 68.5; 149.9; Deut 10.18; Matt 6.32) and speaking truth.

Personal Application:

1. Read 1Cor. 13.11-12. How long have you been a Christian? Which man that James describes are you most like, the one who passively or intently looks into the mirror? Why?
2. How would you define religion? When James says that "True Religion" is helping the orphans and widows, what is he challenging his readers to do?
3. Read 2Cor. 13.5 then take a few minutes to pray. Ask the Holy Spirit for a self-analysis then honestly examine yourself. Is there real change in your life? Do you come to church, act like a Christian, even read your Bible and pray, but don't really act on the truths you read and hear?

Family Discussion:

1. What does it mean to be religious? Can you be religious and not be a Christian?
2. Read 1 John 5.2. How do you know you really love Jesus?
3. Read Matthew 25.31-40. What does Jesus teach here about our faith? How does it make you feel?

Week 8 James 2.1-13 sitting and standing

2 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. **2** For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, **3** and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," **4** have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? **5** Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? **6** But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? **7** Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. **9** But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. **10** For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. **11** For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. **12** So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. **13** For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Summary:

Addressing his brothers, James now moves to deal with the relationships within their church. He attacks the natural tendency of all people to gravitate toward those like them and to retreat from those who are different. Skin color, age, economic status, education, weight, language, or hobbies often bring people together into homogeneous huddles. If not careful, our innocent gatherings become havens of prejudice as the group accepts those similar and rejects those who are different. For James, this problem is most prominent between the rich and poor.

There were mixed emotions about the rich. Although it was the rich who oppressed the poor, ironically, the rich converts were made to feel welcome in the community while poor were treated as less important. As they gathered in the synagogue, a place for church services and judicial proceedings, the Scribes and Pharisees occupied the important seats. Clothing such as gold rings or beads marked great wealth or status which many abused to their advantage—showing a ring, for example, to get favor. Conversely, the poor people had only one set of clothes, and they were typically dirty and unimpressive. When the rich entered into the synagogue, they were given the preferred seating while the poor were encouraged to stand uncomfortably for the proceedings. Sometimes, the poor were put in the back of the synagogue during the service to make room for the rich. This was favoritism at its worst. Favoritism literally means, “receiving the face.” James attacks this practice as ungodly and evil. God judges the heart, but men wrongly judge by external appearances.

James points out the utter hypocrisy as it is the rich who are in fact exploiting the poor; it is the rich who are dragging the poor into court; it is the rich who are slandering the name of Jesus. James charges them to fulfill the Royal Law, the seemingly simple command of Christ to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Living the Royal Law means showing love and respect to those around you, regardless of their station. We fail to live out the Royal Law when we only love our “friends” and ignore our “neighbors”, only respect those like us while we show indifference to those unlike us. This is not a command to be best friends with everyone you meet or to give money to anyone who asks. We break the Royal Law, however, when we prevent justice, show favoritism to the “successful”, or disrespect those we don’t naturally care about. Such a practice not only dishonors our neighbor, but it dishonors Jesus himself who was neither rich, nor beautiful, nor successful by the world’s standards (Isaiah 53.1-3).

What we confess with our mouths only matters if we confess also with our actions. James charges his readers to act as one saved by Jesus, judged by the Law of Liberty. Under the Law of Christ, our motivation for doing good is the mercy which he showed undeserving sinners. Those who genuinely believe will repent and act likewise. Those who consistently choose to deny justice, to show no mercy, or to show favoritism, in the end, will not be judged by the work of Christ (2.13), but by their own works. And they will be found guilty.

Personal Application;

1. Have you ever experienced or seen favoritism, prejudice, or racism? How did it make you feel?
2. Read Galatians 2.11-16. What does Paul see Peter do at Antioch? What does Paul say is at the heart of his prejudice (v.14)?
3. Christian living is a constant realignment process to bring our lives back “in step” with the gospel. How is the sin of racism or prejudice NOT in line with the gospel?

Family Discussion:

1. Read 1 Sam 16.1-7. What is the difference between how men judge and God judges?
2. Read Luke 18.9-14. What is in the heart of one who shows favoritism? How does Paul’s attitude as expressed in 1 Timothy 1.15, protect us from such pride?

3. Read Psalm 147.10-11. In whom or what does God take pleasure?

Week 9 James 2.14-26 faith and works

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! ²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵ And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Summary:

This passage of Scripture represents the heart of James’ message. Reading verses 2.14-26 provides a set of lenses through which we can read his practical advice and not fall into legalism. James does his best to explain our connection with Christ and faith, in a way that will make sense to everyone. In doing so, he makes a distinction between faith affirmed by words and faith affirmed by actions, faith he describes as either dead or alive.

In the past, James’ description of faith with works has been interpreted as in opposition to Paul’s teaching of faith by grace. Though he later came to appreciate the book of James, the author’s focus on works is what led Martin Luther to dismiss the book as, “an epistle of straw.” In truth, these positions complement each other, providing us a clearer picture of what both men mean. A closer examination of Paul’s teaching reveals his stress on actions as a mark of true belief (2Tim. 4.4-10; 1Cor. 6.8-9). The difference between James and Paul is one of emphasis. Paul battles the spirit of self-righteousness as he teaches legalists that salvation is a gift received by faith in the work of Jesus. James, on the other hand, teaches against the self-indulgent and what genuine faith should actually produce in the life of the believer. He challenges the notion that faith is a matter of intellectual assent. To further his point, James spends little time discussing theology in his book, and an inordinate amount on actions. James intends to attack false faith that is acknowledged but not actually lived out (v. 15). Those of real faith do more than just say, “Be warmed” to the cold homeless sitting on the street. This does not mean they give to every homeless person they come across, but it does speak to the fact of “real” faith being demonstrated beyond words.

If “real” faith is affirmed by actions, then a “dead” faith is a faith without any actions. James would argue that a dead faith isn’t in fact faith at all. There is a temptation to separate faith and works, but James argues that true faith cannot exist separately from the works. *The works themselves do not save, as Paul agrees, but we are saved for “works” (Eph. 2.8-10).* In fact, works as a response to the work of Jesus confirm that our faith is genuine. James expects his readers will disagree with him, arguing that they know God because they know their Scriptures (Deut. 6.4). James simply dismisses this idea because the demons also believe such things but are, without question, not followers of Jesus. James is not trying to scare his readers into doubting their salvation but to understand that faith that is only intellectual is not faith at all.

Paul argues against self-righteousness. Helping the world for no reason is dead works. James argues against self-indulgence. Not helping the world but saying you love Jesus is dead faith. Jesus argues for a life of self-denial. We accept the truth of Jesus as savior AND we submit all that we think, say, and do to his Lordship.

Personal Application:

1. You have been a Christian your whole life. You have a healthy family and marriage. You know your Bible cover to cover. You attend church and even tithe 10% regularly. You have led Bible studies and are preparing to teach a new class at church. Yet, you ignore the people in need right in front of you. You won't help your neighbor when he asks if you'll help him fix his roof. You refuse to give a homeless person anything. You won't volunteer your time to help a single mom or prepare a meal at a shelter. What does James say about your faith?
2. You have a heart for those in need. They need food, shelter, money, relationships, and much more. You can't help but give your money, food, and your time to anyone who asks, in fact, you've developed a reputation for being the most caring person around. But, you reject the hard truths of Jesus and despise His Bride (church) because you see the hypocrisy of Christians. What does James say about your faith?
3. Is it possible to be obedient to God but NOT of service to our neighbor? Is it possible to NOT be obedient to God and be of service to our neighbor? How does James use the contrasting examples of Abraham and Rahab to demonstrate both of these?

Family Discussion:

1. Read Mark 4.13-20. What do you think James means when he says "Faith without works is dead."? How can a faith die? What is a faith that is alive?
2. James intends to say that true faith is always a living faith, a faith that is active. What are some practical ways you can begin to live out your faith for yourself? In your family? In your neighborhood? In your community?
3. Read 1 Peter 3.13-17. What is the "hope" Peter writes about? What is the reason for the world asking for the "hope" that we have? How might they respond to our answer?

Week 10 James 3.1-12 Taming and Staining

3 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. ² For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. ³ If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. ⁴ Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵ So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. ⁷ For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh

and salt water? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

Summary:

James begins chapter three with a warning to those who teach. Teachers of the day received honor and prestige due to their position. There was an attraction and allure to being an official teacher. Many of those aspiring teachers were teaching the sort of wisdom that promoted revolution and led to violence. James warns all teachers that they would answer to a higher authority for what they espouse. Far from sinless, he includes himself in the group, admitted that he “stumbles in many ways.” Paradoxically, he admits that a mature Christian controls his tongue but that it is nearly an impossible task.

Controlling the tongue is so important because of the power that this small muscle possesses. James uses three illustrations to demonstrate this power, a bit in a horse's mouth, a rudder in a ship, and flame that begins a forest fire. Though the tongue is one of the smallest parts of the body, it has enough influence to direct all of our actions. With our words we can lead, navigate, build up, or destroy. James wants his readers sobered to the flame thrower they hold in their mouths, a weapon that can not only stain every part of their body, but burn up their life with hellfire. No other body part has such far reaching disastrous potential. Of the seven deadly sins, three are specific to the tongue (Prov. 3.16). Every list in the N.T. of detestable sins includes the sins of the tongue. The tongue can determine success or failure in life, in the home, and in the community. A faithless fool does not control his tongue and ignores the fact that he/she will be judged for every careless word they speak (Matt.12.36) apart from Jesus. It was Jesus himself who said that what comes out of the mouth is an indicator of what is in the heart (Matt. 15.18).

James doesn't give us much hope to control our tongues, in fact, he says the tongue cannot be tamed; the poison cannot be completely eradicated from it (2.7-8). He does not place hope in silence nor has he offered lists of words not “culturally acceptable”. Rather, James attacks the heart attitude of those who say they have faith. In reality, Christians woefully underestimate the sins of the tongue. Pornography, alcohol, gambling are preached as the icons of evil to avoid, while the sins of the tongue are ignored. Here, James speaks directly to the “Christian” who praises God on Sundays and habitually curses, condemns, or otherwise abuses people with his tongue during the week. Our tongues reflect the genuineness of our faith. An apple tree will not produce oranges, it makes apples. In the same way, the tongue-tree of a Christian will produce fruit of a changed heart...or not.

Personal Application:

1. Is it wrong to use profanity? Why do you think so? How might James respond to a Christian, a church, or a culture that makes a list of “bad words” to avoid?
2. Do you think Jesus laughed? How do you determine when a funny joke has gone too far? Read Galatians 3.11. Why do we need guidelines for decision-making and not laws?
3. How might James instruct his readers today about the tongue and today's technology (e.g. email, blogs, facebook, etc.)?
4. A friend of yours comes up to share a story about a mutual acquaintance. You listen, only to realize that the story is really gossip. How should you respond in the moment and why don't we do this very often?

Family Discussion:

1. Read Ephesians 4.29. Paul is not admonishing Christians to avoid all humor in life. He does not expect that men and women will prudishly avoid laughing at anything humorous for fear of men's approval or God's disapproval. Clearly, Paul gives us some guidelines to use when discerning what is appropriate to laugh at or joke about.

Discuss the following guidelines. What would you add, subtract, or change as a way to help us to use our words to glorify God and avoid foolish legalisms:

- 1) Does the language break down, as opposed to build up, an individual or group?
- 2) Does it consist of inappropriate gestures that are dishonoring to the body?
- 3) Does it encourage acceptance of heretical teachings or false doctrine?
- 4) Does it glorify sin, especially, sexual sin?
- 5) Does it minimize or make light of sinful behavior?
- 6) Does it cause one to fascinate about sin?
- 7) Does it cause a weaker brother to actively sin?
- 8) Does it make use of culturally obscene or vulgar language that may offend?
- 9) Does it make use of or reference to God's creation for unholy purposes?
- 10) Can I say it with a clear conscience?

2. Take a mental inventory of the words you speak this week. How have you fulfilled (or not fulfilled) the Royal Law of loving your neighbor as yourself through your words?

Week 11 James 3.13-4.3 Above and Below

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

4 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

Summary:

Wisdom and knowledge are not synonyms. Though many people aspire to obtain knowledge in our world today, few pursue wisdom. In reality, knowing the Royal Law intellectually is much different than actively applying it to our daily lives. As evidence of genuine faith, James charges the believer to act wisely.

Throughout his sermon, James contrasts what amounts to two different paths of life, one for the genuinely faithful and one for the faithless. Just as he pits living faith against dead faith, true religion against false, and trials against temptations, here James speaks about wisdom that comes from heaven, and wisdom that finds its source in hell. The books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes best define the

characteristic of godly wisdom. True wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1.7). True wisdom does not have its foundation in our natural knowledge, but in the mind of the Lord. True wisdom is more valuable than precious jewels and is supreme over all other virtues. True wisdom brings prosperity, long life, joy, contentment, profitability, power, and protection (Prov. 3.1 ff).

Wisdom that is from heaven will manifest itself in peace, submission, and humility. On the other hand, people filled with wisdom that is from the earth will be governed by strife, envy, and pride. Demonic wisdom such as this is not irrational, random, or devoid of agenda. In fact, it is governed by selfishness and committed to serving personal interests. Here James addresses those who claim to be believers but are in fact frauds. Though they claim to be wise and though they have justifications for every sin they do or good thing they do not do, the truth is that they are making decisions in line with their sinful hearts.

James ends this section of Scripture by asking a question to prove a point. The solution to our problem is not a matter of choice. In reality, we cannot simply CHOOSE the way of wisdom. We are unable to choose the right path and follow it every time, not because of external temptations, but because of our internal brokenness. But we live with hearts waged in a civil war; a war that spills out of our hearts and into our communities creating disunity. James says that this happens, not because we didn't choose wisely, but because we didn't appeal to God's wisdom in prayer. Even if we do pray, we often do so selfishly as if God is a vending machine in the sky. Jesus teaches us to ask for things in line with God's name, kingdom, and will (Matt. 6.9-10). Prayer is more for us than it is for God. At times he will answer prayer by giving us the desires of our heart; other times he will give us new desires and a changed heart.

Personal Application:

1. Describe the difference between knowledge and wisdom. How has knowledge, even that of the Bible, become a false measurement of wisdom? How do you know if someone is wise?
2. Read Psalm 119. 97-112. Where do you get your wisdom—from above or from below? Think about how much philosophy you absorb from the culture around you. Where have you learned most of what you know about finances, parenting, sex, marriage, work, etc?
3. Read Psalm 119.145-152. Where are we supposed to obtain wisdom? Consider the last few months or even years of your life as a Christian. Do you feel wiser with regard to God's truth than you did in the recent past? Why? What do your disciplines of prayer, reading Scripture, meditation, etc. say about your trust in God's Wisdom?

Family Assignment:

The average adult spends 3 ½ minutes in conversation with their child each day. The average child spends over 360 minutes at school each day and over 1,680 minutes watching television each week. All the while they are absorbing the wisdom of the world that will shape their hearts and direct their actions.

As a family, commit to taking in some of God's Wisdom for the next 31 DAYS by reading the Book of Proverbs daily. As there are 31 Proverbs, read the Proverb according to the current day of the month (Proverbs 1 = October 1st). Why might this be difficult for you or your family? How might this commitment impact your family?

Week 12 James 4.4-10 Friends and Enemies

⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you suppose it is

to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? ⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore 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 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Summary:

James goes “Old Testament” style, charging the church with adultery in the same way God often spoke to Israel. God often uses marriage imagery in describing his relationship with his people. In the Old Testament, Israel was often identified as an adulteress or a whore because they worshiped pagan gods, profaning the name of the one true God. James’ intent is to clarify that the root problem is not simply wavering between right and wrong, it is an issue of idolatry. The decision to choose any way other than God’s is to choose to worship and love something more than Jesus.

By seeking friendship with the world, James says they are in effect, committing spiritual adultery. The word “world” is the Greek word “cosmos” used 151 times in the New Testament. Though marred by sin, the “world”, meaning creation or culture, is not inherently evil. James does not object to friendship with the world to the extent that we separate from culture and live in the hills. What he does object to is friendship with the world that is rebellion against God. Today, we use the word friend to mean acquaintance. True friends, in ancient times, shared a mindset and an outlook on life. They shared interests, values, and goals. They saw life in the same way. They shared resources as necessary. They cared for each other, worked together, and encouraged one another in their agreed way of life. It is impossible to be “friends” with God in this way and “friends” with the world at the same time. Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world, sharing and living out the values of the world, chooses to be hostile toward God and enemies of the cross of Jesus.

James then explains why flirtation with the world is so dangerous. Those who practice jealousy, selfish ambition, unrestrained passion, and murder are worldly and in danger of judgment—despite a confession of faith. God is a jealous God who wants his bride to be fully satisfied in Him. He will not allow his bride to sleep with another lover because He jealousy desires our worship. Even though we are tempted to go after the world, God graciously pursues us. God breaks through all of our resistance to him that we might submit to his Lordship in our lives. Those in Christ have access to a supernatural grace, a grace that empowers us to resist the devil, to run away from our sin, and to draw near to God. *James does not call us to a hyper-active life of self-righteousness, or a passive life of self-indulgence, but a submissive life of self-denial where we lose our lives in Him (Matthew 10.39).*

Personal Application:

1. How does it make you feel that God is jealous for you? Is jealousy always sinful? How does imagery like marriage, the bride, adultery, and jealousy help in understanding your relationship with God?
2. How can we NOT be “friends” with the world and still live as missionaries in culture? In other words, is it possible to be in relationship with the world without compromising God’s truth? How?
3. In verses 8 and 9, why do you think James describes the cleaning process the way he does? What might this say about the process of repentance?

Family Discussion:

1. Read Romans 12.1-2. How can we make sure we don’t get too “friendly” with the world?

2. What are some real practical ways we can actively submit to God and draw near to him? What are some practical ways that we can resist the devil and flee from him?
3. You've been convicted about sins of the tongue, about envy, about friendship with the world, about partiality, and about your overall dead faith. You want to change but are not sure how to begin. What does James 4.7-10 teach us about how to change?

Week 13 James 4.11-12 Judge and Judging

¹¹ Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. ¹² There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

Summary:

James came to somewhat of a climax in his campaign for genuine faith, calling his readers to humble themselves that God might lift them up. At first reading, it seems as if James moves on from how we relate to God, to talking about how a few people are relating to one another. James doesn't simply drop the issue of humility and move on, rather, he condemns the various expressions that the sin of pride can take.

Without question, the New Testament teaches that the local church leadership cannot simply ignore certain gross sins to avoid conflict. Under the law of Christ, the law of liberty, there is a process by which sin is to be dealt with that is clearly defined. People are to first attempt to cover perceived sin in love, to avoid the trivial (1 Peter 4.8). If someone sins against you personally, then we are to make every attempt to deal with it privately (Matthew 18.15-17). It seems that James' readers have been slow to follow a process of love and quick to judge. He warns them about the sins of slander and false judgment. Those who slander publicly or make false charges outside the courtroom, do so without evidence serving as witness, judge, and jury. Speaking against a brother in this way, is to speak against the Royal Law. Instead of obediently following the law, they judge of the law itself as wrong, denying the authority of God's law—and even the law giver Himself.

The point must be made that, in effort to avoid being prideful, many avoid "judging" all together, ignoring the words of Jesus who clarified what kind of judgment we should exercise. Judgments are necessary at times. Scripture requires leaders to discern or judge when a member sins and refuses to repent. Jesus taught that the supposed disciple must be put out of the church (Matthew 18.15-18). Leaders are called to judge when a teacher is guilty of teaching error or false doctrine, to confront them, then to put them out of the assembly (Deut. 13.1-11; Matthew 7.15-20; 1Tim. 1.3-4; 6.3-5). Jesus knew that judgments were at times necessary, but he warned his disciples to NOT judge by appearances, but to make a right judgment (John 7.24). In most cases, if we even need to judge, we begin our judgment with the wrong person. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes the point that judgment always begins with self-examination. Anyone who dares proclaim and judge by the word of God to anyone, best have preached that sermon to themselves first.

Personal Application:

1. What does it mean to judge someone? How has this idea been misunderstood and abused by the church and the world? Is judging ever the most loving thing to do?
2. Read Matthew 18.15-18. You've heard through the "grapevine" that someone in the church has a drinking problem. You've been taught in church that this is a "church discipline" issue, so you go to the elders to report the problem. Does James say this is how you should handle this?

3. Read 1 Cor. 5.9-13. What does Paul indicate here about fellowship with believers and non-believers caught in sin? Is this too judgmental? Why isn't this practiced today?

Family Discussion:

1. Read Matthew 7.1-5. What does Jesus teach us about judging?
2. Should we ever tell someone that they are sinning and that they should stop? Read Luke 17.1-4
3. When we know someone is sinning, but refuses to stop, should we continue to confront them over and over again? What is the best thing we can do for them? Read 1 John 5.16

Week 14 James 4.13-17 Planning and Vanishing

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

Summary:

James continues his attack on sins of the tongue. He now moves his attention to the presumptive speech which boasts arrogantly. Specifically, James addresses the belief of his readers (evidenced by words) that they will live as long as they please, that they can make whatever plans they want, and that all of their plans will succeed—all without God. At the heart of their arrogance is ignorance of who they are and how dependent they are upon their Creator.

When planning for the future, near or far, there are often two major abuses that occur. First, men are overconfident in their own power, wealth, and wisdom. In our pride, we make plans without relying on God's wisdom and believe that we achieve anything apart from God's favor. Nothing is wrong with making plans or succeeding. What is wrong is to keep God out of the picture before, during, and after the process. Paul, arguably the most influential apostle, constantly expressed his dependence on God. He often said, "If the Lord wills" or "If the Lord permits" as he spoke about his plans for ministry (Acts 18.21; 1 Cor 4.19; 1 Cor 16.7; Phil. 2.19). Jesus himself taught his disciples to pray that the will of God be done in all their prayers. These words are not a magic formula; in fact they are meaningless if they don't translate into a kingdom mindset. Our plans will succeed if God allows it, even our "plan" to live to see the next day.

Not only are we overconfident in our own wisdom and strength, we are often overconfident in our ability to know the will of God. Even if we pray that God's will be done, in our hearts we're praying that ours will be done. As we genuinely dedicate our plans to the Lord, believing that whatever we achieve or receive is a result of God's favor, then we must accept God's will when it's different than ours. We must fight the temptation to spiritualize the future as inevitable, "It's God's Will". Rather, we must humbly submit our will to God's and pray for what we desire. As we do, we must trust that he will either give us the desire of our hearts, or change our desires. We trust that, even if our plans do not come to fruition as we hoped, God's will is still at work. In the end, though we may not be able to see God's will perfectly in all things, if we do what he has already said is wrong, or not do what we know is clearly right, then we are out of God's will.

Personal Application:

1. When was the last time you planned and dedicated your plans to the Lord BEFORE executing them? How much of your faith, marriage, parenting, career, finances, or other aspects of your life have you planned WITH God? Why do we struggle with this?

2. How do you personally determine God's will for your daily life?
3. Admittedly, you struggle with anxiety and are a bit of a control freak. You are worried about being able to support your family of four and thinking about how you are going to pay for college tuition in the future. You see a financial planner and together you lay out your career goals for the next 30 years, you plan your investment strategy, and open two separate accounts for your kid's education. How does this represent planning that is out of balance? Should we plan like this? (Read Proverbs 16).

Family Discussion:

Assignment: Have each member of your family share something they want to achieve in the next years. Let them describe their hope in detail and explain why they desire this. Discuss as a family how this might be able to happen, or what it would take to make it a reality. After writing each of these things down, take time to pray. 1) Commit yourself to the will of God for your future. 2) Pray your desires to God. 3) Dedicate your plans to the Lord and ask him to fulfill your desires, according to His will. 4) Ask God to change your desires, or your plans, to align with His will if need be.

Week 15 James 5.1-6 Defrauding and Indulging

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

Summary:

James' rant against the rich here may surprise the reader as earlier in his letter he appears to address the wealthy as brothers. He does not attack the rich for being rich, as much as he reveals what sin does to them and to others through their riches. The desire for wealth is powerful and never satisfied. *"He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity"* (Ecclesiastes 5.10). James powerfully attacks these worshipers of wealthy who are using their financial power to oppress the poor and indulge themselves. Specifically, James tells them that they will weep and howl in response to the judgment that awaits them. While we must respond properly to the suffering in our own lives, we can take confidence that God will deal justly with those who cause suffering in the lives of others. The unbelieving rich will be punished because they trust in their wealth above Jesus. Their faith in their "god" manifests itself through greed, fraud, and self-indulgent living.

The unbelieving rich are greedy. Material wealth is transitory, fleeting, and easily spoiled. That does not prevent the rich from stockpiling clothes in their closets and coins in their shoeboxes. Though there are people in need around them with moth-eaten shirts and empty stomachs, they refuse to share. Additionally, the rich will be judged because they have defrauded their laborers. Though what exactly happened can be interpreted several different ways, it is clear that the employers cheated because they could get away with it (v.4). As the rich defraud the poor, they live lavish lives of luxury and self-indulgence. They spend every penny they make on themselves, not out of need, but out of self-serving pleasure (v.5).

The Bible never condemns the rich for being rich. But it regularly condemns those who live for pleasure in this world apart from God, promising they will suffer sorrow in the next (Luke 16.19-31). Genuine gospel humility recognizes that we have been blessed richly in spirit, and that all we on earth is a gift

from God to be used to bless others. Hoarding, defrauding, and indulging are the very antithesis of the gospel. Though Jesus emptied himself of all power, status, and wealth, giving everything he had for sinful broken people who hated him; we refuse to give up our wealth for any reason.

Personal Application:

1. Read 1Timoth 6.8; 17-18. What three things does Paul say we are to use our money for?
2. Read Luke 19.1-10. What changed Zaccheus' view of wealth and fraud?
3. You have a strong work ethic, instilled in you by your parents, and you have used it to become very successful. You have all the finer things the world can offer, and you live a very comfortable life. However, you have trouble giving any of your "stuff" away, mostly because you feel that you've had to work for it, and others should too. What would James say about this?

Family Discussion:

1. Does God care about our money? Why or why not?
2. Read Matthew 6.19-24. How can we lay up treasures in heaven? Why should we?
3. Read Philippians 2.4-8. What does our view of material wealth have to do with Jesus?

Week 16 James 5.7-11 Suffering and Waiting (BBQ)

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

Summary:

James begins to bring his sermon to a close. In the previous section of his sermon, he had given negative principles of behavior—what we must not do. Now, he affirms what he began to teach in chapter one about enduring suffering. James knows his readers, and all people, are impulsively prone to pride, envy, and ambition. Therefore, he calls for patience much like a farmer waits for the rains to turn his muddy field of nothing into a fruitful harvest. James is not trying to encourage with pithy analogies. The use of "therefore" shows James calling for real patience, right now, in response to what he listed in verses 1-6. This isn't a suffering to come; it is the minor irritants and major oppressions we experience daily.

As people are oppressed, he knows that patience wears thin. He does not want his readers to think that God has somehow forgotten or is indifferent toward their suffering. Moreover, the patience that James calls for is not a passive intellectual or emotional ascent; it is an active volitional choice to believe that God is working. He calls them to "establish" their hearts in the same way that Jesus had set his face to go to Jerusalem, resolved and undaunted (Luke 9.51). They are commanded to do this because of the fact that the Lord is coming, the judge is standing at the door. Today, some would wonder why Jesus has been standing so close to the same door for nearly 2,000 years and not walked in yet. Let us never forget that Peter teaches us that "a thousand years are like a day" to the Lord (2Peter 3.8).

The Lord's second coming can happen at any minute. Until then, genuine Christians are to endure the brokenness of themselves, of their relationships, and the world not because it is easy, fair, or pleasant,

but he trusts God is bringing joy (Heb.12.2). Patiently trusting God through the most difficult circumstances, promises to result in blessing, just as it did for the Old Testament believers before us. Therefore, we should fight the temptation to ask God “are we there yet,” like some child on a trip, rather, focus on how we need to live now. We should not grumble or vent onto others as suffer, but remain steadfast in our belief that the Lord is in control, is near, is loving, and is the judge and King who reigns and will set and is setting all things right. We can endure and God will overcome.

Personal Application:

1. Read Psalm 27.13-14. What does waiting on the Lord look like? Why is it so difficult for us to wait on the Lord? If we lack patience, how would James counsel us?
2. Read Proverbs 20.22. Why do you believe that God doesn't want us to take justice into our own hands? When people do this, do you think that they feel a sense of peace? Why or why not?
3. Read Job 1.-2.10. Do you believe that Job really believed what he said? Though he did not sin with his “lips” do you think he sinned with his mind? Why is it so hard to believe such trust and patience is possible?

Family Discussion:

Read Psalm 37 as a family. Discuss the things that the wicked do and how God calls his people to respond.

Week 17 James 5.12 Swearing and Vowing

12 But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

Summary:

This verse has puzzled scholars relative to its placement in the overall structure of the book. Though it follows the pattern of wisdom-like literature, the verse is difficult to interpret because of the different possibilities. Nevertheless, James is consistent in once again echoing the teachings of Jesus who made the same command of oath-taking in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5.33-37). In closing his letter, James reemphasizes the sins of the tongue.

Oaths protect us from sin. They are intended to prevent lying, deceit, and other forms of false speech. In the Old Testament, Israelites would guarantee their “word” by swearing to it in God’s name. Doing so meant God witnessed their oath and judged them if they did not keep it. Jews were always fearful of breaking the 3rd Commandment—taking God’s name in vain (Ex. 20.7; Deut. 5.11). To keep from breaking the law, the Jews found other ways to make oaths. Rabbis artificially distinguished between binding (swearing by God’s name) and nonbinding oaths (swearing by “heaven and earth”). From there, oaths and promises became perverted. In essence, nonbinding promises had become a convenient excuse not to keep your word. Here, James flatly condemns oaths all together.

In truth, having to use oaths between brothers and sisters in Christ may evidence a deeper issue. If believers need oaths to guarantee their word, then perhaps enough people are not speaking truthfully most of the time. The family of God should be truthful and their commitments assured—we shouldn’t need oaths to verify our words. Unfortunately, however, it seems that many of us today fail to give or keep our word. Some of us make commitments and break them, believing that our commitment to act is predicated on someone else’s response or lack thereof. Some of us make commitments only to reinterpret them when they don’t suit us. And still others refuse to make any commitments at all, justifying their unwillingness to commit with earthly wisdom. Here James warns us to say what we mean and mean what we say. Throughout the rest of his letter, he has called us to say something.

Personal Application:

1. Why do people make oaths or swear by something or someone? What might be a better alternative to taking oaths?
2. Read Matthew 5.33-37 & 15.1-9. Summarize Jesus teachings on giving oaths and those who give them. Also, why do you think his teaching on oaths is immediately following his teaching on divorce?
3. Read 2Timothy 2.11-13. What kind of oath or promise has God made to us? Have you made an oath to God and, if so, have you kept your promise? Why or why not?

Family Discussion:

1. Read Exodus 20.7. Should we “swear to God”? What should we swear on?
2. What is a true promise? Have you ever given your “word” to someone or something?
3. Is there ever a reason to break a promise? Explain.

Week 18 James 5.13-18 Praying and Healing

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

Summary:

Believers pray. As he closes his sermon, James spends some time on instructing the church when, how, and why they should pray. His primary concern for his readers is to pray in times of suffering. At the same time, he does not want his readers to pray merely when times are difficult. We should pray for wisdom when we are suffering, that we might endure. We should pray to God through “praises” when we are joyful (1Cor. 14.15). We should pray to God for healing when we are sick.

Instead of prayer, we often give into the temptation to grumble, grit our teeth, or find some other way to “get through it” without God. In truth, we don’t pray because we don’t believe it does anything. James does not expect prayer to be a spiritual discipline we exercise periodically. For the believer, prayer is a natural way of living, like eating and sleeping. There are times, however, when more intensive prayer is necessary. James instructs those who are sick to call for the elders to pray over them, and anoint the sick with oil. The word he chooses for “sick” literally means “weak”. Oil was used in the ancient world as a kind of medicine (Luke 10.34). Other ancient sources attest to its helpfulness in curing toothaches, paralysis, or other similar maladies. Depending on the context, the term can also refer to spiritual or mental weaknesses (Rom. 5.6; 6.19). It can even refer to a troubled conscience, severe depression, or one overwhelmed with anxiety (Rom. 4.1-2; 1Cor. 8.7-10).

Here, the oil seems to have symbolic significance. The disciples used oil in their healing ministry at least once (Mark 6.13), but the purpose is not explained. Though oil is traditionally a sign of God’s power to heal, James emphasizes the power of prayer. All healing has a spiritual dimension just as all illness is essentially a result of sin. In Jesus’ day, people over-spiritualized illnesses as we have seen some churches do in our day. More commonly, however, is modern day culture’s tendency to de-spiritualize

illnesses completely. Our technological advancements and medical discoveries cause us to deny any connection between sin and illness. While God does heal through various means, all too often, we seek material solutions for spiritual problems.

Not all illnesses are the result of personal sin, but James urges us to consider the possibility. In Psalm 32, David speaks about the power of unconfessed sin; how it wastes away bones and drains us of strength. To avoid such sickness, James encourages us to confess our sins to one another. In doing so, we live out the gospel most beautifully; we confess our sins to one another without fear of rejection for the purposes of prayer. The prayer of a righteous man is the prayer of a man who does not doubt God's ability to give healing or strength. Contrary to some popular heresies, God does not heal as a reward for faithfulness—as if he owes us healing for our faith. Earlier, James had warned us against faithless prayers (1.6), proving that the issue here is not that “strong” faith guarantees healing, but that doubting faith or “going through the motions” guarantees nothing.

Personal Application:

1. How does this quotation make you feel? *“The greatest thing anyone can do for God and man is pray. It is not the only thing; but it is the chief thing. The great people of earth today are the people who pray. I do not mean those who talk about prayer, nor those who say they believe in prayer; nor yet those who can explain about prayer; but I mean those people who take time to pray.” S.D. Gordon*
2. Why do you think that most elders in most churches do not follow the simple instructions of James with regard to sicknesses and anointing with oil? Is this type of prayer archaic and irrelevant for today or should the elders practice this?
3. Read Psalm 32. David wrote this Psalm about his unconfessed sin with Bathsheba (2Samuel 11). We often assume unconfessed sin as having only to do with “that bad thing” we did that we never told anyone. While confession of such things to God and to others is healing, we also must consider any subtle sins such as bitterness. Bitterness is not just an innocent feeling, it is a sin not to forgive, and it will cause us to be weak and rotten from the inside out if not confessed. Take some time to ask God to reveal your unconfessed sins, obvious and subtle, that you might be healed (Psalm 51).

Family Discussion:

Assignment: Take time to pray as a family. Below are some suggestions that can make prayer a bit less unpredictable and a bit more intentional.

1. Prayer of Praise: Take a few minutes to pray the name of God by describing the character qualities of God. Do not thank God for these qualities, simply declare them: “God you are holy”; “God you are beautiful”; “God you are powerful”; “God you are forgiving”. You can also pray a Psalm out loud in praise of him. Some good Psalms to do this are: 8, 19, 29, 93, 95, 96, 104, 105, 113, 145, 150.
2. Prayer of Confession: Spend some time confessing your sins to one another. As a family, you can ask forgiveness for words spoken or not, actions taken or not. The goal is to have the family recognize that, though we sin against each other, we in fact sin against God alone—it is his law we break. God already knows all things, past, present, and future. When we sin, we do not “lose” our salvation, but we do lose out on a joyful relationship with God. We confess each day that we are more sinful than we’ll ever admit, but more loved than we could ever imagine.
3. Prayer of Provision: First, thank God for all that He has given. As we do this, we recognize that all we have, even the breath to say it, is a gift from God. Thanking God for our material things such as food, a warm home, even our toys, helps us to be content with what God has decided to bless us

with. Most importantly we must also thank God for giving us forgiveness through Jesus. Secondly, ask God for your needs, according to His will. Ask for healing, for comfort, of for wisdom during whatever trial you find yourself in.

Week 19 James 5.19-20 Wandering and Finding

19 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, **20** let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Summary:

Speaking to his brothers, Pastor James closes his letter with the same focus with which he started. The truth James speaks about is the authenticity of faith itself. James wants all of his readers to consider that a faith without works is in fact, no faith at all. More works is not what the individual requires, but confession and repentance that leads to true faith. James calls upon all of the brothers to not only examine their own faith but to challenge one another.

It is against most of our natures to confront people in love over sin. We either feel it is more loving to let people work out their own issues or avoid conflict all together. James challenges the wisdom of allowing your brother to wander away without saying anything. If someone is blatantly straying from the faith in their actions, or lack thereof, it is our responsibility to help them get back on the right path. This view of love is nauseating to many, because they imagine the worst. They assume that any such action is always rooted in pride and will only result in public humiliation. This is not the picture James has in mind. Everything is to be done with gentleness, respect, and privacy, because they love them enough to want them freed from their sin.

Many refuse to love others in this way because they feel unworthy. Because we have our own faith struggles, we avoid speaking truth with any sense of authority. How can I help someone with their sin, when I am a sinner myself? Such a qualifier would prevent everyone from helping anyone in this world. No one wants or expects anyone to become sin hunter for their friends and family. James is not talking about minor infractions. He is talking about faithful, imperfect, self-examining believers helping other brothers see major issues in their life. We do not help because we have it all together. We help because Jesus helped us and we want to see their lives saved from the same sinful destruction.

Personal Application:

1. Read Galatians 6.1-5. How do we balance “bearing one another’s burden” and the fact that Paul says that everyone will have to, “bear his own load”?
2. You have a Christian friend who is in a destructive dating relationship with an unbeliever. You know if you say something to him/her about it, there’s a chance you could damage or even break off the friendship. What does James say you should do?
3. James pulls back the curtains on our faith to reveal what is really there. After your study of James, in what ways does YOUR faith need a retro-movement? What beliefs, practices, or elements of your faith would you like Christ to breathe new life into again?

Family Discussion:

Assignment: James teaches us that faith without action is dead. A dead faith is the way of the world, a false confession of words. A living faith is the way of God, a genuine transformation confirmed by works. What practical changes can you make for both you and your family, to actively live out the gospel with intentionality?

1. Dealing with Suffering
2. Facing Temptations
3. Knowing God's Wisdom
4. Dealing with Anger
5. Spending our Money
6. Being Impartial
7. Being Friends with the World
8. Judging others
9. Loving our neighbors
10. Making Plans for the Future
11. Training our Tongue
12. Making Promises
13. Praying for Healing
14. Confessing our sin
15. Confronting sin in our brother