

Daily Devotions

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

Have you ever wondered what it would have been like to share a room with Jesus as a half-brother?

Being poor, maybe He shared a small room with His half-brothers, packed close enough together to reach out and annoy each other, or stay up late talking. During the day, it was all about helping in and around the house, and playing outside.

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

Over the next few weeks, we will learn more about Jesus through the eyes of His little brother by studying the book of James. We will start with the man behind the words; James.

If you could interview anyone in the Bible about Jesus Christ, who would you interview? For me His brother James would be top of the list.

Nobody knows you like your siblings. If anyone in all of Scripture could reveal any sins or wrong behaviour on Jesus, surely His half-brother James would know. I know my siblings would never mistake me for the sinless and perfect Messiah. But James grew up to preach “faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory”— a true indication that there was something special happening in that family. **(see James 2:1)**

That is not to say James always believed Jesus was who He claimed to be. The Bible tells us that when Jesus first started preaching, His family “went out to seize Him, for they were saying, ‘He is out of His mind’”. **(see Mark 3:21)**

By the time Jesus rose from the dead, however, His brothers were worshipping Him as God. **(see Acts 1:14)** James went on to lead the church in Jerusalem, the largest and most influential church of the first century.

Does reading about Jesus from the perspective of His brother help you to see that Jesus truly was human?

Does the fact that His family worshipped Him as God encourage you in your faith?

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Perhaps the best way to begin these devotions is to answer four important questions:

1. Who was James?
2. What kind of man was James?
3. To whom did James write?
4. Why did James write?

Today we look at who was James?

James 1:1a; “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...”
This is how James introduces himself. It was a popular name, and several men had this name in New Testament.

James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John.

He was a fisherman called by Christ to follow and become a disciple (see **Matthew 4:17 – 22**). He and his brother John were nicknamed by Christ “sons of thunder” because of their impulsiveness (see **Mark 3:17; Luke 9:51 – 56**). James was the first of the disciples to give his life for Christ. He was killed by Herod in AD 44 (see **Acts 12:1 – 2**).

James, the son of Alphaeus.

He was another of the disciples (see **Matthew 10:3; Acts 1:13**), but very little is known about him. Matthew (Levi) is also identified as “the son of Alphaeus” (see **Mark 2:14**), and some students suggest that the two men might have been brothers. There is no indication that this James wrote the letter we are about to study.

James, the brother of our Lord.

He does not identify himself in this way; humbly, he calls himself “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” That Jesus had brothers and sisters is stated in **Matthew 13:55 – 56** and **Mark 6:3**, and one of His brothers was named James. (By “brother,” of course, I mean half-brother. Joseph was not our Lord’s father since Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.)

James and the other brothers did not believe in Jesus during His earthly ministry (see **Mark 3:31 – 35; John 7:1 – 5**). Yet we find our Lord’s brothers in the Upper Room praying with the disciples (see **Acts 1:14**). What caused the change from unbelief to faith? First Corinthians 15:7 indicates that Jesus appeared to James after His resurrection! This convinced James that Jesus truly is the Savior, Lord, and God.

James became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. Paul called him “a pillar,” in **Galatians 2:9**. It was James who facilitated the church conference described in **Acts 15**. When Peter was delivered from prison, he sent a special message to James (see **Acts 12:17**); and when Paul visited Jerusalem, it was to James that he brought greetings and the special “love offering” from the Gentiles (see **Acts 21:18 – 19**).

We have no record in the Bible, but tradition tells us that James was martyred in AD 62. The story is that the Pharisees in Jerusalem so hated James’ testimony for Christ that they had him cast down from the temple and then beaten to death with clubs. The story also relates that James died, as did his Savior, praying for his murderers, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

How does James’s faith inspire you?

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What kind of man was James?

He must have been a deeply spiritual man to gain the leadership of the Jerusalem church in so short a time. His impact is seen in Acts 15, where he was able to bring peace and direction by drawing a conclusion based on the Word of God. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 9:5, suggested that he was a married man.

Again, tradition tells us that he was a man of prayer, and this explains the emphasis on prayer in his letter. It was said that he prayed so much, his knees were as hard as a camel's!

James was a Jew, rooted in the tradition of the law of Moses, and his Jewish legalism stands out in his letter.

While still an unbeliever, James must have paid attention to what Jesus taught; in his letter there are numerous references to our Lord's sayings, particularly the Sermon on the Mount. You can compare these passages:

James 1:2 — Matthew 5:10 – 12

James 1:4 — Matthew 5:48

James 1:5 — Matthew 7:7 – 12

James 1:22 — Matthew 7:21 – 27

James 4:11 – 12 — Matthew 7:1 – 5

James 5:1 – 3 — Matthew 6:19 – 21

Keep in mind that James led the church in Jerusalem during a very difficult time. It was a time of transition, and such times are always difficult and demanding. There were many Christian Jews in Jerusalem who still held to the Old Testament law (**see Acts 21:20**). The temple and its services were still in operation, and the full light of the gospel of God's grace had not yet been received.

We who have read Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews might be quick to judge these early believers, but we must not. They were saved people, but they were still in the shadows of the law, moving out into the bright light of God's grace. While there may have been differences in degrees of spiritual knowledge and experience, there was no competition between Paul and those who directed the Jerusalem church (**see Galatians 2:1 – 10**).

James was respected for the advice he gave and for the wise decisions he helped the believers make (**see Acts 15:13 – 21**). We know that James lived by the power of the Holy Spirit because he wrote Scripture, and to write Scripture, you must be empowered by the Spirit. (**see 2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16**).

At one point he decided to write down some of his best teachings and advice and send them to other Jewish believers who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. What he wrote to them has become known as the book of James.

This book begins like a letter because it is being sent to people at a distance. But it is actually not like other letters of the time. It is a collection of short sayings and discussions of practical topics. The conversational style, the short, sayings and the interweaving of themes all make this book similar to the wisdom writing found in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Like those wisdom books, James concentrates on questions of daily living in God's creation. He considers such practical issues as concern for the poor, the responsible use of wealth, control of the tongue, purity of life, unity in the community of Christ-followers, and above all patience and endurance during times of trial.

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To whom did James write?

James 1:1b; "To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting."

James wrote to Jews living outside the land of Palestine. The term "twelve tribes" can only mean the people of Israel, the Jewish nation (**see Acts 26:7**). The fact that many Jews lived outside their Promised Land is evidence of the spiritual decline of the nation. God had to scatter them (**see Deuteronomy 4:25**).

When Peter addressed that huge Jewish congregation at Pentecost, he spoke to men from many different nations (**see Acts 2:9 – 11**). James sent his letter to Christian Jews. At least nineteen times he addressed them as "brother," indicating not only "brothers in the flesh" (fellow Jews), but also "brothers in the Lord."

James was very clear on the doctrine of the new birth (see James 1:18). There are times when James also addressed wicked men who were not in the fellowship (**the rich, for example, in James 5:1 – 6**), but he did so to teach and encourage the saved Jews to whom he sent the letter.

The word scattered in James 1:1 is an interesting one. It means "in the dispersion." The term "the dispersion" was used to identify the Jews living outside the land of Palestine. But the Greek word carries the idea of "scattering seed." When the Jewish believers were scattered in that first wave of persecution (**see Acts 8:1, 4**), it was really the sowing of seed in many places; and much of that seed bore fruit (**see Acts 11:19**).

Christian Jews scattered throughout the Roman Empire would have needs and problems of their own. Being Jews, they would be rejected by the Gentiles, and being Christian Jews, they would be rejected by their own countrymen. This letter indicates that most of these believers were poor, and some of them were being oppressed by the rich.

How can you encourage a fellow believer today who is experiencing persecution?

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Why did James write?

Each New Testament letter has its own special theme, purpose, and destination. Paul wrote the book of Romans to prepare the Roman Christians for his intended visit. First Corinthians was sent to the church at Corinth to help correct certain problems. Galatians was written to a group of churches to warn them against legalism and false teaching.

As you read the letter of James, you discover that these Jewish Christians were having some problems in their personal lives and in their church fellowship. For one thing, they were going through difficult testings. They were also facing temptations to sin. Some of the believers were catering to the rich, while others were being robbed by the rich. Church members were competing for offices in the church, particularly teaching offices.

One of the major problems in the church was a failure on the part of many to live what they professed to believe. Furthermore, the tongue was a serious problem, even to the point of creating wars and divisions in the assembly. Worldliness was another problem. Some of the members were disobeying God's Word and were sick physically because of it, and some were straying away from the Lord and the church.

As we review this list of problems, does it appear to be much different from the problems of an average local church today? Do we not have in our churches people who are suffering for one reason or another? Do we not have members who talk one way, but walk another way? Is not worldliness a serious problem? Are there not Christians who cannot control their tongues? It seems that James was dealing with very up-to-date matters!

All of these problems had a common cause: spiritual immaturity. These Christians simply were not growing up. This gives us a hint as to the basic theme of this letter: the marks of maturity in the Christian life. James used the word perfect several times, a word that means "mature, complete" (see **James 1:4, 17, 25; 2:22; 3:2**). By "a perfect man" (see James 3:2) James did not mean a sinless man, but rather one who is mature, balanced, grown-up. Spiritual maturity is one of the greatest needs in churches today.

Just look at the problems James dealt with and you can see that each of them is characteristic of little children:

- Impatience in difficulties — 1:1-4
- Talking but not living the truth — 2:14.
- No control of the tongue — 3:1.
- Fighting and coveting — 4:1.
- Collecting material "toys" — 5:1.

The five chapters of this letter suggest the five marks of the mature Christian. James encourages his readers to build on this perfect salvation of Jesus Christ, and grow into maturity. Without the perfect work of Christ there can be no perfecting of the believers.

Are you ready to study the book of James?

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v.1; James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve (Hebrew) tribes (scattered abroad among the gentiles) in the dispersion: greetings.

Verse 1 reads; “James, a servant.” How many of us would have added a little more? James says my name is James and I am a servant. What James has come to realize is that Jesus serves us, therefore serving others on behalf of Jesus is the highest and noblest calling.

If there is anyone in history that could add to his name, it would be Jesus’ half-brother, James. Surprisingly though, James does not introduce himself as an apostle or even make the familiar connection as someone with the authority to write to his fellow believers. He calls himself a “servant” of God and Christ, a man bound to his Master, living his life in loving obedience no matter the cost.

He is not a volunteer or an executive in Christ’s business. He is his Lord’s servant, serving the Lord who served him by living, dying, and rising to save. This echoes Jesus’ humble claim to do nothing on his own but only what He sees the Father doing. **(see John 5:10,30)**. With this introduction, James appeals as an equal to his readers, believing Jews who have been displaced from their homes and families.

Secondly, it is important to take note that James worships his half-brother Jesus as Lord God and Savior. He starts with God, and that God is the Lord Jesus Christ. And what he is saying is over our life in human history and the trials, troubles, and tribulations that we face, there is the Lord Jesus Christ.

He writes to those who are dispersed (Amplified says, to the 12 Hebrew tribes scattered abroad among the gentiles). The twelve tribes is a Jewish figure of speech that sometimes referred to the Jewish people as a whole **(see Matthew 19:28)**. Paul referred to our twelve tribes in his speech before King Agrippa **(see Acts 26:7)**. The concept of the “twelve tribes” among the Jewish people was still strong, even though they had not lived in their tribal regions for centuries.

“Which are scattered abroad”: At this time, the Jewish people were scattered all over the world and there was a Christian presence among most Jewish communities throughout the world. Regarding the extent of the dispersion, Josephus wrote: “There is no city, no tribe, whether Greek or barbarian, in which Jewish law and Jewish customs have not taken root.” (Cited in Barclay)

“Greetings”: The salutation Greetings was the customary Greek way of opening a letter. Paul never used it; he preferred to salute his readers with the words grace and peace. Here James used this more customary salutation.

In many ways, we read the book of James because it echoes the teachings of Jesus. There are many similarities to the Sermon on the Mount in the letter of James. James was a man who knew the teachings of Jesus, and took it seriously when he wrote this letter.

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James 1:2 – 3; Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials (not if, but when) of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness / endurance (leading to spiritual maturity, and inner peace).

God tells us to expect trials. It is not “if you fall into various testings” but “when you fall into various testings.” The believer who expects his Christian life to be easy is in for a shock. Jesus warned His disciples, “In the world you shall have tribulation” (**John 16:33**). Paul told his converts that “we must through much tribulation to enter the kingdom of God” (**Acts 14:22**).

We cannot always expect everything to go our way. Some trials come simply because we are human; accidents, disappointments, even seeming tragedies. Other trials come because we are Christians. Peter emphasized this in his first letter: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (**1 Peter 4:12**). Satan fights us, the world opposes us, and this makes for a life of battle.

The key word is count. It is a financial term, and it means “to evaluate.” Paul used it several times in Philippians 3. When Paul became a Christian, he evaluated his life and set new goals and priorities. Things that were once important to him became “garbage” in the light of his experience with Christ. When we face the trials of life, we must evaluate them in the light of what God is doing for us.

This explains why the dedicated Christian can have joy in the midst of trials: he lives for the things that matter most. Even our Lord was able to endure the cross because of “the joy that was set before him” (**Heb. 12:2**), the joy of returning to heaven and one day sharing His glory with His church.

Our values determine our evaluations. If we value comfort more than character, then trials will upset us. If we value the material and physical more than the spiritual, we will not be able to “count it all joy.” If we live only for the present and forget the future, then trials will make us bitter, not better. Job had the right outlook when he said, “But He knows the way that I take: when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold” (**Job 23:10**).

So, when trials come, immediately give thanks to the Lord and adopt a joyful attitude. Do not pretend; do not try self-hypnosis; simply look at trials through the eyes of faith. Outlook determines outcome; to end with joy, begin with joy.

“But how,” we may ask, “is it possible to rejoice in the midst of trials?” Verse 3 will explain this.

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James 1:2 – 3: Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials (not if, but when) of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness / endurance (leading to spiritual maturity, and inner peace).

What do Christians know that makes it easier to face trials and benefit from them?

Faith is always tested.

When God called Abraham to live by faith, He tested him in order to increase his faith. God always tests us to bring out the best; Satan tempts us to bring out the worst. The testing of our faith proves that we are truly born again.

Testing works for us, not against us.

The word trying can be translated "approval." Again, Peter helps us understand it better: "That the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes..." **(1 Peter 1:7)**. God's approval of our faith is precious, because it assures us that our faith is genuine.

Trials work for the believer, not against him. Paul said, "And we know that all things work together for good" **(Rom. 8:28)**, and, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" **(2 Cor. 4:17)**.

Trials rightly used help us to mature.

What does God want to produce in our lives? Patience, endurance, and the ability to keep going when things are tough. "We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation produces perseverance / patience; and perseverance / patience, character; and character, hope" **(Rom. 5:3 – 4)**. In the Bible, patience is not a passive acceptance of circumstances. It is a courageous perseverance in the face of suffering and difficulty.

Immature people are always impatient; mature people are patient and persistent. Impatience and unbelief usually go together, just as faith and patience do. "Be... followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" **(Heb. 6:12)**. "For you have need of endurance / patience, so that, after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise." **(Heb. 10:36)**. "...whoever believes will not act hastily" **(Isa. 28:16)**.

God wants to make us patient because that is the key to every other blessing. The little child who does not learn patience will not learn much of anything else.

When the believer learns to wait on the Lord, then God can do great things for him. Abraham ran ahead of the Lord, married Hagar, and brought great sorrow into his home **(Gen. 16)**. Moses ran ahead of God, murdered a man, and had to spend forty years with the sheep to learn patience **(Ex. 2:11)**. Peter almost killed a man in his impatience **(John 18:10 – 11)**.

The only way the Lord can develop patience and character in our lives is through trials. Endurance cannot be attained by reading a book, listening to a sermon, or even praying a prayer. We must go through the difficulties of life, trust God, and obey Him. The result will be patience and character. Knowing this, we can face trials joyfully. We know what trials will do in us and for us, and we know that the end result will bring glory to God.

This fact explains why studying the Bible helps us grow in patience **(Rom. 15:4)**. As we read about Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, and even our Lord, we realize that God has a purpose in trials. God fulfills His purposes as we trust Him.

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James 1:4; But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

God cannot build our character without our cooperation. If we resist Him, then He chastens us into submission. But if we submit to Him, then He can accomplish His work. He is not satisfied with a halfway job. God wants a perfect work; He wants a finished product that is mature and complete.

God's goal for our lives is maturity. It would be a tragedy if our children remained little babies. We enjoy watching them mature, even though maturity brings dangers as well as delights. Many Christians shelter themselves from the trials of life, and as a result, never grow up. God wants the "little children" to become "young men," and the "young men" He wants to become "fathers" (**1 John 2:12 – 14**).

Paul outlined three works that are involved in a complete Christian life (**Eph. 2:8 – 10**). First, there is the work God does for us, which is salvation. Jesus Christ completed this work on the cross. If we trust Him, He will save us. Second, there is the work God does in us: "For we are His workmanship." This work is known as sanctification: God builds our character and we become more like Jesus Christ, "conformed to the image of His Son" (**Rom. 8:29**). The third work is what God does through us — service. We are "created in Christ Jesus for good works."

God builds character before He calls us to service. He must work in us before He can work through us. God spent twenty-five years working in Abraham before He could give him his promised son. God worked thirteen years in Joseph's life, putting him into "various testings" before He could put him on the throne of Egypt. He spent eighty years preparing Moses for forty years of service. Our Lord took three years training His disciples, building their character.

But God cannot work in us without our consent. There must be a surrendered will. The mature person does not argue with God's will; instead, he accepts it willingly and obeys it joyfully. "Doing the will of God from the heart" (**Eph. 6:6**). If we try to go through trials without surrendered wills, we will end up more like immature children than mature adults.

Jonah is an illustration of this. God commanded Jonah to preach to the Gentiles at Nineveh, and he refused. God chastened Jonah before the prophet accepted his commission. But Jonah did not obey God from the heart. He did not grow in this experience.

How do we know? Because in the last chapter of Jonah, the prophet is acting like a spoiled child! He is sitting outside the city, hoping that God will send judgment. He is impatient with the sun, the wind, the plant, the worm, and with God.

One difficult stage of maturing is weaning. A child being weaned is sure that his mother no longer loves him and that everything is against him. Actually, weaning is a step toward maturity and liberty. It is good for the child! Sometimes God has to wean His children away from their childish toys and immature attitudes.

David pictured this in Psalm 131: "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child" (**Ps. 131:2**). God uses trials to wean us away from childish things; but if we do not surrender to Him, we will become even more immature.

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James 1:5 – 8; If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

The people to whom James wrote had problems with their praying (**James 4:1 – 3; 5:13 – 18**). When we are going through God-ordained difficulties, what should we pray about? James gives the answer: ask God for wisdom.

James has a great deal to say about wisdom (**James 1:5; 3:13 – 18**). The Jewish people were lovers of wisdom, as the book of Proverbs gives evidence. Someone has said that knowledge is the ability to take things apart, while wisdom is the ability to put them together. Wisdom is the right use of knowledge.

Why do we need wisdom when we are going through trials? Why not ask for strength, or grace, or even deliverance? For this reason: we need wisdom so we will not waste the opportunities God is giving us to mature. Wisdom helps us understand how to use these circumstances for our good and God's glory.

In James 1:5; James not only explained what to ask for (wisdom), but he also described how to ask. We are to ask in faith. We do not have to be afraid, for God is willing and able to answer, and He will never rebuke or reject us! "He gives more grace" (**James 4:6**). He also gives more and more wisdom. The greatest enemy to answered prayer is unbelief.

James compares the doubting believer to the waves of the sea, up one minute and down the next. And that is why you never turn your back on the waves, they are down, then they are up.

This is the experience of the "double-minded man." Faith says, "Yes!" but unbelief says, "No!" Then doubt comes along and says "Yes!" one minute and "No!" the next. It was doubt that made Peter sink in the waves as he was walking to Jesus (**Matt. 14:22 – 33**). Jesus asked him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" When Peter started his walk of faith, he kept his eyes on Christ. But when he was distracted by the wind and waves, he ceased to walk by faith, and he began to sink. He was double-minded, and he almost drowned.

Many Christians live like this: up one minute, down the next; tossed back and forth. This kind of experience is evidence of immaturity. Paul used a similar idea in **Ephesians 4:14**; "That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting."

If we have believing and united hearts, we can ask in faith and God will give the wisdom we need.

How has God given you wisdom when you asked Him?

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James 1:9 – 11; Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, 10 but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. 11 For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So, the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.

As much as it is appropriate for the lowly to rejoice when they are lifted up by God, so it is appropriate (but far more difficult) for the high (the rich) to rejoice when they are brought to humiliation by trials.

“As the poor brother forgets all his earthly poverty, so the rich brother forgets all his earthly riches. By faith in Christ the two are equals.” (Hiebert, citing Lenski)

Though we can understand the relative poverty and riches as trials or tests of a living faith that a Christian may deal with, it nonetheless seems that James has made a sudden shift in his subject, from trials and wisdom to riches and humility.

In some ways, the book of James is like the book of Proverbs or other Old Testament wisdom literature, and it can jump from topic to topic and back again to a previous topic.

Trials serve to remind the rich and the high that though they are comfortable in this life, it is still only this life, which fades as the grass grows brown and the flowers fade away.

In the land of Israel there are many kinds of beautiful flowers that spring to life when the rains come, but they last for only a short time before withering away. On the scale of eternity, this is how quickly the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.

The riches of this world will certainly fade away, but James says that the rich man also will fade away. If we put our life and our identity into things that fade away, we will fade away also.

How much better to put our life and our identity into things that will never fade! If a man is only rich in this world, when he dies, he leaves his riches. But if a man is rich before God, when he dies, he goes to his riches.

The struggle is like that of the rich young ruler (Matthew 19, Mark 10, Luke 18) – between our stuff and our Savior. Jesus shows us how to be both poor (while on this earth) and rich (now in Heaven). Whether we are rich or poor, the most important thing is that we are like Jesus.

How often do you think of eternity?

When you make important decisions, do you consider eternity?

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James 1:12; Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

James closed this section with a beatitude: "Blessed is the man who endures temptation" (James 1:12). He started (James 1:2) and ended with joy. Outlook determines outcome. This beatitude is a great encouragement because it promises a crown to those who patiently endure trials.

James reminds us that it really is worth it to endure under the temptations we face. Our endurance will be rewarded as we demonstrate our love for Jesus (to those who love Him) by resisting temptation.

Paul often used athletic illustrations in his letters, and James did so here. He is not saying that the sinner is saved by enduring trials. He is saying that the believer is blessed and rewarded by enduring trials.

How is he rewarded?

First, by growth in Christian character. This is more important than anything else. He is rewarded also by bringing glory to God and by being granted a crown of life when Jesus Christ returns. First the cross, then the crown. First the suffering, then the glory. God does not help us by removing the tests, but by making the tests work for us. Satan wants to use the tests to tear us down, but God uses them to build us up.

In James 1:12, James used a very important word: love. We would expect him to write, "the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" or "that obey Him." Why did James use love? Because love is the spiritual motivation behind this verse.

Why do we have a joyful attitude as we face trials? Because we love God, and He loves us, and He will not harm us. Why do we have an understanding mind? Because He loves us and has shared His truth with us, and we love Him in return. Why do we have a surrendered will? Because we love Him. Where there is love, there is surrender and obedience. Why do we have a believing heart? Because love and faith go together. When you love someone, you trust him, and you do not hesitate to ask him for help.

Love is the spiritual motivation behind James' words. But there is another factor involved: love keeps us faithful to the Lord. The double-minded person (James 1:8) is like an unfaithful husband or wife: he wants to love both God and the world. James' encouragement is; "purify your hearts, you double-minded!" (James 4:8) The Greek word translated "purify" literally means "make chaste." The picture is that of an unfaithful lover.

Let us go back to the weaning. The child who loves his mother, and who is sure that his mother loves him, will be able to get through the weaning and start to grow up. The Christian who loves God, and who knows that God loves him, will not fall apart when God permits trials to come. He is secure in God's love.

He is not double-minded, trying to love both God and the world. Lot was double-minded; when trials came, he failed. Abraham was the friend of God; he loved God and trusted Him. When trials came, Abraham triumphed and matured in the faith.

God's purpose in trials is maturity.

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James 1:13; Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God;" for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

Temptation does not come from God. Though He allows it, He Himself does not entice us to evil, God tests our faith. James knew that most people tend to blame God when they find themselves in trials. Yet by His very nature, God is unable to either be tempted (in the sense we are tempted, as James will explain), nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

The mature person is patient in trials. Sometimes the trials are tests on the outside, and sometimes they are temptations on the inside. Trials may be tests sent by God, or they may be temptations sent by Satan and encouraged by our own fallen nature. It is this second aspect of trials — temptations on the inside — that James dealt with in this section.

We may ask, "Why did James connect the two? What is the relationship between tests without and temptations within?" Simply this: if we are not careful, the tests on the outside may become temptations on the inside. When our circumstances are difficult, we may find ourselves complaining against God, questioning His love, and resisting His will. At this point, Satan provides us with an opportunity to escape the difficulty. This opportunity is a temptation.

There are many illustrations of this truth found in the Bible. Abraham arrived in Canaan and discovered a famine there. He was not able to care for his flocks and herds. This trial was an opportunity to prove God's provision; but Abraham turned it into a temptation and went down to Egypt. God had to rebuke Abraham to bring him back to the place of obedience and blessing.

While Israel was wandering in the wilderness, the nation often turned tests into temptations and tempted the Lord. No sooner had they been delivered from Egypt than their water supply vanished and they had to march for three days without water. When they did find water, it was so bitter they could not drink it. Immediately they began to murmur and blame God. They turned their tests into a temptation, and they failed.

Do not blame God for temptation. He is too holy to be tempted, and He is too loving to tempt others. God does test us, as He did Abraham (**see Genesis 22**); but He does not and cannot tempt us. It is we who turn occasions of testing into temptations. A temptation is an opportunity to accomplish a good thing in a bad way, out of the will of God.

For example; it is not wrong to eat, but if you consider stealing the food, you are tempting yourself.

Certainly, God does not want us to yield to temptation, yet neither can He spare us the experience of temptation. We are not God's sheltered people; we are God's scattered people. If we are to mature, we must face tests and temptations.

There are three facts that we must consider if we are to overcome temptation.

Daily Devotions

James 1:14 – 16; But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

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God does test us, as He did Abraham (see Genesis 22); but He does not and cannot tempt us. It is we who turn occasions of testing into temptations.

A temptation is an opportunity to accomplish a good thing in a bad way, out of the will of God. Is it wrong to want to pass an examination? Of course not, but if you cheat to pass it, then you have sinned. The temptation to cheat is an opportunity to accomplish a good thing (passing the examination) in a bad way. It is not wrong to eat, but if you consider stealing the food, you are tempting yourself.

We think of sin as a single act, but God sees it as a process. Adam committed one act of sin, and yet that one act brought sin, death, and judgment on the whole human race. James described this process of sin in four stages.

Daily Devotions

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Desire (v.14).

The word lust means any kind of desire, and not necessarily sexual passions. The normal desires of life were given to us by God and, of themselves, are not sinful. Without these desires, we could not function. Unless we felt hunger and thirst, we would never eat and drink, and we would die. Without fatigue, the body would never rest and would eventually wear out. Sex is a normal desire; without it the human race could not continue.

It is when we want to satisfy these desires in ways outside God's will that we get into trouble. Eating is normal; gluttony is sin. Sleep is normal; laziness is sin. "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (**see Hebrews 13:4**).

Some people try to become "spiritual" by denying these normal desires or by seeking to suppress them, but this only makes them less than human. These fundamental desires of life are the steam in the boiler that makes the machinery go. Turn off the steam and you have no power. Let the steam go its own way and you have destruction. The secret is in constant control. These desires must be our servants and not our masters, and this we can do through Jesus Christ.

Deception (v.14).

No temptation appears as temptation; it always seems more alluring than it really is. James used two illustrations from the world of sports to prove his point. Drawn away carries with it the idea of the baiting of a trap; and enticed in the original Greek means "to bait a hook." The hunter and the fisherman have to use bait to attract and catch their prey. No animal is deliberately going to step into a trap and no fish will knowingly bite at a naked hook. The idea is to hide the trap and the hook.

Temptation always carries with it some bait that appeals to our natural desires. The bait not only attracts us, but it also hides the fact that yielding to the desire will eventually bring sorrow and punishment. It is the bait that is the exciting thing. Lot would never have moved toward Sodom had he not seen the "well-watered plains of Jordan" (**see Genesis 13:10**).

When David looked on his neighbour's wife, he would never have committed adultery had he seen the tragic consequences: the death of a baby (Bathsheba's son), the murder of a brave soldier (Uriah), the violation of a daughter (Tamar). The bait keeps us from seeing the consequences of sin.

When Jesus was tempted by Satan, He always dealt with the temptation on the basis of the Word of God. Three times He said, "It is written." From the human point of view, turning stones into bread to satisfy hunger is a sensible thing to do; but not from God's point of view. When you know the Bible, you can detect the bait and deal with it decisively. This is what it means to walk by faith and not by sight

Daily Devotions

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Disobedience (v.15).

We have moved from the emotions (desire) and the intellect (deception) to the will. James changed the picture from hunting and fishing to the birth of a baby. Desire conceives a method for taking the bait. The will approves and acts, and the result is sin. Whether we feel it or not, we are hooked and trapped. The baby is born, and just wait until it matures!

Christian living is a matter of the will, not the feelings. I often hear believers say, "I don't feel like reading the Bible." Or, "I don't feel like attending prayer meeting." Children operate on the basis of feeling, but adults operate on the basis of will. They act because it is right, no matter how they feel. This explains why immature Christians easily fall into temptation: they let their feelings make the decisions. The more you exercise your will in saying a decisive no to temptation, the more God will take control of your life. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (see **Philippians 2:13**).

Death (v.15).

Disobedience gives birth to death, not life. It may take years for the sin to mature, but when it does, the result will be death. If we will only believe God's Word and see this final tragedy, it will encourage us not to yield to temptation. God has erected this barrier because He loves us. "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" (see **Ezekiel 18:23**).

These four stages in temptation and sin are perfectly seen in the first sin recorded in the Bible in Genesis 3.

The serpent used desire to interest Eve: "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (see **Genesis 3:5**). Is there anything wrong with gaining knowledge? Is there anything wrong with eating food? Eve saw that "the tree was good for food" (see **Genesis 3:6**), and her desire was aroused.

Paul described the deception of Eve in **2 Corinthians 11:3**: "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." Satan is the deceiver, and he seeks to deceive the mind. The bait that he used with Eve was the fact that the forbidden tree was good and pleasant, and that eating of it would make her wise. She saw the bait but forgot the Lord's warning: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (**Gen. 2:17**).

Eve disobeyed God by taking the fruit of the tree and eating it. Then she shared it with her husband, and he disobeyed God. Because Adam was not deceived, but sinned with his eyes wide open, it is his sin that plunged the human race into tragedy (**read Rom. 5:12 – 21; 1 Tim. 2:12 – 15**).

Both Adam and Eve experienced immediate spiritual death (separation from God), and ultimate physical death. All men die because of Adam (**1 Cor. 15:21–22**). The person who dies without Jesus Christ will experience eternal death, the lake of fire (**Rev. 20:11–15**).

Whenever you are faced with temptation, get your eyes off the bait and look ahead to see the consequences of sin: the judgment of God. "For the wages of sin is death" (**Rom. 6:23**).

Daily Devotions

James 1:17 – 18; Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. 18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.

One of the enemy's tricks is to convince us that our Father is holding out on us, that He does not really love us and care for us. When Satan approached Eve, he suggested that if God really loved her, He would permit her to eat of the forbidden tree. When Satan tempted Jesus, he raised the question of hunger. "If Your Father loves You, why are You hungry?"

The goodness of God is a great barrier against yielding to temptation. Since God is good, we do not need any other person (including Satan) to meet our needs. It is better to be hungry in the will of God than full outside the will of God. Once we start to doubt God's goodness, we will be attracted to Satan's offers, and the natural desires within will reach out for his bait.

Moses warned Israel not to forget God's goodness when they began to enjoy the blessings of the Promised Land (see **Deuteronomy 6:10 – 15**). We need this warning today.

James presented four facts about the goodness of God.

1. God gives only good gifts.

Everything good in this world comes from God. If it did not come from God, it is not good. If it comes from God, it must be good, even if we do not see the goodness in it immediately. Paul's thorn in the flesh was given to him by God and it seemed to be a strange gift; yet it became a tremendous blessing to him (see 2 Corinthians 12:1 – 10).

2. The way God gives is good.

We can translate the second clause "and every act of giving." It is possible for someone to give us a gift in a manner that is less than loving. The value of a gift can be diminished by the way it is given to us. But when God gives us a blessing, He does it in a loving, gracious manner. What He gives and how He gives are both good.

3. He gives constantly.

"Comes down" is a present participle: "it keeps on coming down." God does not give occasionally; He gives constantly. Even when we do not see His gifts, He is sending them. How do we know this? Because He tells us so and we believe His Word.

Daily Devotions

James 1:17 – 18; Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.¹⁸ Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.

The fourth fact that James presented about the goodness of God is:

4. God does not change.

There are no shadows with the Father of Lights. It is impossible for God to change. He cannot change for the worse because He is holy; He cannot change for the better because He is already perfect.

The light of the sun varies as the earth changes, but the sun itself is still shining. If shadows come between us and the Father, He did not cause them. He is the unchanging God. This means that we should never question His love or doubt His goodness when difficulties come or temptations appear.

If King David had remembered the goodness of the Lord, he would not have taken Bathsheba and committed those terrible sins. At least this is what Nathan the prophet told the king. "Thus says the Lord God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered You from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more!'" (see **2 Samuel 12:7 – 8**).

Note the repetition of the word give in this brief statement. God had been good to David, yet David forgot God's goodness and took the bait.

It was this understanding of God's goodness that kept Joseph from sinning when he was tempted by his master's wife (see **Genesis 39:7**). "Behold, with me around, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?" (see **Genesis 39:8 – 9**).

Joseph knew that all these blessings had come from God. It was the goodness of God, through the hands of his employer, that restrained him in the hour of temptation.

God's gifts are always better than Satan's bargains. Satan never gives any gifts, because you end up paying for them dearly. "It is the blessing of the Lord that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it" (see **Proverbs 10:22**). Achan forgot the warning of God and the goodness of God, saw the forbidden wealth, coveted it, and took it. He became rich, but the sorrow that followed turned his riches into poverty (see **Joshua. 7**).

The next time you are tempted, meditate on the goodness of God in your life. If you think you need something, wait on the Lord to provide it. Never play with the devil's bait. One purpose for temptation is to teach us patience. David was tempted twice to kill King Saul and hasten his own coronation, but he resisted the temptation and waited for God's time.

Daily Devotions

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

The emphasis in this section is on the dangers of self-deception: "deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22); "deceives his own heart" (James 1:26). If a believer sins because Satan deceives him, that is one thing. But if he deceives himself, that is a far more serious matter.

Many people are deceiving themselves into thinking they are born-again when they are not. Jesus said it this way in Matthew 7:22 – 23; "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you: depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

But there are true believers who are fooling themselves concerning their Christian walk. They think they are spiritual when they are not. It is a mark of maturity when a person faces himself honestly, knows himself, and admits his needs. It is the immature person who pretends, "I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing..." (**Revelation 3:17**).

Spiritual reality results from the proper relationship to God through His Word. God's Word is truth (**John 17:17**), and if we are rightly related to God's truth, we cannot be dishonest or hypocritical.

In these verses, James stated that we have three responsibilities toward God's Word, and if we fulfil these responsibilities, we will have an honest walk with God and men.

Over the next few days, we will study these three responsibilities towards God's Word:

Receive the Word (v.19 – 21)
Practice the Word (v.22 – 25)
Share the Word (v.26 – 27)

Daily Devotions

James 1:19 – 21; 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.

James gives us three responsibilities towards God's Word; and the first one is:

1. Receive the Word

James called God's Word "the implanted word" in v.21. Borrowing this from our Lord's parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1 – 9; 18 – 23), James compared **God's Word to seed** and the **human heart to soil**.

In His parable, Jesus described four kinds of hearts: the hard heart (along the path), which did not understand or receive the Word and therefore bore no fruit; the **shallow heart** (rocky ground), which was very emotional but had no depth and bore no fruit; the **crowded heart** (thorny ground), which lacked repentance and permitted sin to crowd out the Word; and the **fruitful heart** (good soil), which received the Word, allowed it to take root, and produced a harvest of fruit.

The final test of salvation is fruit, and this means a changed life, Christian character and conduct, and ministry to others in the glory of God. This fruit might be winning souls to Christ (**Romans 1:16**), growing in holy living (**Romans 6:22**), sharing our material possessions (**Romans 15:28**), spiritual character (**Galatians 5:22 – 23**), good works (**Colossians 1:10**), and even praising the Lord (**Hebrews 13:15**).

Religious works may be manufactured, but they do not have life in them, nor do they bring glory to God. Real fruit has in it the seed for more fruit, so that the harvest continues to grow fruit, more fruit, much fruit (**see John 15:1 – 5**).

But the Word of God cannot work in our lives unless we receive it in the right way. Jesus not only said, "Take heed what you hear" (**Mark 4:24**), but He also said, "Take heed how you hear" (**Luke 8:18**).

Too many people are in that tragic condition in which "hearing they hear not, neither do they understand" (**Matthew 13:13**). They attend Bible classes and church services but never seem to grow. Is it the fault of the teacher or the preacher? Perhaps, but it may also be the fault of the hearer. It is possible to be "dull of hearing" (**Hebrews 5:11**) because of decay of the spiritual life. If the seed of the Word is to be planted in our hearts, then we must obey the instructions James gave us.

Tomorrow we will look at three instructions James gives us v.19.

Daily Devotions

James 1:19 – 21; 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.

In v.19, James gives us three instructions on how to receive God's Word for us:

1. Be quick to hear (v. 19a).

We read in **Matthew 13:9**; "He who has ears, let him hear." And in **Romans 10:17**; "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

Just as the servant is quick to hear his master's voice, and the mother to hear her baby's smallest cry, so the believer should be quick to hear what God has to say.

There is a beautiful illustration of this truth in the life of King David in 2 Samuel 23:14 – 17. David was hiding from the Philistines who were in possession of Bethlehem. He yearned for a drink of the cool water from the well in Bethlehem, a well that he had often visited in his boyhood and youth. He did not issue an order to his men; he simply said to himself, "Oh, that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate" (**2 Samuel 23:15**).

Three of his mighty men heard their king sigh for the water, and they risked their lives to secure the water and bring it to him. They were "quick to hear."

2. Slow to speak (v. 19b).

We have two ears and one mouth, which ought to remind us to listen more than we speak. Too many times we argue with God's Word, if not audibly, at least in our hearts and minds. "... But whoever restrains his lips is prudent / wise." (see Proverbs 10:19b). "Whoever restrains his words has knowledge..." (see Proverbs 17:27a).

Instead of being slow to speak, the lawyer in Luke 10:29 argued with Jesus by asking, "and who is my neighbour?" In the early church, the services were informal, and often the listeners would debate with the speaker. There were even quarrels and fights among the believers that James was writing to (see James 4:1).

Tomorrow we will look at the third instruction of how to receive God's Word.

Daily Devotions

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In v.19, James gives us three instructions on how to receive God's Word for us.

And today we will look at the third instruction:

3. Slow to wrath (v. 19c).

Do not get angry at God or His Word. "Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly." (see **Proverbs 14:29**). When the prophet Nathan told King David the story about "the stolen ewe lamb," the king became angry, but at the wrong person. "You are the man," said Nathan, and David then confessed, "I have sinned..." (see **2 Samuel 12:7; 13**).

In the garden, Peter was slow to hear, swift to speak, and swift to anger and he almost killed a man with the sword. Many fights are the result of short tempers and hasty words.

There is a godly anger against sin (**Ephesians 4:26**), and if we love the Lord, we must hate sin (**Psalms 97:10**). But man's anger does not produce God's righteousness (**James 1:20**). In fact, anger is just the opposite of the patience God wants to produce in our lives as we mature in Christ (**James 1:3 – 4**).

James warns us against getting angry at God's Word because it reveals our sins to us. Like the man who broke the mirror because he disliked the image in it, people rebel against God's Word because it tells the truth about them and their sinfulness.

The importance of a prepared heart (v. 21).

James saw the human heart as a garden; if left to itself, the soil would produce only weeds. He urged us to "pull out the weeds" and prepare the soil for the "implanted Word of God." It is foolish to try to receive God's Word into an unprepared heart.

How do we prepare the soil of our hearts for God's Word?

First, by confessing our sins and asking the Father to forgive us (**1 John 1:9**). Then, by meditating on God's love and grace and asking Him to "plow up" any hardness in our hearts: "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns" (**Jeremiah 4:3**). Finally, we must have an attitude of "meekness" (**James 1:21**).

Meekness is the opposite of "wrath" in James 1:19 – 20. When you receive the Word with meekness, you accept it, do not argue with it, and honour it as the Word of God. You do not try to twist it to conform it to your thinking.

If we do not receive the implanted Word, then we are deceiving ourselves.

Daily Devotions

James 1:22 – 25; 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.

The second responsibility towards God's Word is:

2. Practice the Word (v.22 – 25)

It is not enough to hear the Word; we must do it. Many people have the mistaken idea that hearing a good sermon or Bible study is what makes them grow and get God's blessing. It is not the hearing but the doing that brings the blessing.

In the previous paragraph, James compared the Word to seed, but in this paragraph, he compared it to a mirror. There are two other references in the Bible to God's Word as a mirror; and when you put all three together, you discover **three ministries of the Word of God as a mirror.**

1. Examination (v.23 – 25).

This is the main purpose for owning a mirror, to be able to see yourself and make yourself look as clean and neat as possible. As we look into the mirror of God's Word, we see ourselves as we really are.

James mentions several mistakes people make as they look into God's mirror. We look at two today.

First, they merely glance at themselves. They do not carefully study themselves as they read the Word. Many sincere believers read a chapter of the Bible each day, but it is only a religious exercise and they fail to profit from it personally. Their conscience would bother them if they did not have their daily reading, when actually their conscience should bother them because they read the Word carelessly.

The second mistake is that they forget what they see. If they were looking deeply enough into their hearts, what they would see would be unforgettable! We tend to smile at the "extremes" of people back in the days of the great revivals, but perhaps we could use some of that conviction.

Remember how saints in the Bible responded to the true knowledge of their own hearts. Isaiah cried, "Woe is me! for I am undone" (**see Isaiah 6:5**)! Peter cried, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (**see Luke 5:8**)! Job was the most righteous man on earth in his day, yet he confessed, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (**see Job 42:6**).

Mistake number three: they fail to obey what the Word tells them to do. They think that hearing is the same as doing, and it is not. If we are to use God's mirror profitably, then we must gaze into it carefully and with serious intent. We must examine our own hearts and lives in the light of God's Word. And this requires time, attention, and sincere devotion.

Why did James call the Word of God "the perfect law of liberty" in v.25)?
Because when we obey God's Word, God sets us free.

Daily Devotions

James 1:22 – 25; But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

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The second ministry of God's Word is:

Restoration (see Exodus 38:8).

When he built the tabernacle, Moses took the metal looking glasses of the women and from them made the laver. The laver was a huge basin that stood between the brazen altar of sacrifice and the holy place. **(Read Exodus 30:17 – 21 for details.)** The basin was filled with water, and the priests washed their hands and feet at the laver before they entered the holy place to minister.

Water for washing is a picture of the Word of God in its cleansing power. "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" **(see John 15:3)**. The church is sanctified and cleansed "with the washing of water by the word" **(see Ephesians 5:26)**. When the sinner trusts Christ, he is once and for all washed clean **(see 1 Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:4 – 6)**. But as the believer walks in this world, his hands and feet are defiled, and he needs cleansing **(see John 13:1 – 11)**.

The mirror of the Word not only examines us and reveals our sins, but it helps to cleanse us as well. It gives us the promise of cleansing **(see 1 John 1:9)** and, as we meditate on it, it cleanses the heart and the mind from spiritual defilement. It is the blood of Christ that cleanses the guilt, but the water of the Word helps to wash away the defilement.

Nathan's experience with David in 2 Samuel 12 helps to illustrate this truth. Nathan told David the story about the stolen ewe lamb, and David became angry at the sin described. "You are the man," said the prophet in v.7, and he held up the mirror of the Word for David to see himself. The result was confession and repentance in v.13; "I have sinned against the Lord!" The mirror of the Word did its work of examination.

But Nathan did not stop there. He also used the Word for restoration in v.13b; "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die" **(2 Sam. 12:13)**. Here was the assurance of forgiveness and cleansing, and it came from the Word. David visited the laver and washed his hands and feet.

If we stop with examination and restoration, we will miss the full benefit of the mirror ministry of the Word. There is a third ministry which we will look at tomorrow.

Daily Devotions

James 1:22 – 25; 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.

The third ministry of God's Word is:

Transformation (see 2 Corinthians 3:18).

After the Lord restores us, He wants to change us so that we will grow in grace and not commit that sin again. Too many Christians confess their sins and claim forgiveness, but never grow spiritually to conquer self and sin.

Second Corinthians 3 is a discussion of the contrasts between the old covenant ministry of law and the new covenant ministry of grace. The law is external, written on tablets of stone; but salvation means that God's Word is written on the heart. The old covenant ministry condemned and killed; but the new covenant ministry brings forgiveness and life. The glory of the law gradually disappeared, but the glory of God's grace becomes brighter and brighter. The law was temporary, but the new covenant of grace is eternal.

Paul's illustration of this truth is Moses and his veil. When Moses came down from the mount where he met God, his face was shining (see Exodus 34:29 – 35). He did not want the Jews to see this glory fading away, so he put on a veil to hide it. When he returned to the mount, he took off the veil. When Jesus died, the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom, and the veil between men and God was removed. The Old Testament prophet wore a veil to hide the fading of the glory. The New Testament believer has an unveiled face, and the glory gets greater and greater!

You may explain 2 Corinthians 3:18 in this way: "When the child of God looks into the Word of God [the glass, the mirror], he sees the Son of God, and he is transformed by the Spirit of God to share in the glory of God!" The word changed in the Greek gives us our English word metamorphosis – a change on the outside that comes from the inside.

When an ugly worm turns into a beautiful butterfly, this is metamorphosis. When a believer spends time looking into the Word and seeing Christ, he is transformed: the glory on the inside is revealed on the outside.

It is this word that is translated "transfigured" in Matthew 17:2. The glory of Christ on the mount was not reflected; it was radiated from within. You will find the same word in Romans 12:2: "But be transformed by the renewing of your mind." As we meditate on the Word, the Spirit renews the mind and reveals the glory of God. We do not become spiritual Christians overnight. It is a process, the work of the Spirit of God through the mirror of the Word of God.

The important thing is that we hide nothing. Take off the veil! "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (see Psalm 139:23 – 24). "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (see 1 John 1:8).

Our first responsibility is to receive the Word. Then, we must practice the Word; otherwise, we are deceiving ourselves. This leads to a third responsibility which we will look at tomorrow.

Daily Devotions

James 1:26 – 27; If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle (control) his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. ²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

This leads to a third responsibility which we will look at today is:

Share the Word

The word translated “religion” means “the outward practice, the service of a god.” It is used only five times in the entire New Testament (**James 1:26–27; Acts 26:5; and Col. 2:18, where it is translated “worshipping”**).

Pure religion has nothing to do with ceremonies, temples, or special days. Pure religion means practicing God's Word and sharing it with others, through speech, service, and separation from the world.

Speech (v. 26).

There are many references to speech in this letter, giving the impression that the tongue was a serious problem in the assembly (**see James 1:19; 2:12; 3:1–3, 14–18; 4:11–12**). It is the tongue that reveals the heart (**see Matthew 12:34 – 35**); if the heart is right, the speech will be right. A controlled tongue means a controlled body (**see James 3:1**).

Service (v. 27a).

After we have seen ourselves and Christ in the mirror of the Word, we must see others and their needs. Isaiah first saw the Lord, then himself, and then the people to whom he would minister (**see Isaiah 6:1 – 8**).

Separation from the world (v. 27b).

By “the world” James meant “society without God.” Satan is the prince of this world (**see John 14:30**), and the lost are the children of this world (**see Luke 16:8**). As the children of God, we are in the world physically but not of the world spiritually (**see John 17:11 – 16**). We are sent into the world to win others to Christ (**see John 17:18**). It is only as we maintain our separation from the world that we can serve others.

The world wants to “spot” the Christian and start to defile him. First, there is “friendship of the world” (**see James 4:4**), which can lead to a love for the world (**see 1 John 2:15 – 17**). If we are not careful, we will become conformed to this world (**see Romans 12:1 – 2**), and the result is being condemned with the world (**see 1 Corinthians 11:32**).

This does not suggest that we lose our salvation, but that we lose all we have lived for. Lot is an illustration of this principle. First, he pitched his tent toward Sodom, and then he moved into Sodom. Before long, Sodom moved into him and he lost his testimony even with his own family. When judgment fell on Sodom, Lot lost everything.

It was Abraham, the separated believer, the friend of God, who had a greater ministry to the people than did Lot, the friend of the world. It is not necessary for the Christian to get involved with the world to have a ministry to the world. Jesus was “unspotted” (**see 1 Peter 1:19**), and yet He was the friend of publicans and sinners. The best way to minister to the needs of the world is to be pure from the defilement of the world.

Tomorrow we start with chapter 2.

Daily Devotions

James 2:1 – 4; My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. 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, 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,” have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

The glorious faith we have, the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, should never be associated with partiality (favouritism or discrimination). The Lord of glory Himself shows no partiality (see **Deuteronomy 10:17 and Acts 10:34**) so neither should those who put their trust in Him.

James used strong words to refer to Jesus Christ as the Lord of glory. The Christian faith is here called very clearly, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of Glory.

This is especially significant because James is regarded as one of the first letters of the New Testament. This means that the earliest Christians considered Jesus to be God, and said so in strong, unmistakable words.

James uses the words; “show no partiality...” It is important to remember that James wrote to a very partial age, filled with favouritism, discrimination, prejudice, and hatred based on class, ethnicity, nationality, and religious background. In the ancient world people were routinely and permanently categorized because they were either Jew or Gentile, slave or free, rich, or poor, Greek or barbarian, etc.

A significant aspect of the work of Jesus was to break down these walls that divided humanity, and to bring forth one new human race in Him as we read in:

Ephesians 2:14 – 17; For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

The unity and openness of the early church was shocking to the ancient world. But this unity did not come automatically. As this command from James shows, the apostles had to teach the early church to never hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ... with partiality.

Jesus also rebuked religious hypocrites who looked good outwardly to others but looked awful inwardly to God (see **Matthew 7:15 and 23:7 – 8**).

Judging someone outwardly is easy – we do not need to meet them, get to know them, or learn anything about them. Getting to know someone inwardly is harder, because we need to approach them, ask questions, listen, and hear about their life journey and where they are at with Jesus Christ.

Is there anyone you have ever judged, before getting to know them that, once you got to know them, you realized they were actually kind and godly?

Daily Devotions

James 2:2 – 4; 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, 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," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

James wanted to help us practice God's Word, so he gave us a simple test. He sent two visitors to a church service, a rich man, and a poor man, and he watched to see how they were treated. The way we behave toward people indicates what we really believe about God. We cannot, and dare not separate human relationships from divine fellowship.

"If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." (see **1 John 4:20**).

v.2; "...a man with gold rings..." This showed the man was rich. "In Roman society the wealthy wore rings on their left hand in great profusion. A sign of wealth, rings were worn with great pride. There were even shops in Rome where rings could be rented for special occasions."

v.2; "...a poor man in shabby clothing..." "The word signifies one very poor, even to beggarliness."

To favour the rich man over the poor man in the way James described shows a deep carnality among Christians. Their evil thoughts are evident by their partial actions.

To show partiality shows that we care more for the outward appearance than we do upon the heart. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart (see **1 Samuel 16:7**). God looks at the heart, and so should we.

To show partiality shows that we misunderstand who is important and blessed in the sight of God. When we assume that the rich man is more important to God or more blessed by God, we put too much value in material riches.

To show partiality shows a selfishness in us. Usually, we favour the rich man over the poor man because we believe we can get more from the rich man. He can do favours for us that the poor man cannot.

Our Lord did not look at the outward appearance; He looked at the heart. He was not impressed with riches or social status. The poor widow who gave her last coins was greater in His eyes than the rich Pharisee who boastfully gave his large donation.

Can you remember a time you were the person who was rejected and outcast by family or friends?

How can that experience help you grow in empathy for others?

Daily Devotions

James 2:5 – 7; 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? But you have dishonoured the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honourable name by which you were called?

Though it is easy for man to be partial to the rich, God is not partial to them. In fact, since riches are an obstacle to the kingdom of God (**see Matthew 19:24**), there is a sense in which God specially blesses the poor of this world.

v.6; James says they are chosen... to be rich in faith because the poor of this world simply have more opportunities to trust God. Therefore, they may be richer in faith than the rich man. "The rich man may trust Him; but the poor man must... the poor man has no fortress (security) in which to hide, except the two strong arms of God."

We read in Matthew 11:5b that the poor have the good news preached to them. They believed on the Lord Jesus, and found His salvation. The poor are chosen in the sense that the poor more readily respond to God in faith, having fewer obstacles to the kingdom.

We should remind ourselves that God also never calls for partiality against the rich. If one must judge in a dispute between a rich man and a poor man, they should let the law and the facts of the case decide the judgment instead of the economic class of those in the dispute.

James reminded his readers that the rich often sin against them (**oppress you... drag you**). This is often because the love of money is the root of every kind of evil (**see 1 Timothy 6:10**). For this reason alone, the rich are not worthy of the partiality often shown to them.

How do we not make the same mistakes?

It is quite simple: look at everyone through the eyes of Christ. If the visitor is a Christian, we can accept him or her because Christ lives in them. If he or she is not a Christian, we can receive them because Christ died for them.

It is Christ who is the link between us and others, and He is a link of love. The basis for relationship with others is the person and work of Jesus Christ. Any other basis is not going to work.

In James' day, if you were in a synagogue, which was their church for Jewish people, this is actually how it was: you would buy your seat! So, on the holy days, when everyone was coming to church, you could have the seat you paid for. So, you knew who the rich and the poor were, even at church.

Church should be a family. When you go to a family dinner at your parents' house, for how many of you, your parents do not organize your seating at the dinner table by your income? If they do, those are probably some awkward Christmas dinners.

If someone comes into church, we should not treat them differently based upon their income level. In the family of God, we should love one another like brothers and sisters and should not operate the way the world does by economics.

How glad are you that church does not operate like a movie theatre, concert, or sporting event?

Daily Devotions

James 2:5 – 7; 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? But you have dishonoured the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honourable name by which you were called?

The emphasis here is on God's choosing, and this involves the grace of God.

God ignores social differences. Masters and slaves (see Ephesians 6:9) and rich and poor are alike to Him. James taught us that the grace of God makes the rich man poor, because he cannot depend on his wealth; and it makes the poor man rich, because he inherits the riches of grace in Christ. (see **James 1:9 – 11.**)

In **1 Samuel 2:7 – 8** we read; "The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and He exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; He lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honour."

From the human point of view, God chooses the poor instead of the rich.

1 Corinthians 1:26 – 27; "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong..."

It is possible to be poor in this world and rich in the next, or rich in this world and poor in the next (see **1 Timothy 6:17 – 18**). Or, you could be poor both in this world and the next, or rich in this world and the next. It all depends on what you do with Christ and the material wealth He has given you. God promises the kingdom to "those that love Him" (see **James 2:5**), not to those who love this world and its riches.

James gave a stern rebuke in James 2:6 – 7: "When you despise the poor man, you are behaving like the unsaved rich people." In that day, it was easy for rich persons to exploit the poor, influence decisions at court, and make themselves richer.

Unfortunately, we have the same sins being committed today; and these sins blaspheme the very name of Christ. Our Lord was poor, and He too was the victim of injustice by the wealthy leaders of His day.

God's grace, if we really believe it, forces us to relate to people on the basis of God's plan and not on the basis of human merit or social status. When He died, Jesus broke down the wall that separated Jews and Gentiles (see **Ephesians 2:11 – 22**).

But in His birth and life, Jesus broke down the walls between rich and poor, young, and old, educated, and uneducated. It is wrong for us to build those walls again; we cannot rebuild them if we believe in the grace of God.

Daily Devotions

James 2:8 – 10; if you really fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself,” you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.

James anticipated that some of his readers might defend their partiality to the rich as simply loving the rich man as their neighbour in obedience to the law.

The problem is not that one is nice to the rich. The problem is that one does show partiality to the rich, and is not nice to the poor man! So, you cannot excuse your partiality by saying, “I’m just fulfilling the command to love my neighbour as myself.”

In His parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus told us that our neighbour is anyone who needs our help (**see Luke 10:25 – 37**). It is not a matter of geography, but opportunity. The important question is not, “Who is my neighbour?” but “To whom can I be a neighbour?”

James reminds his readers that the poor man is just as much their neighbour as the rich man.

Why is “love your neighbour” called “the royal law”?

For one thing, it was given by the King. God the Father gave it in the law, and God the Son reaffirmed it to His disciples (**see John 13:34**). God the Spirit fills our hearts with God’s love and expects us to share it with others (**see Romans 5:5**). True believers are “taught of God to love one another” (**see 1 Thessalonians 4:9**).

But “love your neighbour” is the royal law for a second reason: it rules all the other laws. “Love is the fulfilling of the law” (**see Romans 13:10**). There would be no need for the thousands of complex laws if each citizen truly loved his neighbours.

But the main reason why this is the royal law is that obeying it makes you a king. Hatred makes a person a slave, but love sets us free from selfishness and enables us to reign like kings. Love enables us to obey the Word of God and treat people as God commands us to do. We obey His law, not out of fear, but out of love.

There is only one Lawgiver, and all of His laws are from His mind and heart. If I disobey one law, I am capable of disobeying all of them; and by rebelling, I have already done so.

Christian love does not mean that I must like a person and agree with him or her on everything. I may not like his vocabulary or his habits, and I may not want him as a close friend.

Christian love means treating others the way God has treated me. It is an act of the will, not an emotion that I try to manufacture. The motive is to glorify God. The means is the power of the Spirit within (“for the fruit of the Spirit is love”). As I act in love toward another, I may find myself drawn more and more to him, and I may see in him (through Christ) qualities that before were hidden to me.

Love should help the poor man do better; love should help the rich man make better use of his God-given resources. Love always builds up (**see 1 Corinthians 8:1**); hatred always tears down.

Daily Devotions

James 2:10 – 13; For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. 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. So, speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

James here guards us against a selective obedience, the sort that will pick and choose which commands of God should be obeyed and which can be safely disregarded.

We cannot say, “I like God’s command against murder, so I will keep that one. But I do not like His command against adultery, so I will disregard it.” God cares about the whole law.

The Judgment of God:

- Our words will be judged.

Note the words spoken to the two visitors in James 2:3. What we say to people, and how we say it, will come up before God. Even our careless words will be judged (**see Matthew 12:36**). Of course, the words we speak come from the heart; so, when God judges the words, He is examining the heart (**see Matthew 12:34 – 37**). Jesus emphasized caution when speaking in some of His warnings in the Sermon on the Mount (**see Matthew 5:21 – 26; 33 – 37; 7:1 – 5; 21–23**).

- Our deeds will be judged.

Read Colossians 3:22 – 25 for additional insight. It is true that God remembers our sins against us no more (**see Jeremiah 31:34 and Hebrews 10:17**), but our sins affect our character and works. We cannot sin lightly and serve faithfully. God forgives our sins when we confess them to Him, but He cannot change their consequences.

- Our attitudes will be judged.

James contrasted two attitudes: showing mercy to others, and refusing to show mercy. If we have been merciful toward others, God can be merciful toward us.

However, we must not twist this truth into a lie. It does not mean that we earn mercy by showing mercy, because it is impossible to earn mercy. If it is earned, it is not mercy! Nor does it mean that we should “be soft on sin” and never judge it in the lives of others.

Mercy and justice both come from God, so they are not competitors. Where God finds repentance and faith, He is able to show mercy; where He finds rebellion and unbelief, He must administer justice.

It is the heart of the sinner that determines the treatment he gets. Our Lord’s parable in Matthew 18:21 – 35 illustrates the truth. The parable is not illustrating salvation, but forgiveness between fellow servants. If we forgive our brothers, then we have the kind of heart that is open toward the forgiveness of God.

Daily Devotions

James 2:10 – 13; For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. 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. So, speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

We shall be judged “by the law of liberty.” Why did James use this title for God’s law? For one thing, when we obey God’s law, it frees us from sin and enables us to walk in liberty (**see Psalm 119:45**).

Also, law prepares us for liberty. A child must be under rules and regulations because he is not mature enough to handle the decisions and demands of life. He is given outward discipline so that he might develop inward discipline, and one day be free of rules.

Liberty does not mean license. License (doing whatever I want to do) is the worst kind of bondage. Liberty means the freedom to be all that I can be in Jesus Christ. License is confinement; liberty is fulfilment.

Finally, the Word is called “the law of liberty” because God sees our hearts and knows what we would have done had we been free to do so. The Christian student who obeys only because the school has rules is not really maturing. What will he do when he leaves the school? God’s Word can change our hearts and give us the desire to do God’s will, so that we obey from inward compulsion and not outward constraint.

There is one obvious message to this section: our beliefs should control our behaviour. If we really believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that God is gracious, His Word is true, and one day He will judge us, then our conduct will reveal our convictions. Before we attack those, who do not have the same beliefs, we must be sure that we practice the Word we defend.

One of the tests of the reality of our faith is how we treat other people.

Can we pass the test?

Daily Devotions

James 2:14 – 16; What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 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?

Faith is a key doctrine in the Christian life. The sinner is saved by faith (see **Ephesians 2:8 – 9**), and the believer must walk by faith (see **2 Corinthians 5:7**). Without faith it is impossible to please God (see **Hebrews 11:6**), and whatever we do apart from faith is sin (see **Romans 14:23**).

When you read Hebrews 11, you meet men and women who acted on God’s Word, no matter what price they had to pay. Faith is not some kind of weird feeling that we work up; faith is confidence that God’s Word is true and conviction that acting on that Word will bring His blessing.

In this paragraph, James discussed the relationship between faith and works. This is an important discussion, for if we are wrong in this matter, we jeopardize our eternal salvation. What kind of faith really saves a person? Is it necessary to perform good works in order to be saved? How can a person tell whether or not he is exercising true saving faith? James answered these questions by explaining to us that there are three kinds of faith, only one of which is true saving faith.

1. Dead Faith (2:14 – 17)

Even in the early church there were those who claimed they had saving faith, yet did not possess salvation. Wherever there is the true, you will find the counterfeit. Jesus warned, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (see **Matthew 7:21**).

People with dead faith substitute words for deeds. They know the correct vocabulary for prayer and testimony, and can even quote the right verses from the Bible, but their walk does not measure up to their talk. They think that their words are as good as works, and they are wrong.

James gave a simple illustration. A poor believer came into a fellowship, without proper clothing and in need of food. The person with dead faith noticed the visitor and saw his needs, but he did not do anything to meet the needs. All he did was say a few words! “Go, in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? (see **James 2:16**). But the visitor went away just as hungry and naked as he came in!

Food and clothing are basic needs of every human being, whether he is saved or unsaved. “But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.” (see **1 Timothy 6:8**). “Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, ‘what shall we eat?’ or, ‘what shall we drink?’ or, ‘what shall we wear?’ ... your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.” (see **Matthew 6:31 – 32**). Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “if God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. (see **Genesis 28:20 – 21**).

How can you help someone in need today?

Daily Devotions

James 2:14 – 16; What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 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?

We continue to look at dead faith:

As believers, we have an obligation to help meet the needs of people, no matter who they may be. “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (see **Galatians 6:10**). And the King will answer them, truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” (see Matthew 25:40).

To help a person in need is an expression of love, and faith works through love (see Galatians 5:6). The apostle John emphasized this aspect of good works. “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?”

Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.” (see **1 John 3:17 – 18**). The priest and Levite in the parable of the good Samaritan each had religious training, but neither of them paused to assist the dying man at the side of the road (see **Luke 10:25 – 37**). Each of them would defend his faith, yet neither demonstrated that faith in loving works.

The question in James 2:14 should read, “can that kind of faith save him?” What kind? The kind of faith that is never seen in practical works. The answer is no! Any declaration of faith that does not result in a changed life and good works is a false declaration. That kind of faith is dead faith. “So also, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (see **James 2:17**).

The great theologian John Calvin wrote, “It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies can never be alone.”

The word alone in James 2:17 simply means “by itself.” True saving faith can never be by itself: it always brings life, and life produces good works.

The person with dead faith has only an intellectual experience. In his mind, he knows the doctrines of salvation, but he has never submitted himself to God and trusted Christ for salvation. He knows the right words, but he does not back up his words with his works.

Faith in Christ brings life (see John 3:16), and where there is life there must be growth and fruit. Three times in this paragraph, James warned us that “faith without works is dead” (see **James 2:17, 20, 26**).

Beware of a mere intellectual faith. No man can come to Christ by faith and remain the same any more than he can come into contact with a 220-volt electric wire and remain the same. “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (see **1 John 5:12**). Dead faith is not saving faith. Dead faith is counterfeit faith and leads the person into a false confidence of eternal life.

Tomorrow we will look at; demonic faith (v.18 – 19)

Daily Devotions

James 2:18 – 19; 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. You believe that God is one, you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder.

2. Demonic faith (v.18 – 19)

James wanted to shock his complacent readers, so he used demons as his illustration. In recent years the church has rediscovered the reality and activity of demons. When our Lord was ministering on earth, He often cast out demons, and He gave that power to His disciples. Paul often confronted demonic forces in his ministry, and in Ephesians 6:10 – 20, he admonished the early Christians to use God’s protection and defeat the spiritual forces of wickedness.

It comes as a shock to people that demons have faith! What do they believe? For one thing, they believe in the existence of God; they are neither atheists nor agnostics. They also believe in the deity of Christ.

Whenever they met Christ when He was on earth, they bore witness to His sonship (see **Mark 3:11 – 12**). They believe in the existence of a place of punishment (see **Luke 8:31**), and they also recognize Jesus Christ as the Judge (see **Mark 5:1 – 13**). They submit to the power of His Word.

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord!” (**Deut. 6:4**) This was the daily affirmation of faith of the godly Jew. “You believe that there is one God. Good!

Even the demons believe that and shudder” (see **James 2:19**). The man with dead faith was touched only in his intellect, but the demons are touched also in their emotions. They believe and tremble.

But it is not a saving experience to believe and tremble. A person can be enlightened in his mind and even stirred in his heart and be lost forever. True saving faith involves something more, something that can be seen and recognized: a changed life. “Show me your faith apart from your works,” challenged James, “and I will show you my faith by my works” (see James 2:18).

How could a person show his faith without works? Can a dead sinner perform good works? Impossible! When you trust Christ, you are “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (see **Ephesians 2:10**).

Being a Christian involves trusting Christ and living for Christ; you receive the life, then you reveal the life. Faith that is barren is not saving faith. The Greek word translated “dead” in James 2:20 carries the meaning of “barren or idle,” like money drawing no interest.

James has introduced us to two kinds of faith that can never save the sinner: dead faith (the intellect alone), and demonic faith (the intellect and the emotions).

He closes this section by describing the only kind of faith that can save the sinner – dynamic faith.

Tomorrow we will look at; dynamic faith (v.20 – 26)

Daily Devotions

James 2:20 – 26; Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works, 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. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 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? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

3. Dynamic faith (v.20 – 26)

Dynamic faith is faith that is real, faith that has power, faith that results in a changed life.

James described this true saving faith. To begin with, dynamic saving faith is based on the Word of God. We receive our spiritual rebirth through God's Word (**see James 1:18**). We receive the Word and this saves us (**see James 1:21**). "So, then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (**see Romans 10:17**). James used Abraham and Rahab as illustrations of dynamic saving faith, since both of them heard and received the message of God through His Word.

Faith is only as good as its object. The man in the jungle bows before an idol of stone and trusts it to help him, but he receives no help. No matter how much faith a person may generate, if it is not directed at the right object, it will accomplish nothing. "I believe" may be the testimony of many sincere people, but the big question is, "In whom do you believe? What do you believe?" We are not saved by faith in faith; we are saved by faith in Christ as revealed in His Word.

Dynamic faith is based on God's Word, and it involves the whole man. Dead faith touches only the intellect; demonic faith involves both the mind and the emotions; but dynamic faith involves the will. The whole person plays a part in true saving faith. The mind understands the truth; the heart desires the truth; and the will acts upon the truth. The men and women of faith named in Hebrews 11 were people of action: God spoke and they obeyed. Again, "Faith is not believing in spite of evidence; faith is obeying in spite of consequence. "

True saving faith leads to action. Dynamic faith is not intellectual contemplation or emotional consternation; it leads to obedience on the part of the will. And this obedience is not an isolated event: it continues throughout the whole life. It leads to works.

Many different kinds of works are named in the New Testament. "The works of the law" (**see Galatians 2:16**) relate to the sinner's attempt to please God by obeying the law of Moses. Of course, it is impossible for a sinner to be saved through the works of the law. "The works of the flesh" (see Galatians 5:19) are done by unsaved people who live for the things of the old nature. There are also "wicked works" (**see Colossians 1:21**) and "dead works" (**see Hebrews 9:14**). Where there is dynamic faith saving faith, you will always find good works.

James then illustrated his doctrine in the lives of two well-known Bible persons: Abraham and Rahab and tomorrow we will read more about examples of faith.

Daily Devotions

James 2:23 – 25; ...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. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 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?

James illustrated his doctrine in the lives of two well-known Bible persons: Abraham and Rahab and tomorrow we will read more about examples of faith. You could not find two more different persons! Abraham was a Jew; Rahab was a Gentile. Abraham was a godly man, but Rahab was a sinful woman, a harlot.

Abraham was the friend of God, while Rahab belonged to the enemies of God. What did they have in common? Both exercised saving faith in God.

You will want to read Genesis 15 and 22 to get the background facts for this illustration. God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees to lead him into Canaan and to make out of him the great nation of Israel. It was through Israel that God would bring the Savior into the world. Abraham’s salvation experience is recorded in Genesis 15. At night, God showed His servant the stars and gave him a promise, “So shall your offspring be. And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him (Abraham) as righteousness.” (**see Genesis 15:5 – 6**).

The word counted is a legal or financial term; it means “to put to one’s account.” As a sinner, Abraham’s spiritual bankbook was empty. He was bankrupt! But he trusted God, and God put righteous on Abraham’s account. Abraham did not work for this righteousness; he received it as a gift from God. He was declared righteous by faith. He was justified by faith (**read Romans 4**). Justification is an important doctrine in the Bible.

Justification is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous on the basis of Christ’s finished work on the cross. It is not a process; it is an act. It is not something the sinner does; it is something God does for the sinner when he trusts Christ. It is a once-for-all event. It never changes.

How can you tell if a person is justified by faith if this transaction takes place between the sinner and God privately? Abraham’s example answers that important question: the justified person has a changed life and obeys God’s will. His faith is demonstrated by his works.

James used another event in Abraham’s life, an event that took place many years after Abraham’s conversion.

This event is the offering up of Isaac on the altar in Genesis 22. Abraham was not saved by obeying God’s difficult command. His obedience proved that he already was saved. “You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.” (**see James 2:22**). There is a perfect relationship between faith and works. As someone once said; “Abraham was not saved by faith plus works, but by a faith that works.”

How was Abraham “justified by works,” when he had already been “justified by faith” (**see Romans 4**)? By faith, he was justified before God and his righteousness declared; by works he was justified before men and his righteousness demonstrated. It is true that no humans saw Abraham put his son on the altar, but the inspired record in Genesis 22 enables us to see the event and witness Abraham’s faith demonstrated by his works.

Daily Devotions

James 2:24 – 26; You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 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? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

His second illustration is Rahab, and the background for her is found in Joshua 2 and 6. Israel was about to invade their promised land and take the city of Jericho. Joshua sent spies into the city to get the lay of the land. There they met Rahab, a harlot, who protected them and affirmed that she believed in what God had said and what God was going to do. When the men departed, they promised to save her and her family when the city was taken, and this they did.

It is an exciting story. But in it is one of the Bible's great examples of saving faith (**see Hebrews 11:31**). Rahab heard the Word and knew that her city was condemned. This truth affected her and her fellow citizens so that their hearts melted within them (**see Joshua 2:11**).

Rahab responded with her mind and her emotions, but she also responded with her will: she did something about it. She risked her own life to protect the Jewish spies, and she further risked her life by sharing the good news of deliverance with the members of her family.

The Hebrew word translated "harlot" in Joshua 2 can also have the wider meaning of "an innkeeper." Rahab ran a guest house, so it was normal for the spies to go there. The Greek word "harlot" in James 2:25 definitely means an immoral person. This is also the meaning in Hebrews 11:31. Matthew 1:5 indicates she married into Israel and became an ancestress of our Lord. What grace! Rahab is one of the first soul-winners in the Bible, and you cannot help but compare her with the "bad Samaritan" in John 4.

Rahab could have had dead faith, a mere intellectual experience. Or she could have had demonic faith, her mind enlightened and her emotions stirred. But she exercised dynamic faith: her mind knew the truth, her heart was stirred by the truth, and her will acted on the truth. She proved her faith by her works.

When you realize the small amount of information Rahab had, you can see how truly marvellous her faith really was. Today we have the full revelation of God through His Word and His Son. We live on the other side of Calvary, and we have the Holy Spirit to convict and to teach us the Word. "Everyone to whom much is given, of him much will be required" (**see Luke 12:48**). Her faith is an indictment against the unbelief of sinners today.

James 2 emphasized that the mature Christian practices the truth. He does not merely hold to ancient doctrines; he practices those doctrines in his everyday life. His faith is not the dead faith of the intellectuals or the demonic faith of the fallen spirits. It is the dynamic faith of men like Abraham and women like Rahab, faith that changes a life and goes to work for God.

It is important that each professing Christian examine his own heart and life and make sure that he possesses true saving faith, dynamic faith. "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves..." (**see 2 Corinthians 13:5a**).

Satan is the great deceiver; one of his devices is imitation. If he can convince a person that counterfeit faith is true faith, he has that person in his power.

Daily Devotions

James 3:1 – 2; Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. 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.

THE TONGUE; the world's smallest but largest troublemaker

James has explained to us two characteristics of the mature Christian: he is patient in trouble (**see James 1**) and he practices the truth (**see James 2**). In this section, he shared the third characteristic of the mature believer he has power over his tongue.

The Christians that James wrote to were apparently having serious problems with their tongues. James had warned them to be "quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (**see James 1:19**). The believer who does not bridle (control) his tongue is not truly mature (**see James 1:26**). We must speak and act as though we were already facing Christ in judgment (**see James 2:12**). When you read passages like James 4:1, 11 – 12, you get the impression that this congregation must have had some interesting meetings!

The power of speech is one of the greatest powers God has given us. With the tongue, man can praise God, pray, preach the Word, and lead an unbeliever to Christ. What a privilege! But with that same tongue he can tell lies that could ruin a man's reputation or break a person's heart. The ability to speak words is the ability to influence others and accomplish tremendous tasks, and yet we take this ability for granted.

In order to impress on us the importance of controlled speech, and the great consequences of our words, James gave us six pictures of the tongue: the bit, the rudder, fire, a poisonous animal, a fountain, and a fig tree. You can put these six pictures into three meaningful classifications that reveal the three powers of the tongue.

1st power of the tongue:

1. Power to direct: the Bit and Rudder

Apparently, everybody in the congregation wanted to teach and be a spiritual leader, for James had to warn them: "Not many of you should act as teachers, my brothers" (**see James 3:1**). Perhaps they were impressed with the authority and prestige of the office and forgot about the tremendous responsibility and accountability! Those who teach the Word face the stricter judgment. Teachers must use their tongue to share God's truth, and it is easy to commit sins of the tongue.

Furthermore, teachers must practice what they teach; otherwise, their teaching is hypocrisy. Think of the damage that can be done by a teacher who is unprepared.

But teachers are not the only ones who are tempted and sin; every Christian must admit that "we all stumble in many ways..." (**see James 3:2**). And sins of the tongue seem to head the list. The person who is able to discipline his tongue gives evidence that he can control his whole body. He proves that he is a mature (perfect) man.

Tomorrow we will continue to look at the power of the tongue to direct.

Daily Devotions

James 3:2 – 4; 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. If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 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.

Was James making a mistake by connecting sins of the tongue with sins committed by “the whole body”? No, because words usually lead to deeds, and loose lips can wreck lives. A person makes an unguarded statement and suddenly finds himself involved in a fight. His tongue has forced the rest of his body to defend itself.

In selecting the bit and the rudder, James presented two items that are small of themselves, yet exercise great power, just like the tongue. A small bit enables the rider to control the great horse, and a small rudder enables the pilot to steer the huge ship. The tongue is a small member in the body, and yet it has the power to accomplish great things.

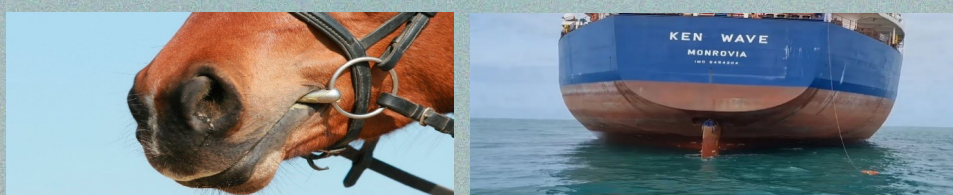
Both the bit and the rudder must overcome contrary forces. The bit must overcome the wild nature of the horse, and the rudder must fight the winds and currents that would drive the ship off its course. The human tongue also must overcome contrary forces. We have an old nature that wants to control us and make us sin. There are circumstances around us that would make us say things we ought not to say. Sin on the inside and pressures on the outside are seeking to get control of the tongue.

This means that both the bit and the rudder must be under the control of a strong hand. The expert horseman keeps the mighty power of his steed under control, and the experienced pilot courageously steers the ship through the storm. When Jesus Christ controls the tongue, then we need not fear saying the wrong things or even saying the right things in a wrong way!

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue,” warned Solomon in Proverbs 18:21. No wonder David prayed, “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips. Incline not my heart to any evil thing.” (see **Psalm 141:3 – 4**). David knew that the heart is the key to right speech. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” (see **Matthew 12:34**). When Jesus Christ is the Lord of the heart, then He is Lord of the lips too.

The bit and rudder have the power to direct, which means they affect the lives of others. A runaway horse or a shipwreck could mean injury or death to pedestrians or passengers. The words we speak affect the lives of others.

Never underestimate the guidance you give by the words you speak or do not speak. Jesus spoke to a woman at a well, and her life and the lives of her neighbours experienced a miraculous change (see **John 4**). Peter preached at Pentecost and three thousand souls came to salvation through faith in Christ (see **Acts 2**). Yes, the tongue is like a bit and a rudder: it has the power to direct. How important it is that our tongues direct people in the right way!



Daily Devotions

James 3:5 – 7; 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! 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.

2nd Power of the tongue:

2. Power to destroy: the Fire and Animal

A fire can begin with just a small spark, but it can grow to destroy a city. Our words can start fires. "For lack of wood, the fire goes out, and where there is no whisper, quarrelling ceases. As charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife." (see **Proverbs 26:20 – 21**).

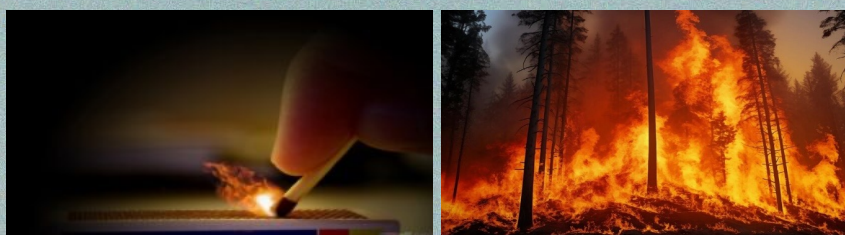
Like a fire, the tongue can "heat things up." David wrote, "I said, 'I will guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue.'... v.3; My heart became hot within me. As I mused, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue" (see **Psalm 39:1, 3**). Have you ever had that experience?

Of course you have! A hot head and a hot heart can lead to burning words that later we will regret David had a temper, and he had to have God's help in controlling it. No wonder Solomon wrote, "whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding." (see **Proverbs 17:27**). "Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly." (see **Proverbs 14:29**).

Fire not only starts small and grows, and creates heat; it also defiles. Fiery words can defile a home, a Sunday school class, a church. The only thing that can wash away that defilement is the blood of Jesus Christ.

Fire burns and hurts, and our words can burn and hurt. One of the sorrows our Lord had to bear when He was here on earth was the way His enemies talked about Him. They called Him a "man gluttonous and a drunkard..." (see **Matthew 11:19**) because He graciously accepted invitations to dine with people the Pharisees did not like. When He performed miracles, they said He had a demon. Even when He was dying on the cross, His enemies could not let Him alone but threw vicious insults at His face.

Fire spreads, and the more fuel you give it, the faster and farther it will spread. The tongue "setting on fire the entire course of life..." (see **James 3:6**). James suggested that all of life is connected like a wheel, and therefore we cannot keep things from spreading. A person's entire life can be injured or destroyed by the tongue. Time does not correct the sins of the tongue. We may confess our sins of speech, but the fire keeps on spreading. As it spreads, fire destroys, and the words we speak have the power to destroy. Our own words may not have caused wars or wrecked cities, but they can break hearts and ruin reputations.



Daily Devotions

James 3:7 – 8; For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

2nd Power of the tongue:

2. Power to destroy: the Fire and Animal

Not only is the tongue like a fire, but it is also like a dangerous animal. It is restless and cannot be ruled (unruly), and it seeks its prey and then pounces and kills.

Some animals are poisonous, and some tongues spread poison. The deceptive thing about poison is that it works secretly and slowly, and then kills. How many times has some malicious person injected a bit of poison into the conversation, hoping it would spread and finally get to the person he or she wanted to hurt?

Would you turn hungry lions or angry snakes loose in your Sunday morning service? Of course not! But unruly tongues accomplish the same results.

James reminds us that animals can be tamed, and, for that matter, fire can be tamed. When you tame an animal, you get a worker instead of a destroyer. When you control fire, you generate power. The tongue cannot be tamed by man, but it can be tamed by God.

Your tongue need not be “set on fire of hell” (**see James 3:6**). Like the apostles at Pentecost, it can be set on fire from heaven! If God lights the fire and controls it, then the tongue can be a mighty tool for the winning of the lost and the building up of the church.

The important thing, of course, is the heart, for it is “out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks” (**see Matthew 12:34**). If the heart is filled with hatred, Satan will light the fire. But if the heart is filled with love, God will light the fire.



Daily Devotions

James 3:9 – 12; With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

3rd Power of the tongue:

3. Power to delight: the Fountain and Tree

The fountain, of course, provides the cool water that man needs to stay alive. In underdeveloped countries, the presence of a freshwater fountain is a great blessing to a village. Man needs water not only for drinking, but also for washing, cooking, farming, and a host of other activities so necessary to life.

“The words of a man’s mouth are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook” (see **Proverbs 18:4**). “The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life” (see **Proverbs 10:11**). “The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death” (see **Proverbs 13:14**). These verses parallel what James has written and underscore the importance of our words.

Water is life-giving, and our words can give life. However, if water is not controlled, it brings death and destruction. “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (see **Proverbs 18:21**).

However, when we bend over a fountain for a drink of cool water, we rarely think of floods. We think only of the precious gift of refreshment that comes with a drink of water. We could not be healthy without water. “There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” (see **Proverbs 12:18**).

Paul’s prayer was that he might “refresh” the saints in Rome when he came to them (see **Romans 15:32**). He often named Christians who had refreshed him (see **1 Corinthians 16:18; Philemon 7, 20**).

Water also cleanses. There was a laver in the Old Testament tabernacle and temple, provided for the cleansing of the priests’ hands and feet. God’s Word is the spiritual water that cleanses us (**John 15:3; Eph. 5:26–27**). But our words to others can also help to cleanse and sanctify them. Our words ought to be like that river described in Ezekiel 47 that brought life to everything it touched.



Daily Devotions

James 3:9 – 12; With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

3rd Power of the tongue:

3. Power to delight: the Fountain and Tree

The tongue is also delightful because it is like a tree. In Bible lands, trees are vitally important to the economy: they help to hold down the soil; they provide beauty and shade; and they bear fruit.

Our words can help to shelter and encourage a weary traveller, and can help to feed a hungry soul. "The lips of the righteous feed many" (see **Proverbs 10:21**). Jesus said, "The words that I speak to you, they are spirit, and they are life" (see **John 6:63**). As we share God's Word with others, we feed them and encourage them along the way.

The most important thing about a tree is the root system. If the roots do not go down deep, the tree will not grow in a healthy manner. If we are rooted in the things of the Lord, then our words will be the fruit of our fellowship with Him. We will be like that "blessed man" in Psalm 1 and produce fruit in due season. One reason our Lord was able to say the right words at the right times was because He communed with His Father and heard from heaven each day.

Listen to His testimony: "The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught." (see **Isaiah 50:4**). "And rising very early in the morning, while it is still dark, He departed and went out to a desolate place, and there He prayed." (see **Mark 1:35**).

If you and I are going to have tongues that delight, then we must meet with the Lord each day and learn from Him. We must get our "spiritual roots" deep into His Word. We must pray and meditate and permit the Spirit of God to fill our hearts with God's love and truth.

But James issued a warning: a fountain cannot give forth two kinds of water, and a tree cannot bear two different kinds of fruit. We expect the fountain to flow with sweet water at all times, and we expect the fig tree to bear figs and the olive tree to bear olives. Nature reproduces after its kind.

If the tongue is inconsistent, there is something radically wrong with the heart. The tongue that blesses the Father, and then turns around and curses men made in God's image, is in desperate need of spiritual medicine! How easy it is to sing the hymns during the worship service, then after the service, get into the family car and argue and fight all the way home!

The problem, of course, is not the tongue; it is the heart. It is easy to have "bitter envying and strife" in our hearts (see **James 3:14**). "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man" (see **Matthew 15:18**). "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." (see **Proverbs 4:23**). As we fill our hearts with God's Word and yield to the Holy Spirit, He can use us to bring delight to others, and be refreshing fountains and trees.

Daily Devotions

James 3:9 – 12; With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

Let me suggest that you start using the **“Twelve Words That Can Transform Your Life.”**

If you use these words and sincerely mean what you say from your heart, you will find that God will use you to be a blessing and encouragement to others. There are only twelve of them, but they work.

“Please” and “Thank you.”

When you use these three words, you are treating others like people and not things. You are showing appreciation.

“I’m sorry.”

These two words have a way of breaking down walls and building bridges.

“I love you.”

Too many people read “romance” into these words, but they go much deeper than that. As Christians, we should love the brethren and even love our enemies. “I love you” is a statement that can carry tremendous power.

“I’m praying for you.”

And be sure that you are. When you talk to God about people, then you can talk to people about God. Our private praying for people helps us in our public meeting with people. Of course, we never say “I’m praying for you” in a boastful way, as though we are more spiritual than others. We say it in an encouraging way, to let others know that we care enough for them to meet them at the throne of grace.

Yes, the smallest but largest troublemaker in all the world is the tongue. But it does not have to be a troublemaker! God can use our tongues to direct others into the way of life, and to delight them in the trials of life. The tongue is a little member, but it has great power.

Give God your tongue and your heart each day and ask Him to use you to be a blessing to others.

Daily Devotions

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

Wisdom was important to the Jewish people. They realized that it was not enough to have knowledge; you had to have wisdom to be able to use that knowledge correctly. Solomon tells us that; “wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom” (see **Proverbs 4:7**).

James explains the difference of true wisdom and false wisdom in three different aspects.

1. Different in origins (v.15, 17a)

True wisdom comes from above, but the false wisdom comes from below. In other words, there is a “heavenly wisdom” that comes from God, and there is a “man-made wisdom” that does not come from God. Whatever does not come from God is destined to fail, no matter how successful it may seem at the time.

The Bible contains many examples of the foolishness of man’s wisdom. The building of the Tower of Babel seemed like a wise plan, but it ended in failure and confusion (see **Genesis 11:1 – 9**). It seemed wise for Abraham to go to Egypt when famine came to Canaan, but the results proved otherwise (see **Genesis 12:10 – 20**).

King Saul thought it was wise to put his own armour on young David for the lad’s battle with Goliath, but God’s plan was otherwise (see **1 Samuel 17:38ff.**). The disciples thought it was wise to dismiss the great crowd and let them find their own food; but Jesus took a few loaves and fishes and fed the multitude.

What is the origin of man’s wisdom?

“This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.” (see **James 3:15**). The believer has three enemies: the world (earthly), the unspiritual (flesh), and the demonic.

The first two chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul had a lot to say about God’s wisdom and man’s wisdom. Man’s wisdom is foolishness to God (see **1 Corinthians 1:20**), and God’s wisdom is foolishness to man (see **1 Corinthians 2:14**). Man’s wisdom comes from reason, while God’s wisdom comes from revelation. Man’s worldly wisdom will come to nothing (see **1 Corinthians 1:19**), while God’s wisdom will endure forever.

Tomorrow we will continue with the origin of man’s wisdom

Daily Devotions

James 3:13 – 15; Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

What is the origin of man's wisdom?

But this false wisdom has another source: it is "unspiritual." The main idea seems to be that of man's fallen nature as opposed to the new nature given by God. There is a wisdom that gets its origin in man's nature totally apart from the Spirit of God.

But this "wisdom that is from beneath" is also "demonic."

Beginning with Genesis 3, where Satan successfully deceived Eve, and continuing through the entire Bible, there is a "wisdom of Satan" at work, fighting against the wisdom of God. Satan convinced Eve that she would be like God. He told her that the tree would make her wise. Ever since that event, people have continued to believe Satan's lies and have tried to become their own gods (see **Romans 1:18 – 25**). Satan is cunning; he is the old serpent! He has wisdom that will confound and confuse you if you do not know the wisdom of God.

In contrast to the wisdom that is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic, James describes a "wisdom that is from above" (see **James 3:17**).

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (see **James 1:17**). The believer looks up to heaven for all that he needs. His citizenship is in heaven (see **Philippians 3:20**), just as his Father is in heaven (see **Matthew 6:9**). His treasures are in heaven, not on earth (see **Matthew 6:19ff.**). He was born from above (see **John 3:1 – 7**) when he trusted Jesus Christ. The believer's home is in heaven (see **John 14:1 – 6**) and his hope is in heaven. He sets his affection and attention on things above, not on earthly things (see **Colossians 3:1 – 4**).

Where do we find wisdom?

We begin with Jesus Christ He is our wisdom (see **1 Corinthians 1:24, 30**). In Jesus Christ "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (see **Colossians 2:3**). The first step toward true wisdom is the receiving of Jesus Christ as Savior.

The Word of God is also our wisdom.

"Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments.... Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and you are understanding in the sight of the nations" (see **Deuteronomy 4:5 – 6**). The Scriptures are able to make us "wise unto salvation" (see **2 Timothy 3:15**).

We find wisdom through believing prayer.

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." (see **James 1:5**).

The Holy Spirit of God is "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation" (see **Ephesians 1:17**), and He directs us in the wisest paths as we trust the Word and pray. The origin of true spiritual wisdom is God. To get your wisdom from any other source is to ask for trouble.

Tomorrow we will see that because true and false wisdom originate from radically different sources, they must operate in opposite ways.

Daily Devotions

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

2. Contrast in operations (v.13 – 14, 17)

The wisdom from above, God’s wisdom, operates in a different way from the wisdom that is “earthly, unspiritual, demonic.” Since they originate from radically different sources, they must operate in opposite ways.

What are the evidences or characteristics of false wisdom?

Jealousy or envy (v. 14a). This word carries the meaning of selfish ambition and zeal. It ties in with James 3:1, where James warned them not to be ambitious for spiritual offices. The wisdom of the world says, “Promote yourself. You are as good as the other candidates, maybe better!” Sad to say, there is a great deal of selfish, carnal promotion among God’s people. Even the apostles argued over who was the greatest in the kingdom.

The Pharisees used their religious activities to promote the praise of men (**see Matthew 6:1 – 18**). We ought to be zealous in the things of the Lord, but we must be sure that our motives are right. The wisdom of this world exalts man and robs God of glory.

In 1 Corinthians 1:17; Paul discussed the wisdom of God and the wisdom of this world, and he explained why God works as He does: “That no flesh should glory in his presence” (**see 1 Corinthians 1:29**). He concluded the section with the admonition, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord” (**see 1 Corinthians 1:31**).

Is our zeal for the Lord spiritual or carnal? Do we rejoice when others succeed, or do we have secret envy and criticism? Do we feel burdened when others fail, or are we glad? When the wisdom of the world gets into the church, there is a great deal of fleshly promotion and human glorification. Beware!

Selfish ambition or strife (v. 14b). This word strife means “party spirit.” It was used by the Greeks to describe a politician out canvassing for votes. The world’s wisdom says, “Get all the support you can! Ask the people in the church if they are for you or against you!” Of course, this spirit of self-seeking only creates rivalry and division in the church.

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than [more important than] themselves” (**see Philippians 2:3**).

Tomorrow we will continue to look at the other characteristics of false wisdom

Daily Devotions

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

What are the evidences or characteristics of false wisdom?

Boasting (v. 14c). Pride loves to boast, and nothing is prouder than the wisdom of men. There is a way to report blessings so that God gets the glory, but there is also an approach that gives men the praise.

In 2 Corinthians 10, when Paul was forced to boast about his ministry, he was careful to give God the glory.

When God’s wisdom is at work, there is a sense of humility and submission, and you want God to get all the glory. You have no desire to compare yourself with any other Christian, because you see only Christ, and compared with Him, all of us still have a long way to go!

Be false to the truth or deceit (v. 14d). “Lie not against the truth.” The sequence is not difficult to understand. First, there is selfish ambition that leads to a party spirit and rivalry. In order to “win the election” we must resort to boasting; and boasting usually involves lies! A man’s life is not read in his press releases; it is read by the Lord in his heart.

“Therefore, judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God” (see 1 Corinthians 4:5).

Tomorrow we will look at the characteristics of true wisdom

Daily Devotions

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

The characteristics or evidences of true wisdom are:

Meekness (v. 13). Meekness is not weakness; it is power under control. The meek person does not selfishly assert himself. The Greek word was used for a horse that had been broken so that his power was under control. The meek person seeks only the glory of God and does not worry about the praises of men.

Meekness is a fruit of the Spirit (**see Galatians 5:23**); it cannot be manufactured by man. There is a false humility that some people mistake for meekness, but it is only counterfeit.

The phrase “meekness of wisdom” is an interesting one. Meekness is the right use of power, and wisdom is the right use of knowledge. They go together. The truly wise person will show in his daily life that he is a child of God. Attitude and action go together.

Purity (v. 17a). “First pure” indicates the importance of holiness. God is holy; therefore, the wisdom from above is pure. The idea behind this word is “chaste, free from defilement.” James used it again in James 4:8; “purify your hearts,” or, “make chaste your hearts.” God’s wisdom leads to purity of life. Man’s wisdom may lead to sin. There is a spiritual purity that results in a chaste relationship with the Lord (**see 2 Corinthians 11:3**), and there is a worldliness that makes the person a spiritual adulterer (**see James 4:4**).

Peace (v. 17b). Man’s wisdom leads to competition, rivalry, and war (**see James 4:1 – 2**); but God’s wisdom leads to peace. It is a peace based on holiness, not on compromise. God never has “peace at any price.” The peace of the church is not more important than the purity of the church. If the church is pure, devoted to God, then there will be peace. “And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever” (**see Isaiah 32:17**). The church can never have peace by sweeping sins under the carpet and pretend they are not there. Man’s wisdom says, “Cover up sin! Keep things together!” God’s wisdom says, “Confess sin and My peace will keep things together!”

Gentleness (v. 17c). It carries the meaning of moderation without compromise, gentleness without weakness. The gentle person does not deliberately cause fights, but neither does he or she compromise the truth in order to keep peace.

Tomorrow we will continue with the rest of the characteristics of true wisdom.

Daily Devotions

James 3:17 – 18; But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

The characteristics or evidences of true wisdom are:

Open to reason or compliance (v. 17d). God's wisdom makes the believer agreeable and easy to live with and work with. Man's wisdom makes a person hard and stubborn. The compliant person is willing to hear all sides of a question, but he does not compromise his own convictions. He can disagree without being disagreeable.

He is "quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." (see **James 1:19**). Many people think that stubbornness is conviction, and they must have their own way. When God's wisdom is at work, there is a willingness to listen, think, pray, and obey whatever God reveals. "Yielding to persuasion" is another translation of this word.

Full of mercy (v. 17e). To be "full" of something means to be "controlled by." The person who follows God's wisdom is controlled by mercy. "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (see **Luke 6:36**). God in His grace gives us what we do not deserve, and in His mercy, He does not give us what we do deserve. Our Lord's parable of the good Samaritan illustrates the meaning of mercy (see **Luke 10:25–37**). For a Samaritan to care for a Jewish stranger was an act of mercy. He could gain nothing from it, except the blessing that comes from doing the will of God, and the victim could not pay him back. That is mercy.

Good fruits (v. 17f). People who are faithful are fruitful. God's wisdom does not make a life empty; it makes it full. The Spirit produces fruit to the glory of God (see **John 15:1–16**). The lawyer in **Luke 10:25 – 37** was willing to discuss the subject of neighbourliness, but he was unwilling to be a neighbour and help someone else. God's wisdom is practical; it changes the life and produces good works to the glory of God.

Impartial or decisiveness (v. 17g). The word suggests singleness of mind and is the opposite of "wavering" (see **James 1:6**). When you lean on the world's wisdom, you are pressured from one side and then another to change your mind or take a new viewpoint. When you have God's wisdom, you need not waver; you can be decisive and not be afraid. Wisdom from above brings strength from above.

Sincere (v. 17h). The Greek word translated "hypocrite" in our New Testament means "one who wears a mask, an actor." When man's wisdom is at work, there may be insincerity and pretense. When God's wisdom is at work, there is openness and honesty, "speaking the truth in love" (**Eph. 4:15**). Wherever you find God's people pretending and hiding, you can be sure the wisdom of this world is governing their ministry.

There is clear difference between the operation of God's wisdom and the operation of the wisdom of this world. It would be profitable for church and leaders to evaluate their own lives and their ministries in the light of what James has written.

Tomorrow we will look at the third and last aspect that James mentions – contrast in outcomes

Daily Devotions

James 3:16 – 18; For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

3. Contrast in outcomes (v.16, 18)

Origin determines outcome. Worldly wisdom will produce worldly results; spiritual wisdom will give spiritual results. Worldly wisdom produces trouble (v.16). Envy, strife, confusion, evil works. It does not appear that God was at work in that assembly. Wrong thinking produces wrong living. One reason the world is in such a mess is because men have refused to accept the wisdom of God.

The word translated “confusion” means “disorder that comes from instability.” It is related to “unstable” in James 1:8 and “unruly” in James 3:8. Jealousy, competition, party spirit; all of these contribute to confusion. The Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 is a good illustration of this fact. From man’s point of view, the building of the tower was a wise thing, but from God’s viewpoint, the project was full of pride and sinful. The result? Confusion.

Confusion sets the stage for “every evil work” (see **James 3:16**). Evil here means “worthless, of no account.” It reminds us of the “wood, hay, stubble” of 1 Corinthians 3:12. A ministry operating in the wisdom of this world may appear to be great and successful, but in the day of judgment it may burn up. The most important thing we can do in our local churches is measure our ministries by the Word of God, not by the wisdom of men.

God’s wisdom produces blessing (v. 18). James returned to that word, fruit. There is a vast difference between man-made results and God-given fruit. Fruit is the product of life, and fruit has in it the seeds for more fruit. Usually, it is the seed that is sown, but here it is the fruit that is sown. As we share the fruit of God with others, they are fed and satisfied, and they in turn bear fruit.

The Christian life is a life of sowing and reaping. For that matter, every life is a life of sowing and reaping, and we reap just what we sow. The Christian who obeys God’s wisdom sows’ righteousness, not sin; he sows peace, not war. The life we live enables the Lord to bring righteousness and peace into the lives of others.

What we are is what we live, and what we live is what we sow. What we sow determines what we reap. If we live in God’s wisdom, we sow righteousness and peace, and we reap God’s blessing. If we live in man’s worldly wisdom, we sow sin and war, and we reap “confusion and every evil work.”

It is a serious thing to be a troublemaker in God’s family. One of the sins that God hates is that of sowing “discord among brethren” (see **Proverbs 6:16–19**). Lot followed the world’s wisdom and brought trouble to the camp of Abraham; but Abraham followed God’s wisdom and brought peace. Lot’s decision led to “good for-nothing works,” and everything he lived for went up in smoke at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham’s decision, in the wisdom of God, led to blessings for his own household and ultimately for the whole world (see **Gen. 13**).

“Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding” (see **Proverbs 3:13**).