



FAITH WORKS

A STUDY IN JAMES
PERSONAL JOURNAL

DAILY READINGS | GROUP LIFE & SERMON NOTES

FAITH WORKS

A STUDY IN JAMES

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Faith without
works is dead.

James 2:26b



A WORD FROM OUR SENIOR PASTOR

I have been looking forward to immersing our church family in the book of *James* for over two years now. This excites me for two reasons. First, I believe we will become more firmly rooted in God's grace through Jesus. Other religions teach that a person is saved by their good works—if you follow the religious rules, rituals, and regulations, and don't mess up too badly—then you're saved. But Christianity is different from all other world religions! The Bible is crystal-clear that we are not saved by our good works. We are saved by God's great grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul puts it succinctly in his letter to the Ephesians: *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-9). My prayer is that everyone going through this *James* study with our church family will either become saved, or better understand and rest in the salvation Jesus purchased for us. Knowing Jesus is the faith foundation for the new life that follows.

The other reason this excites me is that I believe this study will spur along those who are saved into the good works this world desperately needs. Paul says this in Ephesians 2:10: *"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do"* (2:8-10). A person is saved by grace through faith. Period. No ifs, ands, or buts. But once a person has been saved, the byproducts of authentic faith are sure to follow. This is how faith works.

That's exactly what James, the half-brother of Jesus, teaches us in his short letter. James challenges us to not merely listen to the Word, but to put it into practice and live it out on mission. Because real faith shows up in real life—in how we treat others, how we talk, how we serve, and how we respond in trials. God wants us making an indelible impression on those in our places of influence—in our homes, in our community, and around the world. That's what this study of the book of *James* is all about.

As I look ahead to the future of our church, I envision a greater reach and a deeper impact on our community, and beyond. But that future begins here and now. It begins by each one of us having a faith that works. So, let's commit to work together in making Jesus Christ our all and sharing Him with all.

Jim Heiligman

HOW TO USE FAITH / WORKS

As with most things, you get out what you invest in. It's that simple. To get the most out of this fall churchwide emphasis, it's important that you invest into all three avenues of opportunity.

SERMON SERIES

To kickoff the new ministry year, our church will be kicking off the Fall of 2025 with a churchwide emphasis called *Faith Works*, based on the New Testament book of *James*. On August 24th, our pastor will preach the first Faith Works introductory sermon. Page 13 is provided for you to write down sermon takeaways from this sermon. The following Sunday, the pastor will preach the Week 1 sermon following the Week 1 devotional readings found in this *Faith Works Personal Journal*. We encourage you to bring your *Faith Works Personal Journal* every Sunday to write down sermon takeaways and insights from your GroupLife class.

SUNDAY MORNING GROUPLIFE CLASSES

Your participation in a Sunday morning GroupLife class will reinforce each week with complementary content you will explore together as a group. If you are not a member of a GroupLife class, you can pick one listed in the back of this journal on page 133 and just show up at the time it starts. Any Sunday, you can stop by our Welcome Desk where a host will help you find a class that makes sense for you, and will even walk you there. Or, you may select a pastor's class for the 5-week duration of Faith Works, taught by one of the four pastors who wrote this content. These pastor led classes are only for those who have not already begun attending GroupLife.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL

The Monday following the introductory sermon, you will use this *Faith Works Personal Journal* to guide you through daily devotional readings for Week 1. The time you spend during the week in your journal will guide you to spend meaningful time with the Lord as you consider the truths from *James* and how to apply them. The full text for *James* is listed in the back of your journal. We will encourage you on Day 1 of every week to read the corresponding Chapter of *James* in your journal, marking the text as guided to help you study with insight and depth.

The New English Translation (NET) was selected for the devotional readings and is the default translation throughout this resource. It is a newer, but trustworthy translation that we hope will give you fresh eyes to read and study *James*. We encourage you to read with your favorite translation open

as well. The NET has some of the best online free resources available, so we encourage you to make the most of them for this study www.netbible.org. Below, you can find a QR code. Scan it with your mobile phone camera, and tap the browser link that appears. It will take you directly to www.fbcbryan.org/faithworks, where you can find a direct link for these NET bible study resources, a PDF copy of the *Faith Works Personal Journal* to download, and GroupLife Teacher resources.



WWW.FBCBRYAN.ORG/FAITHWORKS

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FALL KICKOFF SUNDAY, AUGUST 24: INTRODUCING FAITH / WORKS

- GROUPLIFE: **Pickup your FAITH / WORKS Personal Journal.** Today's lesson will close out the final week of your Summer curriculum.
- SERMON: Jim will preach the *FAITH / WORKS* introductory sermon

WEEK 1: JAMES CHAPTER 1

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- CHAPTER 1 DAILY READINGS begin August 25
- CHAPTER 1 SERMON & GROUPLIFE on August 31

WEEK 2: JAMES CHAPTER 2

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- CHAPTER 2 DAILY READINGS begin September 1
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- CHAPTER 5 DAILY READINGS begin September 22
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AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF JAMES

As we journey together over the next five weeks, our goal is to provide you with some approaches and tools that will enhance your study of *James*. You can carry these with you as you engage the entire Bible over a lifetime. One of the first steps when beginning a Bible book study like *James* is to consider the *who, when, where, what, and why* of the book. Understanding the answers to each of these questions will help the modern reader avoid misunderstanding or misapplying the ancient Scriptures. We've provided the background to *James* below to help you discover those answers.

Background and Overview

WHO?

(Who wrote James, and to whom was it written?)

In Chapter 1 Verse 1, the author identifies himself as “*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.*” Various men named James were mentioned in the Bible, and James was a common name at the time, so Verse 1 leaves us with the question, “Which James is this?” Most credible scholars conclude that the author of *James* is neither of the men named James (James the son of Zebedee and James the son of Alphaeus) who were counted among the original 12 Apostles of Jesus. Rather, the author of *James* is the half-brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19). This James led the church in Jerusalem as its first pastor for many years (Acts 15; Galatians 2:1-13). According to tradition, James was martyred around A.D. 62 for refusing to deny Jesus as Lord when Jewish authorities demanded that he do so. It is significant to note that during Jesus’s life and ministry, James was an unbeliever (Mark 3:21, John 7:5). It was only *after* the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to James, the Apostles, and more than 500 followers at the same time that James surrendered to Jesus as Lord and Messiah (I Corinthians 15:7).



Imagine growing up as Jesus’s younger brother. Would it have been easier or more difficult to believe Jesus was the Messiah? How does James’s conversion after the resurrection give credibility to the historicity of the resurrection?

James is one of the eight “general” letters in the New Testament. The others are Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude. They are called general because they are letters written to an audience broader than a specific person or church. *James* is written to Jewish (“the twelve tribes”) believers in Jesus scattered across a variety of communities throughout the region.

In Acts 8:1 we read, “*On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.*” James is writing as a pastor to his church members, primarily composed of Jewish believers, who have been scattered away from Jerusalem. They were familiar with persecution and the harsh realities of being exiled away from their home. But, it’s worth noting that the Jewish community was a mixture of Christian Messianic Jews and those who had yet to reconcile their Judaism with Jesus. James also addresses the non-believers who might indirectly be a recipient of their Jewish affiliation.

WHEN?

(When and where was the book written and circulated?)

Since history tells us James was put to death by Jewish leaders in Jerusalem in 62 A.D., *James* must have been written sometime before then. Scholars believe that *James* was written before the Jerusalem council in A.D. 48-50, making *James* perhaps the earliest New Testament book completed. This early dating indicates that *James* was not originally meant as a theological response to Paul’s later writings about faith and works, as we sometimes treat it. Rather, the Holy Spirit originally inspired *James* for a specific purpose with a specific audience in mind.

WHAT?

(What seems to be the central message and purpose of the book?)

James is a letter composed of short moral essays, emphasizing Christian living in hard times, with special concern for practicing it faithfully among believers and unbelievers alike. Portions of *James* seem to be modeled after Old Testament wisdom literature. *James* Chapter 1, in particular, serves as a roadmap for the themes found in the remainder of the letter. Chapter 1 mentions the themes of active faith, endurance in trial, Christian wisdom, stewarding riches, and taming the tongue. These themes are then revisited throughout the remaining chapters of the letter, giving further resemblance to Old Testament wisdom literature such as Proverbs.

When we read the book of *James* we start to notice that James’s primary emphasis is on the practical side of our faith. At least a dozen of *James*’s themes echo topics and ethical issues mentioned by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (see following chart). James is answering the question, “If we claim to follow Jesus and his teachings, what should our lives look like?” *James* is emphasizing that the saving work of Christ in our lives by grace through faith results in obedience to Jesus’s commands. *James* gives us practical examples, illustrations, and metaphors of what following Christ looks like. Look at the chart below, and you will see just how closely James’s

teachings mirror the teachings of Jesus, with a special emphasis on Jesus's ethical teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (adapted from *The Bible Project*, "James Overview Poster").

James' Themes in Chapters 2-5	Jesus' Teaching
2:1-13 Favoritism vs. Love	See Matthew 5:46-48
2:14-26 Genuine Faith	See Matthew 7:21-27
3:1-12 The Tongue	See Luke 6:43-45
3:13-18 True vs False Wisdom	See Matthew 5:3-11
4:1-10 A Divided Heart	See Matthew 6:24
4:11-12 Condemning Others	See Matthew 12:36-37
4:13-17 The Arrogance of Wealth	See Matthew 6:28-34
5:1-6 The Danger of Wealth	See Matthew 6:19-21
5:7-11 Patience and Endurance	See Matthew 24:13
5:12 Telling the Truth	See Matthew 5:37
5:13-18 Faith-Filled Prayer	See Matthew 21:21-22
5:19-20 Restoring Others	See Matthew 18:15

As we spend the next five weeks reading and meditating on the book of *James*, refer back to this chart and remember that we are taking a deeper look at Jesus's teaching through the eyes of his half-brother.

WHY?

(What needs were addressed by the writing of this book?)

While the specific occasion of *James* is not explicitly stated, we can deduce the letter's purpose from the topics it emphasizes. The letter shows concern for real conditions in the dispersed church, including severe trials, dissensions caused by angry and judgmental words, and abuse of the poor by the wealthy. Some of the trials that James mentions are likely referencing the persecution at the hands of the Jewish and Roman authorities, and a severe famine that plagued the region during this period. The recipients of *James* are likely experiencing both types of trials, in addition to the trials brought on through human interactions. God's overarching concern for

these converted Jews is also true of you and me. His concern is that those who have put their faith in Jesus live from a transformed heart, in maturing obedience to Him.

FAITH / WORKS

INTRODUCTORY SERMON

SERMON TAKEAWAYS

Record any insights from today's sermon that God emphasizes to you:

YOUR RESPONSE TO GOD SPEAKING AT CHURCH TODAY:

JAMES CHAPTER 1

BEGIN AUGUST 25

DAVID BOOTH



FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 1 DAY 1

James is widely appreciated for its practicality in Christian living. Our Women's Pastor, Renée Brady, says she fell in love with *James* as a high school student for this very reason. She felt secure in her young faith, but was far less certain about how to live it out. She approached *James*, eager to find the answer to her burning question, "So now what?" True believers, like Renée, long to put their faith into action. They long to be genuine and authentic, demonstrating integrity between what is believed and what is lived out.

When it comes to faith and works, believers can adopt a chicken-or-egg perspective —does faith come first, or works? Sometimes, people see faith and works as opposing ideas in conflict with one another. The truth is, however, that God designed both faith and works to go hand-in-hand. And each has an important purpose before and after one's salvation. *James* is the "so now what?" answer to those who have already responded to Jesus's offer of salvation. *James* isn't the gospel message that leads someone to salvation, but rather post-salvation instructions for Christians made alive to the Lordship of Jesus.

Non-believers are known to cite the hypocrisy they see in church people as a reason not to believe, or at least not to attend. While there is a fallacy in this argument, Christians must not overlook their sincere observations. Bringing our actions into alignment with our beliefs determines the credibility of our witness. Too often, we've become so comfortable with our own inconsistencies and shortcomings that we let ourselves off the hook, rather than confess them and seek the Lord's wisdom and power for change. *James* provides a clear picture of what it looks like to bring daily life into accord with Jesus's teachings. Doing so is for our good, for the sake of those within our influence, and for the glory of God.

***Bringing
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Developing Bible Skills

One important essential for a growing, maturing faith is self-feeding on the Scriptures. It can be easy to become dependent on others (like the Pastor or your GroupLife Teacher) to expose you to the Bible and tell you what a passage means without having to first pray, read, understand, and apply it on your own. While self-feeding takes more time, raises questions, and

may even stir discomfort, it results in deeper love, joy, worship, and greater consistency in living according to God's Word. You might think of studying the Bible like learning a foreign language. To gain fluency in understanding, remembering, and living according to God's Word, time and practice are required.

Think of this devotional guide like the popular language-learning software, *Duolingo*, or *Rosetta Stone*. Many of you reading this devotional guide have never learned to self-feed on the Bible on your own, and you're intimidated to even try. The good news is that self-feeding on God's Word is a skill that can be developed, and just like learning a language, there are guides and practices to help you develop your skill. Each week, we will provide you with an opportunity to grow in your personal Bible study skills by guiding you through some time-tested Bible study practices until fluency in self-feeding finally emerges.

Even if you begin feeling some discomfort, we will challenge you to ask God to help you learn to be a student of His Word. We have included the whole book of *James* at the back of your *Personal Journal*, so that you have plenty of space to make notes, mark certain words and themes, and write any questions or thoughts as you study. We will read one chapter of *James* on the first day of every corresponding week. Ultimately, the aim of our five weeks together is to chew on God's Word through self-feeding, group-study, and sermon insights – all leading us to more rightly understand and faithfully live out what *James* teaches.

Pray Before Reading

The first step in approaching Scripture is to start with prayer. Why? Because we need God's Holy Spirit to help us to understand the words He inspired. Author of *The Bible Recap*, Tara Leigh Cobble, suggests using prayer prompts before engaging in Scripture reading or study. Simple prompts like these can help you open your heart to the guidance of God's Spirit as you approach God's Word.

- *Give me wisdom, knowledge, and understanding without becoming proud.*
- *Correct any lies I believe about You or anything I misunderstand.*
- *Help me see something new about You I've never seen before.*
- *Redirect my attitudes or actions that do not align with Your Word and Your will.*
- *Let any knowledge I gain help me love You and others more.*



Now that we have prayed for the Spirit's assistance, it's time to read through *James* Chapter 1. Please turn to page 123, where you will find the book of *James* in the New English Translation (NET) printed out for you to mark as directed during this study. Gather a highlighter and pen. It would be good to have your favorite translation open to *James* as well.

[Note: If time permits, we also encourage you to go to netbible.org for free, easy-to-understand, user-friendly original language word studies and translation comparisons. These new online tools make advanced Bible Study possible for anyone.]

As you read Chapter 1 today, we encourage you to do three things:

- **Highlight Emphases** — mark with a highlighter the verses you believe God is emphasizing to you,
- **Mark Questions** — place a question mark ? in the margin beside any phrases you do not understand or that challenges your current understanding, and
- **Underline Imagery** — underline the everyday images and metaphors James uses to illustrate his point (verses 6, 10-11, 15, 17, 21, 22-24, and 26).



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

What are 3 words/phrases through which God most strongly engaged my heart or mind? Beside each, jot down the reason I believe God is focusing my attention in this way.

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What are the top questions I have after reading James Chapter 1 today?

List the images and metaphors that impacted me most, along with what I believe God is wanting to communicate to me through each of them:

James wrote his letter so followers of Jesus would live out their faith in action. Faith and works are linked. While faith is internal, works are external. The Bible clearly teaches that what is on the inside is expressed outwardly through word and action (Matthew 12:33-35, James 3:12). In this way, action brings into view the faith inside that cannot directly be seen. As it pertains to faith and works, we could rightly and simply state: faith works. Faith works into corresponding actions.

We can best understand how faith works by looking at James's letter alongside other biblical passages. The Bible is not an encyclopedia in which you can see everything God has to say about how faith works in one location. Though James has much to say, he doesn't say it all. No, God revealed the many nuances of how faith works in His messages to His people across many different occasions and contexts. By surveying key passages from the Bible alongside *James*, we can come to know with confidence the two primary ways that faith works. First, faith is the posture through which God saves people *for* eternity. Second, faith in action is the process by which God matures people *until* eternity.

For the remainder of the week, we will highlight some of the critical questions that can arise when exploring the relationship between faith and works:

Day 2 - How can I know my faith is enough to save me?

Day 3 - What are the outward indicators that my faith is real?

Day 4 - How does living by faith help me with life's difficulties?

Day 5 - What's the point of good works if not necessary for salvation?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 1 DAY 2

I'm a sucker for historical documentaries, especially one involving millions of dollars, controversy, and suspected fraud. *The Lost Leonardo* (2021) is one such documentary, featuring the 2017 sale of a disputed Leonardo da Vinci original masterpiece called *Salvator Mundi* (Latin, for "Savior of the World"). This documentary chronicles the discovery of the lost painting, its controversial restoration, and its debated attribution to renowned Italian Renaissance painter and inventor, Leonardo da Vinci. In spite of the lack of consensus by leading art historians, the Mona-Lisa-esque painting of Jesus eventually fetched north of 450 million dollars, making it the most expensive painting ever purchased. The sticker shock alone makes the documentary worth a sleepy Saturday afternoon viewing. But underlying the staggering price is the burning question that makes it a must-watch: Is the *Salvator Mundi* Leonardo's masterpiece, or is it a fake?



Salvator Mundi.
Attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, c. 1499-1510 A.D.

How can I know my faith is enough to save me?

The book of *James* asks a strikingly similar question, but about something with far more significance than an object with mere monetary value. Regardless of your feelings, the fact is that you are God's masterpiece (Ephesians 2:10). To God, you are of such value that God the Son paid for your redemption with His priceless sacrifice on the cross. God has provided in Jesus all that one needs for salvation—this is what is meant by saving "grace." The good news is that everyone is invited to receive this gracious, undeserved gift of salvation and eternal life. But only those who receive Jesus by saving faith actually obtain it. Faith is the posture of receiving the salvation only made possible through Jesus. We receive God's gracious gift of salvation through faith. Real faith. Survey the following texts from various New Testament authors:



As you read them, underline action words that describe how someone might respond to the offer of forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus. Draw an X through the things the Bible says DO NOT result in salvation.

But to all who have received him—those who believe in his name—he has given the right to become God's children (John 1:12).

For this is the way God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

For this is the will of my Father—for everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him to have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:40).

But these are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:31).

About him all the prophets testify, that everyone who believes in him [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins through his name (Acts 10:43).

For we consider that a person is declared righteous by faith apart from the works of the law (Romans 3:28).

Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified (Galatians 2:16, ESV).

For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

In these verses, you may notice that belief and faith seem to be used interchangeably, and for good reason. Both “faith” and “belief” are translated from the same Greek noun πιστις (pis’-tis). Translators have favored rendering *pistis* as “faith” in James’s and Paul’s writings. However, when reading the book of John, we see translators favoring the word “belief” instead of faith. In its verb form, regardless of the writer, translators render *pistis* as “believe,” because “faithing” isn’t good English. Since faith and belief don’t mean exactly the same thing in English, there is the potential for misunderstanding the dynamics of saving faith. “Faith” more strongly implies trust in a person, whereas “belief” may simply convey factual agreement. So, it’s critical that we understand what is meant by the words “faith” or “belief,” so we can have confidence in our own salvation.

James provides much needed clarity by describing the kinds of faith and belief that result in salvation and the kinds of faith and belief that do not. He addresses the discrepancy between real faith and the faith counterfeits that people may tragically assume secures their eternal life. Faith is enough to receive saving grace, but not just any ‘ol kind of faith will do. Some kinds

of “faith” are really not faith at all; they are faith forgeries. About such faith counterfeits, *James* rhetorically asks, “*Can such faith save*” us (James 2:14)?

So what kind of faith **does** result in our salvation and eternal life? As seen in the verses above, saving faith is first and foremost found in one’s right relationship with Jesus. In his brief one-verse greeting, James describes his own relationship with Jesus. He calls himself a δούλος (dou’-los), or bond-servant, of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only is this an implicit statement of faith acknowledging Jesus as God, it is an explicit statement that James belongs to Jesus His Lord and lives a lifestyle of voluntary surrender to His will. Saving faith is primarily **relational**, not rational. Faith is about recognizing who Jesus is, what He offers us freely, and receiving Him (John 1:12).

Saving faith is primarily relational, not rational.

This right relationship with Jesus begins with a point in time, but continues ever after. In many ways, it is similar to getting married. On December 2, 1995, I married Christy Philbrick. We have been married ever since. We didn’t just become legally married. I entered into an ongoing covenant relationship with a person, a love relationship that changed all future relationships, who I live with, my lifestyle, my finances, and more. Similarly, James, after seeing his half-brother resurrected, entered into a saving relationship with Jesus by faith, and that love relationship continued with Jesus as His Master over all things forevermore. The Bible does not present any kind of saving belief that secures salvation as a legal status that is not also intrinsically linked to beginning a permanent, ongoing relationship of love and obedience with Jesus as Lord.

In contrast to this, are those who believe in the facts about Jesus, but have not entered into covenant relationship with Him. To drive his point home with this Jewish audience, James begins by referencing the most important verses to practicing Jews—the Shema (pronounced sh-MÁH): “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You must love the Lord your God with your whole mind, your whole being, and all your strength* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). James affirms their adherence to the Shema. “*You believe that God is one; well and good.*” Then, in a rapid twist of verbal Jujitsu, he adds, “*...even the demons believe that—and tremble with fear*” (James 2:19). James’s point is painfully clear to his Jewish hearers. Just believing correct facts about God and Jesus are what demons do. That kind of fraudulent faith is nothing to bank your eternity on. However you define “faith” or “belief,” it must include the understanding that at its core, *pistis* is a relationship word. It’s the posture of receiving Jesus as Savior and lifelong Lord, for whom whole-mind, whole-being, and full-strength love are reserved.

James takes this whole-hearted commitment a step further to its logical conclusion. If we enter into a permanent covenant with the Lord Jesus, then our ongoing obedience will flow out of His Lordship. James's primary concern for his Jewish brothers was that good works would reveal the validity of their faith. He understood that a faith that doesn't result in good works is not the kind of faith that can secure salvation, any more than a demon's belief that Jesus is God the Son can. James has much more to say about faith and works. Tomorrow, we will answer the question, *What are the outward indicators that my faith is real?*



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

Here are the reasons I believe my faith is either authentic or fake:

I believe God wants me to respond to the encouragement I received from the verses I read today by:

I believe God wants me to respond to the verses that gave me concern today by:

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WEEK 1 DAY 3

Those who are educators understand that a test is fundamentally designed to measure knowledge. A teacher cannot directly, or accurately, measure knowledge by looking at brain tissue under a microscope. Through the use of various types of questions, the student will demonstrate their knowledge indirectly by filling in the blanks, writing essays, or applying learned concepts to solve problems. Regardless of the nature of the test questions, the answers reveal the underlying knowledge that cannot otherwise be directly observed.

Every single one of us, after breathing our last breath, will stand before our ascended King Jesus, our Righteous Judge. "... [Jesus] *is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. About him all the prophets testify, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name*" (Acts 10:42-43). The Scriptures are crystal clear that the basis for our eternal life is not our works of righteousness, but rather faith in the person and work of Jesus on our behalf. However, whenever the Scriptures describe what the actual judgement scene will look and sound like, curiously, faith is not even mentioned. What is mentioned, though, are good works.



Consider the following key texts. As you do, underline any instance of the word "reward," or synonyms of reward. Circle any specific good works that will be rewarded:

"He will reward each one according to his works: eternal life to those who by perseverance in good works seek glory and honor and immortality, but wrath and anger to those who live in selfish ambition and do not obey the truth but follow unrighteousness" (Romans 2:6-7).

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be paid back according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

For the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done (Matthew 16:27).

Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels! For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not receive me as a guest, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they too will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not give you whatever you needed?' Then he will answer them, 'I tell you the truth, just as you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me.' And these will depart into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life"
(Matthew 25:41-46).

So, are the Biblical authors contradicting themselves? Is salvation determined by faith, or works? Yesterday, we just read a sampling of verses clearly showing that genuine faith (*pistis*) in Jesus is how a person receives the gift of God's undeserved, unearned grace. Faith is the posture of one's heart and will to turn away from sin and receive Jesus as Lord and Savior. Faith exists in the heart, will, and mind before there's even time to prove the authenticity of one's sincerity through subsequent actions. So, if good works can't earn salvation or even verify faith's sincerity before God grants it, how should we rightly understand how works factors into our salvation at all? Similar to an educator's test for knowledge, God will judge the world through Jesus, using the corroborating evidence of our good works to establish the authenticity of our saving faith. If unseen faith is real, the corresponding actions that can be seen will follow suit. Because faith works.

If unseen faith is real, the corresponding actions that can be seen will follow suit.

What are the outward indicators that my faith is real?

We don't have to wait until the final judgement hoping our works will be enough to reveal the genuineness of our faith. God's Word functions to give us real-time feedback so we can live our lives for His glory with confidence as every day draws us closer to our appointed time. God doesn't just want us to be saved. He wants us to know we're saved. The difference between the two is the observable works that reveal the authenticity of our faith, giving us the confidence God wants us to have. The Apostle John writes, *"I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life"* (1 John 5:13). What were "these things" that John was referring to? They are found in his letter to Christians, which, like *James*, describes what a life surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus looks like in practice as it develops. Upon our salvation, our sinful nature is crucified, and we are made spiritually alive, now both willing

and enabled to grow in maturity. And along with that new birth, God gives us His Word, in which we find letters like *James*, to help us steward this new life in Christ. Without His Word, we simply don't see what needs correction or how to go about it.

Every time I hit the golf course (literally, think deep divots), I have this gut feeling that I could be at least a little bit better if I just knew what on earth I was doing. I've never had a swing coach or an instructional session. My swing has never been captured on video to be analyzed in slow motion to identify the adjustments needed for me to become a good golfer. So I just show up and hack away in the best way I know how, using the information I've gleaned along the way from other bad golfers on staff (let the reader understand). God provides His Word, however, to help us understand what faith in Jesus should look like as we approach the hilly ups and downs, obstacles that obscure our view, and the ever-present hazards that taunt us in the course of our lives. We don't have to wait until judgment to recalibrate our lives to the Lordship of Jesus. 2,000 years ago, James said that God's Word is like a mirror that gives us necessary feedback on how we're living. Today, he might have written that it's like a motion capture camera, able to give us the detailed slowmotion feedback that is most useful for correction. Consider John's encouragement of the role of good works in providing confidence of son-ship now, and for future judgment:

And now, little children, remain in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink away from him in shame when he comes back. If you know that he is righteous, you also know that everyone who practices righteousness has been fathered by him (1 John 2:28-29).

Both James's and John's letters (along with the full counsel of God's Word) serve as detailed instruments by which persons can examine the authenticity of their faith now. This "*testing of your faith*" (James 1:3) isn't a test of knowledge, written with a pencil on a test form. This Greek word for testing is also used by the Apostle Peter to describe the work of a goldsmith (1 Peter 1:7). The smith heats the gold to nearly 2,000°F, which releases and separates the gold's impurities. Once pure and cooled, the smith can see his reflection. The book of *James* addresses the many ways in which our faith is tested and purified "*so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything*" (James 1:4). This is a test of the status of one's relationship with the Lord Jesus—faith written with action upon the moments of one's life—moments full of trials and temptations, moments requiring supernatural wisdom, moments managing money and generosity,



and moments pursuing righteous living. Each of these revealing the nature of one's faith relationship with God. While our lives will not be fully purified until we stand in His presence, we should joyfully yield ourselves to His ever-refining work until that day.



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

Here's how I would describe my feelings about my future appointment with God, in which my good works will indicate the authenticity of my relationship with Jesus:

If I were to have concern about the authenticity of someone's faith, based on the lack of their observable good works, here are a few thoughts I'd like to share with them to address those concerns:

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 1 DAY 4

God sees through to maturity and completion over a lifetime the transformation that began at saving faith. Paul writes, *“For I am sure of this very thing, that the one who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 1:6). The God who saved us by grace through faith will work out a lifetime of maturing transformations until we breathe our last. *“For he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him in love”* (Ephesians 1:4). God already sees us as righteous because we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ, which He also imputes to us. It is also true that we are progressively becoming mature and complete as we learn to live according to our new identity in Christ. We’re growing up. Day by day, month by month, year by year, we are becoming more like Jesus. On our last day, the process will be made complete. Upon our salvation, Jesus broke the shame of sin, power of sin, and penalty of sin. But on our last day, even the presence of sin will be eradicated. We will be completely complete and blamelessly blameless. The maturing will be fulfilled in every way that it can be, forevermore.

James brings this general commitment of God to our sanctification into sharper view by zeroing in on trials and temptations. They are uniquely used of God to bring about maturity in several ways that would be otherwise impossible in ever-sunny skies. Because God is good, and the posture of His heart is always *for* His children, we can rest in His faithful love and goodness whenever trials spring upon us and send us reeling. The dreaded phone call from the sheriff’s office, the frightening lab results, the slip back into addiction, or the pink slip releasing you from employment—all such things knock the wind out of our lungs, before we can recalibrate ourselves to our God’s faithful love and yield to His maturing work. Our instinct is to beg for God to keep trials away, or to beg for deliverance from pain once it appears. But God’s faithfulness is experienced most deeply not in the absence of pain, but in the healing that comes when He walks us through it. The key is living by faith.

God’s faithfulness is experienced most deeply not in the absence of pain, but in the healing that comes when He walks us through it.

How does living by faith help me with life’s difficulties?

David Gusewelle, our Senior Adult Pastor, faced one of the greatest challenges of his life back in March of 2023. He shared this story with me:

I was having my annual cardiologist visit. As I visited with the P.A., all initially seemed well. Until I mentioned that I had a slight burning sensation in my chest a few days earlier. The P.A. called in the doctor who informed me that I needed to have a heart catheterization (cath) without delay. The next day, I found myself in surgery. After the heart cath procedure, the doctor came in to tell me that I needed cardiac bypass surgery. Again, without delay. This was the worst case scenario. Ten days later I had triple bypass surgery. During this ten day wait, many people prayed for me and encouraged me. I had no idea how many of our church family had also had open heart surgery. The outpouring of prayers, encouragements, and best wishes were a gift from God. The best piece of advice I received came from my good friend, Glen Wise. His advice to me was to fervently pray to God not only for good outcomes, but also to protect me from the depression that sometimes creeps into heart surgery patients. I prayed fervently that God would protect me and encourage me in my physical and mental well-being throughout my recovery.

The Apostle James was a great encouragement to me through all of this. I read James 1:2-4 over and over again. *“My brothers and sisters, consider it nothing but joy when you fall into all sorts of trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect effect, so that you will be perfect and complete, not deficient in anything.”* I had been saved through faith many, many years before. But now, I was being tested to live by faith, right in the midst of the trial I was facing. Living by faith is entrusting your present trials to the God who is with you and for you.

James was writing to the believing Jews who had been dispersed from Jerusalem due to religious persecution. In Acts Chapter 8 Luke describes a “great persecution” that broke out against the Church in Jerusalem. This persecution was from the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem and it would eventually lead to James being stoned to death by the high priest in 62 A.D. Even though the believers scattered throughout the region, they did not escape trials and persecution. It was not uncommon for Christians to be excluded from business and economic transactions during this time. Also, there was a great famine that broke out throughout the region which brought additional physical and financial hardships.

After an unusually short opening greeting, James didn’t waste any time cutting right to the chase and addressing his brothers and sisters under these intense trials. The Greek word for “falling” into all sorts of trials is

περιπίπτο (per-ee-pip'-to), and connotes the idea of being surrounded on all sides and completely engulfed. These aren't the annoying sneezes and speed bumps that ruin an otherwise perfect day. James is talking about potential life-wreckers, like devastating abuses, divorce, destitution, depression, disease, or death of loved ones—trials of monumental proportions.

By very nature of the trials James is addressing, these 1st century believers, as well as you and me, have every reason NOT to find joy in the world's brokenness, much less pure joy. God made us in His image. God cries, gets angry, experiences anguish, and grieves loss. He hates sin and its devastating effect on us. None of the world's brokenness was His design, but is the inevitable result of a world spinning and sinning ever further from God's rule and reign. He isn't happy about any of it. Nor should we be. All of these gut-level responses are echoes of His image when we find ourselves swallowed up by the worst of life's trials.

The command “consider” is translated from the Greek root work *ηγεομαι* (haygeh'-om-ahee), which means to lead or to command. So, the issue isn't whether we are experiencing a visceral reaction other than joy to the world's brokenness. The issue is whether those emotions are leading us, or whether we are leading them to Jesus in whom joy is found. Paul echoes this in 2 Corinthians 10:5 when he instructs believers to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Considering it joy means you are leading your heart and mind to consider the reasons that, even in this trial, Christ anchors you in His sovereignty, comfort, and love. This is the stuff of faith, truly depending on the Lord's care in the darkest valleys. He is with you. Even in this. And will get you through it. Knowing Christ as our ever-present anchor through it all is joy. Not only that, Paul explains, but He is bound and determined to take all that Satan intended for evil, and redirect it for your good, for your maturity, for your impact on others, and for His glory. *“And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose”* (Romans 8:28). There is joy in being swept up in the beauty and wholeness God brings out of devastation.



James 1:2-4 is packed with meaning and instruction. Before moving further past it, fill in the blanks in the diagram below, which will help you better understand the process God uses to mature us through our trials.

TESTING → _____ → _____ **AND** _____,
NOT LACKING _____.

One of the most devastating trials, if not handled well, may not come from the storm of brokenness imposed by the world around us, but from the storm that can swirl within us. Just as God is not the author of the world's pain and suffering, He is likewise not the author of temptation. *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one"* (James 1:13). Though every believer has a new nature that is alive to Christ and inclined to take joy in surrendering to His Lordship, we must still contend with the former habits of our flesh. Though the power of sin has been broken and it can no longer hold us in slavery, our mind and bodies have developed a robust muscle memory of coping with life apart from Christ (Romans 6:16-18). Faith holds onto the truths of our freedom from sin's power over us, even as our flesh may fight to return to familiar sinful defaults. James explains, that *"each one is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires. Then when desire conceives, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is full grown, it gives birth to death"* (James 1:14-15).



Using verses 14-15, fill in the blanks in the diagram below, which will help you better understand the progression of temptation.

TEMPTATION = LURED AND _____ BY YOUR _____ DESIRES → GIVES BIRTH TO _____ → FULL GROWN SIN GIVES BIRTH TO _____.

Temptation, if unchecked, progresses toward sin and the unwanted, unintended consequences that hurt self and others. We sometimes approach temptation as something that is OK to engage, so long as we don't cross over the fence line of sin. Paul David Tripp paints a caricature of Christians with chain-link fence marks impressed on their face from a persistent, longing gaze at temptations on the other side. Though technically staying within the boundaries, the heart has been captured by the lure of temptation, undermining any fight to maintain purity of action. Jesus addresses this by reminding us that adultery is not only about crossing over into physical participation, but also about one's heart (Matthew 5:28). Similarly, a fish's best defense is to not stare at the lure, admiring in shape and shimmer, as enticing as it may be. Linger in the allure of the bait weakens the fish's resolve to not bite down on the bait, making it vulnerable to getting hooked and entering into a battle for its life. Likewise, we find victory from temptation by fleeing as soon as we recognize that temptation is appealing to our sinful desires. We win by yielding to His Spirit in prayer as soon as we are lured, receiving His empowering to stop the progression any further. We win by fleeing from the lure. Failure to heed God's wisdom and help on this has predictable results.



Temptation can be inflamed by the lusts of our bodies, by the deception of the enemy, and by the sin-saturated world around us. Peter joins James in a call to “*abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul*” (1 Peter 2:11, NASB). God’s will is not for us to fight the enemy *after* he already has gained a stronghold. God’s will is that we do not indulge our temptations and lusts, because if we give the enemy a foothold, he will setup a stronghold to wage war against our souls. We win at step one in the progression. Every temptation is an opportunity for us to strengthen Jesus’s real-time reign and to weaken the persistent habits of our sinful desires. We are no longer slaves to sin, so we literally can decide to whom we will voluntarily yield ourselves. Either we will become a voluntary bond-servant of the good Lord Jesus, or become a slave to sin. Temptation is a storm we can keep in check through the help of God’s Spirit, His Word, and His people. Left unchecked, it can become an EF-5 tornado that leaves a trail of devastation in its path we will soon regret. We don’t sin in a vacuum. There is always collateral damage to those around us. Remember, God does not ask you to do anything *for* Him apart *from* Him. That includes fighting temptation.



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

As I consider the trials I’m facing, here are two ways I believe I can lead myself (or consider) to a place of pure joy as I’m being impacted by them:

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What temptation most successfully lures me? What are practical ways I can yield the first step of the progression (being lured by temptation) to Jesus?

What’s the difference between fighting temptation for Jesus and fighting temptation with Jesus? Which pleases God the most? Why? Why might God want to fight temptation with you, rather than you doing it without Him?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 1 DAY 5

We've spent the week looking at saving faith, works that flow from it, faith's role to anchor us to what is true about God during trials and temptations, and the maturity that is forged from them. James also draws attention to the one life that we are given, and how we are to steward it. Specifically, we are to steward life's moments with wisdom from God, resulting in abundant life. It may feel more spiritual to think of life as suffering for Jesus. Indeed, we do suffer in this life, and depending on our address on the globe, we can experience a wide range of persecution intensity for our faith. But underlying all of that is the core truth that to follow God's way is the best way. It would be impossible for God, informed by perfect wisdom, perfect in love, perfectly good, and perfect in righteousness to NOT lead us into life that is also most full of God's goodness and blessings. Following God's wisdom always leads us to His very best for us. He's our Good Shepherd. Faith in the fundamental goodness and capability of God propels us into actions that trust His wisdom that He generously supplies, without reprimand, to those needing it (James 1:5). Jesus explains that though the enemy's plan is to bring loss and devastation into our lives, His plan is to give us real abundance (John 10:10), if we'll yield in faith and obedience to His best way.

What's the point of good works if not necessary for salvation?

Good works are an outward manifestation of our relationship with Christ. If we rightly relate to Him in love and obedience as our Lord, abundance in life is the result, regardless of the nature or quantity of our trials. Not only that, but our good works determine the nature of our eternal reward. More than just for our own benefit, our good works can unlock for others this abundance and reward. Good works benefit us and others. Finally, good works bless God. Our obedience expresses to God that we love Him as our first love. These three spheres of love – love for God, others, and self – are at the heart of God's greatest command. *"Jesus said to him, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments"* (Matthew 22:37-40).

Part of a child's development is the gradual increase of responsibilities through adulthood—doing the dishes, putting your laundry away, mowing the yard, or taking out the trash. While God is dedicated to our maturity and

desires good works to flow from our relationship with Christ, that's not *all* He cares about. If all I cared about was Mason keeping the cat litter clean, his room clean (enough to not be a biohazard), and the lawn mowed, I wouldn't be much of a dad. In fact, that kind of performance-based relationship would leave emotional scars and spiritual voids that would likely haunt him for a lifetime. Really, God is not that way! But curiously, many Christians find themselves stuck with this skewed view of God. For them, God just expects holiness from them, but doesn't really want them to experience the joys that even imperfect parents want for their children.

There are three key passages that have helped me reshape my distorted image of God. The first, is found in Colossians 1:15-18, where Paul explains that we were made by Jesus *for* Jesus. We were made for Jesus! He wants us for Himself!

The second is in John Chapter 15. Earlier in my walk with Jesus, I only saw the verses that dealt with more fruit, lasting fruit, multiplied fruit — works, works, and more works is how I read and received that. More expectations to perform. And then the Spirit showed me that I had misconstrued what God was saying. Somehow I had missed the repetitions of “remain [or abide] in me,” His many assurances of His love, His desire for fruit for my own good and the good of others, but most of all, because He desires my joy. *“Just as the Father has loved me, I have also loved you; remain in my love. If you obey my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things **so that** my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete”* (John 15:9-11, emphasis mine). God wants my obedience to His commands to flow from relationship with Him, because in obedience I experience His wise, protective love for me. My joy matters to Him. Not just my joy, but my joy nonetheless.

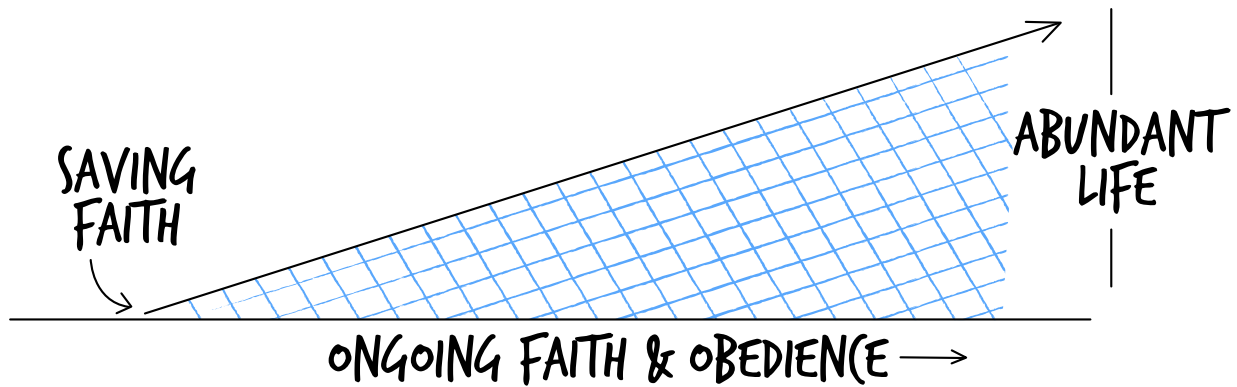
The third is found in James 1:17. *“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...”*, which echoes Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount description of the Father who delights in giving good gifts, and His very presence, to those who ask Him (Matthew 7:11, Luke 11:13). Again, God loves us, wants to give good to us, wants us to abide in Him, wants to give us His Spirit, wants the fruit of faith to flourish in our lives, and wants our joy. He’s not just concerned that we stay on top of our good works as if they were household chores. No, the life the Lord wants for us is filled with abundance. We shortchange Him and dishonor Him when we think otherwise or twist His desire for works away from His tender heart for us.

According to *James* 1, for life to be truly abundant with God's goodness, several things must happen. First, we must have an awareness of the fragility of life. We only have one opportunity to live it. We will "... *pass away like a wildflower in the meadow. For the sun rises with its heat and dries up the meadow; the petal of the flower falls off and its beauty is lost forever. So also... [everyone] ...will wither away*" (James 1:10-11). Though James is directly calling for the rich to be humble, he is doing so based upon the universal truth that all of our days are numbered. He begins Chapter 1 by having us consider what we want God to make of us. Do we want him to make us mature and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-3)? Do we want Him to use us for the purposes of His sovereign plan (James 1:18)? God intends to use all the days of our life in the best way possible for our joy, for the good of others, and for the glory of God. To actually *experience* His good intentions, we must put feet to our faith that our best life is found in surrender to the Lordship of Jesus.

God intends to use all the days of our life in the best way possible for our joy, for the good of others, and for the glory of God.

James is fundamentally a collection of wisdom sayings about what this kind of faith in God looks like lived out—how faith works itself out in various relationships and life situations. Some portions of *James* read like Proverbs in the Old Testament. Within Chapter 1, and in subsequent chapters, it's not unusual for *James* to rattle off a rapid-fire series of commands, seemingly unrelated to the one before or the one after. In the 108 verses in *James*, there are 59 commands, more than one command for every two verses. You can also find in *James* echoes of the Sermon on the Mount, delivered by Jesus, his half-brother. "*Happy is the one who endures testing...*" reads Verse 12. The way of the Kingdom is wisdom, promising abundant life now and to come.

It's impossible to experience abundant life in Jesus if you lack daily faith and its corresponding works. Ongoing faith is the conviction that God is like what the Bible says He is like, and will do in and through you what the Bible says He will do. This fundamental truth is the object of our faith. When faith in this truth about God is present, so is the fitting response of works that reflects such faith. However, it is possible to miss abundant life if faith isn't continued on a daily basis. Our salvation by faith happens in a moment in time. But our daily experience of God is linked to ongoing faith that results in ongoing obedience. Only then will we experience the abundant life God desires for us. Consider the following graph.



As shown on the graph above, your experience of God's abundant life is directly proportional to your faith and works. If you wish to experience all He intends for you, then you have a response to make. Remember, that eternal life is more than a legal transaction, it is found in a relationship with the risen Jesus Christ. So is our abundant life in Him. It's not something we get *from* Him. Abundant life is something we get *in* Him.

The biblical ideal is that works are motivated and empowered by God's indwelling Spirit. However, even good works can be done out of a less than ideal heart. Some who lack confidence in God's acceptance may try to earn His approval through good works. Or, they may inappropriately fear God's punishment, and work on their good deeds to stay on His good side. They may care deeply about the opinions of others, so do good works for a good reputation in the eyes of others. Or their works may be motivated by dutiful obedience, yet sadly, they miss out on an abiding fellowship with Jesus, resulting joy, and God's glory. God isn't interested in us doing what is right in whatever way we can muster up, God cares about doing good in the right ways, for the right reasons. Such works are birthed by His transforming work within, are carried out by His indwelling Spirit, and the results advance His Kingdom purposes and bring glory to Him.

Whatever the reason may be, any work we do for God apart from God glorifies self, thus disqualifying the work from God's glory or future reward. God never asks us to do anything for Him, apart from Him. He doesn't deploy us on mission, with only our own resources in hand. When Jesus commissioned His followers prior to His ascension into heaven, He assured them that through His indwelling Spirit, He would never leave them nor forsake them as they carried out the good work of multiplying disciples among all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). He promised His continual presence

within them. God's will is that we do good works through the abiding Spirit of Jesus, by His power, and for His glory. Whether on this side of salvation or that, good works are never good enough to earn salvation or continued grace from a Holy God. There is a purpose for good works that goes far beyond what we hope it might earn for us.

There is a final nuance to being saved for good works that may have significance greater than our own confidence in our salvation, our ability to weather the storms of life, or our experience of abundant life. Our good works are destined to have an eternal impact on others. *"By his sovereign plan he gave us birth through the message of truth, that we would be a kind of first fruits of all he created"* (James 1:18). God's redemptive plan is that we would receive the gospel, and through our good works, that others would. We also see this in Ephesians 2:10 in God "preparing beforehand" the good works in which believers are to walk. In Romans 8:29, Paul further explains that Christians are *"...predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters."* What Paul and James are both saying is that God has sovereignly planned out the purpose of our works ahead of time. He has determined that my purpose and yours, is to multiply spiritual sons and daughters of God through our works.

Each of us has a unique purpose to play in redemption history. Possibly, to be a renowned world-changer, like Billy Graham. Or to disciple one. Or to disciple one who discipled one. You may be led by the Spirit of God to share a word of encouragement, or a book, or a meal with someone who is about to lose hope—and by doing so, God turns their suffering into significance. You disciplining your sons and daughters is likely to result in them stepping into God's redemptive purposes as well. Through them, God may reach many children, women, and men, their family trees, and their spiritual family trees. You are destined to be a part of a generational chain of disciple makers through which God will collectively reach every nation. Acts 13:36 reads, *"For David, after he had served God's purpose in his own generation, died..."* Our days are also numbered, and our good works will either serve God's purposes for which He destined us, or they will not. Our good works are destined to serve the redemptive purposes of God. Our saving faith is but the starting point of a journey that begins with new birth. And that regeneration results in a cascade of inner transformations and outward actions that alter the trajectory of countless other eternities.



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

What are my top motivations for good works?

Are any adjustments needed to bring my motivations under the rule and reign of the Lord Jesus?

How have I seen my good works influence the relationship that other people (from my household, neighborhood, workplace, and church) have with Jesus?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 1, DAY 6:

REVIEW & REFLECT

Take a moment to review days 1 - 5 of this week. **Identify the most significant truths from FAITH / WORKS you believe God wants you to understand and apply. Write them below:**

Write down any questions you have about the content from this chapter you are unsettled about:

What are some things you will begin doing, or stop doing, in response to what you learned this week?

What is something you'd be willing to share with your GroupLife class this Sunday about what God showed you this week?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 1, DAY 7:

WORSHIP AND GROUPLIFE

GroupLife Takeaways

Record any insights from GroupLife that God emphasizes to you today:

SERMON TAKEAWAYS

Record any insights from today's sermon that God emphasizes to you:

Your Response to God speaking at Church today:

JAMES CHAPTER 2

BEGIN SEPTEMBER 1

DAVID GUSEWELLE



FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 2 DAY 1

Welcome to Week 2. Now that we laid the groundwork for our study last week, we can settle into a weekly rhythm. Before you read each week's chapter in *James*, begin with prayer. Prayer allows us to pause, interrupts the "autopilot" nature of our brains, and focuses our attention on the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe who inspired every word of Scripture for our benefit. The words below are not meant to be a script as a means to "fast-track" your time conversing with God. Use them as a starting point to orient your heart in submission to the words you will read today as His Spirit provides understanding.

Pause to pray, asking for God's wisdom in understanding and applying His Word in ways that personally transform, build others up, and glorify God.

- *Give me wisdom, knowledge, and understanding without becoming proud.*
- *Correct any lies I believe about You or anything I misunderstand.*
- *Help me see something new about You I've never seen before.*
- *Redirect my attitudes or actions that do not align with Your Word and Your will.*
- *Let any knowledge I gain help me love You and others more.*



Turn to page 125 and read James Chapter 2.



In 2-3 sentences, summarize the main idea of the chapter.

Mark the Text

Marking the text will help us to quickly identify the author's use of repetition, comparison, or imagery to emphasize God's character and important themes.

- Mark all words referring to the Trinity (God the Father, Jesus the Son, the Holy Spirit) with a triangle. 
- Draw an arrow between faith and works every time you see them linked in this chapter. 
- Circle every mention or evidence of wealth/ lack of wealth.

List any themes or ideas in this chapter that have already been mentioned in the previous chapters:

Write out any direct imperative commands given to Believers.

Ex: "Speak and act as those who will be judged by a law that gives freedom." (v. 12)

Fill in the blank: *"For just as the body without the spirit is _____, so also faith without works is _____." (v. 26)*

List any biblical persons or references James makes in this chapter:

Write out what seems to be the theme verse in this chapter:



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

What words, thoughts, or phrases from Chapter 2 do I believe God is drawing my attention to, for my own growth and maturity?

The verses that most encouraged, challenged, or convicted me are (beside each, write any actions you think the Lord might require in response):

What question(s) do I hope are cleared up through my study this week?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 2 DAY 2

Prayer: Lord God, I come to You today, seeking Your face. Give me wisdom, insight, and discernment as I look at how James teaches us to live humbly before You. Fill me with a full measure of Your Holy Spirit so that I may draw closer and closer to You. I praise You, Lord, that as I draw closer to You, You will draw closer to me.

My brothers and sisters, do not show prejudice if you possess faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. For if someone comes into your assembly wearing a gold ring and fine clothing, and a poor person enters in filthy clothes, do you pay attention to the one who is finely dressed and say, "You sit here in a good place," and to the poor person, "You stand over there," or "Sit on the floor"? If so, have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil motives? Listen, my dear brothers and sisters! Did not God choose the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor! Are not the rich oppressing you and dragging you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme the good name of the one you belong to?

James 2:1-7



Underline the words "you" or "yours". Now, re-read James 2:1-7 as if James was writing the letter directly to you. How would that change your response?

I remember living in San Antonio in the late 90's. We attended First Baptist Church of San Antonio. Our church was an inner-city church with many ministries for the people living in poverty around our campus. We had a fully functional shelter, which provided housing, meals, church services, clothing, and medical clinics. This was the heart of FBC San Antonio. We also delivered thanksgiving meals to Victoria Courts, the government housing across the highway from the church. This was a dangerous area crime-ridden, drug-infested, and totally unsafe. I was able to help with the food distribution for one year and got to meet many outstanding residents of this community. What looked terrible on the outside was forgotten as I met the people of that community. I found out after I moved from San Antonio that this housing area was bulldozed to develop luxury apartments.



This is just one example of how favoritism is ingrained in us. It is natural for us to want to attract those who will most benefit us and inconvenience us the least.

The Scriptures do not indict wealth itself. In fact, financial increase is a predictable by-product of biblical financial stewardship. God's Word does, however, indict the favoritism and injustice the wealthy are inclined to possess. Two stories come to mind concerning rebuking the wealthy. The first is a sermon illustration Jesus told about Lazarus and a rich man (see Luke 16:19-31). In this illustration, Lazarus and the rich man lived near each other. The rich man lived in luxury and Lazarus, covered in dog-lapped sores, laid at the rich man's gate, begging for table scraps. This is a picture of how the poor lived in the times of Jesus and how they were thought of. There were no shelters, no social programs, no financial assistance. You literally laid in the street night and day hoping for someone to throw you some crumbs. The poor were outcast and forgotten, considered unclean and unworthy of God. Around the world, even in America, the poor are still mistreated and overlooked, and in many cases abused in ways that would have been unthinkable in Jesus's day and culture.

As the story continues, *"Now the poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades, as he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far off with Lazarus at his side. So he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue because I am in anguish in this fire'"* (Luke 16:22-23). Spoiler alert, we are all destined to die once and face God's judgement. The rich man received what he deserved, because he rejected God's provision through the coming Messiah. The rich man sees Abraham far away standing with Lazarus, and he screams, *"Father Abraham, have mercy on me"* (v. 24). In life, the rich man ignored Lazarus's begging at his gate. Now, the tables are turned and the rich man begs Lazarus to relieve his suffering.

The rich man, realizing the permanence of his eternal agony, begs Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers to warn them of their similar fate. The rich man rejected the law of Moses and the object of its hope. He knows his family has also rejected God's provision. The rich man wants Lazarus to return and warn his family. But Abraham replies that if they didn't listen to Moses and the prophets, they would remain in their unbelief even if someone rises from the dead. There is nothing this rich man can do to undue what has befallen him. But it's not too late for us to learn from this story by seeing everyone as bearing the image of God and as a recipient of God's offer of redemptive love.

The story of Jesus and the rich young ruler is also instructive to those who find themselves with material wealth. Let's read it.

Now someone came up to him and said, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to gain eternal life?" He said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." "Which ones?" he asked. Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to him, "I have wholeheartedly obeyed all these laws. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." But when the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he was very rich" (Matthew 19:16-22).

In this account, a rich man approaches Jesus and asks him, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to gain eternal life?" In Mark's account of this story, before responding with His answer, Jesus looked at the young man and felt love for him. This highlights the compassion Jesus feels for those who are far from Him, even for those whose souls have been warped by wealth. Notice that the ruler is asking Jesus what he needs to **do** to be saved. Layer by layer, Jesus peels back the man's self-righteousness performance. First, He addresses obedience to the law—perfect obedience is required for any wanting to attain heaven on their own merit. Then Jesus addresses the man's love. At the thought of parting from his wealth, the young ruler walked away from the only One who could have saved him by grace through faith. Eternal life was less important to him than what wealth could afford him in this brief, temporary life.

Many consider the account of the rich young ruler as a warning for the way that material wealth deeply affects the heart's willingness to let go of everything else to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior. Jesus is not making a universal command for everyone to sell their possessions. He is addressing the rich young ruler's particular obstacle to faith. This exchange emphasizes the fact that salvation is not through human efforts or adherence to the law, but through one's response to the invitation of Christ. The rich young ruler molded his wealth into his idol, displacing his willingness to enter into a first-love relationship with God. In the first-century Jewish context, wealth was often seen as a sign of God's favor and blessing. The young ruler's adherence to the commandments and his social status would have marked him as a model of piety and success. However, the account invites believers to examine the basis of their relationship with God, their own

attachments and priorities, and encourages a life of generosity that flows from a transformed heart. It serves as a reminder that the call to follow Christ requires giving up every lesser thing to receive from God and share what is infinitely greater. Namely, Himself.



How can these two stories of the wealthy encourage us to reorient our relationship with God and others?

When we read James 2:1-7 concerning favoritism, it's best to back up to James 1:27 and follow his train of thought from there. *"Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their adversity..."* The world loves to honor the rich and neglect the poor. James is warning the church of God, that if not intentional, they are also vulnerable to the natural pull to honor the rich and neglect the poor. He says not to show favoritism towards the wealthy, because faith and favoritism are completely incompatible. This is where we see five reminders James gave the church of his day that we must remember as the church of our day. The first two reminders we will look at here and the last three we will look at on day three.

1) Remember the glory of Christ's love

James 2:1 says, *"My brothers and sisters, do not show prejudice if you possess faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ."* This is only the second time that James refers to Jesus directly in this letter. James understood that the glory, supremacy, and goodness of God is embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. The church that James was referring to was giving honor where honor was **not** due. We don't honor the wealthy because they are rich in money, we honor Christ because He is rich in glory. His multi-faceted glory, is in part, due to the fact that He humbled Himself into poverty so that everyone might become rich in Him. It's impossible to be led by the Spirit of Christ and show a favoritism for others that is antithetical to the glory of His heart and mission for all.

We don't honor the wealthy because they are rich in money, we honor Christ because He is rich in glory.

2) Remember God's gaze on the needy

God has delighted in showing His grace to the poor and needy of the world throughout redemptive history. Meditate on these Old and New Testament verses:

The one who oppresses the poor has insulted his Creator, but whoever honors him shows favor to the needy (Proverbs 14:31).

I want you to share your food with the hungry and to provide shelter for homeless, oppressed people. When you see someone naked, clothe them! Don't turn your back on your own flesh and blood (Isaiah 58:7).

Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God belongs to you. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied (Luke 6:20-21).

"If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity... how can the love of God be in that person?" (1 John 3:17).

"And the king will answer them, 'I tell you the truth, just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it for me.' ...Then he will answer them, 'I tell you the truth, just as you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me.' 46 And these will depart into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25:40, 45).

There is a special place in God's heart for the "least of these." There is biblical grounds to suggest that God actually *does* show favoritism—but not toward the wealthy. He shows an outpouring of fatherly concern for the poor, widow, and orphan because of His great sympathy and compassion. If we are yielding to our Master and His indwelling Spirit, we won't *just* be fair and neutral to everyone. The pull of our Christ-formed hearts will bend *toward* the least of these with godly favoritism. When we stand before our Creator and Judge, He will examine our visible works of compassion toward the less fortunate, authenticating our saving faith and lifetime sanctification.



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

What visible evidence shows that the God who favors the needy has transformed my heart to become increasingly like His own?

Why is the term "religion" viewed so negatively among some Christians? Is my religion true, according to James's two-fold definition in James 1:27?

Do I find it easier to care for the needy in adversity, or to keep myself unstained by the world? What is the danger in ignoring one or the other?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 2 DAY 3

Prayer: Lord God Almighty, use my experiences, events, trials, challenges, losses, wins, promotions, and demotions to build me into being more like Jesus. I struggle with many of these things mentioned above, so give me strength to trust You in everything. Jesus, when I feel like You are not granting me Your favor, encourage me to be faithful to You and keep my eyes on You, not on my circumstances.



Read James 2:8-12. As you read this passage, underline words and phrases that relate to the law. Circle words or phrases that relate to love and mercy.

But if you fulfill the royal law as expressed in this scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. But if you show prejudice, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as violators. For the one who obeys 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.” Now if you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a violator of the law. Speak and act as those who will be judged by a law that gives freedom. For judgment is merciless for the one who has shown no mercy. But mercy triumphs over judgment.

James 2:8-13

Remember when you were in high school? For me, the lunch hour was the most awkward time of the day. I would get my tray, head out into the cafeteria, trying not to drop my tray, looking for a place to sit. This was a major decision, I didn’t want to sit at the wrong table. I was a band guy, so I looked for other band guys. I wouldn’t be caught dead sitting with the jocks, nerds, geeks, or ropers (no offense intended). This was just my reality in high school. I wanted to sit by the group that was most like me, where I would be the most comfortable, where I would benefit the most. This is human nature, but James reminds us that we are not serving our old nature. We are serving King Jesus and His Kingdom agenda. He gives us the desire and the strength to go where uncomfortable, without benefit to self, for the sake of someone that deeply matters to Him.



Our two examples in Scripture, Lazarus and the rich young ruler, were stories of how we can be confused, even blinded by wealth. In Day 2, we looked at remembering the glory of Christ's love and God's gaze on the poor. Today, we look at James's final three reminders to combat prejudice against the needy.

3) Remember the royal law of King Jesus

James admonishes believers to live according to what Jesus said was the greatest commandment, the command to love God above all, which results in purity of love for self and others. *"But if you fulfill the royal law as expressed in this scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well."* (James 2:8). James is referencing Jesus's teaching found in all three of the synoptic gospels that masterfully summarizes the heart of God's law.

Jesus said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40).

James tells us that if we keep the royal law, we are doing right, but if you show favoritism to the rich, you disobey the most important commandment. James is bringing home the reality that showing favoritism is a grievous sin. It is a violation of the law of love, the law of Christ, and goes against everything He stands for. When we show favoritism to the advantaged, we are guilty of breaking the law on two fronts. First, favoritism disrespects the dignity of people. The term "favoritism" in the original language means "an acceptor of a face," or in other words, showing partiality to a person based on external appearance. This idea is nowhere near "love your neighbor as yourself." Showing favoritism is not always about the rich and the poor. Many times, we make judgments about people based on external characteristics—the way they dress, general physical appearance, color of skin, social skills, or a host of other characteristics. As Christ-followers, we must be on guard against this sin because it can subtly remain hidden in our blind spots.

4) Remember our date with destiny

James says in 2:12-13, *"Speak and act as those who will be judged by a law that gives freedom. For judgment is merciless for the one who has shown no mercy. But mercy triumphs over judgment."* Because favoritism is such a serious sin, James immediately makes us aware of divine judgment and reminds us that we will be judged according to our speech and actions. We will stand before God to give an account for our words, our actions, or our

lack of action when it comes to that which God has said is most important—to love your neighbor as yourself. So, speak with love and act with love. This brings us to our fifth point.

5) Remember we reflect the mercy of Christ

The message of the Gospel is that God extends the mercy we need. James 2:13 says “*mercy triumphs over judgment*”. Praise God that He brings justice and mercy together in the cross, and we can be declared right before God based on the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ. James is saying that when we have experienced that kind of mercy, we clearly know how to show mercy to others. God’s mercy in us overflows from us. Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount, “*For if you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive you your sins.*” (Matthew 6:14-15). Because we are forgiven of our sins, we are compelled to forgive others. As we receive mercy, we extend mercy. If this is not the case, then the opposite applies. If we do not extend mercy, we demonstrate that we have not received mercy. James reminds us that “*judgment is merciless for the one who has shown no mercy*” (James 2:13).

**God's
mercy
in us
overflows
from us.**

James is not saying that we must be merciful to others to earn mercy before God. We cannot earn mercy; it’s mercy precisely because it can’t be earned. James is telling us that we can tell who has received mercy from God by the way they show mercy to others. If mercy is evident in someone’s life, then clearly Christ, by His mercy, is dwelling in them. But if mercy is not evident in them, then there may be reason to wonder whether the merciful Christ really dwells within. If we fail to do these things, then we show that we have not really been transformed by the life-giving mercy of Christ, and our religion, or faith, is not acceptable before God. Christ produces mercy in His people, which changes the way they act and speak before others. That’s the point of this text, for faith always expresses itself through love.



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

What has my attitude been toward orphans and widows? What are some practical steps I can take to begin practically caring for those around me?

How should Christ's judgment on the last day affect my words and actions today? Does this contradict God's grace?

Why does me showing mercy depend on me receiving mercy, and how does the message of the gospel fit into this?

How does care for the poor in our communities and around the world affect my and my church's gospel witness?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 2 DAY 4

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Can this kind of faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm and eat well," but you do not give them what the body needs, what good is it? So also faith, if it does not have works, is dead being by itself. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith without works and I will show you faith by my works. You believe that God is one; well and good. Even the demons believe that—and tremble with fear.

But would you like evidence, you empty fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? You see that his faith was working together with his works and his faith was perfected by works. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Now Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And similarly, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

James 2:14-26



Re-read James 2:14-26, circle the word "faith" each time it appears. How many times is faith mentioned? _____. Underline "works, deeds, did, do, action", how many times do they appear? _____

This paragraph is the most theologically significant (and controversial) in the letter of *James*. James addresses the claim some make that they have faith but no corresponding deeds—a person who claims faith can be separated from works. This was obviously concerning to James and the Spirit who inspired the letter, so James addresses it head-on. With that said, the modern reader must be careful to not isolate this passage from the whole testimony of Scripture. There are at least five possible interpretations of this passage that have gained acceptance in orthodox streams of Christianity. Why? In part, because James's use of justification and faith can have multiple meanings, depending on how the words are used. The best understanding allows clearer passages to speak into less clear passages, and takes into account the fact that the Spirit who inspired James, Peter, and Paul, always echoes what Jesus had to say about faith and works as well. It

is impossible for God to contradict Himself. There is a way of understanding key texts on faith and works that harmonizes them. Failing to harmonize the full testimony of the Bible indicts its trustworthiness as the inerrant and inspired revelation of our perfect God.



Why is it so easy to blur the line between doing a good work as a means to salvation and doing a good work as evidence of salvation?

There are 3 major truths taught about faith and works in this passage.

1. There are two types of faith in this passage: a “living” faith that saves, and a “dead” false faith that is unable to save.
2. Good works reveal which kind of faith it is.
3. Living faith (i.e. saving faith) results in good works, but is not earned by them.

The term “faith” appears 16 times in the book of James, 11 times in the passage that opened today’s devotional reading. 8 out of 11 times “faith” describes a dead or false faith that is unable to save. The point of this passage is that the kind of false faith that is being described is unable to save. It is also important to note that forms of the word justify have more than one meaning. It may mean legal justification before God in which a sinner is pardoned and declared righteous—this is what is meant when we say “saved”. There is another meaning for justification that fits the context of this *James* passage. Justified can also mean proved righteous, or vindicated in the sight of men. The language and the context permit both understandings. So it’s important to take great care to make conclusions that are consistent with the rest of Scripture. For example, this passage is **not** teaching that if you did not feed and clothe the poor when given the opportunity, that you are not saved. James’s point is that a (dead) faith comprised merely of intellectual assent or emotional sentiment is as useless for salvation as verbal well-wishes are to the practical needs of the poor. James is using an analogy. He isn’t making a theological statement about particular types of charitable acts being a necessary prerequisite to salvation.

So how do you know if you have faith that saves? First, it’s important to understand that faith is not mere intellectual assent, or having agreement with certain facts. We covered that in Chapter 1. Demons rightly believe key facts about God...and they shudder in fear. Like every good Jew who recites the *Shema*, demons believe those things, too. Demons believe in a

lot of things that we believe—the existence of God, the deity of Christ, and the presence of heaven and hell. They know that Christ is the eternal judge and that He is alone able to save. Many people have false assurance they are saved simply because they agree with a list of orthodox statements or creeds. If intellectual assent is the extent of their faith, they are no better off than the demons.

Second, faith is not simply an emotional response. James 2:19 refers to demons shuddering, the emotional response of fear, as they face the truth of God. How many people today rely solely on their emotions to define their faith at any given moment? Third, James notes that saving faith results in willful obedience. Why? Because saving faith brings about a union with Christ, and the indwelling of His Spirit, through which good works flourish and proliferate. If your faith consists merely of factual agreement and emotional stirrings without the corresponding obedience, your faith is not really faith at all.



Is it unloving to question whether someone has genuine biblical faith? What counsel would you give to a friend who believes the teachings of Scripture but has no spiritual fruit?

Faith in our hearts is evident in the fruit of our lives. James is telling us to look for fruit. It is important to note that he is not saying that we need to add works to faith to be saved. As pastor and author Paul Tripp illustrates, that is as disingenuous as stapling apples to an oak tree and calling it an apple tree. James is saying that works are the fruits of faith, and that real, true, genuine faith produces them. Why? Because, remember, faith is primarily relational. Faith removes the barrier between us and a holy God, and reorients us to His Lordship. When faith makes you right with God, you enter into a lifestyle of yielding as a bond-servant of Jesus. So if there is no observable fruit, we should have little confidence that salvation has taken place. Jesus speaks to this truth in the Sermon on the Mount:

You will recognize them by their fruit. Grapes are not gathered from thorns or figs from thistles, are they? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree is not able to bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree to bear good fruit. (Matthew 7:16-19)

If you see a tree with pears on it, you know that it's a pear tree. What is hanging on the outside is evidence of what is on the inside. James is saying that fruit in our lives is evidence of faith in our hearts. If there is no fruit in season, there is no faith. It's that simple. You will know faith by its fruit. While this is certainly true, what should we do about it? The fruit God expects and

inspects only comes through daily, moment-by-moment yielding to the will of His indwelling Spirit—Jesus calls this “abiding.”



If God ultimately produces spiritual fruit in our lives, what role do we play in pursuing greater maturity in the faith?

Dr. Henry Blackaby, in *Experiencing God*, writes, “Obedience is our moment of truth, it reveals what you believe about God. It determines whether you experience His mighty work in and through you. And it will decide whether you will come to know Him more intimately.” At the beginning of today’s devotional reading, you were asked to number how many times the words “works, deeds, did, do, or actions” appear. The word faith appeared 11 times, the words works, deeds, did, do, actions appeared 13 times. This is an indication that works, deeds, and actions flow from a life anchored in relationship to the God we know, trust, and love enough to obey.

Obedience is our moment of truth, it reveals what you believe about God.



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

Does it glorify God for me to attempt to bear fruit and do good works for Him, apart from His ongoing, active involvement and empowering (abiding)?

Does God do a better job of producing fruit in my life, or is that something I think I’m better at? If so, why is that?

It’s been said that a person’s life is perfectly designed to get the results they are currently getting. Likewise, the way I am abiding in Jesus is perfectly designed to produce the fruit I am currently seeing. What are some things I can do to be much more intentional about abiding, so that God multiplies fruitfulness in my life?

What hindrances are interfering with my intimacy with God?

What might I do to removed these hindrances with the support of my Christian community?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 2 DAY 5

But would you like evidence, you empty fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? You see that his faith was working together with his works and his faith was perfected by works. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Now Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And similarly, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

James 2:20-26

James uses the story of Abram (later called Abraham) found in Genesis 15 and 22 to illustrate how faith works. In Genesis 15, Abram had a vision from God telling him that he would become the father of many nations. Abram and Sarai were old, far too old for having babies. Abram could have brushed off this vision as a pipe dream. But what did Abram do? He believed (had faith) in the Lord and it was credited him as righteousness. Fast forward thirty years. Isaac, Abraham's miracle son, is now thirty years old. God tells him to offer his son as a burnt offering. Abraham never hesitated. He immediately made the necessary preparations, went to the appointed place, lifted his knife, and then we read, *"But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, 'Abraham! Abraham!'" "Here I am!" he answered. "Do not harm the boy!" the angel said. "Do not do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God because you did not withhold your son, your only son, from me"* (Genesis 22:11-12). Abraham believed God from the moment God called him. Thirty years later, Abraham's faith resulted in works of obedience when God called him to sacrifice his son. By its nature, faith creates works, then in turn works complete faith. In James 2:22, we read *"his faith was perfected by works"*.

Likewise, Rahab's story further illustrates that mere sentiment and intellect does not make true faith. Sentiment and intellect don't reach the point of effectual faith until it reaches the level of obedience. Thoughts and feelings have not surpassed the threshold to become faith, if stopping short of obedience. The backstory of Rahab is that the Jewish nation had left Egypt and wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Moses has died,

Thoughts and feelings have not surpassed the threshold to become faith, if stopping short of obedience.

Joshua is now in charge, and they are ready to enter the promised land. The first city they will encounter is Jericho. Joshua wants to know what they will face when they cross the Jordan, so he sends two spies to scope out the land. They come to the house of Rahab the prostitute and stay with her. The king of Jericho got news that the spies were staying with Rahab and asked her to hand them over to him. Rahab covers for them and they are spared. Rahab explains to the spies why she helped them: *"She said to the men, 'I know the Lord is handing this land over to you. We are absolutely terrified of you, and all who live in the land are cringing before you'"* (Joshua 2:9). Rahab begs the spies to spare her and her family when the Israelites take over the city. Rahab recognizes that the Lord is God in Heaven above and earth below. Her kindness to the spies was because of the fear of the Lord God. Because she shows kindness and mercy to the spies, the spies will do the same for her and her family. Rahab's obedience to God and to the spies saved her and her family from destruction.

Abraham and Rahab couldn't have been more different. Abraham was the patriarch of the Jewish people, he was a friend of God, a great leader, and at the top of the social order. Rahab was a practicing prostitute in the middle of a Gentile nation, servicing and living among the enemies of God. She was a common citizen at the bottom of the social order. Even with their extreme differences, Rahab and Abraham had two things in common. Both feared God to the extent that it became active faith. Both were obedient to God's call on their particular lives, and they were considered righteous by their obedience.

We just read of two Old Testament characters who were obedient to God in both their faith and actions, Abraham and Rahab. Now let's compare two scriptures, the first written by James, the second written by Paul, both inspired by the Holy Spirit:

- *You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone* (James 2:24).
- *For we consider that a person is declared righteous by faith apart from the works of the law* (Romans 3:28).



Do these two verses contradict each other?

Circle one: **YES** **NO** **MAYBE**

We cannot shrink back from either Paul or James because they do not contradict each other. Each of them is writing about the same gospel, yet

they are writing from two different vantage points, addressing different problems in the churches to whom they are writing. James and Paul are not standing toe-to-toe with contrary views of the gospel. Instead, they are standing back-to-back with each other fighting two different enemies and defending a unified understanding of the gospel. Paul is fighting against the idea that we can earn our salvation with our works. James, on the other hand, is fighting against an “easy gospel” which reduces salvation to mere intellectual belief.



Which of these scriptures will you hold to today, James 2:24 or Romans 3:28? _____. Spoiler alert – the answer is BOTH.

Two Types of Faith

James, in his discussion of faith, talks about two types of faith—dead faith and living faith (James 2:20). Dead faith, which does not save, is when a person claims to have saving faith without the corroborating evidence of any good works. James also describes dead faith as incomplete or imperfect (James 2:22). Essential elements of faith may be present—intellectual belief, emotional sentiment, a desire to surrender—but fall short of attaining faith. Consider a small child on the deck of a swimming pool looking at her mother inside. The child believes that her mother is good and loves her, she believes her mother can and would catch her, she feels compelled to jump, and she wants to jump. She even shimmies closer to the edge of the pool with her toes now dangling over the water. But until she actually jumps, she stops short of what the biblical writers describe as faith. Like a missing piece of a puzzle, jumping “completes” the faith she already possessed in part.



Is my saving faith dead, incomplete, or imperfect as James described? What inner elements of faith are present that need to be made complete by my actions? Has my saving faith produced a subsequent lifestyle of daily faith and obedience that permeates and transforms every part of who I am?

Two Pictures of Works

The word *works* can be translated “actions” or “deeds”. When you see works/actions/deeds in the New Testament they can be either positive or negative. Negative works are works often fueled by the flesh, which do not honor God. This is what Paul writes about when he is speaking of works. Paul is constantly speaking against people attempting to attain salvation by their works. This is the danger of legalism, a danger we must always be on guard

against. Legalism is the belief and lifestyle that becoming right before God is ultimately a result of doing enough to earn His favor. On the other hand, James is not talking about legalism when he mentions works/actions/deeds. When he is talking about works, he is talking about God-glorifying obedience: love for the needy, mercy for the poor, care for the orphan, provisions for the impoverished—all driven by the transforming love and mercy of God.

Henry Blackaby, the author of *Experiencing God*, goes into great detail on the topic of obedience. Blackaby explains that we come to know God by experience as we obey Him, and He accomplishes His work through us. God is always at work in our world. He is currently at work around our lives. God always takes the initiative to come to us and reveal what He is doing or what He is about to do. This is His invitation for us to join Him in His activity. Joining Him may require us to make major adjustments in our lives. When we know what God has said and what He is about to do, and when we have adjusted our life to Him, we must respond to God. To experience God at work in and through us, we must obey Him. When we obey Him, He will accomplish His work through us, and we will come to know Him by experience.



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

Am I eager or hesitant to obey God? What do I think that means? How does that reality connect to my love relationship with Jesus?

I know that I've been saved by grace through faith, not as a result of my good works. But post-salvation, am I living legalistically, trying to maintain or earn God's continued favor?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 2, DAY 6:

REVIEW & REFLECT

Take a moment to review days 1 - 5 of this week. **Identify the most significant truths from FAITH / WORKS you believe God wants you to understand and apply. Write them below:**

Write down any questions you have about the content from this chapter you are unsettled about:

What are some things you will begin doing, or stop doing, in response to what you learned this week?

What is something you'd be willing to share with your GroupLife class this Sunday about what God showed you this week?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 2, DAY 7:

WORSHIP AND GROUPLIFE

GroupLife TAKEAWAYS

Record any insights from GroupLife that God emphasizes to you today:

SERMON TAKEAWAYS

Record any insights from today's sermon that God emphasizes to you:

YOUR RESPONSE TO GOD SPEAKING AT CHURCH TODAY:

JAMES CHAPTER 3

BEGIN SEPTEMBER 8

RENÉE BRADY



FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 3 DAY 1

Imagine you are going in to have eye surgery. You meet your surgeon for your pre-op appointment and he meticulously details every step of the procedure. As you talk more, he shares with you the new advancements made in the technology that make this surgery better than the “old way” it used to be done and noting the precise accuracy that can be measured in every move. Your surgeon next moves on to share with you what your post-op experience will entail and hands you a detailed post-op care sheet before asking you if you have any questions. Every question you ask, he answers with such confidence, detail, and certainty that your fears are alleviated one at a time. In an effort to appear thoughtful and thorough, you ask him one final question, “How many times have you performed this particular surgery before?” He sits up straighter, smiles, takes a deep breath and slaps his legs as he says, “Well, this will actually be my first on a live patient but I have done this several times on cadavers.” I’ll wait while you catch your breath! Despite the very strong start to the consultation, your confidence level just took a dramatic nosedive in a matter of seconds! Why? Because your surgeon has a lot of knowledge, but he lacks the experience of putting it into practice successfully.

Sadly, this can be the case for many knowledgeable Christians. Their knowledge and theology far outpace their character and integrity. It shouldn’t be a leap to conclude this shouldn’t be so. While the whole book of *James* is about bringing action into alignment with belief, Chapter 3 focuses on the use of words. James explains that our words both reveal and direct our hearts.

Pause to pray, asking for God’s wisdom in understanding and applying His Word in ways that personally transform, build others up, and glorify God.

- *Give me wisdom, knowledge, and understanding without becoming proud.*
- *Correct any lies I believe about You or anything I misunderstand.*
- *Help me see something new about You I’ve never seen before.*
- *Redirect my attitudes or actions that do not align with Your Word and Your will.*
- *Let any knowledge I gain help me love You and others more.*




Turn to page 127 and read James Chapter 3.



In 2-4 sentences, summarize the main idea of this chapter:

Mark the Text

Marking the text will help us to quickly identify the author's use of repetition, comparison, or imagery to emphasize God's character and important themes.

- Mark all words referring to the Trinity (God the Father, Jesus the Son, the Holy Spirit) with a triangle 
- Mark every illustration (word picture) with a star. 
- every mention of the tongue, our words, or what we say.

List the ideas in this chapter that have already been mentioned in the previous chapters:

Chapter 3 has two primary sections. One related to the tongue, the other to wisdom. Jot down your initial thoughts on how they relate to one another:

List the words that are connected to wisdom in Verses 13-18:

Fill in the blank: “*And the fruit that consists of righteousness is planted in _____ among those who make _____.*” (Verse 18)

Write out what seems to be the theme verse in this chapter:



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

What words, thoughts, or phrases from Chapter 3 do I believe God is drawing my attention to, for my own growth and maturity?

The verses that most encouraged, challenged, or convicted me are (beside each, write any actions you think the Lord might require in response):

What question(s) do I hope are cleared up through my study this week:

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 3 DAY 2

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, because you know that we will be judged more strictly. For we all stumble in many ways. If someone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect [mature] individual, able to control the entire body as well.

James 3:1-2

When I was younger, I remember people asking me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I went through a particular phase when the answer was almost always, “be a famous Christian singer.” I laugh at it now because while it may have sounded sweet at the time, do you know which part of that phrase was most compelling to me? Famous. The Christian part was sincere, too, but it lacked the sparkle of being famous. Only a few years ago, I asked a group of kids the same question. While there was a little variety to the jobs they listed (athletes, YouTubers, and doctors), nearly every one of them had a clarifier like “famous,” “pro,” or “expert.” Even from childhood, there is a fascination we have with greatness that often overtakes even the purest of desires.

James Chapter 3 begins with a strong warning for those in (or desiring) teaching and leadership positions within the church. His aim here is not to dissuade people from teaching. His purpose is to draw attention to the motivations for teaching. James was well acquainted with the fact that the human heart desires and can be led astray by position, influence, and privilege that can come with such roles. James saw first-hand the results of mixed motives in leadership and did not want to see the same for the forming Christian church. Let’s look at Jesus’s warning to the Pharisees, the teachers of the Mosaic law, one of the most powerful groups among the Jews:

“Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ‘The experts in the law and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat. Therefore pay attention to what they tell you and do it. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they teach. They tie up heavy loads, hard to carry, and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing even to lift a finger to move them’ (Matthew 23:1-4).

The Pharisees were known for their self-righteous attitudes, hypocrisy, affinity for honor and recognition, and mistreatment of the poor. Sound

familiar? These are essentially the same list of things James is warning about in our study. Jesus further indicts the Pharisees in one of His last confrontations with them in Matthew 23, listing out His grievances against them, calling them “whitewashed tombs” (v. 27) and “offspring of vipers” (v. 33). Jesus knew that their words revealed the true nature of their hearts, despite their outward show of religiosity. Jesus cannot stand this hypocrisy, especially among those who have the responsibility to lead others.

James echoes Jesus’s warning that leaders are to bring both their words and actions under the leadership and Lordship of the Holy Spirit, not selfish ambition. However, James wasn’t only concerned with wrong motives in teaching, but also the accountability that must accompany the role of teaching. Teachers have a great and holy responsibility to accurately communicate the Word of God and instruct others in it. That is a responsibility that should never be taken lightly and always be approached with humility, reverence, and submission to the Holy Spirit. A teacher has so much potential to not only build up and lead others to truth, but also to harm and to lead others astray.



Using God’s Word as the standard, do I carefully consider the weight and impact of my words at home, in the church, and throughout my spheres of influence?

James continues, *“For we all stumble in many ways. If someone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect individual, able to control the entire body as well”* (James 3:2). The Greek word translated “perfect” is τελειος (tel’-i-os), which suggests being brought to maturity. Because the tongue has the capacity to deeply affect people for good or ill, teaching should be restricted to those who possess maturity in the Lord. He’s not suggesting that leaders won’t sin or make mistakes, but is warning them to not overlook the true condition of their own hearts.

Those who teach about the Lord in the church must have a corresponding maturity in the Lord from which to draw. *“A spring does not pour out fresh water and bitter water from the same opening, does it? Can a fig tree produce olives, my brothers and sisters, or a vine produce figs? Neither can a salt water spring produce fresh water”* (James 3:11-12). So James rightly emphasizes that teachers cannot deflect judgment away from themselves, but must embrace the fact that they rightly will be judged for the harmony between their hearts and their tongues.

James understood, however, that without this essential maturity, that

human nature devolves into the judgment of others and a lack of self awareness. He may have heard his half-brother Jesus speak on this very topic: *“Why do you see the speck in your brother’s eye, but fail to see the beam of wood in your own? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye,’ while there is a beam in your own? You hypocrite! First remove the beam from your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye”* (Matthew 7:3-5).

It is human nature to magnify the faults and mistakes of others and minimize, excuse, and defend our own. The very first sin in the Garden of Eden was filled with blame-shifting, defensiveness, and evasion of accountability. They sinned, blamed each other, and hid from God. This has characterized our fallen human nature ever since. But those who belong to Jesus are set free from the dominion of our old nature. It no longer has any claim on us, or mastery over us. We are empowered and free to follow our new Master, Jesus Christ. Believer, we are called to live in the way of maturity. A way that rightly deals with and confesses our own sin (both to God and others), and extends to others the same grace and mercy we desire for ourselves.

***We are
empowered
and free to
follow our
new Master,
Jesus Christ.***



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

Am I quick to notice or point out the missteps, flaws, and shortcomings of others, while I generally let myself off the hook?

Have I nurtured my own self-awareness and support by being transparent with a trusted Christian friend about my propensities toward specific sins?

Does my growing maturity in my abiding relationship with Jesus harmonize with my willingness to influence and teach others about abiding in Jesus?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 3 DAY 3

And if we put bits into the mouths of horses to get them to obey us, then we guide their entire bodies. Look at ships too: Though they are so large and driven by harsh winds, they are steered by a tiny rudder wherever the pilot's inclination directs. So, too, the tongue is a small part of the body, yet it has great pretensions. Think how small a flame sets a huge forest ablaze. And the tongue is a fire! The tongue represents the world of wrongdoing among the parts of our bodies. It pollutes the entire body and sets fire to the course of human existence—and is set on fire by hell. For every kind of animal, bird, reptile, and sea creature is subdued and has been subdued by humankind. But no human being can subdue the tongue; it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

James 3:3-8

If you're old enough, you may remember where you were on January 28, 1986. Many school children were gathered around a TV in school to watch the historic space flight where the first civilian, a school teacher named Christa McAuliffe, would be launched into space. She would join 6 other NASA astronauts and was scheduled to teach two lessons to schoolchildren from space. The launch was highly publicized, and people who previously felt no connection to space endeavors now felt a sense of pride that space exploration could even include a "regular person" like them. National pride swelled as the NASA Space Shuttle Challenger took off, but within 73 seconds, things took a tragic and traumatic turn as the shuttle exploded in front of millions of viewers. The country was in disbelief over what they



had just witnessed. Within days, the cause of the explosion was identified and later confirmed by the Rogers Commission. The 4.5 million pound rocket was compromised by a failed seal on the right rocket booster. The unusually cold launch day in Cape Canaveral caused the O-ring to lose its flexibility, allowing hot gasses to escape and ignite the fuel tank. The whole disaster came down to a tiny rubber ring.

And the consequences were catastrophic. The state of the art shuttle system, with its 2.5 million moving parts was all compromised by a ¼ inch ring of rubber.

James employs a number of word-pictures in the verses we will look at today, each teaching what the shuttle tragedy taught nearly 40 years ago—that a small, unseen part can exert such devastating power over the whole.



Read over James 3:3-8 and write down the images James uses to illustrate this truth:

Example: Verse 3: A bit in the mouth of a horse

Verse 4:

Verse 5:

Verses 6-7:

In each of these images, we see something small and seemingly insignificant that does great damage. Verses 3 and 4 are great pictures of something large and powerful, that is steered or controlled by a very small part. James introduces these pictures to remind us that the tongue (our words) has the power to steer and control our whole self. It is important to note that the bit, the rudder, and the tongue don't steer themselves but must all be directed by the person responsible for them. Up to this point, James has used simile, a literary device used to make a subtle comparison, but it is at this point that he moves to the more impactful and direct device of metaphor in verses 6 and 7: "and the tongue is a fire" (vs. 6). James is "turning up the heat" in his conviction of the power of our words to do great damage. Like fire, our words can be used responsibly when contained within healthy boundaries and limits, but can be catastrophically destructive when left unrestrained.



As you read the following verses, put a star next to words left "unchecked," and box around words operating within boundaries.

"Therefore, having laid aside falsehood, each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor because we are members of one another. You must let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but only what is beneficial for the building up of the one in need, that it would give grace to those who hear" (Ephesians 4:25, 29).

"But among you there must not be either sexual immorality, impurity of any kind, or greed, as these are not fitting for the saints. Neither should there be vulgar speech, foolish talk, or coarse jesting—all of which are out of character—but rather thanksgiving" (Ephesians 5:3-4).

"But now, put off all such things as anger, rage, malice, slander, abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another since you have put off the old man with its practices and have been clothed with the new man that is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created it" (Colossians 3:8-10).

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and exhorting one another with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, all with grace in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16).

List the starred, "unchecked" words you recognize in your own speech patterns:



What new speech patterns, under the control of the Holy Spirit, do I need to practice so that others might benefit from them?

Why is it so hard to get control over our tongues? James understood this is universally difficult for everyone. He says it's easier for us to tame a wild animal than it is to tame our tongue! I haven't tried taming a wild animal but I have failed at training two stubborn dachshunds, and I know my tongue is even more rebellious. I remember a particular season when I was struggling to control my tongue and it affected many of my relationships, causing discord, hurt feelings, and resentments. I found myself frustrated and defensive and spent too much time "venting" to others about things I felt justified to be upset about. In a moment of conviction, I remember praying to God and confessing, "I have a tongue problem, Lord help me control it." Immediately, the Spirit brought to mind, *"For out of the abundance of his heart his mouth speaks"* (Luke 6:45, ESV). I realized that the real problem was my heart. Only a few days later I found Psalms 141:3, *"Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!"* Whenever I was tempted to vent, lash out, or get defensive, I would pause and say this verse to myself and ask the Holy Spirit to be the bouncer of my mouth, carefully examining everything that came through.

My sinful tongue would not bring about the righteousness I truly desired.

For me, it was both a heart and a tongue issue that needed to be addressed, but I found the collateral damage was much greater when there was no "guard" set over my mouth. The Lord next addressed my heart problem by bringing to mind James 1:19-20, *"Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters! Let every person be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. For human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness."* I knew I needed to be slower to speak, but I also had the powerful why: My sinful tongue would not bring about the righteousness I truly desired. As if the Lord hadn't

used His Word enough to bring home the point, I came across a meme from the *Golden Girls* TV sitcom that gave a perfect visual representation of the help I needed from the Holy Spirit to get a grip on my mouth! Even today, when I need the Lord's help holding my tongue, I picture Him setting a guard over my mouth just like Dorothy did over Sophia's.



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

Do I regularly speak encouragement to those around me or am I more often critical of others?

Do I allow myself too much permission to “speak my truth” when I am wronged or offended? Does that hurt or build up the relationships I value?

Do I have any control or boundaries over my tongue (the use of my words) whether face-to-face, behind someone's back, or online?

Are there words I have spoken that have caused damage that needs to be repaired? If so, am I willing to obey God's will for forgiveness and reconciliation?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 3 DAY 4

With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse people made in God's image. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. These things should not be so, my brothers and sisters. A spring does not pour out fresh water and bitter water from the same opening, does it? Can a fig tree produce olives, my brothers and sisters, or a vine produce figs? Neither can a salt water spring produce fresh water.

James 3:9-12

Whatever the setting or audience, our words carry weight. We must carefully consider the impact and potential damage they can do. I imagine everyone reading this can recall something hurtful that someone said to you when you were young that still affects you today. You may have accepted that message as your identity or spent your life proving it wrong, but in either case those words carried great impact. In the same way we are shaped by the words of others, we have the same power to build others up or tear them down, long after the words are uttered. Our words carry an invisible weight we often ignore, but James drives home the importance of choosing our words to bring life instead of death.



What words have I allowed to carry too much weight in my life? Lord, point me to truth and freedom from the pain of these words.

James continues in verses 9-12 addressing the power of the tongue and emphasizes both the double mindedness and hypocrisy of the human heart. He points out that with the same tongue we bless God, and then turn around and curse others, who are made in His very image. The hypocrisy James points out here is intolerable. What are the ways I “curse” others, made in God’s Image? How can our words move so quickly between praising and cursing? And maybe even more convicting, how do we become so blind to it?

In Verse 9, James draws a direct line in these verses between our worship of God and our treatment of our neighbors. The New Testament has much to say about this connection.



Read the following verses. Underline the words and phrasing indicating our worship of God. Draw a circle around words and phrases describing love for others.

“I give you a new commandment—to love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples—if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

“We love because he loved us first. If anyone says “I love God” and yet hates his fellow Christian, he is a liar because the one who does not love his fellow Christian whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And the commandment we have from him is this: that the one who loves God should love his fellow Christian too” (1 John 4:19-21).

Remember, James’s inspiration for his teaching is what he heard from Jesus firsthand. Let’s look at the following statements Jesus made about the power of words to get a framework for where James is likely coming from:

“For the mouth speaks from what fills the heart. The good person brings good things out of his good treasury, and the evil person brings evil things out of his evil treasury. I tell you that on the day of judgment, people will give an account for every worthless word they speak. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:34a-37).

“But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these things defile a person. For out of the heart come evil ideas, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are the things that defile a person; it is not eating with unwashed hands that defiles a person” (Matthew 15:18-20).



What do Jesus’ words reveal about the connection between the mouth and the heart?

Next, in Chapter 3, Verse 11, James introduces two images in nature that show the incompatibility of our praising and cursing—a spring and a fruit tree. Just as a spring cannot pour forth both “sweet” (fresh) and “bitter” (salt) water, it shouldn’t be that our mouths pour forth such opposing words either. Springs are the surface opening point at which the water underneath is brought forth. The groundwater determines the freshness of the water and the spring just releases it, much like the mouth just reveals and releases what is contained in the heart.



When do my words tend to be sweet? When do they tend to be “bitter”? Does the authority of Jesus over my words stop when circumstances are triggering and people are undeserving?

The second image James uses is two types of trees. A fruit tree is known and identified by its fruit. You don't have to be an Aggie to know this. If you purchased a lemon tree at Home Depot and it produced peaches, what would you conclude about your purchase? Since you know that the fruit reveals the nature of the tree, you would conclude that you actually bought a peach tree, not that your lemon tree miraculously started producing peaches. That would be impossible! Likewise, James also concludes that the fruit of our words reveals the true nature of our hearts. If our words do not conform to the will of Jesus in certain circumstances, like when we feel wronged by others, we must conclude that a heart adjustment is in order. We must revisit our abiding relationship with Jesus. For when we keep in step with His Spirit, our hearts beat with undeserved grace for others, regardless of the circumstance. And from this state of the heart, only words that build others up in Jesus flow freely.



What thoughts, words, or actions do I see in myself that are inconsistent with maturity in obedience to King Jesus?

For James, these exhortations to examine our words must have been personal. Remember, James was the half-brother of Jesus who did not believe Him during His earthly ministry (John 7:5). More than just unbelief, Jesus's brothers thought He was crazy (Mark 3:21). Imagine the words that must have been hurled at crazy big brother when mom wasn't around. During Jesus's life, James did not use his words to praise Jesus, the Messiah, but misunderstood and ridiculed Him. After His resurrection, the Bible says Jesus found James. The One who sinlessly endured James's unbelief and stinging words for all those years now stood before him, risen. Arguably, James knows the connection between our words and the Lordship of Jesus better than anyone else. Perhaps that's why he uses multiple forms of imagery to drive home this connection between our words and the one who is truly ruling our hearts.



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

Is there a scenario (when I am wronged, when I am wrong, etc.) that tends to influence my words more than Jesus?

Are my thoughts and speech influenced by where I am and who is around?

Here are practical ways I think can help me recalibrate my heart to the Lordship of Jesus, and break other influences over my words:

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 3 DAY 5

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct he should show his works done in the gentleness that wisdom brings. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfishness in your hearts, do not boast and tell lies against the truth. Such wisdom does not come from above but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where there is jealousy and selfishness, there is disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, accommodating, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and not hypocritical. And the fruit that consists of righteousness is planted in peace among those who make peace.

James 3:13-18

A really fun benefit to teaching kids is that they are refreshingly honest. Sometimes, painfully so! I love to ask kids what they picture in their minds when they think of God or heaven. It's not unusual to hear God described like a J.R.R. Tolkien white wizard and heaven as place for bouncing on clouds and eating cotton candy. Just because we have a God concept in our mind's eye doesn't mean it's accurate. So, I ask you, what comes to mind when you picture someone who is wise? Does an old man sitting cross-legged on a rock come to mind? Thankfully, we don't have to draw from our own ignorance or misconceptions to answer that question. God's Word provides what is needed to develop a clearer picture of wisdom, to understand how it works, and to foster a desire for the maturity that accompanies it.



What is wisdom? What makes a person wise?

Wisdom can feel elusive and mysterious. What is it exactly that makes someone wise, or how would one know if they are wise? Let's start our study of wisdom today by taking a look at King Solomon, commonly referred to as "The Wisest Man Who Ever Lived." In 1 Kings 3, we enter into the beginning of King Solomon's reign as king over Israel. He has just taken over after the death of his father, King David, and is young and green in terms of leading a nation. During a moment of worship, the Lord speaks to Solomon and instructs him to ask for whatever he wants from Him. Solomon, full of humility and reverence, asks the Lord for wisdom, or more specifically, "a discerning heart" to "distinguish between right and wrong." God granted his request.

This wisdom was displayed when two prostitutes stood before King Solomon with a dilemma in which wisdom was greatly needed. Let's look at this account from 1 Kings 3:16-28:

Then two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. One of the women said, "My master, this woman and I live in the same house. I had a baby while she was with me in the house. Then three days after I had my baby, this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there was no one else in the house except the two of us. This woman's child suffocated during the night when she rolled on top of him. She got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side, while your servant was sleeping. She put him in her arms, and put her dead son in my arms. I got up in the morning to nurse my son, and there he was, dead! But when I examined him carefully in the morning, I realized it was not my baby."

The other woman said, "No! My son is alive; your son is dead!"

But the first woman replied, "No, your son is dead; my son is alive." Each presented her case before the king.

The king said, "One says, 'My son is alive; your son is dead,' while the other says, 'No, your son is dead; my son is alive.'" The king ordered, "Get me a sword." So they placed a sword before the king. The king then said, "Cut the living child in two, and give half to one and half to the other!" The real mother spoke up to the king, for her motherly instincts were awakened. She said, "My master, give her the living child! Whatever you do, don't kill him!" But the other woman said, "Neither one of us will have him. Let them cut him in two!" The king responded, "Give the first woman the living child; don't kill him. She is the mother." When all Israel heard about the judicial decision which the king had rendered, they respected the king, for they realized that he possessed divine wisdom to make judicial decisions.

This story is a clear, though extreme, picture of wisdom and discernment in action. The king has an eye for justice, but is also aware of the nature of the human heart and a mother's sacrificial love for her children. It wasn't about laying out all the facts and presenting evidence. Or even about the power to do whatever he saw fit. It was about seeing the nature of people, seeing true justice, and responding in a way that brought about the best for the child and honor to the Lord.

In Chapter 3, Verse 13, James asks, "Who is wise and understanding among you?" Far from an elusive riddle, James immediately lets us know that

wisdom is not an invisible quality, but will be on full display in a person's "good life" and deeds. Again, James is reminding us that the inner life (heart and wisdom) is to be congruent with a person's outer life (speech, good life, and deeds). James essentially lays out a rubric for what wisdom is and isn't.

In James 3:13, where does James say humility comes from?



Read verses 13-18 and fill in the chart below with the descriptions that help us know how to recognize wisdom.

WISDOM IS NOT (vs.14-16)	WISDOM IS (vs. 13, 17-18)
ex. • bitter jealousy	ex. • Pure
•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•

What one word stood out most in describing what wisdom is? What word was most convicting in what wisdom is not?



Is there a misunderstanding I've had about wisdom that was corrected by this passage?



James's profile of the characteristics that do or do not display wisdom has clear similarities to Paul's description of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5. As you read it, strike through words that display earthly "wisdom" and circle words that display heavenly wisdom.

But I say, live by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. For the flesh has desires that are opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit has desires that are opposed to the flesh, for these are in opposition to each other, so that you cannot do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality,

impurity, depravity, idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions, envying, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and similar things. I am warning you, as I had warned you before: Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God! But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also behave in accordance with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, being jealous of one another. (Galatians 5:16-26).

The greatest difference between earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom is its source. The former originates outside of God (self, the world, the enemy) and the latter originates in God (Holy Spirit). Praise God that wisdom is a gift from Him and not something that we have to conjure up to do on our own! Can you look around and see that our churches, homes, workplaces, communities, governments, and world need people with heavenly wisdom that comes from above? I don't think that is something we have to approach with the same hope of tossing a penny in a wishing well. We can ask God to make us men and women with heavenly wisdom through the power of His Spirit. I hope that's who you want to be.

The greatest difference between earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom is its source.

Pastor and author, John Piper paints a picture of the impact wisdom makes:

“Whether you are single or married, here's one vision, one way to articulate to yourself why you're on planet Earth: think of becoming a 60-year-old sage, to which hundreds of young women in their 20s and 30s and 40s will come streaming, because you penetrate, you see things, you understand things, you grasp things, you know nature, you know God, you know the heart, you know sin, you know ugliness, you know beauty, you know wrath, you know holiness, you know mercy. You know things. You've been into the human heart and worked around there and understood it and untangled the sanctity and the sin of the human nature. And people read all over you the aroma of wisdom.

And I just think the only reason that doesn't happen more often than it does is that we don't pray toward it, think toward it, work toward it, read toward it, listen toward it, act toward it, relate toward it; we just coast. Isn't that a beautiful goal, for people to sense the “aroma of wisdom” when they're around you?”



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

If wisdom's source is God, am I living in an abiding relationship with God throughout each day—keeping in lock-step with His Spirit—so that wisdom flows naturally through me?

Am I contributing wisdom to my family and church family? In other words, am I mostly bringing the flawed insights and reactions of my flesh to the table, or God's boundless wisdom and companion fruits?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 3, DAY 6:

REVIEW & REFLECT

Take a moment to review days 1 - 5 of this week. **Identify the most significant truths from FAITH / WORKS you believe God wants you to understand and apply. Write them below:**

Write down any questions you have about the content from this chapter you are unsettled about:

What are some things you will begin doing, or stop doing, in response to what you learned this week?

What is something you'd be willing to share with your GroupLife class this Sunday about what God showed you this week?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 3, DAY 7:

WORSHIP AND GROUPLIFE

GroupLife TAKEAWAYS

Record any insights from GroupLife that God emphasizes to you today:

SERMON TAKEAWAYS

Record any insights from today's sermon that God emphasizes to you:

YOUR RESPONSE TO GOD SPEAKING AT CHURCH TODAY:

JAMES CHAPTER 4

BEGIN SEPTEMBER 15

GARY PEIL



FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 4 DAY 1

Pause to pray, asking for God's wisdom in understanding and applying His Word in ways that personally transform, build others up, and glorify God.

- Give me wisdom, knowledge, and understanding without becoming proud.
- Correct any lies I believe about You or anything I misunderstand.
- Help me see something new about You I've never seen before.
- Redirect my attitudes or actions that do not align with Your Word and Your will.
- Let any knowledge I gain help me love You and others more.



Turn to page 128 and read James Chapter 4



In 2-3 sentences, summarize the main idea of the chapter:

Marking the text

Marking the text will help us to quickly identify the author's use of repetition, comparison, or imagery to emphasize God's character and important themes.

- Mark all words referring to the Trinity (God the Father, Jesus the Son, the Holy Spirit) with a triangle. 
-  every word that signifies conflict (quarrel, battle, enemy, against, etc.).

List the ideas in this chapter have already been mentioned in the previous three chapters:

Fill in the blank: *“But he gives greater _____. Therefore, it says, “God opposes the proud but he gives _____ to the humble.”*
(v. 6)

Write out what seems to be the theme verse in this chapter:



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

What words, thoughts, or phrases from Chapter 4 do I believe God is drawing my attention to, for my own growth and maturity?

The verses that most encouraged, challenged, or convicted me are (beside each, write any actions you think the Lord might require in response):

What question(s) do I hope are cleared up through my study this week:

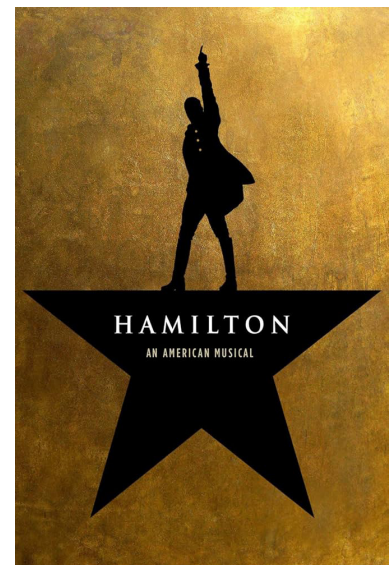
FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 4 DAY 2

Where do the conflicts and where do the quarrels among you come from? Is it not from this, from your passions that battle inside you? You desire and you do not have; you murder and envy and you cannot obtain; you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask; you ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly, so you can spend it on your passions.

James 4:1-3

One of the most popular and critically acclaimed Broadway musicals in recent years is *Hamilton*. The musical uses hip hop to tell the story of Alexander Hamilton and his rise to prominence during revolutionary America. The musical won eleven Tony awards and the Pulitzer Prize, not to mention being one of the hardest tickets to come by in New York and across the nation. One of the themes at the heart of *Hamilton* was the ongoing rivalry with Aaron Burr. The two men were political rivals who had differing ideologies that developed into a significant personal and political battle. Eventually the conflict reached a climax with a duel in which Hamilton was killed. It becomes a cautionary tale of how political agendas, personal ambition, and overwhelming pride can lead to the destruction of relationships and destroy lives. Quarrels and fights can undo significant accomplishments and leave a tragic legacy. James saw such conflicts between Christians and gives a strong warning in response.



In Chapter 4, James continues his discussion of the two types of wisdom mentioned in Chapter 3—heavenly wisdom and earthly wisdom. James now highlights the difference between these two types of wisdom by giving an example of discord within the church. James is never one to beat around the bush, so he jumps straight to the point and calls them out on their behavior. He asks the question, “What causes fights and quarrels among you?” One of the major issues that James identifies in the church is infighting that is going on between church members. These are not just small disagreements. The words that James chooses (fights and quarrels) literally mean “wars” and “battles”. These are long-term conflicts, not just momentary disagreements or explosions. This is exactly the opposite of what James had called for at the end of Chapter 3, in which he emphasized that heavenly wisdom involves

learning to be a peacemaker. The recipients of the letter seem to be failing at this point. They are escalating conflicts and turning them into battles and wars instead of sowing peace and reaping a harvest of righteousness.

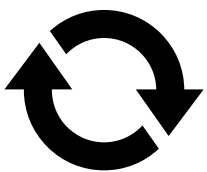


Where have I experienced a conflict in the church, either between large groups or between two individuals? What do I believe was the root cause of the fighting?

I spent a couple of years serving as a hospital chaplain. One of my primary responsibilities was to minister to patients that were nearing the end of their lives. Ministering in these end of life situations was not just focused on the patients, it was also focused on their families. Typically, the stress of the situation only served to magnify the family dynamics that were already in place. Families that were close and connected rallied to give care and support. But unfortunately, families with unresolved conflict and fighting found those conflicts escalating. During that time, I witnessed countless difficult situations involving family conflict. It was always profoundly sad to me when two sides of a family would be fighting with each other about care for a patient, end of life decisions, or issues related to inheritance. My role during those conflicts was to try to act as a peacemaker and allow families to make decisions that would be in the best interest of the patient. Ultimately, the family members had to be willing to look beyond their own selfish desires to reach the best possible outcome.

James is writing to the churches and making the same appeal. He calls them out for the fights and quarrels between them, and then he asks a follow up question, “Don’t they (the fights and quarrels) come from your desires that battle within you?” James proposes that there are two primary causes of fighting. The first cause is inner desire (Verse 3) and the second cause is worldliness (Verses 4-6). Let’s look at the first cause today, and then tomorrow we will take a deeper look at the issue of worldliness.

The first cause of fighting that James mentions is inner desire (4:1-3). In identifying inner desire as the first cause of fighting and quarreling, James actually identifies a circular process that continues to escalate the battle.



Step 1- We desire what we do not have. Our desires start to work in us and remind us of the things we think we lack.

Step 2- Our desire is unfulfilled.

Step 3- Frustrated/unfulfilled desire results in quarreling and fighting.

Step 4- The cycle repeats and escalates resulting in more hostility.

Unfortunately, it is easy to get caught in this destructive cycle. Ultimately these unfulfilled desires lead to more and more conflict and fighting.



Look at the end of James 4:2. What is the first reason James says we do not have what we want?

According to James, we do not have what we want because we do not ask God. Somewhere in this cycle we have forgotten that our Heavenly Father is the source of all good things. *“All generous giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or the slightest hint of change”* (James 1:17).



Now look at James 4:3 and answer the question, “What is the second reason our desires are unfulfilled?”

According to James, when we do ask God for things, we do not receive because we have wrong motives. We want to spend what we get on our own pleasure. We are being driven by our own selfish inner desires and not by the Spirit of God. Some of the desires that drive wrong motives could include the desire for wealth, the desire for power, the desire for pleasure, and the desire to escape. Tomorrow we will look at Chapter 4, Verses 4-10, and we will see that there is a way out of the cycle of fights, quarrels, and unfulfilled desire whenever we might find ourselves within it.



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

What kinds of wrong motives and desires have I succumbed to and am I most susceptible to?

How would abiding in Jesus affect the wrong motives and desires that pull me into its cycle of relationship conflict? Specifically, what would it look like to exchange the control of the flesh for the control of the Spirit?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 4 DAY 3

Adulterers, do you not know that friendship with the world means hostility toward God? So whoever decides to be the world's friend makes himself God's enemy. Or do you think the scripture means nothing when it says, "The spirit that God caused to live within us has an envious yearning"? But he gives greater grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble." So submit to God. But resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and make your hearts pure, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn, and weep. Turn your laughter into mourning and your joy into despair. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.

James 4:4-10

Imagine a tech startup founder so obsessed with securing investors and building status that she neglects her family and her relationship with God. Her team's morale plummets, her health suffers, and her home life unravels. One day, after missing her daughter's school play, she finally pauses and confesses to God, "I've chased the world's applause instead of Your voice." She shuts down her laptop at dawn, prays for help, apologizes to her family, and asks her team's forgiveness. As she humbly reorients her priorities—seeking God first—her innovation flows more freely, her relationships heal, and she finds true purpose beyond success.

Now go back and read the previous illustration and replace "tech startup founder" with "pastor" or "church planter". If we try to live our lives according to the world's values we can lose our way, no matter what our profession might be. This can even happen in the midst of the Church if we are not careful. In this section of Chapter 4, James recognizes that the church is heading down this dangerous path and he directs them towards a pattern of behavior that will lead to health.

Before we get to the solution that James lays out, we need to spend a little time dealing with the second cause of conflict in our lives: worldliness. In addition to our inner desires, an additional cause of the fighting we are experiencing is the impact of worldliness in our lives. The first thing we need to do is define what James means when he is talking about "the world."

In Verse 4, James says that "friendship with the world means hostility toward God". When James is using the word "world," he is referring to

“the whole system of humanity (its institutions, structures, values, and mores) as organized without God” (Davids, Peter H. *The Epistle of James: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 161). The systems of the world actually set themselves up against the Kingdom of God and when we become committed to following the world’s systems and values, we are setting our lives in opposition to God and His Kingdom. There are numerous places in Scripture where Christians are warned to not “love the world.”

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him, because all that is in the world (the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the arrogance produced by material possessions) is not from the Father, but is from the world” (1 John 2:15-16).

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. It trains us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (Titus 2:11-12).

James actually addresses the recipients of his letter as an adulterous people because of their friendship with the world. This frames love for the world in the strongest relationship terms possible, likening it to the betrayal of adultery. Rather than living in faithful, first-love relationship with God, His people court the selfish pleasures that can be found in the world. Essentially, they have decided to cross over into the enemy’s camp and live in union with personal idols.



What are some idols that I invite to displace the Jesus as first place in my life? How does the world tempt me to make that leap into spiritual adultery?



What does James 4:5 suggest God feels when we choose temporary flings with the world rather than abiding faithfulness and intimacy with God?

James has painted a fairly bleak picture of the believers he is writing to. They are consumed with quarrels and fights, they are operating out of their own sinful desires, and they are pursuing the world’s systems and values over the abundant life in intimacy with God. At this point, we would expect James to drop the hammer on them for all of these failures. Yet James has a different message for them:

“But he gives greater grace” (James 4:6a).



Take some time to meditate on this truth. In what ways has God poured His undeserved grace out upon my life?

The reality is that even in the midst of our failures, God pours grace upon grace into our lives. He is ready to forgive, restore, equip, and empower us. He rescues us from darkness and places us into His Kingdom of light. Even though *James* is often characterized as a book that leans into practical behavior and works, at the heart of the entire letter is the reminder that all of this is dependent on God's grace working itself out in our lives.

Now James lays out some steps for us to take to get our walks back on track. Let's look at the process he proposes to replace the cycle of fighting and unfulfilled desire that he identified in Verses 1-3. God's greater grace for us wants to set us free from this joy-suffocating cycle.



Complete the prompts below using James 4:6-10 to inform your responses.

God _____ the proud. (4:6)

God _____ to the humble. (4:6)

James goes on to give seven commands. Look at the Scripture reference and complete the following sentences.

(v. 4:7) Submit to

(v. 4:7) Resist the

(v. 4:8) Draw near to

(v. 4:8) Cleanse your

(v. 4:8) Purify your

(v. 4:9) Turn your joy into

(v. 4:10) Humble

In these verses, James tells us how to repent by means of a series of imperatives. If you do these things, you will escape the sinful cycle that you are in. At the heart of all of these commands is the call for God's people to humble themselves, submit to God, and be reconciled in relationships. This is the heart of repentance and restoration. The promise that follows in Verse 10 is that when we humble ourselves, God will lift us up.



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

Take some time to think through the steps that James describes. Ask God to bring to mind areas where you have adopted the world's values and priorities. Spend some time in confession and repentance. Finally remind yourself that God has more grace and mercy for you. You only need to draw near to Him and worship with the confidence befitting one made righteous by Christ (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Father, since praying about this with You, I think the world has influenced me to treasure the things of the world above You in the following ways:

I confess these sins to You, turn away from them, and turn toward deepening and strengthening my abiding relationship with You. Here are some ways that I will turn from treasuring the world:

Here are some ways I will turn toward deepening and strengthening my abiding relationship with You:

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 4 DAY 4

Do not speak against one another, brothers and sisters. He who speaks against a fellow believer or judges a fellow believer speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but its judge. But there is only one who is lawgiver and judge—the one who is able to save and destroy. On the other hand, who are you to judge your neighbor?

James 4:11-12

As a U.S. History teacher, I would always challenge my students to learn from people's mistakes in the past. And let me just say that there is no shortage of bad examples throughout history. One of the prime examples of slander and judgment in American History comes from the 1950s and Joseph McCarthy. In the early 1950s, McCarthy built his reputation by relentlessly accusing public figures, government employees, and entertainers of Communist sympathies—often on flimsy or fabricated evidence. Known as the post WWII “Second Red Scare,” his fierce, judgmental “witch hunts” created a climate of fear, ruined careers, and divided the nation. But in 1954, during the televised *Army-McCarthy Hearings*, his tactics were exposed as bullying and unsubstantiated. The Senate formally censured him later that year, stripping away his influence and leaving his reputation in tatters. McCarthy's rise and fall vividly illustrate that when we arrogantly presume to judge others—without mercy or proof—we often find that the same harsh standards will be applied to us.



Yesterday, we concluded with James's exhortation for us to humble ourselves before the Lord. Today, James continues his candid teaching on the value of humility and genuine submission to the will and purposes of God. One of the ways that we reveal a lack of humility is through judging others. Ultimately the desire to judge others is a manifestation of the underlying sin of pride in our lives.

The desire to critique and judge others is prevalent in our society. All you have to do is spend a few minutes on social media or in the comments section of online newspapers and magazines to realize that our culture is marked by a critical spirit. Harsh criticism and judgment bombards us every day from multiple perspectives. Modern communications and technology

might have amplified these voices and platforms, but the underlying spirit is not new. James was dealing with a similar judgmental spirit that had crept into the local church in the first century.

In Verse 11, James gives very direct instruction when he says, “*do not speak against one another, brothers and sisters.*” What exactly is slander? It is to speak evil about other people in their absence so that they are not able to defend themselves. This could be a false accusation or a harsh criticism (even if it might be accurate). Every day we are given the opportunity to speak negatively about people or institutions. Are we participating in those negative conversations in the hallways and break rooms we occupy every day? If so we might be violating this principle of Scripture that James is warning us about. What seems like a harmless conversation to us is really a way for us to pronounce judgments on the people around us.



Have there been times this week when I have spoken critically about a person or an organization? What was at the heart of these comments? How could I have directed the conversation to honor people and God more?

It is not a problem to have constructive criticism for people or organizations, but if we are doing it behind the backs of people and not in personal conversations, we could be revealing a deeper issue that we need to address. James points out that when we judge other people, we are not just speaking against them, we are actually putting ourselves in a position to judge the law itself. What law is James referring to? If you look back at Chapter 2, Verse 8, you will see where James says, “*But if you fulfill the royal law as expressed in this scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well.*” In Chapter 2, James was quoting the law of love with regard to showing favoritism. Here, in Chapter 4, he is referencing the law of love in relation to judging others. By judging and slandering others, you are actually placing yourself above the law of love. Your actions reveal your belief that in these circumstances, you are exempt from obedience to God’s will. You’ve exchanged “Thy will be done” for “my will be done.”

By judging and slandering others, you are actually placing yourself above the law of love.

In Verse 12, James concludes his argument by pointing out that only God can judge. When we are judging our neighbor, we are actually putting ourselves in the place of God. This is an indication of pride and the lack of a humble spirit in us. Compare James’s argument about judging others to Jesus’s words in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:1-5). Jesus warned people

to not judge others, because in doing so they will bring judgment upon themselves. Jesus also links this judgmental spirit to pride and tells the story about looking for the speck in your brother's eye while you have a log in your own eye. The word that Jesus used to describe this was the word "hypocrite." We need to be more concerned with humbling ourselves and repenting of our own sins than in pronouncing judgments on others.

Throughout the letter, James has warned us about the power of our tongues. Our criticisms of others could be an indication of the lack of humility in our hearts. Now ask God to give you a humble heart towards Him and others. Judging others is just one way we can play God in our lives. Tomorrow we will look at James 4:13-17 to see a second way that our pride can lead us to play God.



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

*Take some time to meditate on the royal law:
"Love your neighbor as yourself."*

What comes to mind when I meditate on this verse?

How does the royal law apply to my attitudes and words about others?

What actions can I take this week at work, in my home and in my church community to demonstrate the royal law to those around me through my words?

Here's a list below of people that God put on my heart to speak positively about this week:

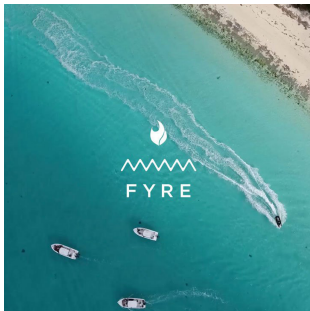
FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 4 DAY 5

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into this or that town and spend a year there and do business and make a profit." You do not know about tomorrow. What is your life like? For you are a puff of smoke that appears for a short time and then vanishes. You ought to say instead, "If the Lord is willing, then we will live and do this or that." But as it is, you boast about your arrogant plans. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows what is good to do and does not do it is guilty of sin.

James 4:13-17

Have you ever made big plans about the future only to see them come crashing down? It's not fun to over-promise and under-deliver, but unfortunately we can see many examples of this all around us. In the entertainment world, one of the most notorious recent examples of this



was the Fyre Festival. The Fyre Festival, initially promoted as a luxury music festival on a Bahamian island, is infamous for its spectacular failure in 2017. Organized by Billy McFarland, the festival was catered to and hyped by celebrities and models. But the attendees who had paid exorbitant sums of money arrived only to find canceled performers, inadequate accommodations, and limited food, shelter, and essential facilities. The event became the subject of numerous documentaries and lawsuits, and McFarland was later convicted of wire fraud.

In the final section of Chapter 4, James again addresses the issue of pride in our lives and how it leads us to try to control things that only God can control. In these verses, James is concerned about how some Christians tend to make presumptions about the future. He seems to be particularly concerned about a group of wealthy businessmen who are boasting about their future plans and money-making schemes.

Boasting about what will happen tomorrow is another example of human arrogance. It is in the same category as judging one another. Judgment is arrogant because God is the only legitimate judge. Boasting about the future is arrogant because God is the only one who knows what will happen in the future. This type of pride is the exact opposite of the humility that is supposed to characterize Christians.

In Verse 13, James describes how wealthy merchants are boasting about

how they are planning on traveling and making money in the future. The reality is that in business, throughout history, it has been necessary to make travel plans, market projections, and profit forecasts. This is the way of the world, and perhaps that is at the heart of the issue. James is concerned that these Christian merchants don't sound any different than worldly merchants. At some point, they seem to have crossed over from "planning for the future" into "boasting about the future." This implies that at some level they are thinking that they are in control.

James reminds them of the stark fact that their lives are a mist that is here for a short time and then vanishes. In a similar way in Luke 12:16-21, Jesus told the parable of the rich fool. He made plans to build bigger barns so he could live off of his profits for many years and simply eat, drink, and be merry. Unfortunately, he had not accounted for the fact that his life would end that very night. James is not saying that it is wrong to plan or keep a calendar, but he is reminding the reader that humility is required. Ultimately, God is the only one who knows the future and any plans we make need to keep that in mind.



How do I typically feel when my plans get derailed? Have I kept a humble attitude about making plans for the future? Am I open to God for Him to change and adjust the plans that I have made?



Think about your life and write down a time when you had planned one thing for your future and then God changed your plans. Did you begin by trusting God for your future, or did it take you a while? What finally brought you to a point of humility and surrender?

After the discussion about the danger of playing God by judging others or boasting about the future, James gives us a final verse that describes two things we need to focus on. First, we must know the right thing to do. That means we must evaluate our attitudes, actions, words, and thoughts; bring them up against the scrutiny of the Word of God; and determine what needs to change. This is a word to the merchants he has been writing about. They are not necessarily

Are they planning to use their wealth to serve widows and orphans and relieve suffering around them?

cheating or stealing—it is more about the good they are **not** doing. Are they planning to use their wealth to serve widows and orphans and relieve suffering around them? Or are they simply planning on increasing their own standard of living?

Second, we must then follow through and do the right thing. Once the Lord reveals areas where you are playing God with others and yourself, you must be willing to repent of them and start doing what is right. You must be willing to lay down your own plans and submit to God's plans for your future. This humble attitude towards the future begins with obedience in the present. When we do the right thing in our current situation, God will faithfully lead us into the good future that He has for us.



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

What areas in my life is God showing me where I know the right thing to do but am not doing them?

What are three good things that God is calling me to do as a result of this study?

My prayer asking God to empower and equip me to take action:

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 4, DAY 6:

REVIEW & REFLECT

Take a moment to review days 1 - 5 of this week. **Identify the most significant truths from FAITH / WORKS you believe God wants you to understand and apply. Write them below:**

Write down any questions you have about the content from this chapter you are unsettled about:

What are some things you will begin doing, or stop doing, in response to what you learned this week?

What is something you'd be willing to share with your GroupLife class this Sunday about what God showed you this week?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 4, DAY 7:

WORSHIP AND GROUPLIFE

GroupLife TAKEAWAYS

Record any insights from GroupLife that God emphasizes to you today:

SERMON TAKEAWAYS

Record any insights from today's sermon that God emphasizes to you:

YOUR RESPONSE TO GOD SPEAKING AT CHURCH TODAY:

JAMES CHAPTER 5

BEGIN SEPTEMBER 22

DAVID BOOTH



FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 5 DAY 1

Pause to pray, asking for God's wisdom in understanding and applying His Word in ways that personally transform, build others up, and glorify God.


- *Give me wisdom, knowledge, and understanding without becoming proud.*
- *Correct any lies I believe about You or anything I misunderstand.*
- *Help me see something new about You I've never seen before.*
- *Redirect my attitudes or actions that do not align with Your Word and Your will.*
- *Let any knowledge I gain help me love You and others more.*

Turn to page 130 and read James Chapter 5



In 2-3 sentences, summarize the main idea of the chapter:

Marking the text will help us to quickly identify the author's use of repetition, comparison, or imagery to emphasize God's character and important themes.

- Mark all words referring to the Trinity (God the Father, Jesus the Son, the Holy Spirit) with a triangle. 
- In verses 1-6, mark every reference to riches (gold, treasure, luxury, etc.) with a dollar sign \$.
- In verses 7-12, circle words that indicate patience and endurance.
- In verses 13-20, underline every mention of prayer.

List the biblical persons or references James mentions throughout the chapter:

List the ideas in this chapter have already been mentioned in the previous three chapters:

Fill in the blank: *“Think of how we regard as blessed those who have _____. You have heard of Job’s _____ and you have seen the Lord’s purpose, that the Lord is full of compassion and mercy.” (v. 11)*

Write out what seems to be the theme verse in this chapter:



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

What words, thoughts, or phrases from Chapter 5 do I believe God is drawing my attention to, for my own growth and maturity?

The verses that most encouraged, challenged, or convicted me are (beside each, write any actions you think the Lord might require in response):

What question(s) do I hope are cleared up through my study this week:

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 5 DAY 2

Come now, you rich! Weep and cry aloud over the miseries that are coming on you. Your riches have rotted and your clothing has become moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted and their rust will be a witness against you. It will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have hoarded treasure! Look, the pay you have held back from the workers who mowed your fields cries out against you, and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Heaven's Armies. You have lived indulgently and luxuriously on the earth. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person, although he does not resist you.

James 5:1-6



If you haven't seen the 2023 *Wonka* movie, I encourage you to give it a try, provided you have any tolerance for musicals. It has such a different tone than the psychedelic, creepy versions of the Willy Wonka character you may have seen on film before. This prequel is a fun, heart-warming movie with charming, well-developed, albeit exaggerated characters. Wonka finds himself among an unfortunate community who has been hopelessly oppressed by a wealthy, chocolate syndicate of criminals (who just so happen to love singing and dancing, too). The chocolate cartel bosses have every

similarities to the rich mentioned in *James*—indulgent in luxuries, building wealth on the backs of the poor, and hoarding wealth (in the form of reservoirs of liquid chocolate, of course). The plot to bring justice to these corrupt oppressors ends up hinging on the whereabouts of a ledger used by the syndicate to record all of their financial dealings. To the cartel, the ledger was their portfolio for continued wealth-building. But for the police, it was a trail of evidence that would result in justice being served. Put a pin in that thought. We'll come back to it.

The theme of *James* is: faith works. Our good works authenticate that God has saved us by grace through faith, and is in the process of transforming us and using us for His Kingdom purposes. In Chapter 5, James addresses the wealthy for the third time. His first reference is in Chapter 1, Verses 10-11, when he says “*the rich person in the midst of his pursuits will wither away.*”

When placed on the timeline of eternity, our wealth, like our lives, are but a brief moment in the scheme of things. It is unwise to build a portfolio of riches for this fleeting and temporary life in exchange for securing eternal life and reward. We can't take our earthly riches with us. Second, James warns against favoritism for the wealthy, oppressing the poor, and withholding provisions from them throughout Chapter 2. Now we come to Chapter 5, and James brings the rich back into view. Apparently, this was a prevailing trial that needed to be addressed in various ways.

As seen in the Gospels, it was generally true that the poor were most receptive to the good news. The rich, however, remained closed to, and in severe opposition of, the message of Christ and those who carried it. It was this wealthy class that James addresses in Chapter 5: "*Come now, you rich!*"



Why do you think that generally speaking, the 1st century wealthy were not as receptive to the gospel? Do you believe that is true in our modern day American culture as well?

Following his address to the rich, James tells them to "*weep and cry aloud*" on the basis of two things: 1) what they are guilty of, and 2) what will happen to them as a result. James echoes the teachings of Jesus, who said, "*woe to you who are rich, for you have received your comfort already*" (Luke 6:24). Both Jesus and James teach that the appropriate response for the rich is to be utterly unsettled by the wealth for which they have to answer. It's human nature to delight in riches, but the Scriptures teach that unchecked wealth is something to dread.



Circle all of the things in Verses 1-6 James says the rich are guilty of, and underline all of the things that will happen to them.

In Verses 1-6, James first mentions their corroded piles of money and stuffed wardrobes, which just sit there rotting while the needs of the poor go unaddressed. He calls this "*hoarded treasure*." Next James describes the oppressive labor practices that often go hand in hand with the accumulation of wealth among those who are far from God. Third, James addresses the indulgent luxuries enjoyed by the wealthy. And finally, he addresses the persecution of the poor. In our culture, our assets and accumulations make up the wealth-accumulation portfolios in which we take pride and comfort. But James points out that these portfolios are more like a rap sheet that serve as a "witness against" the rich. The rich work furiously to pad their portfolios at any cost, unaware that they are only strengthening the case against them. James says the rich are like livestock

that are fattening themselves for the day of slaughter.

In contrast to the pursuits of the rich, Jesus commands His followers to *“not accumulate for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and devouring insect destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But accumulate for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and devouring insect do not destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:19-21).



What might a Kingdom-first “portfolio” characterized by generosity and an eternal perspective look like?

Answering that question, *James* only supplies generalities. Don't oppress the poor. Provide them essentials rather than increasing your hoard. Pay them well for their work. Care for those who cannot help themselves. It's not surprising that James avoids a legalistic answer. The answer is not more law. The answer is a right relationship with God, which produces a changed heart progressively formed into the image of the God, who has a soft spot for the needy. When we voluntarily yield to Jesus's reign, His Word, His Spirit, and His people transform our portfolios into platforms of profuse generosity.

When we voluntarily yield to Jesus's reign, His Word, His Spirit, and His people transform our portfolios into platforms of profuse generosity.

Regardless of what you think of former pastor and author Rick Warren, his “Kingdom portfolio” is instructive for believers. Warren shares my seminary alma mater, and like many seminary students, he was poor while earning his degree. When he planted his church in Southern California, he had very modest means, living more on faith than finances. But he honored God with his tithe of 10% of his income. He and his wife prayed that they would be able to increase the percentage of their Kingdom giving each year. Toward the second half of his ministry years, they had the means to “reverse tithe”, meaning they lived off 10% and gave 90% of their income away. He stopped taking a salary from his church. As royalties from his books continued to increase, so did his generosity. Since his retirement, he invests the wealth of his finances, his retirement time, and his influence into relieving global suffering caused by spiritual, financial, medical, educational, and leadership poverty—through the local church. For more information about Warren's global ministry to the impoverished, visit www.thepeaceplan.com.

We don't have to give *what* Warren gives, but we can all give *like* Rick Warren. He takes care of his family, then gives what he has for the needs of

others. So can we. Why would we want to keep wealth for ourselves when there are so many people with dire needs, who are just as valuable to God as we are?



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

The scriptures teach that generosity should be church-based, proportional, self-sacrificial, ongoing, missional, and given with a cheerfulness that reflects the joy of our generous God. Which of these characteristics are not displayed in my life, thus are out of line with God's will?

How can I leave a legacy of generosity to the next generation in my household? Which of the following ideas can I adopt for my children, grandchildren, or others in the generations behind me?

- *Tithing by example, and teaching about what the Bible says about giving*
- *Giving gifts to those in need at Christmas time, so it's not "all about us"*
- *Give shoeboxes with the church for Operation Christmas Child*
- *Teach my kids how to budget all of their allowance and birthday money to give 10% to the church, and 10% to missions opportunities of their choice*
- *Start a missions saving account for your kids and grandkids. Put \$100+ in there for key holidays and birthdays, rather than just giving them more and more stuff to hoard. When teenagers, use those funds for significant trips.*
- *Other ideas:*

What is my next step of developing obedient generosity for the sake of the widow, orphan, and others in need?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 5 DAY 3

So be patient, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's return. Think of how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the ground and is patient for it until it receives the early and late rains. You also be patient and strengthen your hearts, for the Lord's return is near. Do not grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be judges. See, the judge stands before the gates! As an example of suffering and patience, brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name. Think of how we regard as blessed those who have endured. You have heard of Job's endurance and you have seen the Lord's purpose, that the Lord is full of compassion and mercy. And above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath. But let your "Yes" be yes and your "No" be no, so that you may not fall into judgment.

James 5:7-12

I've never met anyone who is a fan of waiting. We don't like waiting for a parking space, for a K-cup to brew, for a table at Gringo's to open up, or for the Aggies to win a national championship. A mom might say her worst waiting was in labor and giving birth. But the worst experience I have had was waiting for a stone to pass through my kidney. The pain was unbearable and there was nothing I could do to find relief—sitting, standing, walking, laying down—nothing changed the waves of pain that radiated throughout my abdomen. Childbirth and kidney stones are similar in that they involve waves of pain that just won't seem to let up. It keeps coming, and coming. And coming. And when it does, all bets are off. Regardless of the kind of waiting, there is something about waiting that makes us personally uncomfortable and more irritable with others.

James says to be patient until the Lord returns. In the same way a farmer is patient for the harvest, we are to be patient for the Lord to bring to completion our final redemption. He says this after highlighting the suffering that accompanies oppression at the hands of the rich, an experience with which many of the letter's recipients could identify. When the Lord returns, total justice will be served, we will receive relief when the presence of sin is eradicated, and we will receive the rewards of eternal life.

But patience is a fruit of the Spirit. It does not come naturally. Phillip Keller, author of *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, says "I am completely satisfied with his [the Lord's] management of my life." That's what James is getting at

here. While we're waiting for the Lord's return, we have Spirit-produced contentment as God sovereignly brings all things in heaven and earth under the footstool of the risen and exalted King Jesus. The reign of Christ on this side of eternity is furthered by saving and sanctifying all who receive Jesus as Lord and Savior.

But for those who are living outside of an ongoing abiding fellowship with Jesus, Christian or not, we are vulnerable to grumbling. James mentions four effects to losing faith in God's provision in suffering: grumbling with the Lord, losing heart, losing patience, and grumbling with each other. When we lose faith in God's management of our lives, we fixate on what isn't going according to our plans. We question His sovereign decisions and timetable. We lose faith in His good reign. And our mouths swear to invoke control or vent frustration in the Lord, displacing the praise that is due. Our grumbling reveals our lack of ongoing faith.

I am completely satisfied with his management of my life.

Phillip Keller



What are some reasons we feel unsatisfied with God's management of our lives? With limited knowledge, dubious goodness, and questionable righteousness, do we think we can do a better job?

The fact is, we are inclined to grumble. It comes easily. The Hebrews grumbled for years in the wilderness, unaware that their grumbling demonstrated their hearts weren't ready for the promised land. And years became decades. The world is filled with major and micro injustices. We want things to be right and things to be better... now. Christ certainly makes things better, even in the now. In no small way, He changes the entire trajectory of every life entrusted to Him. Joy, pure joy, is available, if grasped. You can always find joy in the Lord, for in every storm of life He is always in the boat with you. James never says to take joy in our circumstances, he says to take joy in the fact that God is at work in them, and in you, producing something in you through your trials that can be celebrated. But all around us, the world is still broken. We are still mistreated. Oppressors get richer. Jails get fuller. And the entire creation groans as if in childbirth, waiting to be re-made by its Creator (Romans 8:22).

It's into this reality that James writes, *"be patient, and strengthen your hearts, for the Lord's return is near"* (5:8). James tells us to remember the blessings produced by suffering (5:10) and the Lord's sustaining compassion and mercy (5:12). Throughout the history of God's people, as illustrated by the prophets of old, God has proven over and over again that He doesn't waste

our suffering, regardless of its source, but recommissions suffering for His Kingdom purposes and our good. In this, we can take joy. Essentially, James connects the end of his letter to the beginning, with an encouragement to endure these trials of many kinds well.

It should be no surprise that our vertical grumbling with the Lord flows into horizontal grumbling with each other. Faith flows that way. Vertical faith flows into horizontal works. Love flows that way, too. When we are corrected and recalibrated to the Lord, our relationships are healthy and flourish. When we are embittered against the Lord, we take it out on each other. Grumbling with each other misdirects the legitimate frustrations we may feel toward our common enemies—the world’s system, sin and its consequences, persecutors, and Satan our adversary. Every married couple must learn that the problems that arise in marriage are the problem, not each other. Believers must learn this, too. We are not each other’s enemy. When we grumble against each other, Satan has duped us and distracted us. We have allowed him to turn our groaning for redemption into grumbling against each other. And we heap upon our sufferings disappointments, disunity, and conflict. This fixates our attention on the offenses we perceive from one another, distracting us from the mission we are called to accomplish together. James implores us to guard our hearts and keep our faith in the Lord, because to do otherwise harms us and discredits of our witness.



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

How can keeping the Lord’s return in mind recalibrate my frustrations with God and others?

How does swearing (either cuss words or control words) reveal a grumbling attitude within? When I catch myself speaking this way, what can I do to ground my emotions and thinking in the perfection and goodness of God’s rule and reign?

In relationships, there’s always something to grumble about. Does my propensity to be easily offended indicate that the bigger issue is me? What does God’s Word say about extending undeserved grace to each other?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 5 DAY 4

Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone in good spirits? He should sing praises. Is anyone among you ill? He should summon the elders of the church, and they should pray for him and anoint him with olive oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick and the Lord will raise him up—and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. So confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great effectiveness. Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain and there was no rain on the land for three years and six months! Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the land sprouted with a harvest.

James 5:13-18

Remember what James is addressing at this point in his letter? He is addressing the issue of suffering imposed by the world and the enemies around us. He urges us to keep faith in the Lord, and to take joy in God's provision and care. Again, he makes it personal. It's about our relationship with the Lord. Rather than grumbling with forms of swearing, we "*should pray...and sing praises*" (James 5:13). Why? Because God is a relational God. He doesn't just give us commands to follow on our own; He wants us to talk things through with Him. He wants us to pray—just the two of us—but He also wants us to pray for each other. He wants the church praying for those who are suffering and in need.

Just before closing his letter, James inserts a handful of verses giving instructions for prayer for healing, anointing for the sick, and confessing sins to each other. Linked to these is what seems to be promises or expectations for God's response to these instructions—do this, this, and this, and healing will be granted. James is not suggesting a formula that twists God's arm into healing, but it can unfortunately be read that way. Before reading further, please know that I believe in physical healing. I am the recipient of physical healing. Our staff at First Baptist Winnsboro prayed for me in response to this very passage during a typical staff meeting devotional. Though olive oil wasn't handy at the time, our prayers in faith were, and I was healed of acute, debilitating, and chronic lower back pain with which I had suffered for a decade. The prayers were simple and calm. Everyone remained in their seats. We just talked to God collectively about my struggle, which I shared with them. Honestly, I was just expecting God's comfort, sustaining strength, and the blessing of community love more than anything

else. But I was unmistakably healed that very day. Since then, I've been careful to seek medical care to keep my back aligned and strong, though sometimes I carelessly move a piano and have to sit it out the rest of the day. But the clear turning point was decisive healing that took place as a result of following the pattern of this passage. So, my leading us to explore this passage, in open-minded depth, does not carry an ulterior motive of "explaining the passage away." I have no desire to do that. My hope for us is to simply and rightly understand how God has revealed Himself to us through these verses in *James*.

There is a lack of consensus in this cluster of verses. Some of the reasons for that are James's use of particular Greek words, the uniqueness of these instructions among other letters to the churches, the unclear link between sin and sickness, and the experience of many who are not being healed when following these instructions. We are left to wonder whether we're reading what we think we are. Let's briefly look at James's use of Greek vocabulary to illustrate the range of understanding for this passage. James uses two Greek words—ασθενεο (as-then-eh'-o) and κμνο (kam' no)—that are universally translated "sick" in every English translation of this passage. Both of these words fundamentally mean "weak" or "weary" and are translated as such in other passages. But depending on the context, they can also mean sick, which is the case with *James*. The context clues that justify translators' use of "sick" include the reference to anointing with oil, which is described in other passages with a medicinal use. Another reason is James's use of εγειρο (eg-i'-ro) for "raise him up," which though it also has a wide range of meaning, has traditionally been viewed as someone who is bed-ridden with sickness and unable to gather with the community for prayer. So where does that leave us? It still leaves us without consensus, and with three main views to consider in understanding this passage.

The first view is the traditional view, which supports the translators' use of the word sick. In this view, James means that upon request by the immobile, church elders are to go to the physically sick person, pray in faith, and physically anoint the sick with oil, and as a result, their sickness will be healed and their sins will be forgiven. If this is the correct translation and interpretation God inspired, it is unquestionably true, but with important qualifiers necessary to harmonize it with the whole of Scripture. Two harmonizing caveats are critical with this understanding. Pertaining to prayer in faith, the phrase "in the name of the Lord" seems to introduce the concept of tempering the expectation of healing with the Lord's will. In other words, we pray with the full expectation that God can heal, and will heal in one way or another, but that physical healing as requested is up to

the Lord's will alone. The second caveat to this traditional view is regarding the forgiveness of sins. Though linguistically possible, the Bible does not permit an understanding that justification by God is accomplished by the prayer and anointing of church leadership. Justification, or the forgiveness of the totality of one's sin, is accomplished by God's grace, through saving faith in Jesus alone. The forgiveness to which James refers could be understood as the forgiveness granted by other believers who have been sinned against. Whatever it means, we must be careful not to dilute the gospel truth that there is one way of salvation, through faith in Christ.

Further supporting this caveat is recognizing that these instructions were given to the community of Messianic Jews; the sick person is *already* justified. So this is likely referring to a particular sin and its impact on the individual needing healing. Sin has an effect on us. David's sin manifested upon him physically:

*When I refused to confess my sin,
my whole body wasted away,
while I groaned in pain all day long.
For day and night you tormented me;
you tried to destroy me in the intense heat of summer. (Selah)
Then I confessed my sin;
I no longer covered up my wrongdoing.
I said, "I will confess my rebellious acts to the Lord."
And then you forgave my sins. (Selah) (Psalm 32:3-5).*

It's also important to remember that there is biblical precedent for sickness as a means of divine discipline within the process of sanctification (John 5:14; 1 Corinthians 11:29-30; Hebrews 12:3-13). So James may be referring to how sin, in one way or another, can bring about physical sickness.

The second view of this passage suggests that "sick" should be understood (and translated) as "weak," which allows for a broader range of meaning, which could still include sickness. The context does suggest that these believers have lost their "strength" under the depressive weight of suffering, as James describes in Verse 8. Proponents of this view note that it makes sense of James mentioning Elijah's prayer for rain, which is symbolic of refreshment and cleansing coming from the Lord. If James had been talking only about physical healing, it seems that he would have instead used the example of Elijah rising the widow's son from the dead through God's response to his fervent prayer (1 Kings 17:17-24). This understanding seems to give a solid rationale for James's inclusion of the references to rain and oil in

this passage. Biblically, anointing oil can be physically refreshing or symbolic of consecration of the whole person to the Lord. This view gives emphasis to the emotional and spiritual kinds of healing that are needed.

Though made new upon salvation, we each are a cocktail of hurts from past sins, the sins against us, current sins, unjust sufferings, and the ailments of our bodies mixed together in unique ways.

The third view rejects the search for an either-or understanding. It regards the ambiguity of the text as useful, if not intentional. The reality is that people come to the Lord with permeating brokenness. Though made new upon salvation, we each are a cocktail of hurts from past sins, the sins against us, current sins, unjust sufferings, and the ailments of our bodies—all mixed together in ways that are unique to each person. It's only fitting that we should pray for one another's healing purchased for us by Christ. On our last day, we will step into complete holistic healing. Until then, we can experience ever-increasing healing from sin and its damaging effects upon ourselves and our relationships. But we cannot perpetually be healed physically—cheating death indefinitely—by using James's "formula" for healing. Our bodies wasting away is God's

plan to bring us through the gateway into eternity. Along the way, He may temporarily provide healing for His Kingdom purposes, which are not fully understood.

James invites us into a relationship with God in which we entrust ourselves—hearts, souls, minds, and bodies—fully to Him in faith. This faith is demonstrated in the context of private prayer and community prayer. We can ask God together for forgiveness and healing for the sins and diseases that haunt us, knowing that His full range of responses are an expression of His flawless sovereignty and deep care. God often intervenes in our lives, increasingly stripping away more of sin's lingering emotional, physical, relational, and spiritual wounds. But we still wait patiently, even as we groan for our eternal home. One day, God will use something broken to bring us there—sickness, accident, or tragedy—in the ultimate vindication of Romans 8:28. *"And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose"*. We can rest in our God who will not let sin, or its effects, have the final word.



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

What are the remnants of sin and suffering that continue to affect my life?

How can I privately talk with God about these things, and also begin responsibly involving others in my Christian community in the healing God wants me to receive?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 5 DAY 5

My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone turns him back, he should know that the one who turns a sinner back from his wandering path will save that person's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

James 5:19-20

In the broader context of Chapter 5, James addresses suffering, emotional distress, and physical sickness. To close out his letter, James brings our attention to spiritual healing and community connection. James frames these commands to those who are in a position of strength. We can have influence and impact over those who wander from the Lord. But like the verses before, there is some uncertainty about the meaning of these verses.



What do context clues say about the identify of this “sinner”? Are they lost needing conversion, or saved needing restoration to faithful living?

The answer to that question is not abundantly clear. There are two primary views. The first is that this person is a part of this Christian community (“*anyone among you*”), and is therefore already saved. In this view, the phrase “*save that person's soul from death*” does not necessarily mean save the person's soul from eternal hell, because they are truly saved. The phrase may mean death of the person due to the discipline of the Lord, as in the case with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) and those mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11:29-30, who took the Lord's supper in an unworthy manner. Scholars also think this can refer to saving someone from the devastation sin can bring, much in the same way Jesus talked about the thief's plan to “*steal, kill, and destroy*” (John 10:10). Like his big brother, James can use hyperbole to make a point.

We can have influence and impact over those who wander from the Lord.

The second view sees the phrase “*save that person's soul from death*” as identifying an unbeliever who is saved from eternal death in hell, and the phrase “*anyone among you*” as referring to a lost person who physically gathers with the Christians, but has not yet received Jesus by faith. Both understandings are linguistically and contextually permissible. Again, James's ambiguity serves to provide a place for the widest range of application. Our focus needs to be on the thrust of the passage. Regardless if

this “sinner” is already justified or not, or from how much of sin’s devastation they need rescue, James says the person is worth our attempts. They are loved by God, have value, and need to turn to Him to be restored. Just as James urges that we not show financial favoritism, we must not show spiritual favoritism toward those who are rich in faithfulness over those who are struggling.

Our job as “brothers and sisters” is not to try to determine what only God can know about a person’s salvation. Our job is to remain in an abiding relationship with Jesus, looking for evidence that the Spirit is at work to involve us in a wanderer’s return. Each of us, made a new creation upon our justification, have also received the role of Ambassador of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). An ambassador speaks on behalf of Christ, urging others to respond to God’s invitation for salvation, intimacy, and obedience.



How can we participate in God’s work of saving and sanctifying those in our community who have wandered?

James ends the letter here, encouraging us to rescue the wanderer, without providing specific guidance on exactly what to do about someone in the faith community who wanders out of it. Here are some best practices, drawn from observations made in ministry for the last 30 years to answer that question.

1. Don’t assume things are OK — First, don’t assume you know what’s going on spiritually in someone’s life. Make sure that everyone is asked about their walk with Jesus. In high school, my Youth Pastor asked me about what my walk with Jesus was like while I was a captive audience on a ski lift. Just because someone shows up at church with a smile, doesn’t mean they aren’t struggling with huge doubts or struggling to connect meaningfully with other Christians. As one who is mature, take the time to ask about how someone is doing spiritually, how they are connecting in community, and invest time into them.

2. Don’t speculate from non-verbal cues — Over the years, I’ve become convinced that people just aren’t comfortable at first being authentic and real with other Christians. What may seem like a non-verbal message to back away may simply be poor social skills, or social discomfort in the level of group intimacy. Some may freeze in social settings. What is sure to thaw one’s social anxiety is when others extend real acceptance that progresses to warm relationships. People want to be known and accepted by those who want them. Show others you

want them by regular invitations into friendship, fellowship, mentoring, discipleship, and missional opportunities. In a room of new people, most feel awkward and are hoping for someone to reach out to include them. Someone has to go first—let that someone be you.

3. Pray for divine appointments — Ask the Lord to see the room as He does. Once the Lord puts someone on your radar, begin praying for that person. Ask God to give you eyes to see the person the way He does. Ask Him to fill you with His love for wandering sheep. When God repeats an idea in your heart and mind, receive it as His leadership calling you into His rescue mission for that person. Make the call. Send the text. Extend the invitation. Walk across the room to that person, show interest in them, and see how the Lord works. Stay in step with the Spirit so that future conversations address how they are doing in their life, and the condition of their walk with the Lord.

4. Build relational bridges — Truth is carried from heart to heart through the pipeline of relationships. This is true from parent to child and also from friend to friend. Show the wanderer the love of Christ. Love them for who they are, and be willing to build a friendship with them. Ask God to help you see beyond their apathetic or sinful pursuits and see the image of God in them. They were beautifully made by Christ and for Christ. Don't define someone by their brokenness, addiction, or self-identity. Focus on what the brokenness can become when Christ restores.

5. Revisit your own hypocrisy — We can't "turn back" a wanderer who doesn't see an integration of beliefs and practices. We must remove stumbling blocks to an authentic, abiding walk with Jesus. The wanderers will not care to join you at church if there is nothing compelling about your love or authentic faith. When others see Jesus in you, it draws them to His kindness. Could it be that the reason they have wandered to start with is the lack of authentic faith and love they formerly saw extended to them from Christians?



Which of these five practices listed above can I begin to be intentional about this week?

Prayer: *Father, I invite You to put someone upon my heart that has wandered from You or this body. If You repeatedly put them on my heart, I will consider that an invitation to extend Your love as Your Ambassador.*

For the last five weeks, we have been studying *James* together, through our devotional readings, the pastor's sermons, and our GroupLife lessons. We have seen the various ways that authentic, growing faith works to produce authentic fruit. What is clear throughout *James* is that saving faith is the foundation for good works. Without truly being saved, Kingdom fruit cannot occur. But, like building a building, no one is satisfied with just a foundation. The purpose of a foundation is to provide the sturdy support necessary for a desired structure. Saving faith ushers us into permanent covenant relationship with the God who made us. But saving faith occurs only on day one of the relationship. It is the wedding day of a life-long marriage. The faith that brought us to salvation needs to continue as a lifestyle of living by faith, intimacy, faithfulness, and obedience. It is in this ongoing faith that Jesus calls "abiding," out of which multiplying fruitfulness grows.

As a church staff, our desire for you is that you will know you are saved. And for the rest of your lives, that you will grow in that relationship for your own joy in the Lord, the influence it will have on others' relationships with God, and for the glory of God. Don't be satisfied to just make Jesus your Savior. Make Jesus your all, and share Him with all!



FOR FURTHER SELF-REFLECTION

Who have I noticed is no longer around in our community? Have I prayed for them, and even made contact to extend care for them? How will they know our community cares if the one who notices them does nothing to extend love?

If this resonates with me, could it be that God has given me a spiritual gift, maturity, or insight to make our community better at reaching the wanderer? Would I be willing to tell one of my pastors or a leader from my GroupLife class about my concern for the wanderer? Perhaps You could use me in a way that would cover a multitude of sin's destruction in someone else's life before it's too late!

Do I consider myself the wanderer in this passage? Rather than passing judgment on the failure of others, I can risk making my needs known. People aren't so good at reading unspoken needs, even those as close as a spouse or best friend. I should give someone at church a chance and let them know my faith is struggling. Here's who I believe I need to reach out to:

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 5, DAY 6:

REVIEW & REFLECT

Take a moment to review days 1 - 5 of this week. **Identify the most significant truths from FAITH / WORKS you believe God wants you to understand and apply. Write them below:**

Write down any questions you have about the content from this chapter you are unsettled about:

What are some things you will begin doing, or stop doing, in response to what you learned this week?

What is something you'd be willing to share with your GroupLife class this Sunday about what God showed you this week?

FAITH / WORKS

WEEK 5, DAY 7:

WORSHIP AND GROUPLIFE

GroupLife TAKEAWAYS

Record any insights from GroupLife that God emphasizes to you today:

SERMON TAKEAWAYS

Record any insights from today's sermon that God emphasizes to you:

YOUR RESPONSE TO GOD SPEAKING AT CHURCH TODAY:

THE BOOK OF JAMES

The text of the New English Translation (NET2). www.netbible.org.

Salutation

1 From James, a slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, to the 12 tribes dispersed abroad. Greetings!

Joy in Trials

2 My brothers and sisters, consider it nothing but joy when you fall into all sorts of trials, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect effect, so that you will be perfect and complete, not deficient in anything. 5 But if anyone is deficient in wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without reprimand, and it will be given to him. 6 But he must ask in faith without doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed around by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 since he is a double-minded individual, unstable in all his ways. 9 Now the believer of humble means should take pride in his high position. 10 But the rich person's pride should be in his humiliation because he will pass away like a wildflower in the meadow. 11 For the sun rises with its heat and dries up the meadow; the petal of the flower falls off and its beauty is lost forever. So also the rich person in the midst of his pursuits will wither away. 12 Happy is the one who endures testing because

when he has proven to be genuine, he will receive the crown of life that God promised to those who love him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each one is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires. 15 Then when desire conceives, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is full grown, it gives birth to death. 16 Do not be led astray, my dear brothers and sisters. 17 All generous giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or the slightest hint of change. 18 By his sovereign plan he gave us birth through the message of truth, that we would be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

Living Out the Message

19 Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters! Let every person be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. 20 For human anger does not accomplish God’s righteousness. 21 So put away all filth and evil excess and humbly welcome the message implanted within you, which is able to save your souls. 22 But be sure you live out the message and do not merely listen to it and so deceive yourselves. 23 For if someone merely listens to the message and does not live it out, he is like someone who gazes at his own face in a mirror. 24 For he gazes at himself and then goes out and immediately forgets what sort of person he was. 25 But the one who peers

into the perfect law of liberty and fixes his attention there, and does not become a forgetful listener but one who lives it out—he will be blessed in what he does. 26 If someone thinks he is religious yet does not bridle his tongue, and so deceives his heart, his religion is futile. 27 Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their adversity and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Prejudice and the Law of Love

2 My brothers and sisters, do not show prejudice if you possess faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. 2 For if someone comes into your assembly wearing a gold ring and fine clothing, and a poor person enters in filthy clothes, 3 do you pay attention to the one who is finely dressed and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and to the poor person, “You stand over there,” or “Sit on the floor”? 4 If so, have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil motives? 5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters! Did not God choose the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor! Are not the rich oppressing you and dragging you into the courts? 7 Do they not blaspheme the good name of the one you belong to? 8 But if you fulfill the royal law as expressed in this scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. 9 But if you show prejudice, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as violators.

10 For the one who obeys the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. 11 For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a violator of the law. 12 Speak and act as those who will be judged by a law that gives freedom. 13 For judgment is merciless for the one who has shown no mercy. But mercy triumphs over judgment.

Faith and Works Together

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Can this kind of faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacks daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, keep warm and eat well,” but you do not give them what the body needs, what good is it? 17 So also faith, if it does not have works, is dead being by itself. 18 But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith without works and I will show you faith by my works. 19 You believe that God is one; well and good. Even the demons believe that—and tremble with fear. 20 But would you like evidence, you empty fellow, that faith without works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that his faith was working together with his works and his faith was perfected by works. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Now Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend.

24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 And similarly, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

The Power of the Tongue

3 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, because you know that we will be judged more strictly. 2 For we all stumble in many ways. If someone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect individual, able to control the entire body as well. 3 And if we put bits into the mouths of horses to get them to obey us, then we guide their entire bodies. 4 Look at ships too: Though they are so large and driven by harsh winds, they are steered by a tiny rudder wherever the pilot's inclination directs. 5 So, too, the tongue is a small part of the body, yet it has great pretensions. Think how small a flame sets a huge forest ablaze. 6 And the tongue is a fire! The tongue represents the world of wrongdoing among the parts of our bodies. It pollutes the entire body and sets fire to the course of human existence—and is set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of animal, bird, reptile, and sea creature is subdued and has been subdued by humankind. 8 But no human being can subdue the tongue; it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse people made in God's image. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.

These things should not be so, my brothers and sisters. 11 A spring does not pour out fresh water and bitter water from the same opening, does it? 12 Can a fig tree produce olives, my brothers and sisters, or a vine produce figs? Neither can a salt water spring produce fresh water.

True Wisdom

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct he should show his works done in the gentleness that wisdom brings. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfishness in your hearts, do not boast and tell lies against the truth. 15 Such wisdom does not come from above but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16 For where there is jealousy and selfishness, there is disorder and every evil practice. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, accommodating, full of mercy and good fruit, 26 impartial, and not hypocritical. 18 And the fruit that consists of righteousness is planted in peace among those who make peace.

Passions and Pride

4 Where do the conflicts and where do the quarrels among you come from? Is it not from this, 2 from your passions that battle inside you? You desire and you do not have; you murder and envy and you cannot obtain; you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask; 3 you ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly, so you can spend it on your

passions.

4 Adulterers, do you not know that friendship with the world means hostility toward God? So whoever decides to be the world's friend makes himself God's enemy. 5 Or do you think the scripture means nothing when it says, "The spirit that God caused to live within us has an envious yearning"? 6 But he gives greater grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble." 7 So submit to God. But resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and make your hearts pure, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn, and weep. Turn your laughter into mourning and your joy into despair. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. 11 Do not speak against one another, brothers and sisters. He who speaks against a fellow believer or judges a fellow believer speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but its judge. 12 But there is only one who is lawgiver and judge—the one who is able to save and destroy. On the other hand, who are you to judge your neighbor? 13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into this or that town and spend a year there and do business and make a profit." 14 You do not know about tomorrow. What is your life like? For you are a puff of smoke that appears for a short time and then vanishes. 15 You ought to say instead, "If the Lord is willing, then we will live and do this or that." 16 But as it is, you boast about your arrogant plans. All such boasting

is evil. 17 So whoever knows what is good to do and does not do it is guilty of sin.

Warning to the Rich

5 Come now, you rich! Weep and cry aloud over the miseries that are coming on you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your clothing has become moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver have rusted and their rust will be a witness against you. It will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have hoarded treasure! 4 Look, the pay you have held back from the workers who mowed your fields cries out against you, and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Heaven's Armies. 5 You have lived indulgently and luxuriously on the earth. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered the righteous person, although he does not resist you.

Patience in Suffering

7 So be patient, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's return. Think of how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the ground and is patient for it until it receives the early and late rains. 8 You also be patient and strengthen your hearts, for the Lord's return is near. 9 Do not grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be judged. See, the judge stands before the gates! 10 As an example of suffering and patience, brothers and

sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name. 11 Think of how we regard as blessed those who have endured. You have heard of Job's endurance and you have seen the Lord's purpose, that the Lord is full of compassion and mercy. 12 And above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath. But let your "Yes" be yes and your "No" be no, so that you may not fall into judgment.

Prayer for the Sick

13 Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone in good spirits? He should sing praises. 14 Is anyone among you ill? He should summon the elders of the church, and they should pray for him and anoint 16 him with olive oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick and the Lord will raise him up—and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 So confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great effectiveness. 17 Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain and there was no rain on the land for three years and six months! 18 Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the land sprouted with a harvest. 19 My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone turns him back, 20 he should know that the one who turns a sinner back from his wandering path will save that person's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

GROUPLIFE CLASSES FOR FAITH / WORKS

5-WEEK, PASTOR-LED FAITH / WORKS CLASSES

If you aren't in a GroupLife class yet, we don't want you to miss out during *Faith Works*. Perhaps you don't want to miss out either, but you're not sure you're ready to take the plunge into ongoing, weekly classes. Our team of discipleship pastors, who wrote the content for the *Faith Works Personal Journal*, are teaching a handful of classes for 5-weeks, for you to experience GroupLife for the first time. Pick the group that seems to fit your life stage best at the time that works for you. We can't wait to meet you!

10:10 AM

Younger Mixed Adults	Room 120F	Pastor David Booth
Older Mixed Adults	Room 120GH	Pastor David Gusewelle
11:30 am		
Singles Pastor Classes	Room Loft A	Pastor Gary Peil
Couples with Kids & Teens	Room 270	Pastor David Booth
Adult Women	Room 271	Pastor Renée Brady
Mixed Adults	Room 120GH	Pastor David Gusewelle

ONGOING GROUPLIFE CLASSES FOR ADULTS

Every Sunday morning, adjacent to the Worship Service of your choice, we have a GroupLife hour for you and every member of your family. We encourage you to attend one of these life stage groups, or choose a class based on intergenerational connections. GroupLife is a great way to connect with other believers for weekly Bible Study, community, and opportunities to be on mission together.

10:10 AM CLASSES

<u>College Department</u>		
College Students	College Life Space	Pastor Gary Peil
<u>Singles Department</u>		
The Loft @ 10:10	Room Loft A	Jason W. & Alicia S.
Prime Time	Room Loft C	Chris, Wes & Richard
<u>Families Department</u>		
Young Couples	Room 276	Tell & Susan Butler
Planting Seeds	Room 270	Tyler P. & Adam V.
Faithful Foundations	Room 272	Robert Cheyne
Reed/Taylor	Room 275B	The Reeds & Matt T.
1BY Parents @ 10:10	Room 170	John Fellers
1BY: Refining Fire	Room 275A	Jason W. & Annie S.
The Gathering	Room 273	Jeremy Palmer
Living Free	Room 271	Alex Berwick
<u>Median Adults</u>		
Lair Class	Room 120C	Pete Lair
Jesus Lifestyle	Room 120D	Richard Alexander
Legacy Class	Choir Room	Pastor Matt Marsh
Generations Women's	Modular 1A	Betty Barrett
Kingdom Seekers	Room 236B	Dicky H. & Mickey B
Walking in Joy Class	Room 235	Jim & Tamera E.
Walking in Faith Women's	Room 233	Alana Curry
Brower Men's	Room 234	Rob Brower
Cornerstone	Room 236A	Dale O. & Karen L.
<u>Senior Adults</u>		
Closer Walk	Room 231	Jim Jackson
Salt and Light	Room 120A	Jim Henry
Oberhelmen Class	Room 241	Steve Oberhelmen
Open Door	Room 236B	Bill Moore
Grace Women's	Conference Room	Gretchen Hanson
Encouragers	Room 137	Glen Thompson
Eunice Women's	Room 138	Karlyn Fedora
Faithful Senior Coed	Room 136A	Frank Murphy
Business Men's Bible Class	Room 135	Murphy, Kling, Springfield

11:30 AM CLASSES

<u>College Department</u>		
College Students	College Life Space	Jason Whisenant
<u>Singles Department</u>		
The Loft @ 11:30	Room Loft A	Pastor Gary Peil
Pathfinders	Room Loft C	Greta C. & Lance S.
<u>Families Department</u>		
Co-laborers (Couples, 20s)	Room 274	Jonathan Furlong
Parents of Kids	Room 275A	Matt Ferguson
1BY Parents @ 11:30	Room 170	James Inmon
Practicing the Way	Room 272	Jeff Turner
<u>Median Adults</u>		
Seasons Women's Class	Room 138	Nancy Taylor
Shield & Sword	Room 137	Mike Lang
<u>Senior Adults</u>		
The Sword	Room 135	Bob Turner
Salt and Light	Room 120A	Jim Henry
<u>Senior Adults</u>		
Adolescente 13 - 17	Room 235	Lozada & Gomez
Jovenes y Universitarios	Room 236B	Sam & Joyce Allen
Nuevos Creyentes	Room 232	Rosy Luna
Adultos 22 - 34	Room 234	Sáenz & Zavala
Adultos 35-44	Room 233	Teo C. & Eric C.
Adultos 45-54	Room 136A	Sandra C. & Sergio C.
Adultos 55+	Room 136B	Eleazar Colina

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

David Booth was led by his father to faith in Christ at 8 years old in Norfolk, VA. He has been married to Christy for nearly 30 years and is the proud father of two girls, two boys, and is “Poppi” to his wiggly 3 and 5 year old granddaughters. He has been our Families Pastor at First Baptist Bryan since 2016 and also the Discipleship Pastor since 2020. David earned a Master’s of Divinity (1999) and Ph.D. (2013) at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has served churches in Virginia, Georgia, and Texas in a variety of ministerial roles and served as an adjunct professor at Dallas Baptist University. His life ambition is to leave a legacy of trusting and treasuring Jesus to his family and to the men and women he has served and known in 25 years of full-time ministry.



Renée Brady accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord during Vacation Bible School as a child, when her view of Him changed from a faraway King to a personal Savior and Shepherd. She joined First Baptist Bryan in 2002 as a freshman at Texas A&M. For almost 18 years, Renée has served First Baptist Church in various full-time pastoral roles over our Preschool, Children’s, Singles, and now, Women’s Ministries. She earned her Master’s in Christian Education from Dallas Baptist University (2011). Renee and her husband, Jonathan, married in 2013 and together they are raising three beautiful children—Stella (7) and twins Wyatt and Lyla (2.5). Her passion is connecting the weary to life-giving community by welcoming their struggles and championing them to flourish in Christ.

David Gusewelle has served at FBC Bryan for 22 years, starting as the Business Manager, and now serving as Senior Adult Pastor. David is married to Angela (43 years) and has three grown children and three amazing grandkids. David is a 1982 graduate from the University of Arkansas with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. David earned his M.Div. (2015) and D.Min. (2021) from the B.H. Carroll Theological Institute. In 1972, upon David’s father sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with him, David professed his faith in Jesus Christ. Being part of FBC Bryan for many years has allowed David to get to know and care for the Senior Adults in our congregation, whom he aims to educate on how to best abide in Christ, so that they can leave a lasting legacy for their Church, their families, and friends.



Gary Peil accepted Christ as his Lord and Savior when he was 9 years old in Bellaire, TX. He has been married to Trisha for 33 years and is the proud father of four adult children: Sarah, Hannah, Aaron, and Joshua; and the grandfather of Rebekah and Josiah. He has been the Singles Pastor at FBC Bryan since December of 2024 and is also currently serving as the Interim College Pastor. Gary earned an MDIVBL (1996) and a Ph.D. (2002) at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. In addition to serving churches in Tennessee and Texas for over 30 years, he served as a hospital chaplain with Baylor, Scott & White and as an adjunct professor at Union University in Jackson, TN. His life ambition is to lead his family well and serve the church by equipping God’s people for works of service.



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