

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS
JAMES



Building Foundations James

Study Guide

Acknowledgments

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Progression Toward Maturity

Phase 1: *Relationship with God* (Revelation 4:11; 1 Corinthians 1:9)

- The Call of God Is First to Himself.
- Foundation for Salvation (“Creation to Christ”)

Phase 2: *Position with Christ* (1 Corinthians 1:30a)

- We Become a New Creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- Foundation for Salvation (“Positioned in Christ” and “New Birth Explained”)

Phase 3: *Dependence upon the Spirit* (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)

- The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth (John 16:13-14)
- Church Is the Pillar and Foundation of Truth (1 Timothy 3:15)
- Acts/Building Foundations

Phase 4: *Practical Sanctification–Identification with Christ, Co-crucified with Christ, Conformed to Image of Christ* (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20; Rom. 8:28-29)

- Romans to Revelation/Building Foundations
- Principles of Spiritual Growth
- God’s Masterpiece–The Cross
- Looking unto Jesus Lessons

Conclusion: *Recommended Order of Study*

Detailed Explanation of Each Phase

Phase 1: Foundation for Salvation (“Creation to Christ”)

The Christian life is a relationship; therefore, our desire is to lead our readers into a deep and intimate relationship with God. In order to grow into that level of relationship with God, there are foundational truths that must be clearly taught and understood. These foundational truths include the following:

- The attributes of God – His love, power, grace, omniscience, omnipotence, justice, immutability, hatred of sin, faithfulness.
- The sinfulness of man, his helplessness to save himself, and his need for a Savior.
- Only God can provide a way of salvation.
- The Gospel

Phase 2: Foundation for Sanctification (“Positioned in Christ” and “The New Birth Explained”)

The moment someone is born again, there is an immediate change of position that takes place in his or her life. At that very moment, one becomes a child of God, and is taken out of Adam and placed into Christ. All that Christ is and all that Christ has become ours. Therefore, before service to God is considered, one must be grounded in an understanding of who we are in Christ. Some important foundational truths that should be emphasized in Phase 2 teaching include the following:

- Placed into Christ
- Justified (declared righteous) and accepted in Christ
- Child of God
- Restored to oneness with God
- Eternally secure in Christ
- His Divine power has given to us all things pertaining to life and godliness through His finished work on the cross.
- Our part is to believe.

Phase 3: Dependence upon the Spirit and Introduction of the Church (“Acts/Building Foundations”)

The position change that takes place in every believer's life at salvation is immediate and complete. The daily “living out” of that position, on the other hand, is a growth process. It is the progression of growth that the Holy

Spirit is working all believers through in His process of conforming us to the image of Christ.

In order for believers to move on to maturity, we must learn to walk and depend upon the Holy Spirit. Therefore, our purpose in Phase 3 teaching is to reveal the Holy Spirit's ministry and His faithfulness to lead, guide, feed, and protect God's children, as well as to introduce the church. Some of the important foundational truths that should be emphasized include the following:

- The Holy Spirit's ministry to lead, guide, feed, protect, and establish us in truth
- To emphasize the FAITHFULNESS of the Spirit to fulfill all that Jesus promised
- To reveal the early church's dependence upon the Spirit
- The Holy Spirit is as faithful in our lives today, as He was to the early church in the book of Acts.
- Introduction of the church and her role

Phase 4: Practical Sanctification–Identification with Christ; Conformed to the image of Christ (“Romans to Revelation/Building Foundations”), “Principles of Spiritual Growth,” God’s Masterpiece the Cross of Christ,” and “Looking Unto Jesus” lessons)

The Holy Spirit is teaching us to walk less in the flesh and more in the Spirit, with Christ becoming more and more the object of our hearts.

In Phase 4, we will study through the epistles with the purpose of learning to rest in our identification with Christ and His finished work. As we, by faith, begin to appropriate identification truths, our co-crucifixion with Christ, our lives will become more and more conformed to the image of Christ, manifesting the fruit of the Spirit.

Some of the important truths that will be emphasized in Phase 4 includes the following:

- The believer's identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (crucified with Him and raised to newness of life)
- Sanctification is the process of walking less and less in the flesh and more and more in the Spirit.
- Our part in the process is faith in the finished work of Christ and our identification with it.
- What it means to truly walk in the Spirit
- Putting off the old and putting on the new
- Manifesting the life of Christ/fruit of the Spirit

Conclusion: Recommended Order of Study

Because there truly is a progression of growth that the Holy Spirit is taking all believers through, our Bible lessons have been developed and arranged to line up with that work of the Spirit in our lives. Each set of lessons contains the foundational truths that must be in place in a person's heart in order to facilitate their growth onto the next stage of spiritual growth. Therefore, we believe that it is important to teach the lessons in the following order:

- ***God's Eternal Plan***
- ***Building Foundations Order of Study:***

Acts	2 Corinthians
Romans	Philippians
Ephesians	Philemon
1 Corinthians	2 Timothy
1 Timothy	1 and 2 Peter
Titus	1, 2 and 3 John
1 and 2 Thessalonians	Hebrews
Revelation	James
Galatians	Jude
Colossians	
- ***Knowing God*** before the ***Digging Deeper*** studies
- ***Digging Deeper*** studies in any order

JAMES

LESSON 1

A. Introduction

- It is believed that the Epistle of James was written between A.D. 45-50 and is very likely the first New Testament book to be written.
- James was the brother of Jude and half-brother to the Lord Jesus (**Matthew 13:55**). James also witnessed the appearance of Jesus after His resurrection (**1 Corinthians 15:7**), and he was also among those who assembled to await the Holy Spirit's coming after Jesus' ascension (**Acts 1:14**). Later, James became one of the key leaders in the church in Jerusalem (**Acts 12:17; Galatians 1:18-19**). As a leader in the Jerusalem church, James was well respected and influential (**Galatians 2:9, 12; Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18**).
- As one of the early church leaders, James had great responsibility and a burden for the early church. Having deep concern for the dispersed church (**James 1:1, 16, 19; 2:5**), James may have written this epistle from Jerusalem (as there is no indication that he ever left). James was aware of errors that needed to be corrected in the early dispersed church, and therefore was writing for that intended purpose.
- As we study this book, it is important to keep a couple of things in mind. First, if indeed James was the first New Testament book written, it was written to Jewish Christians during a period of time when they were transitioning from Judaism and the law into the church age or age of grace. This epistle had to be written in a way that would be acceptable to the Jewish believers, who no doubt were still trying to reconcile in their minds the keeping of the law and the

finished work of Christ. Secondly, James is writing to Jewish believers; therefore, the primary focus of his teaching is not salvation but rather sanctification and the walk of faith.

Read James 1:1.

- As was mentioned in the introduction, the writer of this book was James, the brother of Jude and half-brother of Jesus. Both James and Jude were sons of Joseph and Mary, the mother of Jesus. (**Mark 6:3; Acts 15:13; Galatians 1:19; 1 Corinthians 9:5**)
- James begins this epistle by referring to himself as a *“bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”* We really don’t know much about the life of James before he became a leader in the Jerusalem church. In **Mark 6:4** we read, *“Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house.’”* We don’t know what James personally thought of Jesus during those earlier years, but we do know that Jesus was surrounded by friends, neighbors, and possibly family who did not believe He was the Son of God.
- James grew up with Jesus; therefore, he knew him well and interacted with Jesus throughout their childhood. Between James’ childhood and his writing of this epistle, God must have done an awesome work in his life. In this epistle, James refers to Jesus as “Lord” and to himself as the bondservant of Jesus. This is evidence of the Holy Spirit’s work as he confirmed in James’ heart the true identity of Jesus.
- James said he was a bondservant of God and also of the Lord Jesus Christ. He served Jesus in the same way he served God. By claiming this, James was putting the Lord Jesus on the same level as God. This

is a significant point because of James' audience: Jewish Christians. The Jews knew they were God's chosen people, and this was something they boasted greatly in.

- During Old Testament times as well as during this transitional period when James was writing this epistle, it was virtuous for the Jews to love and serve God wholeheartedly. The majority of the Jews were very sincere in their belief that Jesus was not the true Son of God. Therefore, they considered their rejection of Christ to be virtuous, almost a proof of their love and service for God (**Philippians 3:3-6**). So for James to say he is serving both God and the Lord Jesus Christ was a very strong and significant statement to Jews. Even though he was writing to believers, it was still a transitional time in which they were moving from having a "law mindset and focus" to a "grace mindset and focus."

B. James Wrote This Letter to Jewish Believers

- James wrote this letter to Jews who were living in many countries surrounding Israel: "***to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.***" Throughout the book, James makes references to the law and to wisdom, and uses Abraham, Isaac, Rahab, the prophets, Job, and Elijah as examples. These would all carry much weight to a Jewish reader. This verse does not clearly state that James was addressing believing Jews, but we can assume he was as it would have made no sense for him to write those things to unbelievers.
- James declares that the believing Jews were dispersed abroad. We know that even before the Day of Pentecost the Jews were already dispersed by the Babylonians and Assyrians. That is why on the Day

of Pentecost many Jews came together who spoke different languages. They had been living in other countries and were now speaking the languages of those countries (**Acts 2:5-11**).

- We will also remember that after Stephen was stoned, many believing Jews from the church in Jerusalem were scattered because of the persecution of Christians led by Saul, who later became Paul, the Apostle. These Jews probably were new believers and may have been scattered shortly after coming to Christ. James was naturally concerned for them and their faith, and whether or not they were remaining steadfast (**Acts 8:1**).

C. God Uses Trials to Perfect Our Faith

Read James 1:2-4.

- Reminding ourselves to whom James is writing adds weight to his statement.
- When James writes that we are to “***count it all joy when you fall into various trials***,” he makes it clear that trials are used by the Lord as a key ingredient for growth and therefore gives cause for rejoicing. What could be more contrary to natural thinking? Our natural, fleshly response to difficulties is to become discouraged and attempt to find a way of escaping the difficult situation. So, why then would James make such a statement? Why would anyone ever rejoice in trials and hardship?
- Verse 3 begins with the word, “***knowing***,” and is a continuation from verse 2. Verses 2-3 could be paraphrased, “*Since we know (from experience) that the perfecting of our faith produces patience, therefore trials are something that should cause us to rejoice.*”

- Everyone experiences difficulties in life simply because we live in a fallen world in sin-cursed bodies and wickedness reigns. Just the nature of life on earth brings about much hardship, difficulties, and trials. So, we all HAVE experienced, DO experience, and WILL continue to experience trials and difficulties (**Job 5:7**).
- But, along with the trials, we have all experienced the grace, mercy, goodness, love, power, and faithfulness of God as He has led, guided, comforted, and delivered us through every hardship and difficulty. Each time a new trial comes, we remember what we've already experienced and are strengthened and encouraged to endure—not because we can see that the difficulties are ending, but because we are confident in the faithfulness of God.
- God's purpose for trials in our lives is to bring us to the end of ourselves and to reveal our need for Him.
- It's easy to read God's Word and learn things ABOUT God, but it's through the daily circumstances of life that we truly experience God—who He really is and what He is really like. We can see the faithfulness of God in the lives of the Israelites in the Old Testament, and we can read that God is faithful throughout the epistles; but only in the midst of hardship, difficulty, and trial will we see the faithfulness of God in our own lives.
- The more trials we go through, the more opportunities we have to see the faithfulness and character of God. The more we know Him, the more we'll trust Him. The more we trust Him, the more we'll be able to patiently endure the next trial, calmly trusting and resting in His goodness and grace. However, in the flesh we'll care more about deliverance from the trial rather than deepening our relationship with God (**Romans 5:3-5; 8:35-39**).

- James states that the testing of our faith will produce endurance in our lives, and then he continues on to say that endurance will have a “perfecting” effect. We know from **2 Peter 1:3** that we’ve already been given all things pertaining to life and Godliness. Therefore, “the perfecting effect” in **James 1:2-4** is not a reference to our standing and position we have in Christ, for that is already perfect and complete.
- The perfection and completeness that endurance will produce is referring to the daily living out of the perfect and complete position that is already ours in Christ. Enduring trials and hardships by God’s grace “enlivens” and perfects our faith. As that process progresses, our daily condition is being perfected as it becomes more in line with our already perfect position.
- So putting all this together, James clearly states that trials and difficulties are necessary ingredients for knowing God, and to truly know Him is to trust Him. The more we trust Him, the more we will endure steadfast in the faith; the more we endure, the more “perfected” our lives become in the sense that we manifest more and more the life of Christ. And then James declares, “*You may be [...] lacking nothing.*”
- Currently, we have times when we appear to be deficient. We fail and walk in sin and it appears we are in need of more enabling power, or we need more study, more prayer, or more help from God. The truth is we don’t need anything more from God, for He has already sent His Son and through His finished work has provided all that we need for salvation and sanctification. But the reason we so often seem deficient is because we are living life under the reign and control of the flesh and are manifesting the deeds and characteristics of the flesh rather than the life of Christ and the fruit of the Spirit.

- James communicates clearly that Christians are to rejoice in trials because through them, God is increasing our endurance. The more He grows our endurance, the more perfect we'll become in living a holy and righteous life on a daily basis.
- The supreme example of maturity of faith is seen in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- In all His suffering, He never doubted His Father. Jesus believed that even if He gave His life on the cross, God would remain faithful and raise Him from the dead (**1 Peter 2:21-23; Hebrews 5:7-9; Acts 2:25-28**).

Read James 1:5.

- We need wisdom in order to understand all that God is doing in our lives.
- James comments that if anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask in faith. Wisdom is looking at life from God's point of view. The process of maturing which James speaks of in verses 2-4 is a process that goes against the natural thinking of man. It's impossible for man to "naturally" rejoice in trials. However, as man is able to see this process from God's point of view (a necessary ingredient for growth), he will be able to rejoice in trials. So, James writes that if we are unable to see this process from God's point of view and we can't yet rejoice in trials and hardships, then ask God for wisdom. Ask God for the ability to see these things from His point of view, for God gives generously.

Read James 1:6-8.

- We should ask in faith, not doubting.

- If we lack the ability to view what God is doing from His perspective, then we should ask for wisdom, but James writes that we are to ask in faith and not doubt. The fact that we ask God for wisdom is proof we have a need in our life. We want to rejoice in our trials, but not having God's perspective regarding how He is using the trials in our lives will prevent us from doing so. Therefore, we recognize our need for His wisdom, His point of view. But in asking God for wisdom and the ability to view life from His point of view, we must ask in faith, believing in the goodness of God. However, if we doubt, we will not recognize the good that He is bringing and therefore will not go on to receive and experience the "perfecting" effect this process is intended to have in our lives.
- If we are not convinced of the goodness of God and what His purposes are for our lives, we will be double-minded and unstable in our hearts. This results in focusing more on our circumstances and being delivered from the trials than on God Himself and the maturing process He is seeking to bring about in our lives.
- In the day that James wrote this epistle, Paul's epistles had not yet been written. Today we have Paul's epistles available and many of us have already studied them and understand that truly our greatest need is to walk less in the flesh and more in the Spirit; the more we walk in the flesh, the more self-centered we'll be and unable to view life and circumstances from God's point of view. But when we walk in the Spirit, we will have a hunger to know God. The more we come to know God, the more convinced of His goodness we'll become. The more convinced of His goodness we become, the more free we'll be to truly desire His will in our lives, thereby enabling us to embrace all

circumstances He permits in our lives, for our hearts will be confident of His purposes.

D. Paul As An Example

- The Apostle Paul had some difficulty that caused him great distress. Three times he pleaded with the Lord to remove whatever was distressing him; but the Lord failed to remove it for He knew what was best for the apostle (**2 Corinthians 12:7-9**).
- Once God made His purpose clear to Paul, Paul embraced and rejoiced in his weaknesses, trials, and hardships. There was no doubt in Paul's mind as to the goodness of God and His purposes for Paul (**2 Corinthians 12:10; Philippians 4:12-13**).

E. A New Perspective For Jewish Believers

Read James 1:9-11.

- Once again, it would be good if we remind ourselves to whom James was writing. He was writing to Jewish believers who were scattered abroad, and it was during a period of time in which they were transitioning from the “age of law” to the “church or grace age.” Under the law, the Jews were given earthly promises of protection and prosperity, but many of these believers were experiencing trials, hardships, difficulties, and persecution. To their Jewish “law” mindset, experiencing such circumstances meant God was not blessing them, which they would have viewed as a “low” position, not a “high” position. However, James declares that those who are living in humble means and who are tried and persecuted should take pride in their high position.

- This was new thinking for a Jewish believer during this period of time. James was attempting to move them from the old Jewish legal system mindset of focusing on earthly circumstances, to a new grace/faith focused mindset that centers on Christ. Rather than focusing on what they did or did not have physically, they could raise their gaze to what God was accomplishing in their lives spiritually and therefore rejoice in physical trials and hardships (**Ephesians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3-4**).
- Typically, the rich are earthly focused, self-sufficient, and have the mindset that their riches are all they need. James is declaring that just as poor believers need to shift their focus from the physical and earthly to the spiritual, so must the rich; rather than wealth being what causes them to rejoice, they should rejoice in “their humiliation.” Ultimately, their focus and source of encouragement should come from what God has done and is doing “spiritually” in their lives. They had been spiritually bankrupt but now have been made children of God and are those whom God is now working to perfect and complete (**Jeremiah 9:23-24**).

Read James 1:12.

- God is pleased with those who remain firm in their faith during trials (**Hebrews 11:6**).
- James writes “***blessed*** [fully satisfied] ***is the man who endures*** [remains under] ***temptation; for when he has been approved*** [tried or perfected], ***he will receive*** [take hold of] ***the crown of life***”—the highest state of blessing that a human can receive.
- In the Jewish mind, hardship and trial was something to be avoided, as it meant to them that God was not pleased and therefore not blessing them. But James writes that full satisfaction will come to the man who

remains under trial, who does not seek to prematurely deliver himself from hardships and difficulties. For the man, who because of his confidence in the goodness of God, remains under trial, accepting it as something good from the hand of God, will experience the highest state of blessing that a human can experience on this side of eternity (**Deuteronomy 8:16**). The satisfaction that Jews may have known through keeping the law and the result of God's blessing would pale in comparison to the height of spiritual blessing they would experience as they continued to trust in the goodness of God and remain under trial (**Psalms 66:10-12**).

F. Temptation To Sin Is Not From God

Read James 1:13-15.

- God never tempts anyone with evil.
- James knew there would be some who would misunderstand by thinking he was saying God seeks to test our faith by tempting us with sin. James clarifies this by saying it is impossible for God to be tempted to do evil. He Himself does not tempt anyone with evil even to test one's faith. His testing is not an effort to prove that we are sinful.
- God uses trials and hardships in our lives to deepen our knowledge and dependence on Him, thereby enabling us to endure hardship and achieve the highest state of spiritual blessing that a human can attain. Without trials and difficulties, we would never grow to that extent.
- It is through our own fleshly desires that we are tempted to sin.
- The world, the flesh, and the Devil are our three enemies. The world and the devil are "external"

enemies in the sense that they don't reside within us. Only the flesh resides within and is therefore an ever present enemy. Satan and the world can only gain influence in our lives through the flesh. However, if we are appropriating our co-crucifixion with Christ, we will not only experience freedom from the reign and control of the flesh, but the world and the Devil will also be unable to tempt, accuse, or deceive us (**Matthew 15:19**).

G. The Progression of Sin In Our Lives

- James gives us the progression of sin in our lives. First, it begins with the evil desires of our flesh; then the desire of our flesh influences our soul (mind, will, and emotions), which in turn leads to our committing the sin. Then comes death (**Romans 6:23**).
- It's important to keep in mind that death is separation; sin separates Christians from fellowship and communion with God.
- James' point is that this state of "death" is not brought about through temptation from God but through the evil desires of one's flesh.

H. God Gives Us What is Good

Read James 1:16-17.

- Only good things come from a perfect God.
- James didn't want His readers to misunderstand and think that God brings evil into their lives. Because God is perfect, all He does is perfect.
- James said God is not like the sun, moon and stars which sometimes shine brightly; yet at other times they are dim or may not be seen at all. Every evening, as the world turns, the sun cannot be seen and

darkness covers that portion of the earth. At other times, the light of the sun is completely blocked as the moon moves between the sun and the earth. But God, the source of these great lights, never changes. Everything He permits into our lives is for good. Nothing and nobody can cause God's goodness and God's love to change toward His children.

I. God Saved Us Through His Word

Read James 1:18.

- In His goodness, grace, and mercy, God saved us through His Word.
- He could have left us in our sin to experience the death we deserved, but He chose “*of His own will*” to save us through the power of His Word. As we heard the truth, He worked in our hearts by His Spirit to show us our sinfulness and helplessness. Then, He taught us about the Lord Jesus and His death for us on the cross. In His goodness, He created faith in our hearts by His Word and we believed and were born again by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- The Jewish Christians to whom James was writing may still have been struggling with the change that had taken place in their relationship with God. Under the law, as they obeyed its commands, God blessed their physical lives; but now under grace, it seemed that God's way was to make their lives hard and burdensome. James is again reminding his readers of the goodness and grace of God. His choosing of them was totally of His own will and not because they deserved it (**Romans 3:23**).
- They had believed the gospel soon after the birth of the church on the day of Pentecost, so God called them “*a kind of first fruits of His creatures.*” Just as

farmers eagerly harvest the first grains that appear in their fields, so the Lord Jesus, who gave His life for His church must have rejoiced to see the first believers added to His church (**Acts 20:28**).

- Many people believed and were counted righteous (**Genesis 15:6**) during Old Testament times, but they were not part of the church. The first to make up the church were those who were gathered in the upper room on the day of Pentecost, and the firstfruits were those who believed soon after through their testimony.

Read James 1:19-20.

- As mentioned before, James is writing to Jewish believers who were transitioning from law to grace. In light of the fact that some of James' teaching would have contradicted what his readers had held to as Jews, James encouraged them to be quick to listen and slow to speak. The truth of God's Word is the standard of truth and not the traditions of men that have been passed down from generation to generation.
- If we spend time in God's Word, reading and studying, then we can know that what we believe is according to Biblical truth.
- We must ask this question: are we walking in the flesh or in the Spirit? In the flesh, the mind of man cannot understand the deep things of God (**1 Corinthians 2:12-15**). But as we walk in the Spirit, the Spirit of God communicates to our human spirit the deep truths of God and we become convinced of the truth.
- Man's anger does not produce results that are pleasing to God: "*Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.*"

- In the flesh, we will be the opposite—fast to speak, slow to listen and quick-tempered. An impatient and angry attitude will not help anyone understand and believe the truths of God’s Word but will only work to build up barriers that keep people from wanting to hear. In the flesh and in anger, it is impossible for us to accomplish anything good for God.

Read James 1:21.

- When James uses the phrase “*is able to save your souls,*” many believe he is speaking of eternal salvation. However, in verses 14 and 15, James laid out the progression that sin takes in our lives. It begins with the evil desires of our flesh, which then influences our soul (mind, will, emotions), and ultimately brings forth sin.
- Therefore, James writes if we put off all filth, if we put off the deeds of the flesh, and “*receive with meekness the implanted word,*” or walk in the truth that the Spirit has imparted to us, then our souls will be saved from the torment and death (separation) that otherwise would be experienced through walking in the flesh and committing sin.
- How do we put off that “*filthiness*” and “*receive [...] the word*”? We know from other epistles we’ve studied that this comes as we reckon our flesh dead and ourselves alive with Christ (**Galatians 5:16**).

J. We Should Obey God’s Word

Read James 1:22-25.

- Reading, listening to, or even studying God’s Word is not sufficient if we don’t also live out what God says

in the scriptures; for then we are like a person who looks into a mirror, sees that he has a dirty face, but immediately forgets about what he saw. Looking into the mirror will be of no benefit to a person with a dirty face unless he remembers what he saw and then takes action to wash his face.

- If we don't appropriate and walk in all the truths we have seen, heard, and studied regarding the finished work of Christ and our identification with it and its effect on our lives, they will be of no help to us. We'll just continue to live as if those provisions have never been given.
- There are many who know a lot of truth and can quote scripture, teach through God's Word, even give good counsel, but they themselves are not walking in the truths they know and communicate. James clearly states they are deceived. Knowing truth deceives them into thinking they have attained Christ-likeness. But James makes it clear they are deceived, for the truth they know and teach is not a part of their lives and therefore is of no benefit to them.

K. The Perfect Law of Liberty

- The law (the Old Testament legal system) was not a "law of liberty" (grace) to Israel. Because of the absolute demands of the law and because of Israel's inability to obey its commands, the law did not bring freedom but rather bondage and fear (**Romans 8:15; Galatians 3:10-13**).
- However, all of this has changed through the grace of the Lord Jesus. He has delivered us from the law and its curse. That being said, still today in God's Word under the age of grace, there remains instruction as to Christian conduct and admonition for God's children who now have the Holy Spirit indwelling and

enabling them to live the Christ-life. James states that the one who reads and studies the Word of God and walks in truth (by faith), that one will sense and experience freedom in Christ (**Galatians 5:1**).

- If we claim to walk in the Spirit but don't live out the Christian life, we deceive ourselves (**1 John 1:8**).

Read James 1:26-27.

- When James writes, “*If anyone among you thinks he is religious,*” this is not a reference to salvation but rather claiming to be “devout” (in his religion). If a man teaches the Word and appears to be godly but is unable to control his tongue, he has deceived himself by thinking that he is devout. James declares that such devotion is worthless, for it cannot even handle a very basic thing like controlling a man's speech.
- James goes on to say that pure and undefiled devotion to God will result in caring for orphans, widows, and in the keeping of oneself free from the sin and influence of the world.
- So the issue here is a dead-to-self “devotion” to God and others. As true born again Christians, all of us walk in the flesh and at times act and live as if we are not the children of God. During those times, we are still a child of God, but we are self-centered and wouldn't call ourselves devout Christians. In James' day, some of the Jewish believers were living in this way. They were viewing themselves as devout followers of God but were not truly living out the dead-to-self Christ-life. James states they were deceived, forgetful hearers, and their so called “devotion” was worthless.

JAMES LESSON 2

A. No Partiality in the Body of Christ

Read James 2:1-4.

- In Chapter 2, James continues speaking to specific issues in the lives of his readers, the first of which was showing favoritism to the rich over the poor. James makes it clear that such action is contrary to the Word of God and is not acceptable for those who are truly living the Christian life.
- Favoring some above others is contrary to the attitude the Lord Jesus demonstrated when He associated with the poor and those who lacked social position. Even though He was the Lord from Heaven, He was willing to touch lepers and befriend beggars, tax collectors and other socially unacceptable people (**Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:39**).
- Today, God's greatest purpose in the life of every believer is to conform us to the image of Christ (**Romans 8:29**), reproducing the life of Christ in and through us. Therefore, those who are truly living the Christ-life will manifest the same attitudes and characteristics that Christ manifested. So, if our actions and attitudes are contrary to those of the Lord Jesus, then it should be clear that His life is not being reproduced in us. Instead we are walking in the flesh, viewing people and life through our flesh (**2 Corinthians 5:16a**).
- In our churches today, we often have similar partiality shown. Sometimes it has to do with wealth, other times it's in regard to those who are powerful or influential; these are the ones who are given a preference or shown partiality.

B. An Attitude of Partiality Is Contrary to Being One in Christ

- In our churches today, we continue to have this same type of partiality shown to some believers over others.
- God's Word teaches that in Christ we are all one. There is no caste system, no distinction of one being better or more important than another. These are only distinctions we make in the flesh. **Ephesians 4:16** makes it clear we've all been placed and fitted together into the same body for the benefit of the whole, not for the benefit of self (**Galatians 3:26-28**).

Read James 2:5.

- It was the poor who were more open to Jesus' teaching. The rich, well-educated, and leaders in society were proud, independent, and self-sufficient; they thought they knew the truth and were good enough to be accepted by God.
- A reason why Jewish believers were showing partiality came from the old Jewish legal system which led them to believe that those who are rich and influential were "blessed" by God because of their devotion. The thought that under grace God chooses the weak, foolish, and undeserving still had not penetrated their hearts (**Luke 7:29; 18:9-14; John 9:34; 1 Corinthians 1:18-21, 26-29**).

C. All Children of God Are Rich

- James makes it clear that many of God's children may be considered poor in this world yet are "***rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him.***" James is again attempting to move them from their old, legalistic, earthly Jewish

mindset to a spiritual and eternal mindset. As children of God under grace, there is a new economy. It's no longer works and physical blessing but the finished work of Christ on our behalf and every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. The believer's true "riches" are in Christ, not in the things of this world (**1 Peter 1:3-4; John 14:1-3; Ephesians 2:7; Philippians 4:19; Colossians 1:27**).

Read James 2:5-7.

- We assume that many of the Christians to whom James was writing were rather poor regarding the things of this world.
- We know these Jewish believers had been scattered, persecuted, and oppressed. Apparently some wealthy and influential people had joined the church, and in an effort to avoid future persecution and oppression, these poor oppressed believers began to show partiality to the rich and influential in order to win their favor. Rather than trusting God with their circumstances, some feared man more than God (**Galatians 1:10**).
- The picture James paints was very sobering. He clearly states the poor who are rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom were being dishonored within the body of Christ, but those who were financially rich (and spiritually poor) and who persecuted and oppressed others and blasphemed the very name of God were being honored and exalted within the body.
- This is another fruit of the flesh. For the sake of ourselves and our fleshly desires, we would be willing to sacrifice friends, family, and even the name of God.

D. Love All People Without Partiality

Read James 2:8-11.

- God's royal law of love (**Matthew 22:37-40**) is God's holy standard for His children.
- James quoted the law (**Leviticus 19:18**) because he was writing to Jewish believers who could fully grasp and relate to the truth he was communicating. They knew if someone were to break one point of the Old Testament law, he or she was guilty of all. Though they were no longer under the law, they understood that to go on showing partiality was to make them guilty of breaking God's holy standard.
- In verse 12, James will again refer to "*the law of liberty*" (**James 1:25**). The Old Testament law was a law of bondage and fear to Israel. But to those "in Christ," the law is "the grace-based law of liberty." Christ has fulfilled it on our behalf. Therefore, James is saying since we are people who can no longer be punished and condemned by the law for sin, we ourselves should no longer make judgments of believers that will lead us to show partiality in the body of Christ.

E. Our Faith Is Perfected By Our Works

Read James 2:12-13.

- James states that believers should not speak and act as those who will be condemned by the law but as those who are set free from the law. A reason for considering this is that we ourselves will be motivated to show mercy to others.
- To understand this passage we must consider what takes place in our hearts and minds and our ability to

accept God's grace and mercy in our lives. To be those who will be judged by a law that gives freedom and mercy but not willing to show mercy toward others is to see ourselves under that same merciless judgment with which we are judging others. If we are judging others without mercy, then we ourselves aren't depending upon and resting in the grace and mercy of God in our own lives. Rather, we believe we are able to perform and do all that we feel is right. In our own lives, we aren't resting upon the mercy of God and therefore don't extend it to others.

- But James makes this statement. God's mercy triumphs over judgment. So in life, even if we are unmerciful to others, in the end mercy will triumph over judgment.

F. Works Brings Our Faith To Life

Read James 2:14-18.

- James now returns to his purpose for writing this epistle: to see Jewish believers go on to a mature and enlivened faith. James knew they were in danger of continuing to live life in the flesh and their faith becoming cold and dead. Therefore, when James asks, "***If someone says he has faith but does not have works [...] can faith save him?***" he is asking, "can a faith that has no works be made alive—is it really faith?"
- In verses 15-17, James gives a practical example of faith without works, and then in verse 17 he concludes that true Christian faith which doesn't have works is a dead and useless faith and accomplishes nothing in life for the good of others. Faith without works is contrary to the heart and character of God.

- In verse 18, James quotes an objector who makes the following statement: “*You have faith, and I have works.*” James replies, “*I will show you my faith by my works.*” If you want to see what I believe, watch my life.

Read James 2:19.

- James now gives the ultimate example of the uselessness of faith without works. The demons have faith that God alone is God, but there are no good works with their faith. There is no repentance, no turning to God—only a continuing hatred for Him, His children and His will. Therefore, the point is their faith is dead and useless.

G. Abraham’s Faith Was Made Complete By His Works

Read James 2:20-24.

- James provides proof that faith without works is useless by reminding the readers that Abraham put his faith into action when he offered Isaac on the altar. (**Genesis 15:1-6; 22:1-12**).
- Abraham was counted as righteous because he believed God and was justified by his works.

H. The Example of Rahab’s Faith

Read James 2:25.

- Rahab also revealed her faith by her works.

- The story of Rahab took place after the Israelites finally entered the Promised Land. Joshua, Israel's new leader, sent spies to obtain information about the city of Jericho. It was in Jericho they met Rahab (**Joshua 2:1-22**).
- Before the spies met Rahab, she had heard about what God had done for the Israelites and she believed in the God of Israel (**Joshua 2:8-11**).
- Because of Rahab's faith she was justified; but by hiding the spies when they were in danger, her faith was made perfect.

Read James 2:26.

- If a person is alive, that will be evidenced by their heartbeat, breathing, movement, etc. So it is with faith. If a person's faith is alive and mature, it will be demonstrated by his works.
- In the flesh, we want to be recognized as "spiritual men of faith," but we also want to live for ourselves and not be troubled by the needs of others. The book of James declares, "If you don't have good works along with your faith, then your faith is not perfected; it's dead and useless." However, in the flesh, men go on claiming to be spiritual, all the while showing and proving that just the opposite is true by their lack of good works.

JAMES LESSON 3

A. Teaching in the Church

Read James 3:1.

- Those who aspire to be teachers in the church should realize it is a serious responsibility.
- Teaching God's Word is not something that a person should choose to do without much prayer and careful consideration because teachers will "***receive a stricter judgment.***" God's judgment of teachers will be stricter because when a man teaches the church, he is God's spokesman and therefore he must be careful that what he is teaching is according to truth. Bible teachers have great influence on the overall church as well as the individual lives of the members. Teachers will answer to God for what they teach and how they guide God's people.
- In the flesh, we want to be recognized and one of the ways we seek recognition in the church is to become a teacher or leader. But if our aspiring to be a teacher is through the flesh, then we can rest assured that our teaching will not be according to truth.
- The judgment that James is speaking of will take place in heaven at the judgment seat of Christ. This is the same judgment that Paul alludes to in **1 Corinthians 3:9-15 (Luke 12:48b; 1 Peter 4:10-11; Ephesians 4:11; Romans 12:6-7).**
- The real issue for all believers is to walk in the Spirit, having our hearts occupied with Christ and not ourselves, and function where God has placed us in the body and in the way that He has gifted us.

Read 2 Timothy 4:1-5.

- Timothy was chosen by God to be a teacher in the church. Realizing the seriousness of Timothy's work, Paul wrote words of encouragement and warned Timothy to be faithful in teaching His Word.
- When Paul said goodbye to the Ephesian church elders, he reminded them that during the three years he spent with them, he had been a faithful teacher of God's Word (**Acts 20:17-21, 31**).

B. The Tongue

Read James 3:2.

- At different times throughout this letter, James mentions the tongue and the importance of what we say (**1 Peter 22-23**).
- Anyone at any time can say a wrong word and therefore offend others.
- The only person who always said the right thing was the Lord Jesus Christ (**1 Peter 2:23**).
- James writes that we often offend others by the things we say; however, if a man is able to be so self-controlled that he doesn't offend anyone by his words, that man is a "perfect" or mature man. If we're spiritually mature enough to not offend through words, then the rest of our body will be controlled as well. The first place that "inappropriateness" will show up in our lives will most likely be in our speech, but if that is in control, then more than likely the rest of our body will be also.

Read James 3:3-5.

- Man is made up of three parts: body, soul, and spirit. The soul is also made up of the mind, will, and

emotions. Before salvation, we lived life under the control of our flesh or sin nature. The flesh influenced and controlled our mind, will, and emotions—what we think, desire, and feel. Keep in mind that the soul is what God has given to man to control his body/behavior. However, now that we have been made a new creation in Christ, our spirit has been made alive and we now have the Holy Spirit residing within us. As Paul writes in **Galatians 5:17**, the flesh wars against the spirit and the spirit wars against the flesh. They are battling over control of the soul. As we, by faith, reckon upon our co-crucifixion with Christ (**Romans 6:6**), the flesh is held in the place of death, and it is then that the Spirit influences and controls the mind, will, and emotions, which in turn controls the body/behavior and uses it as an instrument of righteousness.

- James likened the tongue to a bit in a horse's mouth.
- The rider of the horse has control over the horse by pulling on the reins; as he pulls on the bit in the horse's mouth, he is able to guide the horse.
- James likened the tongue to a rudder which controls a ship.
- The ship's captain can control the direction of a ship by moving the rudder. In a similar way, if we are walking in the flesh, the tongue, even though it is small, can cause great effects in our lives.
- The thing we must keep in mind is that the bit and rudder don't have power in themselves to control either the horse or the ship. Nor is there power in the tongue to control our body/behavior. But the real issue is are we walking in the flesh and our tongues and bodies being used as instruments of unrighteousness? Or are we walking in the Spirit and they are being used as instruments of righteousness (**Romans 6:13**)? The tongue will receive its power to

destroy or edify from the source within, either the flesh or the Spirit.

- The tongue boasts great things.
- In the flesh, people boastfully speak against both God and others. Although they have very little knowledge or power, they still foolishly speak great boastful words regarding who they are, what they have done, and what they plan to do. Even though the tongue is a very small member of the body, under the control of the flesh, it can cause great problems and destruction.

Read James 3:6.

- ***“The tongue is a fire.”*** When kept under control, a fire is useful. It warms us when we are cold. It cooks our food and provides light when it is dark. But when a fire is out of control, it causes extensive damage and even death. In a similar way, the tongue under the control of the Holy Spirit brings great encouragement and blessing. But when the tongue is controlled by the flesh, it is basically out of control and may speak unkind and cruel words that hurt and damage our own lives as well as the lives and reputations of others.
- ***“The tongue is [...] a world of iniquity.”*** There is no limit to the evil that the tongue can cause. Just as an unchecked fire will continue to spread and destroy everything in its path, so the tongue can cause unlimited damage to us as well as everyone around us. Families, communities, and even nations have been destroyed by careless, foolish and evil words.
- ***“The tongue [...] defiles the whole body.”*** Empowered by the flesh, a bitter, evil-speaking tongue takes over the whole body of an angry, hateful person. There have been times when those who use abusive language have gone on to attack and even commit murder.

- ***“The tongue [...] sets on fire the course of nature.”***
An abusive evil-speaking tongue will affect every part of a person’s life, as well as those who are within hearing. It will affect the actions, attitudes, and even the health of both the speaker and hearer.
- ***“The tongue [...] is set on fire by hell.”*** The word “hell” that James used to describe the tongue would have brought to the minds of his readers the valley of Hinnom, which was situated outside of Jerusalem. This valley was the place where the city’s rubbish was dumped. Dead animals and even the bodies of executed criminals were dumped in this valley. Fire, smoke, and a horrible smell constantly came from this putrid rubbish heap. James used this foul smelling valley as a picture of man’s tongue when it is not controlled by the Holy Spirit.
- Another thought regarding the tongue being set on fire by hell is the fact that a cruel, destructive tongue is empowered by our sinful human nature, which is hellish in nature, as it finds its root and origin in Satan. Therefore, when the tongue is under the control of the flesh, it’s as if we are “set on fire by hell” (**Romans 3:13-18**).

Read James 3:7-8.

- No person through his or her own effort has the ability to control his tongue. Man has been able to tame all types of animals, but in his own strength he cannot control his tongue. When everything is going well and everyone is pleasing us, we may be able to say the right things. However, as soon as something goes wrong or someone does something that annoys us, we often lose control of our tongue and say things that hurt others. During times like this, it is the flesh that

is influencing the soul, which ultimately controls the body.

- Only the Holy Spirit can control man's tongue as he walks in the Spirit and not in the flesh. If we walk in the Spirit and the Holy Spirit is influencing and controlling our mind, will, and emotions, then we will be enabled to control our tongue (**Galatians 5:16**).
- Our tongue is an unruly evil full of deadly poison. What would be the results if, when we were displeased, we put poison in the food of the person who made us angry? The results could be fatal. Similarly, our words can be extremely hurtful and painful to others. Many marriages and friendships have been wrecked by thoughtless, angry words. Our words can cause "death" or separation in our relationships.

Read James 3:9-12.

- At times, Christians speak kind words of encouragement and at other times bitter words that bite and devour.
- Herein is a clear picture of the deceitfulness of the flesh. In the flesh, we desire to look good before others, so we willingly meet together as believers to sing praises unto God, but then we go home and argue and speak unkindly to one another. James writes, "***My brethren, these things ought not to be so.***"
- When we get a drink of water from the faucet, the water is not sometimes salty and other times fresh. Neither should our words be sweet sometimes and at other times stinging and hurtful. If this is true in our lives, then it is proof we are living the Christian life under the reign and control of the flesh. How can we ensure that our words will be wise, pleasing to God, and helpful to others? By going back to **Romans 6**,

reckoning our flesh as dead and ourselves alive unto God, thereby walking under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit.

- Jesus is our greatest example of this kind of a life. All that He said was wise, pleasing to God, and helpful to others (**Luke 4:22; 1 Peter 2:21-23**).

C. True Wisdom

Read James 3:13.

- James writes, “*Who is wise and understanding among you?*”
- Keep in mind, that “understanding” could be defined as familiarity, gained through experience. The thought is, we’ve looked at life from God’s point of view, we’ve applied it to our lives, and now we know (**Proverbs 24:3-4**).
- James may be asking, “Is there a wise man among you, who is clothed with knowledge?”
- He declares that true wisdom brings gentleness. As stated in Chapter one, a definition of wisdom is looking at life from God’s point of view. If we are seeing our lives and circumstances from the perspective of a sovereign and supreme God who is all loving and powerful, what could ever come into our lives that would give us reason to worry, become anxious, impatient, or angry? Nothing. Our hearts would remain peaceful, stable, and trusting. To walk in this manner is evidence of a wise and mature believer (**Proverbs 3:5-8; Ephesians 5:15-17**).

Read James 3:13-16.

- Understanding and wisdom from the Lord are missing when there is jealousy and selfish ambition.

- We are deceiving ourselves if we think we are wise when there is bitter envy and self-seeking in our hearts. If our main aim is to gain an advantage over others and have the appearance of being wise, we are under the control of the flesh, not the Spirit. **Galatians 5:19-21** declares these things are characteristic of the flesh, and if we are walking in the flesh, we are not walking in the wisdom that comes from God.
- The Lord's wisdom will not lead us to put ourselves first. James states that if we are bitterly jealous and making ourselves out to be wise and spiritual, our actions show that we are carnal, foolish, and unspiritual. This kind of wisdom does not come from God but is according to the values of this fallen and sinful world. Whenever our actions are motivated by selfishness and jealousy, we can be confident that we are walking in the flesh.
- The wisdom that leads us to live for self is “*earthly, sensual, and demonic*.” When Satan tempted Eve in Eden, he did so by telling her if she ate the fruit from the forbidden tree, she would become like God. Both Adam and Eve did eat and, consequently, pleasing and exalting oneself became the priority in man's life. From that time until now, natural man wants to be his own God, wants to be in control of his own life, and doesn't want anyone telling him what to do. Putting self first is “earthly”; it is according to the evil, selfish desires of the natural, unsaved man. It is “demonic”; it is according to the mind of the devil who is guiding the people of this evil world (**1 John 5:19; Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:17-18**).
- Paul wrote his first letter to the church at Corinth because he had heard they were being guided by their own human wisdom. Although they had been born again, they were following natural man's earthly

reasoning. James said where earthly wisdom is in control, there is “envy and self-seeking and confusion”—or we could say instability and commotion. When we live our lives under the control of the flesh, we are often double-minded and never satisfied. Therefore, there will be no stability, steadfastness, or single-mindedness. (**1 Corinthians 3:1-3, 18-20**)

- Our only hope for stability and sober-mindedness is to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh.

Read James 3:17.

- The wisdom that God gives is “*pure*.” James begins by stating that wisdom from God is pure; it’s free from the impurities and influence of sin and evil. It is not tainted with man’s thoughts and ideas. It is pure because it is from God and God Himself is pure, holy, and righteous (**Psalms 19:7-9; 1 Peter 4:11**).
- The wisdom that God gives is “*peaceable*.” **Galatians 5:22-23** states that peace is included in the fruit of the Spirit. Therefore, we could say that true wisdom which comes from God will be present as we walk in the Spirit. So then, as we walk in the Spirit, we will be peaceable and wise. **Galatians 5:19-21**, on the other hand, communicates that division and anger are characteristic of the flesh. If we walk in the flesh, we won’t be peaceable but will be argumentative, divisive, and, therefore, foolish and unwise (**1 Peter 2:18-23**).
- The wisdom that God gives is “*gentle*.” James declares God’s wisdom is gentle, mild, or appropriate; it is perfect and not excessive. God’s wisdom is not harsh, mean, or bullying people into submission or obedience. It’s only as we walk under the control of

the Holy Spirit that we can manifest these characteristics of true wisdom (**2 Timothy 2:23-26**).

- The wisdom that God gives is “**willing to yield.**” If we are being guided by God’s wisdom, we will be reasonable and willing to listen to another’s point of view. We will be approachable and open to reason, with a desire to be reconciled to others. However, God’s wisdom will never lead us to compromise the truth in order to bring about reconciliation.
- In the flesh, we often view the questioning of our viewpoint as a challenge and sense that our significance is being threatened. When that happens, we respond by becoming harsh and unapproachable in order to protect ourselves from being threatened. However, James writes that when God’s wisdom is our focus rather than “looking good,” our desire will be for others and to see them grow in truth. Therefore, if they question us and we are walking in God’s wisdom, we will be free from feeling challenged and threatened, thereby enabling us to answer with patience, humility, and gentleness.
- The wisdom that God gives is “**full of mercy and good fruits.**” We can only experience this by walking in the Spirit. In the flesh, we are self-centered and vindictive. We want others to look bad so that we look better. Therefore, the wisdom of the flesh will be judgmental and critical.
- When we are being guided by God’s wisdom, we will be compassionate and merciful to all, even those who are in the wrong. God’s wisdom will make us ready to help and restore others rather than hurt or harm them. Along with God’s wisdom is the fruit of the Spirit which changes our attitudes toward others and leads us to do good works on their behalf rather than judging and criticizing (**Galatians 5:22-23**).

- The wisdom that God gives is “*without partiality.*” The Jewish believers to whom James was writing were obviously walking in their own fleshly wisdom, for they were showing partiality to the rich over the poor. In the flesh, we are self-centered and therefore tempted to show partiality to anyone who has something that may benefit us. But in the Spirit, Christ will be the object of our hearts and not our own selfish desires.
- The wisdom that God gives is “*without hypocrisy.*” Lastly, James declares that God’s wisdom is not fake. It is genuine, true wisdom, and there is no need to be hypocritical. If we are walking in the Spirit and in the true wisdom of God, we will walk in integrity. What we are before others will be the same as we are when we are alone.

Read James 3:18.

- The wisdom God gives will lead us to produce a good and fair result. James states that those who are truly walking in God’s wisdom and making peace will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteous living. As we walk in the Spirit manifesting the life of Christ, our lives will have a godly effect and influence upon the lives of all who are around us.
- In **1 Corinthians 1:30** Paul writes that Jesus Christ is our wisdom. It is only as we, by faith, reckon upon our identification with the finished work of Christ that we become free from the flesh and walk in the Spirit. Only as we walk in the Spirit do we become conformed to the image of Christ, manifesting His life through ours, thereby walking in the true wisdom that comes from God, which is the life of Christ.

JAMES LESSON 4

A. Arguments Come From the Flesh

Read James 4:1.

- Our own selfish ambitions and desires are the source of fights among God's children.
- If we are involved in an argument, we tend to excuse ourselves and accuse the one who is against us and focus on the wrong he has done. But God desires that we first look to ourselves. Harsh attitudes and fighting against others originates in our evil, selfish flesh. (**Galatians 5:19-20**)
- In Chapter 3, James mentions some things that cause arguments: *“hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, envy.”* The reason for most disagreements and arguments is because of our desire to satisfy our own selfish ambitions. This is the opposite of the attitude of the Lord Jesus. Although He was God, He humbled Himself and willingly became our servant, even though we were the ones who had sinned against Him (**Philippians 2:5-7**).

Read James 4:1-2.

- Struggling and fighting to satisfy self is an endless battle which cannot be won. The more we get the more we want.
- James declares *“you do not have because you do not ask.”* The reason some Christians continue to fight among themselves is because they are carnal and fleshly, and in the flesh, they only have in view their own desires and not God's. Eventually a Christian

may even get to the point where he no longer acknowledges God but simply struggles and strives and argues and fights to get what he wants.

- By God's grace, we have both the power and desire to turn from self and depend on the Lord to supply all of our needs (**Philippians 2:13**).

Read James 4:3.

- The Lord will not give us what we ask for if we are not asking according to His will (**1 John 5:14-15**).
- There are those who, in the flesh, do not go to God in prayer. There are also those who go to God, but it is for selfish motives. They have no concern for His will regarding their lives.
- God, being wise and loving, will not give us those things which He knows will be detrimental to our spiritual life and our fellowship with Him. He is reluctant to give us what He knows will take our heart further from Him.
- However, prayerfully consider **Psalms 106:15**.

B. Live For God and His Glory

Read James 4:4.

- The world system is built on satanic principles such as power, greed, and lust.
- These satanic principles are influencing and controlling the unsaved people of this world to do the evil things we hear and see around us. The world, flesh, and Devil have deceived the unsaved into thinking that living for oneself will bring satisfaction and happiness. We, too, were once deceived by Satan, but God saved us from his kingdom and control and we were baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of

Christ and became His children and are now members of His church (**1 Corinthians 12:12-14; Ephesians 5:30-32**).

- As a man and his wife have been joined together in a physical union, so Christ and His Bride, the church, have been joined together in a spiritual union. Just as a husband or wife who has sexual relations with another person commits physical adultery, so the members of Christ's church commit spiritual adultery when they, through unbelief, live in the flesh, being influenced and controlled by the world and its sinful ways (**2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 7:1**).
- James writes that “*friendship with the world is enmity with God.*” This does not mean it is wrong to love God's creation or that we should not be friendly with unsaved people. However, James is stating that we should not accompany unsaved people in their sinful activities and pleasures. The sinful world is led by Satan, God's great enemy, and it was Satan who guided those who crucified the Lord Jesus. If we join with this world, then we are joining ourselves with God's enemies and acting as though we, too, are His enemies.
- Keep in mind that our flesh will never improve; it will remain evil and sinful until the day we physically die. Therefore, if we walk under its control, it will ultimately lead us back into living the same ungodly lives we lived before we were saved. To reject God's provision for daily deliverance from sin's dominion (**Romans 6:6**) and go on living as a friend to the world is to commit spiritual adultery and live as an enemy in opposition to God (**1 John 2:15-17**).

Read James 4:5.

- The nature of man has selfish, lustful yearnings. Some believe that James' reference to "***the spirit who dwells in us***" is a reference to the Holy Spirit. Others believe that it's a reference to the sin nature that Adam received after the fall and that we all received from him. Two things lead us to believe the latter. First, the context before and after makes more sense if it's the sinful nature of man. Secondly, this spirit, James says, has envious yearnings. This word for envious is always used with a negative connotation, which would not be true if it was referring to the Holy Spirit (**Genesis 8:21**).
- So, if we put it together with the previous verse, it's as if James was contemplating shock or unbelief coming from those who had just heard his statement that believers could become enemies of God. He goes on to say if we don't believe this can happen, then do we think scripture speaks in vain when it says that the old nature of man has lustful yearnings? Do we not believe what God's Word says?

Read James 4:6.

- But God gives greater grace.
- The old nature within man has lustful yearnings and desires, but James declares God gives more grace. **Romans 6:1** states, "***Where sin abounds, grace does much more abound.***"
- Because of the grace of God, He has already given every provision we need in order to be delivered from those lustful yearnings; walk in the Spirit, and we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh (**Galatians 5:16**). No matter how strong the yearnings may be, God's grace is greater.
- James makes this comment: "***God resists the proud.***" So, even though God's grace is greater, and He has

enabled us to be free from the flesh and not fulfill its desires; if we reject His provision and go on living in the flesh, then we are proud and have exalted ourselves above God. Therefore, in order to bring us to repentance, God will resist His child's effort to go on living in the flesh. This is not to be confused with punishment, for Christ has already been punished on our behalf for sin (**2 Peter 1:3-4; Hebrews 12:6**).

- ***“God gives grace to the humble.”*** Ultimately, God's desire is that we walk by faith in His provision. In His provision, there is a grace that is greater than the power of sin and will enable us to overcome the yearnings of the flesh. Those who are proud and walk in unbelief, who do not appropriate God's provision, are resisted by God in order to bring them to repentance and faith. But those who walk in humility are those who, by faith, appropriate God's provision and find the grace and power to overcome the lust of their flesh.

Read James 4:7-10.

- ***“Submit to God.”*** Being that God's heart and purpose is to ultimately bring us to the point that we are overcoming the lust of the flesh and living out the Christ life, James first states that we are to ***“submit to God”***—submit to God's will, plan, and the provision He has given through faith to overcome the yearnings of the flesh and go on to living the kind of holy and wise life He has designed for His children. If we do not submit to God, His will, and provisions, we will remain under the reign and control of the flesh, walking in unbelief and sin (**Romans 6:12-13**).
- ***“Resist the devil.”*** Satan is an external enemy—he resides outside of our bodies. His access into our lives to control and influence our mind, will, and emotions

is through our flesh (our internal enemy). Therefore, to resist him does not mean we are to become focused on and pray against him; but rather by faith, reckon ourselves dead to sin's power and alive unto God (**Ephesians 6:10-11**).

- When the Lord Jesus was tempted by Satan, He answered Satan with the Word of God. Satan then left the Lord Jesus because he knew he was unable to overcome Him while He was walking by faith and by trusting in God's Word for His life (**Matthew 4:1-11**).
- ***“Draw near to God.”*** Next, James mentions drawing near unto God. This is in reference to communing with God in an intimate, abiding relationship with Him.
- Notice James' progression here. First, we submit to God and then we resist the devil; all is done by faith. Finally, after appropriating truths by faith, then comes the drawing near to God and we draw near to God by knowing Him more and more (**Jeremiah 8:23-24**).
- ***“Cleanse your hands, you sinners.”*** The Christian Jews to whom James wrote this letter would have immediately understood what he meant by cleansing their hands. Remembering that one of the pieces of furniture in the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple, was the laver. The laver contained water for the washing of the priest's hands and feet. During Old Testament times, dirty hands and feet were used as an illustration of a person who had been doing sinful things and following the ways of the world. Just as our hands need to be washed when we have been working in the garden or doing other dirty work, so those whose actions are not according to the Word of God need cleansing.
- In the spiritual sense, “cleansing one's hands,” refers to becoming purified from the pollution and guilt of sin. This begins with acknowledging our sin but

moves on to an appropriation of the blood of Christ. It ends with a confident faith-filled thankfulness for God's forgiveness.

- Another important aspect of this scripture is a picture of the grace of God. Notice that James told the believers to draw near to God before being told to "cleanse" their hands. This is the opposite from living under the law (cleanse self, then come to God). This would have been very significant to his Jewish readers (**1 John 1:9; Job 17:9; Ephesians 5:25-26; Hebrews 10:22**).
- ***"Purify your hearts, you double-minded."*** The next comment by James is that of purifying the heart. The double-minded person tries to do the impossible—serve two masters. He says he wants to serve the Lord and yet is not willing to separate from all evil and present himself entirely to Him. Therefore, James urges the readers to submit to God, resist the devil, walk by faith, confess your sin, and return to a singleness of mind and occupation with Christ and the things of God (**2 Timothy 2:19-22**).
- ***"Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom."*** It would appear the Jewish believers to whom James was writing were taking their sin lightly; therefore, James exhorted them to see the seriousness of the way they were living and to grieve over their sin. We must realize that sin is rebellion against God the Father, that the Lord was crucified because of our sin, and that the Holy Spirit is grieved when we go on living in the flesh and walking in unbelief. If we were to truly grasp the truth of this, we would be prepared to repent and change our minds regarding our sin.
- Of course, we must remember that repentance can never pay for sin; only the blood of Jesus can do that. We must accept the Lord's loving and free

forgiveness because of His finished work. In the flesh, we often want to punish ourselves so that we feel forgiven. The view we have of ourselves must come from the view that God has of us, which is the fact that we are in His son and clothed with His righteousness. It shouldn't be how much we confess or how much we punish ourselves that determines how forgiven we feel, but rather the finished work of Christ. If Christ is our focus, our mourning will be changed to peace and joy in the Lord (**2 Corinthians 1:5**).

- ***“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord.”*** James now mentions that rather than continuing on in pride and fulfilling the yearnings of the flesh, we must recognize our sinfulness and its seriousness and return to a singleness of mind upon Christ and His finished work. For those who humble themselves, ***“He will lift up.”***
- This illustrates the principle of death and resurrection (**John 12:24**). As we humble ourselves by reckoning upon our co-crucifixion with Christ and our co-resurrection in Christ, God will lift us up; what we have been given positionally in Christ will begin to be lived out and manifested in our daily lives (**1 Peter 5:5-7; Isaiah 57:15; 66:1-2**).

C. Believers Should Not Judge and Condemn One Another

- Whoever judges and speaks evil of others is setting himself up as a judge of God's law.

Read James 4:11.

- After communicating to believers the importance of humility before God, it would appear that James' aim

is now to lay out some of the effects that true humility will have in their lives.

- In the flesh, we exalt ourselves and feel justified in judging and criticizing others, but God's law commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves. When we fail to live by this command and instead judge and speak evil of others, we set ourselves up as judge. It is as though we have decided that God's command to love others is unimportant, unnecessary, and wrong.
- Another aspect to this is that through the finished work of Christ and our identification with it, all believers have been delivered from the curse of the law, or we could say His judgment. If the demands of the law have been met and satisfied through Christ on our behalf but we go on judging one another, it's as if we are not satisfied with the finished work of Christ on behalf of others. However, if we truly are walking in the Spirit before God, then our hearts will be satisfied with the work of Christ and we won't go on judging one another.

Read James 4:12.

- We are not to act as though we are the lawgiver and have the authority and knowledge to judge others.
- In this verse, James shows the absurdity of our pride in judging others.
- When we judge and condemn others, we are acting as though we were the ones who gave the law and thereby have the right to judge. We are attempting to take over the position and responsibility that rightfully belongs to God alone. This is the same mindset that Lucifer had before he became Satan. It's also the same mindset that has been passed on to each of us through our flesh. Because God wrote the law, He is

the only one who can rightly judge when someone has violated one of His laws. He alone knows the heart and motives of each person, so He alone can judge righteously. Paul reminded the Corinthian church of this when he wrote his first letter to them. Paul was unconcerned that they had judged and condemned him because he was confident in God's judgment of believers which will take place in Heaven.

- If we are truly walking in the Spirit, we won't live and act as if we have taken God's position (**1 Corinthians 4:3-5; Romans 14:4**).

D. Live in Dependence on the Lord

- We shouldn't speak and act as though we can sovereignly carry out our plans.

Read James 4:13-16.

- The next effect that James brings to the attention of his readers is that by truly humbling ourselves under God's hand, which can only be accomplished as we appropriate our co-crucifixion with Christ and walk in the Spirit, we won't be tempted to boast about our future plans as if we are God who can sovereignly carry out our every promise and desire. James is not saying it is wrong to plan (**Proverbs 16:9**); all of us make plans in our lives and scripture actually teaches us to do so. But along with our plans we must recognize that ultimately the fulfilling of the plan is in the hands of our sovereign Creator who knows what's best for every situation. To live life as if we make those decisions is to be proud and exalt ourselves above God.
- When we plan, we should not speak or act as though we are the ones who have the final control of our lives and are able to do whatever we have decided. We

must never forget that if we live or die or if our plans are fulfilled or not, it is all in the hands of our sovereign God (**Luke 12:16-20**).

- In verse 14, James continues giving more reasons why believers couldn't possibly go on exalting themselves as if they are God. James does this by likening our lives to the fog that hangs in the valleys in the early mornings.
- As soon as the sun rises, the mist dissipates. That's how it is with our lives; we are only on this earth for a short time and then we die. Even the longest life is so short when it is compared with the life of God, which never had a beginning and will never have an end.
- In a similar way, the fog cannot determine the length and time of its own existence nor can we determine our own lives.
- We should acknowledge that we will be able to carry out our plans only if God permits it.

Read James 4:17.

- The natural conclusion should be to realize the foolishness and pride that characterizes our lives when we are living in the flesh and recognize God as our supreme and sovereign Lord and Creator who is in control of every aspect of life.
- In verse 16, James declares that some Jewish believers were currently walking in the flesh, focused on themselves and arrogantly boasting as if they themselves were God. James said this pride and arrogance is evil.
- Therefore, he concludes by pointing out that he had shown them the truth of these things and they knew what was the right thing to do. Those who know what is right but don't do it are guilty of sin.

JAMES LESSON 5

A. Warnings For the Rich and Indulgent

Read James 5:1.

- The wealth of the rich led to self-centered and indulgent living. These verses remind us of the true story Jesus told about a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus (**Luke 16:19-23**).
- It is important to understand Lazarus was not saved because he was poor and pitiable nor did the rich man go to Hell because he was rich. It is not sinful to be rich. God has used and still is using wealthy believers to support His work throughout the world. Abraham was rich and so were David and his son Solomon who wrote parts of the Bible. The man who gave his tomb in which Jesus was buried was also a rich man (**Matthew 27:59-60; Isaiah 53:9**).
- It is not being wealthy that is displeasing to God but rather people, to whom wealth has become their focus and god and live selfishly seeking after more and more riches (**Jeremiah 5:26-29; Luke 12:15-21**).
- We may not be rich, but we might have the same selfish attitude as some rich people.
- We also may be self-centered and desire wealth more than we desire God. Some poor people make riches their god. Their greatest ambition in life is to become wealthy. So ultimately, the issue is not whether we are rich or not, but are we walking in the flesh or walking in the Spirit (**1 Timothy 6:17-19; Matthew 6:24-34**).

Read James 5:2-3.

- The elaborate clothing and wealth of the rich is worthless in God's eyes.
- Under the control of the flesh, believers become attracted to the things of the world, focusing on money and material possessions rather than on our hope that is in heaven. In the flesh, it's these material things that make us feel happy, secure, and encouraged. James is pointing out that these things which the rich were living for are temporal and easily destroyed. The things that they were trusting in and depended upon are temporary and decaying; they are passing away (**1 John 2:17**).
- Those who seek after worldly possessions will be filled with regret because they spent all their time and effort on gaining temporal wealth and gave no time to consider the eternal God or His Word. James proclaims that the decay of these things will devour their flesh as if it were fire. Sometimes people become so consumed with money and possessions that after they have accumulated much, they become a slave to their possessions. Now they have to worry about losing it, theft, or it becoming destroyed. Sometimes they become so obsessed and worried that it destroys them mentally, emotionally, and physically.

Read James 5:4.

- The rich man who does not pay a fair wage to his employees will one day come face to face with God.
- James gives proof that some rich believers were carnal and earthly focused rather than God-focused. He went on to say that they were so carnal and materialistic that they had been holding back the wages which were due to those who had been working

in their fields. They were so obsessed with gaining riches that it led them to cheat other people who were poor. James made it clear that God hears and sees all.

Read James 5:5-6.

- Remember James stated in Chapter 2, verse 6, that many rich people were selfish and cruel and had no sympathy for the poor. The rich, he said, “***oppress and take others into the courts.***”
- The rich that James spoke of had obtained their wealth through exploiting others. He said to them, “***you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.***” The wealthy were like soldiers who gathered up all the belongings of the people they had killed in battle. The rich not only defrauded their workers of their wage, but when they were unable to pay for food and clothing, took the poor man’s home and land.
- The rich had “condemned” and even “murdered” the poor and the poor were powerless to protect themselves.

B. James Gives Encouragement and Guidelines to Believers

Read James 5:7-8.

- Believers who had suffered because of the greediness of the rich should look forward, patiently waiting for the coming of the Lord.
- James now addresses the poor, persecuted Jewish believers, and encourages them by directing their focus away from the world to the hope that is Christ and His imminent return.
- Many injustices will not be put right nor will everyone be punished for their wickedness during this lifetime;

however, Jesus Christ is coming again, and when He does, He will begin His final program of dealing with all the evil done during the history of this sinful world.

- To emphasize the importance of believers waiting patiently for the Lord to avenge evil, James gave an illustration of a farmer who labors long and hard planting his fields. Having completed the sowing, the farmer must wait for the appropriate rains and for the seed to germinate, grow, bear fruit, and ripen. Only after all this takes place will he be able to reap the harvest. Similarly, believers must look to the “harvest” and remain focused on their hope in Christ that is reserved for them in heaven. Only as we walk in the Spirit occupied with Christ and our hope that is in Him will we find the enablement to calmly and graciously endure hardship, trials, and even persecution, patiently waiting for our Lord’s return (**Romans 12:19-21; 1 Corinthians 4:5**).
- Not only did James want these persecuted believers to be free from despair and not lose heart, but he also did not want them to become angry, bitter, or judgmental toward the rich who were exploiting them. In the flesh, we can become discouraged and lose sight of our hope in heaven or become angry and bitter toward others who have wronged us.

Read James 5:10-11.

- The Old Testament contains many examples of believers who remained steadfast in their faith during times of great adversity. The writer of the book of Hebrews reminded his readers of many who believed God and were delivered from their trials and of others who also trusted God, yet suffered terrible persecution, some of whom were martyred for their faith (**Hebrews 11:32-40**).

- The testimonies of the prophets have been recorded for us by God. James is seeking to encourage the believers by reminding them of the Old Testament prophets and how those who faithfully endured hardship were considered to be blessed and are lifted up and praised for their faithfulness. Now the believers to whom James was writing were being given an opportunity to endure their hardship and persecution as well.
- Through reading or hearing these Old Testament stories, our faith is strengthened in the goodness, the faithfulness, and the power of God. So, even when circumstances are difficult, we have hope, as we know the Lord cares for us and will return to receive us unto Himself (**Romans 15:4**).
- Lastly, James reminds his readers that the prophets did not endure their hardship and suffering in vain. But as we look back on their lives, we see that God always had a purpose and that He proved Himself to be full of compassion and mercy. God's purpose for allowing hardship was always to bring about that which is good and perfect.

Read James 5:12.

- James now begins his final instruction by writing that in Old Testament times, it was common to make vows and take oaths as a way of proving that the one making the oath would truly follow through with his promise. Vows and oaths were made between people and often made with God. Going back to James' thoughts in Chapter 4, the believers were taught not to boast about what they plan to do as if they were sovereign and could ensure that it would come to pass. James is now telling them to make no vows or oaths or promises, for they didn't have the power to fulfill their promises. The result would be that they would be found

deceitful by making promises they could not keep. James said simply, “*Let your ‘yes’ mean ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ mean ‘no’*” (Exodus 20:7; Matthew 5:33-37).

C. Recognize Your Need to Depend On God

Read James 5:13.

- It would appear the Jewish believers to whom James was writing were earthly focused and whenever sickness or need appeared in their lives, they would make vows and oaths to God thinking they could motivate Him to heal or solve their problem (**Psalm 66:13-14**). However, James clearly states if they were suffering, they should not make promises about what they would do if they were healed, but rather pray, trusting God to do whatever is best for them (**Psalm 66:13-14**).
- It's important to keep in mind that these believers were in a time of transition. They were transitioning from law to grace; from man working for God to God doing and providing everything that man needs through the finished work of Christ. They no longer needed to make vows and oaths in order to receive God's blessings (**1 Peter 5:7; Philippians 4:6-7**).
- If our situation is good and “*cheerful*,” we are encouraged to “*sing psalms*,” thanking and praising the Lord for His goodness, recognizing that all good things come from Him (**Colossians 3:15-17**).

Read James 5:14-15.

- Elders of the church may be called by a sick believer to pray for him and anoint him with oil.

- Remember the old Jewish mindset of being earthly focused and looking to receive earthly promises from God. James had just declared that they were not to make vows and oaths. Sickness was probably one of the main issues that would lead to making vows or oaths to God. But now these believers had moved from the age of law to the age of grace, or we could say the church age. James writes that now as believers and members of the church, those who are sick are to call for the elders of the church to come and pray, anointing with oil the person who was sick.
- James instructed the elders to pray for the sick person, ***“anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”*** Throughout scripture, oil has been a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Oil was used to anoint priests and kings for God’s purposes. Aaron was anointed with oil when he was appointed as the high priest, and Saul, David, and Solomon were anointed with oil when they were appointed as kings over Israel. This indicated that the Holy Spirit had come to empower them for the work God had appointed them (**Exodus 29:7; 1 Samuel 9:27; 10:1; 16:11-13; 1 Kings 1:39**).
- There is no magical power of healing in the oil used for anointing sick folks. The oil is used to indicate that the elders are dependent on the Holy Spirit and His power to heal the sick believer.
- James declares that if the elders pray in faith and in Jesus’ name, which would actually be Jesus making the request to the Father through the elders, then God will save the person from their sickness because that is His will. Neither the oil nor the elders healed the man; it was truly a work of God.

Read James 5:16.

- The Lord desires that we acknowledge all sin to the Lord but not necessarily confess every sin to others.
- For example, if we have spoken unkindly to someone, we should admit our sin to the Lord and then apologize to that person. If our sin is known to others or against the church, the elders may ask us to confess our sin before the church. But if our sin is known only by the Lord, it is usually best that it be left with Him.
- James writes that the “*effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*” First consideration, the man is a righteous man. In Christ, all believers are positionally declared righteous, but this is referencing a man who is walking in the Spirit and not in the flesh. A man whose mind, will, and emotions are influenced and controlled by the Spirit is a man whose prayers will be inspired by the Spirit of God and will be in accordance to the will of God and thus he is praying in Christ’s name. Because it is Christ making the request through the believer, God the Father will carry it out as the believer has prayed (**John 15:7, 16; 1 John 5:14-15**).
- Ultimately, it is God who does the healing for both believers and unbelievers, with or without the use of medicine. Often God heals even when prayer is not offered. In the case of the believer, there must be the realization that the prayer of faith to God avails much. While He is a sovereign God, He loves for His children to come to Him in prayer.

Read James 5:17-18.

- Because of Israel’s sin, the Lord requested Elijah to pray that God would withhold rain from the land of Israel; Elijah was praying in God’s name and God was making the request through Elijah. The people of Israel had turned away from God and were

worshipping idols. God had previously warned Israel that if they did not worship Him alone, He would withhold rain from their land. Elijah knew God, and he also knew about God's warning to Israel, so he prayed in faith. In response to Elijah's prayer, it did not rain for three and a half years. When Israel repented, God told Elijah that He was going to send rain and Elijah again believed God. Elijah didn't demand that God withhold rain and later tell Him to send rain. Elijah knew what the will of God was, so he was able to pray in faith according to the will of God. It is not our responsibility to command God to do what we think is best. Our part is to live in dependence on Him so we will pray in faith according to His will (**Deuteronomy 11:13-17; 1 Kings 17:1; 18:1, 41; Daniel 9:2-3**).

D. Restoring Believers

Read James 5:19-20.

- If a believer turns from the truth and lives in a sinful way so it becomes necessary for the church leadership to discipline him, the church should continue praying and reaching out in love. God desires for all who have fallen away to repent and be restored to fellowship with Himself and return to walking in the Spirit (**Galatians 6:1-2**).
- James states that when a believer repents, turns back from sin to walking in the Spirit, the person who the Lord used to bring him back saved his soul from death. Depending on what the Lord was doing in a man or woman's life, it could be physical death that he was saved from. However, it could also be a reference to saving him from the death and destruction he would experience in his soul from continuing on in his sin. The word "death" means

separation; therefore, there would be the separation and lack of communion with God and the body of Christ.

- James goes on to say that turning a brother or sister back also results in the hiding of a multitude of sins. Not only the sins that this person had already committed, and has now been forgiven and forgotten, but also there is the aspect of the fact that when a person turns back to God, he is prevented from continuing to live in sin.

