

Our Journey Through The Epistle of James

Mike Butler
Southside Baptist Church
First Edition
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Unless otherwise noted all Scripture is taken from the New King James Version

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Lesson #1 - Introduction

Welcome to the Epistle of James

Setting the Stage:

James had an older brother named Jesus. Like their father, Jesus was a carpenter, but there was always something different about Him. He had an unusual gift for understanding God's word and at 30 years old He had left His craft to become a Rabbi. But Jesus was different from the other teachers. He was humble and unassuming but spoke with so much knowledge and authority. He was also unafraid to openly debate their religious leaders and even the Romans.

James and his family dearly loved Jesus, but they were afraid His rebellious message might put His life in jeopardy. To the point James and his siblings believed Jesus may have lost His mind so they once went to a place where He was speaking in an effort to stop Him (Mark 3:21 & 31-32). But Jesus wouldn't stop and He continued to tour the countryside speaking at every opportunity to share a message of love — as if He was the Messiah Himself. But James didn't buy into that idea. Even when His Brother healed the sick and raised the dead, and even, as some said, when He walked on water and fed over five thousand people with a child's lunch, James doubted and did not believe.

And then their worst nightmare happened. Jesus was betrayed by one of His followers and had been arrested. That night He was horribly beaten and scourged almost to death. Then the next day He was nailed to a cross and died. But why? He hadn't committed any crime, but He had infuriated the Jewish leadership to the point they wanted Him dead and out of their hair. So the leaders moved amongst the people with lies until they convinced the crowds to yell "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!". But James still couldn't believe this was actually happening. He had always respected His Brother, even though he didn't take Him seriously, and certainly didn't believe Jesus was the promised Messiah, but His message of love gave no reason to kill Him.

And then, three days later Jesus returned. There was no doubt He had been killed but now He had come back to life. He was alive and seen by over five hundred witnesses including James! How on earth could that be possible? Was this some kind of trick, or...was Jesus in fact who He claimed to be? God Himself, who had come as a man to save the world. Just as the prophets and John the Baptizer said He would.

My goodness James thought - my Brother is God!

James now believed and chastised himself for being so blind and slow to understand. He was convinced Jesus is the Messiah and had been sent by God as the ultimate sacrificial Lamb to give His life for the souls of all mankind. Now it all began to make sense. The prophecies of the Messiah, the altar, the lamb in the temple, the high priest and the atoning sacrifice. All of these things had pointed to His Brother but the people of Israel had foolishly missed the connection for generations.

James would devote the rest of his life to the service of his Brother's message. He would eventually lead the church in Jerusalem and set over the council who clarified their new faith. He would even agree that his Brother's message, now known as the Gospel, needed to be spread to all people, in all places. Even to the Gentiles.

Before his death James would write a letter to the beleaguered Jew's scattered throughout the known world. These were not Jews who were faithful to their traditional rabbinical teaching, but were Jews who believed his Brother's message and now called themselves Christians - followers of the Christ-man. James' letter would encourage his brothers and sisters in Christ. It would help teach them how to grow in their faith and persevere through times of great persecution. It would be a letter initially written to converted Jews, but it would apply equally to converted pagans. It was a letter for all time and for all people. A letter written by James, the doubting brother of Jesus, who had become one of our Lord's most faithful servants.

Please join me as we listen to the words of James. Words inspired by his precious Brother Jesus.

But let's do more than just listen. We need to let these words penetrate our hearts and guide us to be people of steadfast and immovable faith.

Lesson #2

Introduction Continued

Author and Timing

The name James was fairly common in first-century Israel and appears over 40 times in the New Testament. A derivative of the Hebrew name *Jacob*, it was translated from *Ya'ăqōb* in Hebrew, to *Lakwboc* in Greek, and much later in English to *James*.

The name James is associated with four principle characters in the New Testament:

- *James the apostle*,
 - The brother of John and the son of Zebedee the fisherman (Matthew 4:17-22 / Luke 6:14 / Acts 12:1-2).
- *James, the son of Alphaeus*.
 - One of original apostles of whom we know very little (Mark 10:13 / Luke 6:15 / Acts 1:13)
- *James, the father of Judas*.
 - Judas (but not Iscariot) was another little known apostle whose father was also named James (Luke 6:16).

But the one we're most interested in here is *James, the earthly half-brother of Jesus*.

- Paul indicates this sibling relationship in Galatians 1:19, ***“19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother.”***
- James is also mentioned in Matthew 13:55 as a son of Joseph and Mary, ***“55. Is this [Jesus] not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? [Jude, not Iscariot]***

James identifies himself as the author of the letter, but does so in a very unassuming way. He calls himself, ***“...James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...”*** (James 1:1a). He gives no pretense and takes no credit for being the earthly half-brother of the Messiah. He sees himself simply as a ***“...bondservant...”*** in the service of the Lord. Paul uses the same term to identify himself in Romans 1:1, ***“1. Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God.”*** Likewise, Peter refers to himself the same way in 2 Peter 1:1, ***“Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.”*** And Jude, another half-brother of Jesus and James calls himself, ***“Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and***

brother of James, To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ." (Jude 1:1).

The use of this term is important because it expresses the humility each of these men felt as they sought to serve the Lord. It is a title based on the Greek word "*doulos*", that when used in this context can describe someone who willingly commits himself to serving his master. In the Hebrew mindset this could be a servant who, ***"...plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out free...'"*** (Exodus 21:5). In other words, the term can be used to describe James' willing desire to live under Christ's sole authority and be seen as His servant. We see the same attitude expressed in the feminine tense of the word when Mary was informed she would bear God's Son, ***"Behold the maidservant of the Lord!" Let it be to me according to your word.***" (Luke 1:38). This response shows Mary's willingness to serve God without question. Not because she was forced to, but because she wanted to. Similarly, God does not force us to serve Him once we're saved, but we should desire to serve Him unconditionally because He paid for our eternal life with His sacrifice. By using the term ***"...bondservant..."*** James and the others signify the fact they are more than just a bonded servant. They are men who were once true slaves to sin (John 8:34) but are now a willing slave of our Lord Jesus.

The Bible says very little about James' relationship to his half-brother Jesus. As we know, Jesus came to earth through a surrogate human mother but not through a human father. Unlike His siblings, Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, ***"35. And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.'***" Therefore, Jesus was conceived by the power of God and the other children were conceived through their human father Joseph. So the relationship is only through Mary.

But we know Joseph and Mary had other children because Matthew records this fact in his gospel, ***"54. When He [Jesus] had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, 'Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? 55. Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? 56. And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?'"*** (Matthew 13:54-56). Here Matthew lists the names of four sons including James, but also mentions daughters but does not specify how many there were. But what's important to note is the fact James doesn't capitalize on his family relationship with Jesus. He simply calls himself a servant who is bonded to the Lord. A sign of true humility and service.

But sadly, that realization did not come during the Lord's ministry. That's because James did not believe Jesus is the Messiah until after His resurrection, ***"5 For even His brothers***

did not believe in Him.” (John 7:5b). As a result, James missed the opportunity to walk with Jesus during his earthly ministry. On the surface that seems odd given the fact James should have known Jesus in a very unique way. As his half-brother he would have been raised in the same home, and even though the Bible doesn't say, it stands to reason that Joseph and Mary would have shared stories about their eldest Son with their other children. Fascinating stories like the visit of Gabriel, Jesus' miraculous birth in a stable, the visit of wise men from the east, and finding the boy Jesus in the temple, amazing the scribes with His knowledge. They should have also been aware of His miracles and His huge following. So how could James and his siblings be so familiar with Jesus and yet discount the fact He is the Messiah? The same way millions of people continue to discount Jesus today. Unlike James, we have the complete revealed word of God and over two-thousand years of Christ-centered scholarship, but the majority of people continue to deny Jesus as their Lord and Savior. As sad as that is, it's just another example of how our enemy can infiltrate the mind of man and cause them to deny something so obvious.

But James eventually understood and believed, and devoted the rest of his life to serving our Lord.

We see several references to this shift in scripture:

- Luke indicates James was probably in the upper room with the apostles when Jesus met with them after His resurrection, **“13. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. 14. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers”** (Acts 1:14).
- James is mentioned as one of the eye witnesses to Jesus after His resurrection, **“6. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.”** (1 Corinthians 15:6-7). The fact James is mentioned apart from the twelve indicates this is the brother of Jesus and not either of the other men named James.
- James became a prominent leader of the early church in Jerusalem. In fact, Paul called him one of the **“...pillars...”** of church leadership and listed him as one of those who commissioned Paul and Barnabas to the mission field, **“9. and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me [Paul], they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.”** (Galatians 2:9).

- Peter also indicates James' key leadership role when he told others about his miraculous escape from prison and wanted James to know about it, ***"17 But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, 'Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren.' And he departed and went to another place."*** (Acts 12:17). This verse is probably referencing James of the Epistle because James the brother of John had already been executed by Herod before Peter was arrested (see Acts 12:2).
- James is also mentioned in a meeting where Paul gave an account of his ministry's progress. ***"17. And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. 18. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present."*** (Acts 21:18-19)
- James appears to have played a key role in the Jerusalem Council. A group of Elders tasked with leading the early church. ***"12. Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. 13. And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, 'Men and brethren, listen to me: 14. Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. 15. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 16. 'After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; 17. So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things.' 18. Known to God from eternity are all His works. 19. Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God."*** (Acts 15:12-19)
- James is also mentioned by Jude, another half-brother of Jesus, in the introduction to his own Epistle, ***"1. Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James."*** (Jude 1).

We don't know how much James understood about his Brother's ministry during the time Jesus was preaching. We know he was at least aware of some of the things Jesus did (John 7:5), but obviously not to the point of accepting Him as the Messiah until after His resurrection. And yet it's interesting to note the similarities between James' writings and some of the things Jesus said. Particularly during His *Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew chapters 5-7)

For example:

James 1:2-3

- ***“2. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3. knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.”***

Matthew 5:10-11

- ***“10. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.”***

James 1:4

- ***“4. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”***

Matthew 5:48

- ***“48. Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”***

James 1:5

- ***“5. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”***

Matthew 7:7-12

- ***“7. ‘Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10. Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11. If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! 12. Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”***

James 1:22

- ***“22. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”***

Matthew 7:21-27

- ***“21. ‘Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23. And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ 24. ‘Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine,***

and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25. and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. 26. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27. and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

James 4:11-12

- *“11. Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?”*

Matthew 7:1-5

- *“1. Judge not, that you be not judged. 2. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. 3. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4. Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5. Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”*

James 5:1-3

- *“1. Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! 2. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 3. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.”*

Matthew 6:19-21

- *“19. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20. but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

It's possible James was there when Jesus said these things and the Lord's words had an impact on him. Or, he may have heard about it from someone else. Or, since the Holy Spirit inspired James to write the letter He may have made the connection Himself. The Bible doesn't say, but it's interesting to think about it.

Although James became a faithful follower of Christ and leader of the early church we know very little about his personal life. It's possible he was married because Paul says, ***“5. Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?”*** (1 Corinthians 9:5). But again, the Bible is not clear. We also don't know when or how James died. Early church history, including the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, states he was executed around 62 AD, but that fact is not recorded in the Bible either. And yet, if that date is true it means James faithfully served the Lord for about 30 years and helped guide the administration of the early church during a very difficult time in history.

The Bible doesn't say when the letter was written, but scholars place its writing around 44-49AD. This was probably after the Jerusalem Council (Acts 14) but before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. That being the case, it may be the earliest book in the New Testament.

Audience and Theme

Unlike Paul's Epistles that were written to churches or individuals, James had a much broader audience. His letter was initially written to displaced Jews who had been scattered because of their faith in Jesus and as a result had come under heavy persecution. In verse 1:1 James uses the term ***“...scattered...”*** which comes from the Greek word *“diaspora”* and means *“to be dispersed”* or *“through a sowing”* (also see 1 Peter 1:1). This condition had been prophesied in scripture many generations earlier,

- ***“64. Then the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known—wood and stone. 65. And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the Lord will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. 66. Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life. 67. In the morning you shall say, ‘Oh, that it were evening!’ And at evening you shall say, ‘Oh, that it were morning!’ because of the fear which terrifies your heart, and because of the sight which your eyes see.”*** (Deuteronomy 28:64-67).

This is one of the most tragic verses in the Bible. Israel had been chosen by God to be His ***“...special treasure...”*** (Deuteronomy 7:6). Then they had then been given everything they needed to share God's message of redemption:

- ***“14. who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; 5. of***

whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.” (Romans 9:4-5).

- ***“6. Indeed He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ”*** (Isaiah 49:6)

But Israel had failed and instead of recognizing the Messiah they had Him crucified, and as a result they were scattered by God for their self-righteous disobedience (Acts 8:1 / James 1:1). So James sends the converted Jews an instructional letter. Not only to help them grow in their new faith, but also to encourage them through difficult times. Times which were going to get much worse for the Jewish people in the years to come. Just as Jesus had warned them, ***“43. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, 44. and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”***. (Luke 19:43-44). Jesus had come just as the prophets had said He would, and yet, due to their own religious blinding they had missed ***“...the time of your visitation...”*** and for a time they would be driven from the Promised Land.

The fact James intentionally wrote his letter to a dispersed Jewish audience is clear from verse 1:1 where he describes his readers as, ***“1....the twelve scribes scattered abroad...”***. He also references over forty Old Testament verses which would not be well known to pagan Gentiles. Yet, it's also clear his writing applies equally to all followers of Jesus because he uses the term ***“...brethren...”*** fifteen times. But also, let's keep in mind, since the letter is inspired by the Holy Spirit it is written for the benefit of all believers across all time.

In fact, in a sense, we as followers of Jesus are also a ***“...scattered...”*** people. Don't believe me? Then just spend a few days in a country where Christianity is frowned upon and you'll quickly feel targeted and alienated. And much like the Jewish people, we as believers are found all over the world, but in no single place are we comfortable or fully welcomed. Even in America where Godly values and faith in Christ wane more every day, we have become a ***“...scattered...”*** people in the minority. This is true even in the modern church where progressive agendas, relevance to society and an increasing focus on aberrant theology have ***“...scattered...”*** true Bible-believing followers of Jesus into smaller and smaller enclaves. But frankly, that's ok. The Lord has already told us there will be a great falling away (2 Thessalonians 2:3) as satan gains an even stronger foothold in the minds of men. But we shouldn't fear what we see happening because Jesus has already told us the gates of hell will not prevail over His faithful Bride (Matthew 16:18).

The context of James' Epistle is much like John's letters (1st, 2nd, 3rd John). It's not deep in theology or doctrine but instructs believers how to live. Much like Paul's letters to the Philippians, James' letter is encouraging for those going through severe trials. Although initially written to exiled Jews, it can be encouraging to all of us facing challenges in life. In fact, James starts his letter by helping us understand it is often the trials we face that bring us closer to the Lord and more steadfast in our faith (James 1:1-8).

The World of James

In our study through the Books of Romans and Philippians we went into great detail about the Roman Empire, its government, people, economy, world influence and unbridled sin, so we won't go to that level of detail here. Both of those studies can be found on our church website under "*Resources*" and "*Bible Studies*".

But suffice to say James lived in a very difficult time when both Jews and Christians came under great persecution. That made his world the perfect backdrop for a letter which sought to strengthen embattled believers and draw them closer to our Lord. But the world of James is not much different than our own. Corrupt governments, open and violent antisemitism, and an almost universal increase in chaos has resulted in a society drawing further and further from the truth of God's word and the offer of God's grace. That being the case, both the encouragement and warnings from James apply to us as much as they did our brothers and sisters in the Roman Empire.

Our approach to James will not be from a deep theological perspective. Instead, we'll use his letter just as he did. As a platform for understanding its application to our lives. Particularly when our lives are facing great challenges.

Chapter 1

Lesson #3

Quick Recap:

James, the half-brother of our Lord did not believe Jesus is the Messiah. Despite being raised in the same home and later being a witness to His ministry and miracles, James, like the majority of Israel, refused to accept Jesus as their promised King. But all of that changed after James saw his resurrected Brother and realized He is the Lamb of God.

James would then devote the rest of his life to serving our Lord. Taking no credit for his relationship to Jesus, he sought only to be a humble bondservant. As a result, the Lord would inspire James to write a letter to the early church. Intended initially for the displaced Jews being scattered around the world, the letter would apply equally to converted pagans. Believers of all nations and all people who need encouragement and instructions for living the life of a bondservant of our King.

Now, let's read and absorb the inspired words of James and seek to do what they say.

James chapter 1 verses 1-4

James introduces himself in a very unassuming way, ***“1. James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”*** This is humility at its finest. There is no mention of the fact he is the half-brother of Jesus, the son of Mary or a descendant of king David. He is simply James, a servant of our Lord.

There's a lot to be gleaned from this short introduction because it could help us avoid one of the most common sins in our life. The sin of pride. Pride of who we are, what we've accomplished or who we know. We live in a society reeking with self-centered pride. Whether it's a job title we seek, a house we can't really afford, or the desire to be seen and heard, pride is an acceptable character trait for millions of people. But pride can become sin and sneak up on us when we least expect it. Particularly when pride shows itself in our ego, our coveting and our self-righteousness. Pride was the primary reason the Pharisees could not see Jesus for who He is, and it is the motivation behind movements like the modern *Prosperity Gospel* that focuses more on what we have accomplished than what Jesus did on the cross. So how prevalent is pride? It's one of the three primary categories of sin described in scripture, ***“16. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father***

but is of the world." (1 John 2:16). And it's one of the temptations presented to Eve in the garden, and to Jesus in the wilderness (Genesis 3:6 / Matthew 4:1-11). But why is that so important? Because the writer of Proverbs 16 tells us that pride is more dangerous than we sometimes believe, and the outcome is usually not what we desire, ***"18. Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. 19. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud."*** (Proverbs 16:18-19). This means we need to be laser focused on the potential sources of pride in our lives and avoid them. That's a lesson we get from James.

Jesus Himself was the ultimate example of humility and the absence of sinful pride. His offer, ***"29. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."*** (Matthew 11:29) is profound because Jesus is God and had the power to do whatever He wanted and yet He offered to gently carry our yoke:

- He could have come to earth in the trappings of a Mighty King. Instead He came as a baby in a manger, ***"7. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."*** (Luke 2:7).
- He could have lived in the grandest palace on earth. Instead He lived humble and poor, ***"20 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."*** (Matthew 8:20).
- He could have focused on befriending the rich and famous in society. Instead, He sought those in need of redemption, ***"17. When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."*** (Mark 2:17).
- He could have destroyed the Roman Empire and prevented His crucifixion. Instead He quietly went to the cross for you and me, ***"7. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth."*** (Isaiah 53:7)

Jesus was the perfect example of a humble Man. A character trait also indicated in James through his simple introduction. No one would have blamed James had he capitalized on His relationship with the Lord. They would have simply seen it as a way to bring credibility to his message. But James didn't rely on that. He knew his words, inspired by God, would

stand on their own without any help from him. So he avoids any recognition of his relationship with Jesus by declaring himself to be a simple servant.

James addresses his letter to the “...*the twelve tribes...*” of Israel who had been “...*scattered abroad...*”. Although he had no way of knowing it at the time, in just a few years the remainder of his beloved Jewish people would be scattered across the globe for over two-thousand years and would not come together again until 1948. As a result of their scattering, the people of Israel would come under severe persecution wherever they went. A tragic outcome God had warned them about centuries before, “**65. And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the Lord will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. 66. Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life.**” (Deuteronomy 28:65-66). So given the reality of this prophecy James sets out to encourage his people by reminding them, and us, that our Lord often allows trials in our lives to strengthen us and draw us closer to Him, “**2. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3. knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.**” (James 1:2-4). This can be an incredibly encouraging passage, but at the same time it is incredibly difficult to accomplish. Why? Because James tells us to find “...*joy...*” in our “...*various trials...*”. That could mean “...*joy...*” when we're sick, “...*joy...*” when we're poor, “...*joy...*” when we're fearful, or “...*joy...*” in any other difficult circumstance in life. This is similar to Paul's core message in his letter to the Philippian church, “**3. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4. always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy,**” (Philippians 1:3-4). What makes this statement so remarkable is the fact Paul found “...*joy...*” while chained in a Roman prison. At a time when both his mental and physical condition were compromised, and yet, he found the “...*joy...*” to say, “**11. Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am to be content.**” (Philippians 4:11). That's also what we see in James. He wasn't focused on defeating the enemies of Israel or finding a way to escape persecution. He was focused on being “...*content...*” in his situation and seeking to live a courageous life for Jesus no matter how difficult it might be.

To do that James tells us to “...*count it all joy...*” during our trials in life. He uses the Greek word for “...*count...*”, “*hegesasthe*”, that means “*to make a careful appraisal*”. Counting is not simply something we consider doing, but is something we carefully assess to understand its true value. Paul used the same word in Philippians 3:7 to describe the value of giving up the riches of the world for the opportunity to serve Jesus, “**7. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.**”. Counting is intentional. It is a value-assessment to help us understand the extent to which we embrace a task by

seeing the potential outcome. In this case James is telling us to view our “...**trials**...” as a source of “...**joy**...” by understanding the fact that our trials may be used by the Lord to strengthen our faith and increase our spiritual maturity. But finding “...**joy**...” during severe trials isn't easy. It takes commitment, strong faith and a conscious decision to face our trials with the understanding they can be used to glorify God through our unwavering faith. That's where counting comes in. It's not haphazard. It's intentional and direct. It's a commitment to seek the Lord's will no matter how difficult it might be. This is something we've talked about many times in our prior studies. The fact that every trial in our life is already known by God and none of them take Him by surprise. Sometimes He removes our challenges, but at other times He allows us to go through them. But if He does, we know He will walk through the trial with us and we have confidence in the fact He already knows the eventual outcome. Our task then, is to walk that path obedient to God's will so He is glorified, and when He is glorified by our efforts we find “...**joy**...”.

So let's think about “...**joy**...” from the perspective of the cross. The writer of Hebrews tells us, “**2. looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**”. Jesus went to the cross to offer grace for the forgiveness of sin, but in doing so He recognized “...**the joy that was set before Him**...”. By enduring death He took our sins on Himself, and then returned to heaven to prepare a place for us to live with Him for eternity. It was that outcome that brought Him “...**joy**...”, and that's exactly how we can find the “...**joy**...” James is talking about. By counting the value of the outcome we can understand how our trial can be used by the Lord to strengthen our faith.

But the very act of counting requires us to keep our eyes on the eventual outcome. By doing so we draw closer to the Lord, deeper in His word, more fervent in prayer and steadfast in our faith. That's why it's often during the trials in life when our faith is the strongest and we're the most obedient. To describe our journey James uses the word “...**testing**...”. A term which translated from the original Greek means “*to be found approved and genuine*”. A good example of this is the tests we take in school to determine whether or not our knowledge is genuine. If we simply memorize the information long enough to pass the test, then it will probably be of little value in the future and we'll be no smarter after the test than we were before. Likewise, in our Christian walk, if we simply go through the motions but don't invest ourselves in growing closer to the Lord, then our faith won't be genuine when we need it to face the “...**testing**...” of life. That's because “...**testing**...” in a believer's life is often used by the Lord to teach us so we will have the genuine faith we need to not only survive our challenges, but to prosper as a result of them. When that happens our “...**testing**...” can impart lifelong learning, genuine faith and spiritual maturity. Peter discussed the same principle in 1 Peter 1:7 to describe the

outcome of tested faith, ***“7...that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”*** Here Peter explains this very clearly by using the example of gold that is refined from raw ore to a precious metal through extreme heat in a crucible of fire.

But this is not an isolated example:

- Job understood because of the trials he had to endure, ***“10. But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.”*** (Job 23:10).
- What about Abraham? God promised to make him a great nation and through them he would be a blessing to the world (Genesis 12:1-3), but the road would not be without difficulties that would test his faith, ***“1. Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” 2. Then He said, “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”*** (Genesis 22:1-2).
- And Joseph, who spent years in prison in Egypt in order to save the Hebrew people of God, ***“7. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. 8. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.”*** (Genesis 45:7-8)
- And what about David? God promised he would be king of Israel, but first he had to endure years of punishment from the wicked king Saul, ***“1. How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? 2. How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?”*** (Psalm 13:1-2).

So too is our own faith, which grows and becomes stronger and more precious when subjected to the ***“...testing...”*** of life. Of course that means we need to face our trials by focusing on the Lord and seeking to understand how He can use our challenges for His glory. That's not easy, and sometimes it seems nearly impossible, but when it happens we can ***“...count it all joy...”*** because we know our trust in Jesus will carry us through. That's because it is the ***“...joy...”*** emanating from our fire-tempered faith in Jesus that gives us, ***“7...the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding...”*** (Philippians

4:7b), and it is that “...**peace...**” through Jesus that allows us to have a fortified testimony that is, “...**worthy of the gospel of Christ.** (Philippians 1:27b). And when that happens we will find the “...**joy...**” James is talking about.

Then James comforts us with the fact that strong faith during “...**testing...**” will give us the “...**patience...**” we need to endure and persevere so we can be “...**perfect and complete...**”. Paul speaks to this in Romans 5:3-4, “**3. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4. and perseverance, character; and character, hope.**”. That doesn't mean our character will be perfected in our earthly life. Our perfection, or “*glorification*”, will not occur until we are in heaven, “**42. So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.**” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). Prior to that final perfecting in heaven we are being “*sanctified*” on earth as we learn more about our Lord and draw closer to Him. It's through the combination of “...**testing...**”, “...**patience...**”, endurance and “...**perseverance...**” we build through our trials that will mature our spiritual growth. But why is “...**patience...**” so important? In verses 3 and 4 James tells us, “**3. knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.**”. Here James indicates that “...**patience...**” is a by-product of our “...**faith...**” but it is also a component of accomplishing “...**its perfect work...**”. The opposite of “...**patience...**” is impatience, and when we're impatient we're not trusting. When we pray and expect God to answer us exactly the way we want and in the timeframe we want we're doing two things. First, we're not trusting God to answer our prayers in His way and in His timing, but we're also ignoring the fact that God may opt to take us through a challenge to “...**test...**” us and mature us to more genuine faith. In that sense a lack of “...**patience...**” may indicate a lack of trust and when that happens we're not seeking to allow God to, “...**have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.**”. As the writer of Hebrews tells us, “**11. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, 12. that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**” (Hebrews 6:11-12). Here the, “...**full assurance of hope...**” indicates our trust which we have because of our “...**faith and patience...**”. That's why Isaiah reminds us, “...**Whoever believes will not act hastily...**” (Isaiah 28:16a). Instead, we must act with “...**patience...**” by trusting the Lord to see us through in His way and in His timing. That's how we pray in the will of the Lord.

So what happens when we don't face our trials and “...**testing...**” with trust in the Lord? Instead of trusting, we fear. Instead of seeking to glorify God we get mad at God. Maybe

we walk away, we don't seek Him in His word and we're not in fellowship through prayer. When that happens we fail the test. Not in the sense of heaven and hell, but from the perspective that if we don't have faith that ***“...produces patience...”*** and we're not allowing the Lord to use our trials to ***“...have its perfect work...”*** then we miss an opportunity for Him to teach us and draw us closer to Him.

So, as we seek to trust the Lord through our trials, may we be encouraged by remembering:

- ***“14. Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!”*** (Psalm 27:14)
- ***“4. For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. 5. Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus.”*** (Romans 15:4-5)

And yet, having ***“...patience...”*** and finding ***“.. joy...”*** in times of ***“...testing...”*** can be exceedingly difficult. For that we need something else from God.

We need wisdom...

Lesson #4

Quick Recap:

James initially addressed his letter to beleaguered Jewish people who had converted to Christianity. Scattered from their homeland because of disobedience he sought to encourage them by reminding them of the joy that can be found even in our most difficult circumstances. But finding joy during life's challenges is never easy and sometimes seems nearly impossible. And yet, if we trust the Lord to use our trials to train us and teach us we can glorify God in every situation.

But finding joy during life's challenges often takes an ingredient only the Lord can provide — spiritual wisdom.

James chapter 1 verses 5-8

Immediately after encouraging us to find, “**...joy when you fall into various trials...**” (James 1:2b), James implores us to ask the Lord for “**...wisdom...**”. But why “**...wisdom...**”? Why not strength or some kind of divine super power? Because it’s “**...wisdom...**” that will enable us to understand how to deal with our challenges in a way that will glorify the Lord. As Warren Wiersbe puts it, “*We need wisdom so we will not waste the opportunities God is giving us to mature.*”. This is the spiritual “**...wisdom...**” we need to know God's will, the “**...wisdom...**” to follow God's direction, and the “**...wisdom...**” to understand how the Lord can use the trials in our life to glorify Him. This is the type of “**...wisdom...**” we need to grow in our faith and stand steadfast during the testing of life. It’s a component of our Christian walk that’s vitally important when life gets complicated, but it’s a character trait missing in many Christians.

So what does “**...wisdom...**” really mean in the life of a believer? First, let’s discuss what “**...wisdom...**” is not. Spiritual “**...wisdom...**” is not how much education you have or how many degrees you’ve earned. It’s not the same as intelligence or being smart. It’s much more than the “**...wisdom...**” of the world, making good decisions or smartly getting through our day. For a follower of Jesus “**...wisdom...**” is the spiritual maturity we need to live life in the will of God. It’s the decisions we make to be obedient to the Lord rather than obedient to our own desires. It’s the guidance we need to walk a difficult path by seeking ways to glorify the Lord even when we’re weak. It’s this “**...wisdom...**” from God that when applied to our life will give us “**...all joy when you fall into various trials...**” (James 1:2b).

This is the type of “...*wisdom*...” our society is sorely lacking today.

So how important is “...*wisdom*...”? To answer that question let's consider a narrative from the Old Testament. When Solomon became king of Israel God asked what he desired, “**5. At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask! What shall I give you?”** (1 Kings 3:5). Given his unique position, most kings would ask for a powerful army, defensible fortifications or great wealth and prestige. Instead Solomon asked for “...*wisdom*...”, “**9. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?**” (1 Kings 3:9). Solomon asked for an “...*understanding heart*...”, the ability to “...*discern between good and evil*...” and the skills required, “...*to judge this great people of Yours*...”. Combined, these attributes would give him great “...*wisdom*...”. But also, by asking in this way Solomon was acknowledging his need for God's direction to accomplish the task of managing God's chosen nation; “...*this great people of Yours*...”. Solomon recognized the fact it was not his people he was leading. It was God's people, and he needed the “...*wisdom*...” of God to lead them well. Can you imagine what our world would be like today if our leaders asked God for “...*wisdom*...” like Solomon did?

So James encourages us, “**5. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.**”. We might wonder, if “...*wisdom*...” is so important, why doesn't the Lord just give it to us without asking? At times He may, particularly if we're intentionally walking in the Spirit and seeking to be obedient, but He also wants us to recognize the fact we need “...*wisdom*...” and we need it from Him. Asking for “...*wisdom*...” is acknowledgement that we don't have what we need and it's recognition that the “...*wisdom*...” we need comes only from God. It's a humbling request. A plea to the Lord from a surrendered heart that says, “*I don't know which way to go, but I know You do.*”. But in seeking “...*wisdom*...” we must ask “...*in faith*...” by fully trusting the Lord to provide the “...*wisdom*...” we need even if it is counter to what we would do in our flesh.

Unfortunately “...*wisdom*...” is something most people rarely ask for when they pray. Instead we ask for healing, or strength, or direction, or a dozen other things we think we need. But many times what we really need is “...*wisdom*...” so we can be obedient with the healing, strength and direction the Lord gives us. But what if He opts not to heal, not to strengthen and not to provide clear direction? Then we must trust Him and ask for the “...*wisdom*...” we need to be obedient even during those difficult times. Because the “...*wisdom*...” we need is not our own. As Paul tells us, “**33. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments**

and His ways past finding out! (Romans 11:33). It's the Lord's ***"...wisdom..."*** we seek. The type of ***"...wisdom..."*** Paul prayed for in his letter to the church at Colossae, ***"9. For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; 10. that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11. strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; 12. giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14. in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."*** (Colossians 1:9-14)

Let's take a minute to break this down.

In his prayer Paul asks:

- To be ***"...filled with the knowledge of His will..."***
- And ***"...in all wisdom..."***
- So we can have ***"...spiritual understanding..."***

So what was his intended result?

- ***"...that you may walk worthy of the Lord..."***
- While ***"...fully pleasing Him..."***
- And ***"...being fruitful in every good work..."***
- And ***"...increasing in the knowledge of God..."***
- While being ***"...strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power..."***
- Giving us ***"...all patience..."***
- So we can endure ***"...longsuffering with joy..."***

That's why asking for ***"...wisdom..."*** is so important. It's key to understanding how to walk in the Spirit, please our Lord, and bear spiritual fruit, so we can have the strength, power, patience and longsuffering we need in life. The very act of asking for ***"...wisdom..."*** is obedience in itself because it recognizes the fact we need God's guidance and not our own. But James clarifies a critical component of our prayer for ***"...wisdom..."***, ***"6. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind."*** We must ask ***"...in faith..."*** that our Lord will provide what we need, and do so ***"...with no doubting..."***.

But what happens when we doubt the outcome and ask without faith? James gives an example using the rolling action of waves in the sea. Have you ever watched how waves move? They go up, then they go down with little purpose or direction. And if you throw a stick or something else that floats in the waves and watch what it does, it goes up and down too. Add to that a strong wind and the waves become violent and the stick will be tossed too and fro with no control of its own. James is illustrating the fact that a believer's life without seeking spiritual *"...wisdom..."* we vacillate; up and down, hot and cold, faithful and weak. Paul uses a similar illustration in his letter to the church at Ephesus when he implores us, ***"14. ...that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting."*** (Ephesians 4:14). Here Paul is talking about the influence of false doctrine which can be a direct result of not seeking the *"...wisdom..."* we need to understand the direction of God's word. But the outcome is the same. We are *"...tossed to and fro..."*.

So why would our life be any different? When we walk through the storms of life, or life in general for that matter, don't we sometimes find ourselves *"...tossed to and fro..."*? Sure we do. That's why the Lord reminds us, ***"5. Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; 6. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."*** (Proverbs 3:5-6). When we walk our own path we make bad decisions, go in the wrong direction, and fall prey to temptation. But why? Because we insist on moving forward without asking for *"...wisdom..."* from God, and when that happens our life gets a little out of control. Just like a stick in the waves we bounce around with little or no direction. Jesus gives us an excellent example of this in the narrative of Peter walking on the water, ***"29. So He said, 'Come.' And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. 30. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!' 31. And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?'"*** (Matthew 14:22-33). Do you understand why Peter sank? Doubt. He took his eyes off of Jesus and focused on the storm and when he did his doubt caused him to sink. So we have to wonder what the outcome could have been if Peter stepped out of the boat and said, *"Lord, give me the wisdom to walk through this storm to you."* The storm would not have stopped and the wind would still be strong but Peter would have the *"...wisdom..."* and *"...faith..."* to walk to Jesus without doubting. That's why James tells us, ***"7. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8. he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."*** Let's not assume the Lord will give us the *"...wisdom..."* we need if we don't ask Him. As James will remind us later in his letter, ***"...you do not have because you do not ask..."*** (James 4:2b). So let's ask the Lord for the wisdom we need to live our life, face our trials and walk obedient to His will.

Let's wrap-up our discussion on “...**wisdom**...” by reading the first ten verses of Proverbs 2,

- ***“1. My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, 2. So that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; 3 Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, 4. If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; 5. Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. 6. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; 7. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly. 8. He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints. 9. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path. 10. When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, 11.”.***

This is a beautiful picture of how spiritual “...**wisdom**...” can influence every aspect of our life with the power of God.

Lesson #5

Quick Recap:

Verses 5 through 8 taught us a very important lesson. One of the key ingredients for finding joy in our trials is spiritual wisdom. That doesn't mean a college education, common sense or even street-smarts. Wisdom for a believer is the recognition that we need guidance and direction, and we need it from God. But to have spiritual wisdom we need to ask for it. By asking we're acknowledging we can't go forward in our own understanding but instead need the Lord to direct our way.

James chapter 1 verses, 9-11

As followers of Jesus we are all the same. Whether rich or poor, or whatever situation you find yourself in, we are all sinners saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). And yet, as a society we tend to categorize each other into classes or groups of people. Most commonly by how someone looks or how much they are worth. But it was no different in the ancient world. The Judaizers thought salvation came through faith plus religious works which they felt set them apart from the others. Likewise, the Gnostics felt they were made righteous through special knowledge given only to a select few. And the Pharisees, arguably the worst of the bunch, viewed themselves as elite because of their exalted religious position. We see a great example of their self-righteousness in Luke 18:9-13

- ***“10. ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ 13. And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ “***

Even today some people equate their salvation to their own prosperity or to the idea they were somehow special and “*elected*”. But all of these perceptions stand in contrast to the truth Paul expresses so clearly in Galatians 3:28, ***“28. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”***

Or said another way, *“All ground is level at the foot of the cross.”*

James touches on this topic in verse 9 by contrasting the “**...lowly brother...**” and “**...the rich...**”. We don’t know what prompted him to broach this subject with the early church but we may get some indication in chapter 2 (verses 1-7) where James contrasts perceptions of those on opposite ends of the prosperity curve. But either way, by discussing this James helps us understand it is not our material wealth that feeds our faith. It is our willingness to conform to God’s will no matter what our situation may be. That’s why we should, “**...let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation...**”. He is exalted because he is faithfully following God and finds richness in the wealth of obedience. In the original Greek the word translated to “**...exaltation...**” means, “*The brother in humble circumstances should exult in his high position.*”. This is not sinful pride in what he has accomplished, but is the recognition of God’s grace given to him despite his lowly station in life. Likewise, the “**...rich...**” man may glory in “**...humiliation...**” because he recognizes he did not earn God’s grace through wealth, but through humble obedience. In both cases we are all equal before the Lord, and in neither case does the person’s financial position influence their value to God. They are both of equal worth to the Lord because as believers they were both sinners saved by grace through the blood of Christ, and not through any effort or payment of their own. Likewise, when facing the trials and testing of life neither person has a leg-up on the other because they have more or less money, power or prestige. We are all brought low by our challenges and we are all brought high by the grace of God. Whether “**...lowly...**” or “**...rich...**” we can legitimately boast in the recognition of our faith in Jesus as the only way of dealing with the trials we face.

James explains this in poetic fashion by using the example of a flower to illustrate his point, “**10...because as a flower of the field he will pass away. 11. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes.**”. A flower is a beautiful thing. Rising above the garden it is resplendent in its color and shape. Far more so than the weeds surrounding it. But once the sun comes out the heat will wither the flower and even the most beautiful will eventually shrivel and die. James’ example pulls from the same principle expressed by Isaiah, “**6. The voice said, “Cry out!” and he said, “What shall I cry?” “All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. 7. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. 8. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.**” (Isaiah 40:6-8).

So too is our earthly wealth. It is of no value after death and plays no role in our eternal life. Jesus made that clear in His letter to the unfaithful church at Laodicea, “**16. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and**

naked.” (Revelation 3:16-17). Tragically they saw themselves as “**...rich...**” and righteous, and yet the Lord saw them as “**...wretched...**”. Why? Because they boasted in their earthly wealth, but not their eternal glory through Jesus.

That's what's so sad about the modern *Prosperity Gospel* movement. They view their faith from the value of their net assets. As if God will judge them for eternity based on what they achieved and how well they prospered in life. But what they miss is the fact God doesn't consider our earthly station or financial position when judging our life. He looks for one thing and one thing only. Faith in Jesus and the sin-saving grace that comes through true belief in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord. In that case, both the “**...lowly...**” and the “**...rich...**” stand on level ground and are judged the same way. Prosperity has nothing to do with it.

And yet, it astonishes me how many well-meaning people have come to believe their own prosperity will influence their eternity. They forget that Jesus, who is their final Judge, (Revelation 20:11), set the standard by being born in a manger through a poor Jewish family, lived the meager life of a carpenter and had no home of His own. And on top of all of that He had a character that was, “**...gentle and lowly in heart...**” (Matthew 11:29b). How could we possibly take that example from God and somehow interpret that he'll consider our own prosperity at judgment?

To better understand the outcome of that line of thinking let's look at what happens at the *Great White Throne Judgment* in Revelation 20:11-15:

- **“11. Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. 14. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”**

We tend to view this event as a judgment when in fact it's actually a final sentencing. That's because those who died without accepting Christ are effectively judged at death because they died lost. At the Great White Throne Judgment there is no appeal process and no chance for providing evidence for their defense. We see this event clearly explained in Matthew 7:21-23:

- ***“21. ‘Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23. And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”***

Here we see people at their final judgment. Well-meaning people who believed they were saved and are shocked to find out they're lost. So they try desperately to provide evidence of their righteousness by telling Jesus all the wonderful things they accomplished; even things they did in His name. In a sense they are recounting their own prosperity. The list of things they did on earth to earn a place in heaven. But note what is missing. There's no confession of their sin, or their need for redemption. No mention of God's grace, or the cross, or the resurrection. In fact, there's no mention of Jesus other than the things they did in an effort to earn His favor. And yet, despite all of their accomplishments and prosperity our Lord says, ***“...I never knew you...”***. He never knew them as a believer because they never knew Him as a Savior.

So in that context let's go back to the *Great White Throne Judgment* where we see the lost of the world standing before the Lord. These are, ***“...the dead, small and great...”***. In other words, the ***“...lowly...”*** and ***“...rich...”*** who died without accepting Christ and are now learning their eternal fate. As part of their judgment proceedings, ***“...books were opened...”***, ***“...And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.”***. Isn't that interesting. Jesus will show them their entire life, ***“...their works...”*** which have been recorded throughout time. This will undoubtedly include their accomplishments and prosperity and the things they achieved in life. But none of that will matter because, ***“...they were judged, each one according to his works...”***. They will be given a fair shake and what they did will be presented and used as the basis of their sentencing. But pay close attention to what is missing. Just like the example in Matthew 7, there's no mention of their faith, no mention of their sin, or their need for redemption. No mention of God's grace, the cross, or the resurrection. In fact, there is no mention of anything Jesus did but only the lame ***“...works...”*** they did. And when that happens, ***“...7. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the Lord blows upon it...”*** (Isaiah 40:7b).

But this future reality is a direct result of what we see happening in society today. Most people are focused on what they want and how they can get it, even if it is to the detriment of others. Most chase what they desire in an effort to make their earthly life more prosperous, but in some extreme cases they also consider it a ticket to heaven. Sadly this situation isn't going to improve and in fact will get worse over time. We get an indication

of this in the Book of Revelation and the discussion of our society during the Tribulation period.

For the purpose of this lesson we'll review a brief summary of the Tribulation period as context for what we see happening in our society. But for a more detailed discussion of the End Times please see either the Revelation study or the lessons related to the Last Days on our website under “Resources” and “Bible Studies”.

For context let's start with the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:9-12,

- ***“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.”***

Jesus spoke these words over two-thousand years ago to help us understand what would happen in the future. But these are words that define exactly what we see happening in our society today. The friction, disunity, chaos and rising antisemitism we see are all indications we are living in the Last Days. But we need to remember, Jesus can see tomorrow more clearly than we can see yesterday, so He knows exactly what's going to happen. He warns us so we can be prepared and strong, not surprised and fearful. That way we can be confident in the fact nothing happening is unknown to our Lord which means it's all part of His plan. In fact, what we see happening today is simply the glideslope mankind must be on to prepare them for the antichrist. A time when, ***“8. All who dwell on the earth will worship him...”*** (Revelation 3:8). But as difficult as it is to watch our society fall away from God we need to remember what Jesus told us, ***“6. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.”*** (Matthew 24:6). So as we watch and wait for His return we must trust and not be alarmed.

Now let's discuss a quick overview of the future Tribulation Period and how the mind of man we see emerging in our society will continue to degrade.

After the Rapture of the church the antichrist will emerge. He will be a charismatic leader who will establish a global government, military, economy and religion. When that happens the whole world will worship him, which is essentially the worship of satan (Revelation 13:8). But at a point in the Tribulation mankind will abandon their focus on worshipping the antichrist and will focus instead on worshipping themselves. At that point the Bible describes society with three titles:

- The “*merchants*” who, “**8...have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.**”. (Revelation 18:3b)
- The “*kings*”, “**9...who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her...**”. (Revelation 18:9a)
- The “*shipmasters*”, “**17...who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea...**”. (Revelation 18:17b)

These titles represent a future society who are laser focused on two things; themselves and their wealth. They will have become so focused on their own prosperity they will seek to acquire more and more even as the world around them is falling apart.

When taken in that context it's easy to understand why our society is so fractured and angry today and why they are becoming more and more ungodly. But sadly, we're not going to change that. Granted, we may go through a season of conservative leadership but we can easily see how quickly that could change and society turn back to progressive ideologies. That, coupled with the fact our Lord has already told us, “**8. All who dwell on the earth will worship him** [the antichrist]...” (**Revelation 3:8**), helps us understand where the world is headed. Our task is not to change the world but to share the gospel. The Lord has already told us the eventual outcome, but for a time He has left us here to share His message with as many people as possible.

So, as we watch our society fall away, don't fear, and when you listen to our politicians, don't cringe. View them as an opportunity to share the truth of the cross.

Lesson #6

Quick Recap:

In the opening verses of his letter James assures his readers we can find joy during our trials by asking for spiritual wisdom. That way we remain faithful no matter what situation we're facing or what place we find ourselves in.

Now James will address one of the most critical elements of our Christian walk that often presents itself during the trials of life — temptation.

James chapter 1 verses, 12-15

Let's establish one thing right up front; testing and temptation are not the same. Testing comes from the Lord to train us and mature us spiritually. Temptation comes from satan to trip us and make us spiritually weaker. As James confirms in verse 13 God does not tempt us, ***“13. Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.”*** But unfortunately, temptation may present itself during times of testing if we don't face our testing with spiritual wisdom. Testing is intended to mature us and train us, but if we're not careful it can become a season of worry and weakness which can lead to anxiety, doubt, and even sin. That's why James stressed the need to ask for wisdom. The wisdom we get from the Lord will help us fight any temptation the enemy throws our way.

So given that, let's do a deep-dive on temptation to better understand what causes it, how to recognize it and how to defeat it.

Not long ago someone asked me to recommend a few verses to help them fight temptation. I really appreciated that request because no matter how hard we try there is often an unwelcome tension in our lives. Tension that comes from the temptation to sin. It might be something as simple as a bad thought, a careless word, an angry attitude or something much more serious, but whatever it is, temptation is there and it affects our fellowship with the Lord. In fact, it affects every aspect of our life. But why is that? Very simply. When we sin we rebel against God by doing things He asks us not to do. And when we're in rebellion we're not in fellowship with our Lord and our life quickly gets off track.

But the Lord knew that was going to happen so to help us better understand how to fight temptation Jesus allowed Himself to be tempted so He could show us what to do and

teach us how to win. We see this illustrated in Matthew 4:1-11. There we're told about the temptation of Jesus and how He defeated it. But there's something fundamental about this event we need to understand. Jesus wasn't tempted to see if He would sin. Jesus is sinless and cannot sin because Jesus is God and even in human form He cannot be in conflict with His divine nature. The writer of Hebrews clarifies this in Hebrews 4:15, ***“15. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”*** Likewise, the Apostle Paul confirms this fact in 2 Corinthians 5:21, ***“21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”***

But even though Jesus couldn't sin He allowed satan to tempt Him so He could teach us how to fight our own temptation and come out victorious. His intention becomes clear in Matthew 4:1, ***“1. Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”*** Pay close attention to what verse 1 really tells us, ***“...Jesus was led up by the Spirit...”***. That's important to understand because Jesus was not being called by satan He was ***“...led...”*** by God through the Holy Spirit. In other words, satan was not in charge. God was in control so He could use this event to show us how to fight temptation in our own lives. To do that Jesus instructs us by facing three temptations Himself.

The same three temptations we face:

- The lust of the flesh
- The lust of the eyes
- And the pride of life

These are the same three temptations described in 1 John 2:16, ***“16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.”*** And they are also the same temptations satan presented to Adam and Eve - in Genesis 3:6

- ***“6. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food,”***
 - That's lust of the flesh
- ***“...that it was pleasant to the eyes,”***
 - That's the lust of the eyes
- ***“...and a tree desirable to make one wise,***
 - That's the pride of life

Then it says, ***“...she took of its fruit and ate...”***. That action exposes a dual reality we all face. The desire for the fruit was sin in Eve's heart and eating the fruit was sin in her flesh. James explains this in James 1:14-15:

- First, satan takes the initiative, ***“14. But each one is tempted...”***
- The temptation causes desire that can become sin in our heart, ***“...when he [that's us] is drawn away by his own desires and enticed...”***.

- Paul talked about this in 2 Corinthians 11:3, ***“3. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”***
- Then if we take a physical action it becomes sin in the flesh. ***“15. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”***

Interestingly, verse 14 uses the terms “***...drawn away...***” and “***...enticed...***” to describe the process. In the original Greek both of these words were used to describe an animal lured into a trap or a fish lured to a baited hook. Let's think about that. Neither an animal nor a fish would be willing to step in a trap or bite a hook if they knew the result was capture or death. But add a piece of bait and the whole scenario changes. Suddenly the trap or hook is inviting, the lust of the eyes takes over and they are caught. That's exactly what satan does. The temptation is the bait that entices us to step in the wrong place or go after the wrong thing. And that can apply to both mental or physical sin. But whatever the bait might be we should never lose sight of the fact that the journey from temptation to sin is completely under our control. The enemy doesn't force us into the trap or make us bite the hook. He simply presents the bait and leaves the rest up to us. So how can we fight temptation if it is so strong? By understanding that sin is not forced on us. Sin is a conscious decision we make to think, or act in a way that is displeasing to God. That also means sin doesn't always require a physical action. Sin can be in our heart or even through a simple thought in our mind, and before we realize it our foot is in the trap or the hook is in our jaw. Jesus discusses this in Mark 7:21-23, ***“21. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22. thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. 23. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”***

Have you ever really thought about that? We can be defiled by what is within. That means you don't have to be living in open sin in order to be living in sin, because the sin in our life doesn't have to be physical. It can simply be sin in our heart and in our mind. This is what Paul was getting at in Romans 8:7, ***“...the carnal mind is enmity against God...”***. Likewise, Jesus tells us in Matthew 15:19, ***“...For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts...”***. And in the Old Testament Jeremiah 17:9 declares, ***“The heart is deceitful above all things...”***. In other words, you may think you're not living in sin because you haven't done anything physical, but you can still be living in sin by what is going through your mind and by what you're harboring in your heart. That means we can look squeaky clean on the outside but are actually living a life of sin on the inside simply by how we think and what we think about. And when that happens we damage our fellowship with the Lord because, ***“18. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.”*** (Psalm 66:18).

Paul explains this further in Ephesians 2:3, ***“3. among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”*** Did you catch the nuance in verse 3? Sin can be from both the ***“...flesh and of the mind...”***. That hits close to home doesn't it? We might think our **thoughts** are not important because nobody knows about them but us. But God knows, and God takes our sin very seriously. But how seriously? Well...in Genesis chapter 6 we're told about God destroying the earth by flood. An action He took because mankind had become so sinful. But pay close attention to how Moses describes their sin in verses 5, ***“5. Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”***

Isn't that interesting. Moses doesn't describe their physical actions of sin. He describes their sin as ***“...every intent of the thoughts of his heart...”***. He's not talking about just the sins in their ***“...thoughts...”***. He's also talking about the very ***“...intent...”*** of their ***“...thoughts...”***. Their inner-most secret thoughts and desires that are hidden from everyone...but God. Solomon touches on this in Ecclesiastes 12:12, ***“12. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.”*** Our ***“...work...”*** including ***“...every secret thing...”*** will have to be addressed with God, so Paul tells us how to fight the hidden sin in our mind in 2 Corinthians 10:5,

- By, ***“5. casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”***

So how do we do that? How do we fight temptation and bring ***“...every thought into captivity...”***? The same way Jesus did. By using scripture. Each time Jesus was tempted in Matthew chapter 4 He fought satan with scripture. The same scripture He's given us to use. But how does that work against such a powerful enemy? Because scripture is truth and the word tells us satan has no truth in him (John 8:44). So he can't stand it when we use God's word against him. James confirms that when he tells us, ***“7. Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”*** (James 4:7).

So given that, how do we ***“...submit to God...”*** so the enemy will ***“...flee...”***? Very simply. By filling our heart and mind with His word. When we do that we're effectively sealing every crack or crevice where the enemy can enter. And when that happens satan will flee. But as we fight our temptations we have to be alert to our own weaknesses and remember that satan doesn't put a gun to our head and force us to sin. Instead, he simply places a temptation in our path with the hope we're weak enough to turn his temptation into our desire. That's why the process of turning temptation into sin is not caused by satan. It's caused by us because sin requires a conscious decision on our part. It is either

a desire or action that turns temptation into sin. Whether it's in our mind or body the spiritual warfare we fight every day can only be fought one way. By drawing near to God, being in His word, asking for wisdom and by walking in the Spirit. As Paul confirms in Galatians 5:16, **“16. I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”** That's why fighting temptation basically comes down to one thing, how closely we **“...walk...”** with the Lord. In the Bible the word **“...walk...”** is often used to describe our testimony. It's how we **“...walk...”** through life as a believer and how closely we **“...walk...”** with the Lord. That's why Paul tells us to **“...Walk in the Spirit...”**, because our **“...walk...”** is how we represent Jesus before a lost world.

But how do we **“...walk...”** like that with so much temptation fighting against us? The Bible gives lots of instructions.

For example:

- Romans 8:1-4, tells us not to **“...walk...”** in the flesh.
- Romans 12:2, tells us not to **“...walk...”** as the world walks.
- And Ephesians 5:15 tells us to **“...walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise...”**

That means our **“...walk...”** which is our testimony, can either fight our temptations or cause us to **“...walk...”** right into them. Depending on which way we **“...walk...”**. That's critically important for us to understand because our **“...walk...”** can either clarify or blur the truth of Jesus to someone who is headed to hell. That's why satan tempts believers. Although he can't have us he can certainly cause us to stumble and discredit our testimony. And when our testimony is damaged we discredit the message of the cross and the name of Jesus. That's so important to understand because our life may be the only reflection of Jesus some people will ever see, and, how we live and **“...walk...”** in front of them may be the only gospel they will ever hear.

We're reminded of this in 1 John 1:6, **“6. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.”** In other words...if we claim to **“...have fellowship with...”** Jesus, but walk in sin then we will drive people away from our Lord rather than drawing them in. Why? Because they will see our life as a lie. But don't get me wrong. We all sin from time to time. Even a lustful or hateful thought can be sin if we dwell on it, but the difference is a faithful believer, who may occasionally fail doesn't live in intentional or habitual sin but instead tries to avoid sin by walking closer to the Lord. That means, if your life has habitual sin you need to bow before the Lord right now and to get that straight because the longer you wait, the longer your fellowship will be broken.

But how do we do that? There are three verses I go to often to draw me away from temptation:

- The first is Psalm 139:23-24, ***“23. Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; 24. And see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”***. Here we are asking the Lord to search our heart and help us see the temptation in our lives so we can fight it.
- The second is Psalm 119:11, ***“Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.”***. This verse causes us to ask whether or not God's word is in our heart? Because if it's not, then we're fighting a losing battle
- And the third verse is Psalm 51:10a ***“Create in me a clean heart, O God.”***. Here we are asking our Lord, our Creator, for the strength and wisdom we need to purge our heart of temptation.

But we also need to remember what Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:13, ***“13. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”***. That means our temptations are not unique. They are the same temptations everyone else goes through, but God promises we will not be tempted beyond what we can bear. That means when we are tempted He will give us a way out. So how do we ***“...bear it...”*** and ***“...make the way of escape...”***? The same way Jesus did. By taking an opposing action and using scripture as our weapon. In our own strength we can't fight an enemy as powerful as satan, but we can fight him - and win - through the power God gives us in His word. In fact, God tells us exactly how to do that in Ephesians 6:10-17,

- ***“10. Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15. and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16. above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. 17. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”***

Here the Lord warns us we will be tempted, but He also tells us to fight, ***“...in the power of His might....”*** by putting on ***“...the whole armor of God...”***. The very act of putting

on the armor is an action we must take to counter our desire to follow temptation. But the true strength of God's armor is found in verse 17, “...***the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God***...”.

Isn't that interesting, here God provides several weapons

- A belt of truth
- A breastplate of righteousness
- Boots to share the gospel
- The shield of faith
- And the helmet of salvation

But these are all defensive weapons to protect us against attacks from the enemy. But there's one more weapon listed and it's the only one that's offensive. A weapon designed for close combat. A weapon for fighting face to face with your enemy. It is, “...***the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God***...”. That's important for us to understand because it is the same weapon Jesus used to combat satan's temptation in Matthew chapter 4. Jesus used Scripture. He used His own words, “...***The word of God***...”. The same words He has given us to use as our “...***sword***...”. So doesn't it make sense if Jesus used scripture to defeat satan, and then He gives us the same words and illustrates how to use them, that His words would have the same power for us? Sure it does. That's why the Lord tells us in Psalm 119:9-11, “***9. How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. 10. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! 11. Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.***”. By combining these verses from Ephesians and Psalms the Lord is telling us how to fight temptation just like Jesus did. By attacking the enemy with, “... ***the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God***...”. The weapon which is “...***hidden in my heart that I might not sin against You.***”. Let's think about that. When God's word is “...***hidden in my heart***...” there's no place left for temptation to hide, and it becomes our desire to fight satan rather than succumbing to his temptation. That's what Jesus is showing us in Matthew 4. He wasn't tempted to see if He would fail. He was tempted to show us how to brandish His “...***sword***...” in our own battle. Jesus endured His temptation to teach us to fight temptation by taking the “...***sword***...” of His word and fighting in His strength. And when we do that James tells us, “***12. Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.***”. If we love our Lord, we will follow His example, pick up our sword, ask for wisdom and then fight the temptation in our lives. That's why the real message of Matthew 4 isn't the fact Jesus was tempted. The real message is combat training for us so we can fight and win.

So what does temptation look like?

- For Eve it was an innocent piece of fruit that looked so good.
- For Moses it was impatience.
- For David it was the fact Bathsheba was so beautiful.
- For Judas it was thirty pieces of silver.
- For Peter it was survival by denying Christ.

But what does it look like to you and me?

- Maybe it's a person you find attractive.
- Or something you read or watch that draws your mind to a bad place or a bad practice.
- Or maybe, it's a place you go with your Buddies where you hope no one from church sees you.
- Or maybe, it's the foolish idea that social drinking doesn't kill your testimony.
- Or maybe, it's the house you can't afford but everybody else has one.
- Or, the fact you really don't have time to read the Bible.
- Or, maybe it's the words you say or the tone of your voice.
- Or, maybe how you respond on Facebook.

You name it, the list of temptations is endless. But whatever it is, our enemy will use it against us because he knows what makes people tick and he will plant a temptation in the cracks of our mind to draw us away from the things God said for us to do, or not to do. That's why sin is a conscious act that sometimes seems unconscious. It's the battle in our minds and the actions in our flesh. It's the bait that looks like what we need to satisfy our own desires. But...as we see in Matthew 4 the Lord gives us clear direction for how to combat sin in our own lives with the power of His word. Logically that means we must be in His word and learn to use it when temptation comes our way. If not we're fighting a losing battle and rather than walking away from temptation we'll walk right along with it.

So let's focus on this truth: God's grace and indwelling Holy Spirit gives us a new nature and a new desire. We should no longer desire to sin but should instead desire to please our Lord. We do this by “...***Walking in the Spirit...***” (Galatians 5:26) every moment of every day, and by being alert to God's movement in and through our lives. That doesn't mean we won't occasionally trip and fall, but it means we'll immediately know when we do, and we'll seek forgiveness and move forward in renewed obedience. So when we're tempted let's seek to follow the model Jesus gave us in Matthew 4:

- Face our temptation head on
- Look the enemy right in his beady little eyes and remind him who we belong to and let him know he has no power over us.

- Focus on Jesus and seek to please only Him.

So what do we do with all of this? First off, as believers we need to fight and face our temptations like Jesus did. With the power of His word in your heart and with the resolve to please only the Lord. But that means we must be in God's word every single day. Otherwise, we'll find ourselves on the field of battle with no sword and totally defenseless. So let's get in His word, sharpen our sword, ask Jesus to train you to use it, and then use it to destroy the temptation in your life.

Lesson #7

Quick Recap:

In verses 12 through 15 James alerts us to a danger in every Christian's life - *temptation*. He starts by reminding us that temptation never comes from God. It always comes from our enemy, but even so, it might not be as obvious as we'd like. That's because the three sources of sin: *lust of the flesh*, *lust of the eyes*, and *the pride of life* influence us with deception. That simply means our enemy doesn't force us to sin. He presents temptation to us in ways that often appeal to our weakened flesh.

But Jesus showed us how to fight the sin in our life by allowing Himself to be tempted. In doing so He provides real-life combat training we can use to defeat our own temptation. But we have to remember, satan doesn't force us to sin. Instead, he simply provides the source of our desire and then sin results from a conscious decision on our part. That's important to understand because wrangling with temptation is the spiritual warfare we face every single day. And yet, Jesus shows us that by using His word as a weapon we can make our enemy flee.

Now James will caution us not to be deceived and encourage us with a reminder of God's wonderful gifts.

James chapter 1 verses, 16-18

"4. And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you." (Matthew 4:4). This statement from our Lord is more than a commandment. It's also a warning. But why is a warning like this even necessary? Because our enemy is the one, ***"...who deceives the whole world..."*** and he does it very well (Revelation 12:9b). So let's really think about that. How can satan deceive so many otherwise intelligent people? Don't they see what's happening? Don't they understand that what they're doing is inherently wrong? No, they don't. That's the power of deception. As Isaiah warns us, ***"20. Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"*** (Isaiah 5:20). It's deception that makes evil look good and darkness appear as light. If you doubt that, just consider the fact that the Supreme Court of the United States, the most powerful judicial body on earth, had to debate whether or not a boy is a boy, and a girl is our girl. In other words, satan has made great progress deceiving the world in ways that are hard to get our head around. That's why we must be alert to what's happening around us and be wary of what we watch and listen to. Mainstream media, social media, AI, progressive

agendas, government platforms and aberrant pulpits all provide our enemy an unprecedented avenue to deceive billions of people – and make it sound legitimate. In other words, satan's opportunities to deceive society are nearly endless and his efforts are tireless. That makes deception one of our enemy's most powerful tools, and is the one he uses most often to quietly draw us away from God. For example, Eve was deceived into thinking it was ok to eat the fruit. Moses was deceived into thinking it was a good idea to strike the rock. David was deceived into the false idea that no one would find out about Bathsheba. In one sense deception is the key to all temptation, because temptation itself is harmless but once we're deceived we react to the temptation and it becomes sin.

From the moment he deceived Eve in the garden until now satan has been relentless in his efforts to deceive the world. So James repeats the same warning he heard from Jesus, ***“16. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.”***. In the original Greek the word for ***“...deceived...”*** can be translated ***“To wander”*** or ***“To be led astray”***. And that's exactly what satan does. Instead of forcing us to sin he leads us and tempts us to wander away from God. That's something we must always be aware of. But the opposite of wandering away from God is the obedience of walking with God. In doing so we are reminded that, ***“17. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above...”***. The Lord will provide what we need even though it may not always be in a way we expected it. God sees the future and understands how every aspect of our life can be used for His glory. Paul clarifies this in Romans 8:28, ***“28. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”***. Pay close attention to what this says. Because of God's omniscience, ***“...all things work together for good...”***. The key word here is ***“...all...”*** because that includes both good things and bad things. God doesn't cause bad things but He knows they're going to happen, so if we ***“...love God...”*** and seek to be obedient, ***“...according to His purpose...”*** then He can use anything in our life for His glory. At the same time, those bad things we go through can strengthen us and mature our faith. Sometimes more effectively than a life of all good things would ever teach us.

We've often talked about the fact that nothing in our life will ever take God by surprise because, ***“...your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him...”*** (Matthew 6:8). That means whatever happens today is already known to God, and if we approach it in a prayerful and obedient mindset it can ***“...work together for good...”***. For example, maybe you're going through a trial, but you begin to realize the trial will strengthen you. Or maybe you're in a place you don't want to be, but you realize God put you there because someone needs the gospel. If we will try to look at our trials this way and be alert to how God is moving in our hearts then we will understand why we ***“...are the called according to His purpose.”*** We are called by the gospel to salvation, and

after salvation we are called to service and obedience. When those things are done ***“...according to His purpose...”*** then we will find the ***“...joy...”*** in trials James talked about in verse 2.

So how do we approach our trials ***“...according to His purpose...”***? Take for instance the time when Paul asked God to remove his ***“...thorn...”*** (2 Corinthians 12:1-10). God elected not to remove whatever it was, but He assured Paul He would walk through the trial with him. As a result, Paul embraced his challenge because he knew, ***“9...the power of Christ may rest upon me.”***, so that, ***“10...when I am weak, then I am strong.”*** (2 Corinthians 12:9b&10b). In that mindset Paul realized that what he initially thought of as a ***“...thorn...”*** turned out to be the gift of a fortified testimony. So James reminds us those gifts only come one way, ***“17....from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.”*** The gifts we receive come from our Lord. The creator of light (Genesis 1:3-5), who is the ***“...Light of the World...”*** (John 8:12), in whom there is no darkness, (John 1:4-5). James reminds us of these fundamental truths because it can be easy to question God's love during the great trials of life.

We also have to remember that gifts are free and God's grace is freely given. He doesn't ask us to pay for it. Instead, He sent Jesus to make the payment for us. In doing so He took our sin and exchanged it for the most precious of all gifts. Our salvation, ***“23. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** (Romans 6:23). All we have to do is accept God's free gift of grace in order to enjoy eternal life with Him. No payment or effort on our part is required. It only takes faith to receive an eternal gift from the Lord, ***“8. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9. not of works, lest anyone should boast.”*** (Ephesians 2:8-9). Given that understanding, you have to wonder, how could anyone hear that and turn it down?

On the other hand, temptation is never free. When we accept the bait of temptation from satan we pay dearly. God is dishonored, testimonies are damaged, lives can be destroyed, and we pay with disobedience, anxiety and pain. In fact, those who die in sin without accepting Jesus pay with their eternity. And yet, the deception of satan is so persuasive it can cause temptation to seem ok and convince most people they can somehow gain immortality on their own. To grasp that fundamental truth let's look one more time at the example of Adam and Eve. God promised them the gift of a perfect life if they would simply avoid the tempting fruit. At the same time He warned them right upfront there was a consequence of death if they disobeyed. But the lure of the fruit was so powerful to their eyes, their flesh and their pride that they were deceived and sinned against God. No matter how good the fruit tasted, the payment was shocking. It separated them from God, exiled them from the garden and caused the atoning death of an innocent

animal. In the same way, our sin, that results from satan's deception, causes us to be separated from God and resulted in the atoning death of the Lamb of God. It was through our Lord's atoning death, the most valuable of all payments, that we can be forgiven, **"18. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures."** And when that happens we become in essence a **"...firstfruits..."** of His death and resurrection. In the Old Testament Israel brought forth a *firstfruit* offering of their very best to show their devotion to God. Jesus became a *firstfruit* through His offering to the world (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). Likewise, our life can become a *firstfruit* as a sacrifice of obedience. That's what Paul meant when he said, **"1. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."** But living this way isn't easy and requires strong faith and endurance. Particularly in times of challenges in our lives. That's why we must be in God's word. That's where we will find **"... the word of truth..."** that will carry us through the toughest times.

Lesson #8

Quick Recap:

In the last segment of his letter James warns us, ***“16. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.”*** (James 1:16). We might wonder why a warning like this is even necessary until we realize that our enemy seeks to deceive the whole world (Revelation 12:9). A deception that is relentless and can even lead the most faithful into sin. Particularly during those times when we're weakened by the trials of life and temptation seems to rest on our doorstep (Genesis 4:7). But God, in His infinite mercy and grace, gave us the perfect and most priceless gift. A gift we cannot pay for, nor could we, even if that were possible. It's the gift of salvation, paid for by our Savior on the cross, and gifted to us through grace by our faith.

Now James will warn us about one of the most common temptations most of us deal with nearly every day.

The temptation to say what is better left unsaid.

James chapter 1 verses, 19-20

James starts this section ***“...So then...”***, referring back to his previous discussion about God's gifts and particularly ***“...the word of truth...”***. In that light we should be ***“...swift to hear...”*** the truths of God's word and depend on it for the wisdom and strength we need. Particularly in times of great trials when it is so easy to fall away and act in an ungodly way. A way that may damage our testimony for Jesus. This passage can be understood from the perspective of being eager to hear, read and understand God's word, but at the same time we should be cautious how we interpret or try to teach God's word. James will point to this later in his letter when he warns us, ***“1. My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”*** (James 3:1).

But for the purpose of our study let's take a little different track and talk about how it applies to our own testimony. Why? Because our testimony, which is simply how we live our life, may be the only view of God's word some people will ever see. How we act in front of them can either affirm the truth of God's word, cause them to question it, or even worse, to ignore it completely. But wouldn't it be great if people could watch how we live, and listen to what we say, and get a good idea of what is in the Bible?

So in that context let's evaluate the life application of being, ***"19...swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath..."***. There is one aspect of our lives that can take a lifetime to build, but only seconds to destroy. And that, of course, is our testimony. The life we live before a lost world that can influence the world by what we do and what we say. So James reminds us to watch what we say and how we say it. Otherwise, we're at risk of violating what is in ***"...the word of truth..."*** (James 1:18b) by acting in a way that's not pleasing to our Lord. Peter speaks to this in 1 Peter 3:10, ***"10. For "He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit."*** To put this passage in context, the Book of 1st Peter was written at a time very similar to our own. The Roman Empire was sinful and hedonistic and sought to eradicate both Jews and Christians through a process of systematic persecution that would last for hundreds of years. So Peter wrote a letter to those early believers who were living in a fallen society and suffering for their faith. He wanted to encourage them to remain optimistic in a pessimistic world and to remain faithful to the Lord and fearless in their obedience, even as the world around them seemed to be falling apart. As their society fell deeper and deeper into sin Peter wanted these believers to have a testimony of strength and joy that reflected their faith in the Lord. But Peter was also being obedient to Jesus, who years before told him to, ***"...Feed My sheep..."*** (John 21:17). Jesus knew the day would come when He would call Peter to encourage his persecuted followers to stand firm in their faith. Even through the trials of life.

James was now doing the same thing for his scattered and persecuted readers. Readers, including us, who need encouragement through difficult times in life. So how did Peter and James feed these persecuted believers? Did they teach them to fight? No. Did they tell them to protest? No. Did they tell them to run and hide? No. They recommended none of these options. Instead, they told them to live their lives as a testimony so their lives would show the world that Jesus is real by reflecting the reality of His word. That's why the letters from Peter and James are so encouraging to us. As we watch our own society fall deeper into moral decline and watch our leaders destroy our own empire, we too must remain faithful to the Lord and fearless in our walk with Jesus. That's one reason James reminds us to be, ***"19...swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath..."*** (James 1:19b). Our personal testimony is critically important because our life reflects, ***"...the word of truth..."*** (James 1:18b) to those who desperately need it. In a society inundated with wasted actions and meaningless words it is often our actions, and our words, through our testimony that will make the greatest difference in someone else's life, and our life can make God's word a reality. That's because the world is searching for answers and we can help them find the answers they seek through Jesus. But we do this most effectively by living our lives as a testimony according to, ***"...the word of truth..."***.

That's why our personal testimony is so critically important. Our fallen society is sick of wasted words. They want to see substance and our lives can show them that if our lives show them Jesus. That's why Paul reminds us in Romans 12:1, **1. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."** In other words, our life lived for Jesus is not like the dead sacrifice of a temple offering. We are a **"...living sacrifice..."** as we live our life for the Lord and show the world the power of Jesus in our life. But let's be honest. Does a lost world watching our lives see and hear a testimony that shows them Jesus is real? Do they see God's word lived out in our daily walk? Can the skeptics begin to see the relevance of God's word in their lives because they see it lived out in ours? These questions are important because we can't over-estimate how critical our testimony is in this fallen world because our testimony may be the single most important variable in someone accepting or rejecting Jesus as their Savior. That's why we must be, **"...swift to hear, slow to speak..."**. Our world is full of harsh people and harsh words. Angry people, angry politicians, angry organizations, angry ideas, angry agendas, and angry nations. All of them feeding off of each other's angry actions and angry words. So our testimony has to be different, and it must reflect the guidance of Proverbs 15:1, **"...A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger..."**. So in the harsh and angry environment of our sinful fallen society our testimony may be the only thing left on earth that can show the world a different outcome is possible. That's why it's sometimes important to be, **"...slow to speak..."** and **"...slow to wrath..."**, because being swift to speak and swift to wrath is what the world sees all around them every day. So we need to model something different. The example of of Jesus that was prophesied in Isaiah 53:7, **"...He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth."** Isaiah lived hundreds of years before our Lord's earthly ministry but he already knew how Jesus would react even as He was being crucified. He was **"...slow to speak..."**.

But don't think that was easy. Jesus could have called down legions of angels to protect Him, or He could have simply destroyed His tormentors. Instead, He was silent so that two thousand years later His silence speaks louder than words. Why? Because His silence reflects His willingness to put Himself aside and die for others in order to forgive the most hardened sinners and redeem their souls. Even those who put Him on the cross. Sinful people, just like me and you.

So, how can we have a testimony like that? A testimony that can show the love of Jesus to a world who hates Him but so desperately needs Him? Through a testimony that can illustrate the truth of God's word. David gives us some insights in Psalm 34:11-13. A Psalm David wrote at a very difficult time in his life, **"11. Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. 12. Who is the man who desires life, and**

loves many days, that he may see good? 13. Keep your tongue from evil.". Here we are directed to, **"13. Keep your tongue from evil."** In essence what David is saying is the same thing James is telling us. To be, **"...swift to hear..."** and **"...slow to speak..."**. There is a key word in verse 13 that is critical to our testimony. It's our **"tongue"**. Our words. The things we say that others hear. The things we say that can either build our testimony or destroy it. So David tells us to, **"...keep your tongue from evil..."**. The action implied by the word **"...keep..."** requires discipline to guard what we say and how we say it. It also reminds us of Psalm 141:3, **"3. Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips."** Which is basically the same thing Jesus tells us in Matthew 15:11, it's, **"11. Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."**

So that means our words can defile our testimony and drive a wedge between people and the gospel. It can also discount the validity of God's word if they see us living in an unBiblical way. But if you doubt our words are that important, then listen to the warning we will see later in James 3:3-6, **"3. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. 4. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. 5. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! 6. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell."**

So what does that really mean? Well...Let's think about the examples he uses:

- A small bit can turn a thousand pound horse,
- And a small rudder can turn a giant ship.

Likewise, our tongue - our words - can turn our testimony into a witness or a disaster, it can make Jesus real or questionable, and it can discount the value of God's word. That's why James calls our tongue, **"...a fire..."**, and **"...a world of iniquity..."**. Because he says it, **"...defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell."** We need to really pay attention to what he's saying. The words we say and how we say them can be like a destructive fire from hell. But how is that even possible? Maybe by repeating gossip, or what about debating a silly social media post, or by criticizing someone, or talking behind their back, or simply by making a comment that's better left unsaid. Or maybe, it's the words we choose and how we say them. Or maybe even the tone of our voice.

Our words, possibly more than any other single thing, can damage our testimony and drive our listener away from Jesus. Paul confirmed this in his letter to the Ephesians, **"29. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary**

edification, that it may impact grace to the hearers." (Ephesians 4:29). To **"...impact grace..."** means our words could negatively impact God's message. The gospel of redemption through His grace. So Paul focuses on our testimony by telling us how we should act towards others and how we should talk to others so they can see and hear God's grace in our life. But in doing so, he warns us about the **"...corrupt..."** words that **"...proceed out of your mouth..."** that can be so impactful. So what does Paul consider to be a **"...corrupt word..."**? He tells us a few verses later in Ephesians 5:3, **"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor course jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks."** That's interesting. Paul lists sins like fornication and coveting in the same list where he includes, **"...filthiness..."**, **"...foolish talking"** and **"...course jesting..."**. Have you ever thought about that? The words we say, even in jest, and meant as a joke can be **"...corrupt..."** and sinful and damage our testimony. So what do we do about that? Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:31-32, **"31. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."** And that's exactly what we need to do. The next time we're tempted to share gossip, or even listen to gossip, or join in a needless social media debate, or criticize someone, or share an opinion that's better left unsaid. Even raising our voice or snapping at someone. We need to recognize this is sin and work diligently and prayerfully to use words that represent the love of Jesus to a lost world. Not words that can be viewed as, **"...the wrath of man..."**. Why? Because they do, **"...not produce the righteousness of God."** (James 1:20b). As a follower of Jesus our life should illustrate the commands God has given us to live by. That way people can learn about the Lord and the life He gave for them, and see how God's word is relevant to their own lives.

So what do we do with all of this so we can be, **"...swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath..."**? We must remember that other than our salvation there is no greater gift than our personal testimony. Because it is our life lived for Jesus in front of this fallen world that helps the world see our King as Someone they need. But this requires us to search our hearts and ask ourselves some hard questions:

- What are we doing with our testimony?
- Are we guarding it, nurturing it, strengthening it, controlling it, and sharing it?
- Or is there sin in our lives that is marring it and maybe even destroying it?
- Does our testimony represent Jesus in a favorable way?
- Does our life represent the precepts of God's word?

The answer to these questions can either affirm or destroy our ability to be an effective witness for Jesus. This is why we are reminded, **"19. So then, my beloved brethren, let**

every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20. for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

Lesson #9

Quick Recap:

In an effort to encourage his readers during difficult times in life James instructs us, ***“19. So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20. for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”*** Our attitude, our words and even how we say them are critically important because our life may be the only view of Jesus some people will ever see. God's words and wisdom, and not our own, must be the driving force in our lives so that our testimony represents Jesus well.

Now James will talk about another important reason to be in God's word.

The risk of deceiving ourselves.

James chapter 1 verses, 21-27

Earlier in his letter James warned us, ***“16. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.”*** (James 1:16). This led us to a lengthy discussion about temptation, its source and how to fight it. But now James takes us a step further and warns us not to deceive ourselves. Self-deception is beyond that of satan's deception. It's the mistakes we make by ***“...deceiving yourselves...”*** (James 1:22) when a person ***“...deceives his own heart...”*** (James 1:26). In other words, satan can deceive us, but we can also deceive ourselves, and in some ways that's even more dangerous.

One of the most tragic examples of self-deception are the well-meaning people who believe they're saved but in reality they're not (see Matthew 7:21-23). They base their salvation on religion, or works, or prosperity, or feelings, but not on the work of Jesus on the cross (Ephesians 2:8-9). As we studied in John's Epistle these people are a picture of the ***“...spirit of the antichrist...”***, (1 John 4:3). This is not referring to the eventual antichrist who will appear during the Tribulation (Revelation chapter 13), but is talking about the ***“...spirit...”*** that exists in the hearts of mankind that is counter to God. It is the ideas, agendas and progressive political platforms of those who are frankly following the influence of satan. A fact few of them even understand or would admit, but it is true. So John clarifies, ***“22. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.”*** (1 John 2:22). This verse captures several foundational truths: Jesus is the Messiah, He is with the Father as part of the *Trinity*, and He is the Son of God. But John says someone is a ***“...liar...”*** who ***“...denies that Jesus is the Christ...”***. But why? Because it is through faith in the life, death and

resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God, who came as the Messiah, ***“...the Christ...”***, that brings us salvation. Belief in any other way to salvation is simply deceiving yourselves because, ***“12. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*** (Acts 4:12).

John also tells us, ***“4. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”*** (1 John 2:4). We can convince ourselves that we ***“...know Him...”*** but do we really? If we're not in His word what do we really know? Are we sure we understand the gospel, or are we possibly deceiving ourselves by basing our belief on what someone told us instead of searching God's word ourselves? Are we sure we're living within God's commands if we don't know first-hand what His commands are? Again, not being in God's word could lead you to be someone who, ***“...deceives his own heart...”***. (James 1:26) by thinking you understand when you really don't.

So James implores us to avoid self-deception by ***“...the implanted word...”*** (James 1:21). In the original Greek the word translated ***“...implanted...”***, *“emphyton”*, is where we get the English word *embryo*. It describes a seed planted in fertile ground or a branch grafted into a tree. Once planted or grafted it gets nourishment from the host and grows strong. Jesus used a similar example in the *Parable of the Sower* planting seeds, ***“8. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”*** (See Matthew 13:1–23; Mark 4:1–20 and Luke 8:4–15). The seed is the word; the soil is our heart, and once the word is in our hearts we grow and become spiritually mature. In the same way God's word is ***“...implanted...”*** in us when we study and absorb what it says. Like a planted seed or grafted limb we become one with the word because it becomes the driving force in our lives. And when that happens we can find the strength and wisdom to, ***“...lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness...”*** (James 1:21).

But then in verse 22 James challenges us with a task many Christians struggle with, ***“22. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”*** The Book of Revelation starts with an amazing promise from Jesus, ***“3. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.”*** Although in its immediate context this verse speaks to the End Times prophecy recorded in Revelation, it is much more than that. It applies to the blessing we receive from all Scripture. But pay close attention to what it says. We are ***“...blessed...”*** when we ***“...read...”*** and ***“...hear...”*** God's word, but we must also ***“...keep...”*** it. In the original Greek the sentence structure is, ***“...keeping the things in it...”***, using the word *“terountes”* for ***“...keeping...”*** that can be translated to mean, ***“...to guard from loss or injury, by keeping an eye upon, to fulfil a command, to detain in custody and to withhold for personal ends”***. All of these describe actions taken as a result of

reading and hearing. These are the types of actions James is talking about when he says to be “**...doers of the word...**”.

Being “**...doers of the word...**” requires us to be in the word and not being “**...hearers only...**”. God's word needs to be “**...implanted...**” if it's going to have a transformative impact on our lives. Unfortunately many believer's knowledge of God's word is limited to what they hear from the pulpit or classroom. Certainly we can learn a lot from those platforms but unless you're in the word yourselves you're never going to fully grasp its full impact on your life. It's simply impossible to be true, “**...doers of the word...**” and transformed by the word if you're not sure how the word speaks to you as an individual. Being a doer is not a listener. It's not even a reader. Doing is an action. Doing is taking what is in the word and applying it to your life every day. And that simply can't be done very effectively if we are “**...hearers only...**”. A great example of this principle are faithful missionaries who spend years translating the Bible into an undocumented tribal language. Sometimes they have to first develop a written language where none existed before, and then they teach the people to read their own language. Then they can translate the Bible into a written language they can now read. All of that can take decades of hard work to finally hand a village a Bible in their own language. But why is that so important? Can't they learn enough from what the missionary tells them? Certainly they can understand the gospel well enough to accept Jesus, but until they are able to read and study the word they will never understand how it can transform their lives to greater faith. They will never reach a state of *sanctification*, or spiritual growth if they only rely on what they hear. And they will not be an effective witness for Christ if they cannot use His word to confirm what they are saying. All of that means, unless they are in God's word they cannot “**...keep...**” it. And yet, as logical as that sounds, we as English speakers have had a translation in our language for over five-hundred years, but statistics tell us over sixty percent of Christians never read the Bible on a regular basis. So they're not “**...keepers...**” or “**...doers...**” and the deep blessings promised by Jesus will elude them. That's tragic.

So James gives us a simple illustration to help us understand, “**23. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror.**” (James 1:23). Here he contrasts a “**...hearer...**” and a “**...doer...**” by picturing a man looking in a “**...mirror...**”. But why a “**...mirror...**”? Very simply. A “**...mirror...**” is used for self-examination. It never lies, it never hides, but it shows a clear image of what we really look like. Not what we wish we looked like. It also shows all of our blemishes, scars and the weathering of life. In other words, it doesn't deceive us but gives a true picture of who we really are. But the image it bears is only there while we're looking. Once we walk away the image is gone and we can easily forget the flaws it revealed. But not so with God's word. Like a “**...mirror...**” God's word reveals who we really are, but in a much deeper sense. It looks beyond the surface and penetrates deep into our heart and the recesses of our mind. In its pages we will find all of our blemishes, scars and the

weathering of life, but we will also find guidance and direction for correcting them, or the strength we need to endure them.

But let's think about another aspect of looking in a *"...mirror..."*. Looking at our reflection we see imperfections. When we do we often investigate them even more. Getting closer, maybe using magnification or even adjusting the light. We do everything we can to see the clearest possible image. Yet, at the same time we'll open the Bible for a few minutes and read through a few verses, but we don't dig deep enough to uncover its true meaning. When we do that we might feel good about what we did, but we didn't see what we needed to see, because we didn't spend the time required to reveal our fears, point out our sin and guide our path. We walk away feeling good about the fact we read the word but we are only *"...deceiving ourselves..."* because we didn't allow it to be, *"...implanted..."* in our hearts. Which means we have little chance of being, *"...doers of the word..."*. And if we're not a *"...doer..."* we're just fooling ourselves. Why? Because God's word will take you to places you cannot go any other way. It will reveal truths about yourself you might not recognize or admit, and it will provide the guidance you need by giving you a clear image of where you need to go and what you need to do. That's what the writer of Hebrews meant when he said, ***"12. For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."*** (Hebrews 4:12-13). Unlike a *"...mirror..."* God's word looks beyond the surface. It digs deep into our soul, it understands, *"...the thoughts and intents of the heart..."* and nothing, no matter how deep or secret is hidden from its view. That means the word of God knows more about us than we would ever know on our own, and it will tell us things we would never know without it. It's a *"...mirror..."* into our soul.

But once we see what the word reveals, what do we do with it? We should become *"...keepers..."* and *"...doers..."*. We should allow God's word to be our guide and light our way (Psalm 119:105) and we should be alert to the blemishes and scars it reveals. Then, and only then, can we move forward in spiritual growth. That's what James means when he says, ***"25. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty [God's word] and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does."*** It is a blessing beyond measure when God's word reveals a necessary change in our life, an action we need to take or a service we need to accomplish. If we are alert and obedient it is transformational as we begin to pattern our life after the guidance it provides. And if we apply it correctly it will provide the wisdom we need to work through this life obedient to our Lord, ***"11. Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You."*** (Psalm 119:11). But we must remain diligent

and not give up. That's what James means by, “**...continues in it...**”. Being in God's word, “**...keeping...**” it, and being “**...a doer...**” of it isn't a sprint. It's a marathon.

But James warns us, “**26. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.**”. Here James uses the Greek word “*thréskos*” for “**...religious...**”. This word is only used a few times in the New Testament to describe someone devoted to outward religious practices, observances, rituals, ceremonies, and public acts of worship. This could describe pagan worship, or even traditional Judaism that focused on meticulously following rituals, temple duties and adherence to the law of Moses. But the word can be used two ways. One spelling is related to outward worship activities, and the other indicates a person whose life reflects the intent of those activities. James uses both tenses here.

James contrasts both views by comparing being “**...religious...**” with our “**...tongue...**”, which as we've previously discussed represents our testimony. If a person outwardly practices religious activities but doesn't reflect those activities in their life then they, “**...deceives his own heart...**”. These are what some people refer to as a *Sunday Morning Christian*. Those who attend church, participate in worship and maybe even serve in some capacity, but their life outside of church is a completely different story. They act “**...religious...**” on the outside but are sinful on the inside, and their life reflects that conflict. James uses our “**...tongue...**” to illustrate this. You'll recall from our earlier discussion (Lesson #8) our “**...tongue...**” can be what “**...defiles a man...**” (Matthew 15:11) because, “**6. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.**” (James 3:6). So James stresses the fact that if a person fails to control or, “**...bridle his tongue...**”, he lacks the self control and discipline expected in our Christian character. And when that happens we are not “**...keeping...**” the word, nor are we being a “**...doer...**” (Revelation 1:3 / James 1:22). That's one of the reasons the lost world often views the church as a gathering of hypocrites. In many cases they're right when they see us participating in religious activities but living like the world. That's why James says, “**...this one's religion is useless...**” and he gives us a few examples of living our life as a reflection of our faith, “**27. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.**”. Caring for orphans and widows is a service that can show the love of Jesus (Jeremiah 49:11 / Psalm 68:5). But more difficult to accomplish is the command to, “**...keep oneself unspotted from the world.**”. Here for “**...world...**” James uses the Greek term *kosmou* where we get the English words *cosmos* and *cosmetic*. But in this context James is talking about the lost world. The vast sea of people who are not followers of Jesus. This is the same term Paul used to describe the “**...world...**” in Ephesians 2:2, “**2. in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who**

now works in the sons of disobedience.” This is our greatest challenge. To be in the world but not to partake of the world, ***“15. Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.”*** (1 John 2:15). To be spotted by the world is to be tainted by its temptations (see Lesson #6), but to be ***“...unspotted...”*** is to have a testimony of faithfulness to God in every station in life.

It is a culmination of all that James has talked about so far. The endurance, patience, truth and wisdom we need to be keepers and doers of God's word.

That is our task. – Let's make it happen.

Chapter 2

Lesson #10

Quick Recap:

James, the half-brother of our Lord, wrote a letter of encouragement and instruction to the beleaguered Jews. Persecuted and scattered from their ancestral homeland the Jews he wrote to were converts to Christianity who needed guidance and direction for living a faithful life under challenging circumstances. But in that context this is also a letter for all believers across all time.

James began his letter by encouraging us to ***“...count it all joy when you fall into various trials...”*** (James 1:3b). To do this requires patience and endurance during the testing of life. Otherwise, doubt will creep in and we become like a wave at sea, ***“...tossed by the wind...”*** (James 1:6b). James then warns us of the dangers of temptation, which is deception from our enemy, but it can also be self-deception from ourselves. So we need to seek spiritual wisdom and ensure the word of God is ***“...implanted...”*** in our hearts (James 1:21). Then the combination of patience, endurance, wisdom and God's word will make us, ***“...doers of the word, and not hearers only...”***. In that way God's word and its guidance will help us live a life that is an effective witness of the gospel.

Now in the second part of his letter James will continue to focus on our spiritual maturity and how to live it out before a lost and darkening world.

James chapter 2 verses 1-7

Earlier in his letter James spoke to the lowly and the rich, and how we are all equal at the foot of the cross (James 1:9-11). Now he will dig a little deeper to uncover a sin we might not always recognize - favoritism.

Our society, particularly in America, is fixated on celebrities. Movie and television stars, entertainers, athletes, musicians, politicians, financiers and now even social media influencers often reach a level of celebrity far beyond their actual contribution. But ironically, we often realize how out of touch many of these celebrities really are. They live in an artificial bubble of money and fame but in reality they are often disconnected from the real-world people who idolize them. In a recent interview with a well known Hollywood celebrity he said he tried to live one day as a middle-class American and it was a horrible experience. And yet, millions of middle-class Americans will still idolize him.

Our fascination with glitz and glitter even translates into how normal people act, think and talk. Sometimes influencing our actions in ways we don't recognize as harmful. In their effort to be a celebrity in their own minds, otherwise normal people buy houses they can't afford, luxury cars they don't need and wear expensive clothes intended to make them look better than everyone else. We buy items with a specific brand or name embossed on them even if the quality of that item is no better than one at half the price. But unfortunately, buying the cheaper item, without the name, won't impress our friends nearly enough. This fixation on material wealth often results in a prison of debt many people are chained to. A fact confirmed by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York who estimates the current U.S. credit card debt at 1.23 Trillion (Big T) dollars. The world's focus on celebrity and wealth has even found its way into theology (albeit bad theology), with the fairly recent growth of the *Prosperity Gospel* movement. A "theology" that focuses on wealth and position as an indication of salvation. How eternally tragic that deception is.

So James addresses this situation by comparing how we often treat, ***"...a man with gold rings, in fine apparel..."*** versus ***"...a poor man in filthy clothes..."***. As believers in Christ we shouldn't treat them any differently. They are either lost or saved. If they are lost we should give them the gospel, and if they are saved, we're already equal at the foot of the cross (see James 1:9-11). But human nature being what it is, we have the tendency to show favoritism, or ***"...partially..."*** to those who are in a higher station in life. To illustrate this James uses the example of giving the rich person a seat of honor and making the poor person sit on the floor. That illustration would have struck a chord with his Jewish readers because they were accustomed to the arrogant Pharisees who saw themselves as celebrities and expected to be given *"The best seat in the house"*, ***"38. Then He said to them in His teaching, 'Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, 39. the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts.'"*** (Mark 12:38-39). We might read this verse and see the Pharisees as arrogant, but are we any different? Let's be honest. If a well-known celebrity was to show up at church on Sunday there would probably be people who would try to find him or her the best seat and maybe even request their autograph. But what we should be interested in is whether or not they know Jesus as their Savior. Not who they are or what they're worth. This reminds me of a comment I once heard a preacher say during a discussion about what clothes people wore to church. One group preferred a suit and tie, while the other group wanted to be more casual. During the conversation the pastor made a comment that has always stuck with me, *"If a person comes in wearing a burlap bag, find them a good seat. And if they come in buck naked, first give them a burlap bag and then find them a good seat."* The point was, stop worrying about what's on the outside and get focused on what's on the inside.

We don't know what was taking place in the early church that James was concerned about, but he recognized they had, ***"...shown partiality among yourselves, and***

become judges with evil thoughts...”. Certainly something was being done that resulted in them treating the rich differently than they did the poor. That was a common practice in the Roman Empire, but it's something we still see in our own society. People tend to judge each other more by what they are, rather than who they are. We consciously or subconsciously notice how they look, the clothes they wear, where they live, what they drive, or even their job title. We're often more interested in finding out what they do for a living than we are in what they're going to do for eternity. That's when we become, ***“...judges with evil thoughts...”***, and judge people and place them in buckets based on their looks or their perceived importance. Even in a church people will often categorize a person by the condition of their clothes rather than by the condition of their heart. That's a sad commentary but it's the tendency of many people. It's also something we need to be aware of because it's so easy to form cliques or factions among our select insiders which can make others feel like outsiders. And when we do that it's ***“...partiality...”***.

But why was this so important to James? Well...let's consider the best example of man's ***“...partiality...”***. Jesus, who is God, could have come to earth as royalty, born into a wealthy family, living in a grandest palace and wearing the finest clothes. Instead, He came as a regular guy; and a poor guy at that. Born in a manger to a poor mother, he lived in the meager town of Nazareth, had no home of His own, and died the death of a common criminal. A death He died for us because He had committed no sin of His own. During His earthly ministry Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick, raised the dead, encouraged the downtrodden, and in His death and resurrection He offered forgiveness and redemption for everyone who will accept Him and His atoning work on the cross. But in spite of all this His chosen people crucified Him, and to this day the bulk of mankind resists His offer of grace. Why? Because mankind has a celebrity fixation. They just can't accept the fact that a poor Carpenter from a poor town is God. As Nathaniel said to Phillip when he first heard of Jesus, ***“46... “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”*** (John 1:46b). Clearly, to many people, first impressions mean everything. That's why Jesus warns us, ***“24. Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”*** (John 7:24). Jesus is the ultimate example of ***“Don't judge a book by its cover.”*** Rather than coming in the trappings of a King or great Warrior, He came in the guise of a poor man, from a poor family in a poor village. But why? For one, we can more easily relate to Jesus as a commoner than we could if He lived as royalty. He's much more approachable that way. But also, if Jesus had come dressed as a King everyone would have accepted Him as a King. Why? Because He would look like what people thought a king should look like. But, for them to look at a homeless Carpenter and see Him as God took real faith. The kind of faith most people don't have because they are looking for some preconceived notion of what a person should look like.

For example, consider king Saul in the Old Testament. Through the prophet Samuel God told Israel they didn't need a king. They had Him to rule over them and didn't need anyone

else. But the people resisted and said, ***“5...Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.”*** (1 Samuel 8:5b). Think about that. The people of Israel, chosen and led by God Himself, wanted an earthly king like their pagan neighbors. So God gave them exactly what they asked for, ***“7. And the Lord said to Samuel, “Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.”*** (1 Samuel 8:7). In other words, if Israel insisted on being disobedient God would let them, knowing they would eventually suffer the consequences of their poor judgment. So they selected a man named Saul but not for the right reasons. Saul wasn't an exceptional leader, accomplished diplomat or mighty warrior. He was selected because, ***“...There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.”*** (1 Samuel 9:2b). He was selected because of his looks. Not his talents, or abilities, but because he *“Looked the part.”* This was the sin of ***“...partiality...”***. The people knew it was against God's will to have a human king but they were blinded by Saul's outward appearance. But their plan backfired and Saul became a terrible king. He even tried to kill God's anointed choice, David. But Israel's acceptance of tall Saul is no different than their rejection of the Carpenter Jesus. They had an image in their minds of what the Messiah should look like and that's not how Jesus looked. So despite the fact He fulfilled prophecy, healed the sick, and raised the dead, they rejected Him because He didn't look like how they thought their king should look. Recognizing Jesus took faith to see beyond their blindness, but it was faith they didn't have. As a result they became, ***“...judges with evil thoughts...”***, and crucified their true King.

But judging ***“...with evil thoughts...”*** can also occur when we label someone based on their past, rather than focusing on what the Lord can do with them in the future. Case in point, when Jesus selected the Pharisee and Christian persecutor Paul to be His apostle to the Gentiles He asked a man named Amanias to meet with Paul. Yet, rather than immediately fulfilling the Lord's command Ananias hesitated and said, ***“13...“Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem.”*** (Acts 9:13b). In his own mind Ananias had already considered Paul unworthy because of rumors he had heard from other people. But don't we sometimes do the same thing?

So James continues in this vein by warning his readers, ***“5. Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?”*** (James 2:5). Earlier in his letter James reminds us, ***“9. Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, 10. but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away.”*** Whether we are rich or poor, of low class or high status, white collar or blue, we are all on level ground at the foot of the cross. The rich who are lost cannot buy their way into heaven, nor can they bribe their way out of hell. But the poor, who believe, need no money for an

eternity with the Lord because we are made rich by Jesus who has already paid our fee to make us, ***“...heirs of the kingdom...”***. Without Jesus the wealthiest man on earth is eternally bankrupt, but the poorest man redeemed by faith in Christ will have a home in heaven. A home made for us by Jesus (John 14:2-3). Whether rich or poor, celebrity or commoner, we are either lost or saved, because, ***“28. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*** (Galatians 3:28). Our station has no bearing on our eternity because our destination is dictated by our faith in Jesus, and as believers we should all be humbled by that fact. As Jesus tells us, ***“11. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*** (Luke 14:11).

Then James addresses a specific issue, ***“6. But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? 7. Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?”*** The rich often take advantage of the poor. That's not always the case because there are many wealthy Christians who live a life of humility and service. But more often than not, those with wealth, power or influence tend to get the upper hand. We even label crime as a *“white collar crime”* as if committing a crime wearing a suit is somehow different than a crime wearing blue jeans. Paul addressed this issue in 1 Corinthians 6:1-7, ***“1. Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?”*** (1 Corinthians 6:1). Disputes between believers should be handled amongst ourselves in a Biblical way, and not in the civil courts. Jesus directs us to this process in Matthew 18:15-17 which addresses how to handle disputes between believers. Otherwise we risk, ***“7. Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?”*** When we drag a fellow believer before the world and prosecute them.

Lesson #11

Quick Recap:

In the first part of chapter 2 James warns us against the sin of “...**partiality**...” (James 2:1). That's because our human nature tends to categorize people based on how they look, what they wear or where they live. When we do that we forget the fact we are all equal at the foot of the cross (see James 1:9-10 / Galatians 3:28 / 1 Corinthians 6:1 / Luke 14:11). So James gives us guidance to look on the inside, not the outside, and by doing so we honor the name of Jesus.

Now James will take us back to the core topic of love and the role of God's word revealed in our lives.

James chapter 2 verses 8-9

In 1 John 3:1 the apostle talks about the amazing love of God, “**1. Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!**”. God's love is a topic discussed throughout the Bible. We see it from the moment God sacrificed an innocent animal to atone the sin of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21) until the very last verse in the Bible when God reminds us, “**21. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.**” (Revelation 22:21). That verse really says it all because, “...**God is love**...” (1 John 4:16) which is why His “...**grace**...” is the clearest picture of the unconditional love He has for everyone who will accept Jesus. A love seen no more clearly than through the iconic verse of salvation, “**16. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**” (John 3:16). Here the Lord expresses the profound love He has for us. A love many Christians may never think about. Certainly we understand the meaning of the cross and redemption available through faith in Jesus, but how often do we really think about what Jesus actually did for us? He left His glorious kingdom in heaven to live like us, hurt like us, feel hunger like us. All so He could die for us in order to forgive sins He didn't even commit. But why? Because He loved us even though we had sinned against Him, “...**8. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**” (Romans 5:8). But why is it so important for us to understand that? Because the love God has for sinners is the foundation of the gospel, “...**12. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.**” (John 15:12-13). In a nutshell, the love of God is the gospel. A love so powerful that God Himself came to earth as a man, to live like a man, and die like a man, in order to take our sin on Himself and raise us victorious with Him. As Paul explains

in Galatians 2:20, ***“20. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*** That transformation could not happen without the miraculous love God has for us. A love we do not deserve and cannot earn.

So James tells us to express that type of sacrificial love to everyone, ***“8. If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well;”***. But that isn't always easy, is it? It can be really difficult at times to ***“...love your neighbor...”*** when that might include people we do not align with or share the same values. But that's the kind of love the Lord had for us when He died for us, ***“...5. while we were still sinners...”*** (Romans 5:8b). Jesus didn't just die for good people or religious people, and He didn't pre-elect who would accept or deny His sacrifice. He went to the cross for everyone and then gave everyone the ability to accept Him or reject Him. No matter who we are or what we've done. With Jesus there is no ***“...partiality...”***. That's the beauty of God's love expressed through the gospel. It doesn't matter what we've achieved or what we're worth, Jesus is willing to forgive us by dying in our place. But this type of love is not a New Testament commandment. It is constant throughout the word. It is the same love expressed in the law through Moses, ***“17. ‘You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. 18. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.’”*** (Leviticus 19:17-18).

This is the kind of love and forgiveness we see described by James as the ***“...royal law...”***. In the original Greek the word translated as ***“...royal...”***, *balisikos*, means *sovereign law or the king's law*. As Jesus declared, ***“34. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”*** (John 13:34). This ***“...new commandment...”*** is not actually ***“...new...”*** but given the rejecting attitude of the people Jesus had to remind them of what they should have already known. That this ***“...commandment...”***, in fact, all of His commandments are based on love. That's what the apostle John meant when he said, ***“7. Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. 8. Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.”*** (1 John 2:7-9). John reminds us this is not a ***“...new commandment...”***, but an ***“...old commandment...”*** which he explains further in 2 John 1:5-6, ***“5. And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. 6. This is love,***

that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.”

The “***...new commandment...***”, is the same as the “***...old commandment...***”. To “***...love one another...***”. Just as Jesus instructed us to do, “***35. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.***” (John 13:35). That’s the “***...new commandment...***” John is talking about, that has been made fresh and anew through the sacrifice of Jesus for our sin. The “***...old commandment...***” of love now illustrated by Jesus on the cross as “***...new...***” because His death brings new life as we are born again, and are given the promise of an eternal life with Him (John 3:3). It is love that brought Jesus to earth, and love that put Him on the cross. This is the expression of God’s love we should show to others. Even if they don’t deserve it or appreciate it.

Case in point, the wicked Pharisees were always trying to trick Jesus so they could discredit His ministry. So when they asked Him to prioritize God’s commandments Jesus responded, “***37. Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38. This is the first and great commandment. 39. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”*** (Matthew 22:37-39). In other words, Jesus took the commandments, the “Law”, and summarized them into two actions, “***...love the Lord your God...***” and “***...love your neighbor...***”. In both cases the underlying commandment to us is to “***...love...***”.

On the surface that might seem nearly impossible in today’s society until we think about the example Jesus gives us:

- Jesus lived in the Roman Empire. A sinful pagan culture who made it a sport to kill Jews and Christians.
- Jesus ministered in Israel. A country He chose to be His own and yet they rejected Him.
- Jesus was surrounded by religious leaders who should have worshiped Him. Instead demanded He be crucified.

So Jesus and His followers knew what it meant to live in a sinful society, with sinful leaders and a sinful government. In many ways even more challenging than our society today. And yet, Jesus still died on the cross for all of them and would have given even the most evil of them an eternity in heaven if they would simply believe. That’s an application of “***...love your neighbor...***” that’s hard to wrap our head around. But James warns us what happens when we don’t do that, “***9. but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.***”. Categorizing people as we often do, even subconsciously, is sin. The sin of “***...partiality...***”. Why? Because we consciously

or subconsciously exclude certain people from God's commandment to ***“...love your neighbor...”***. And when we do that we're being disobedient to God.

So let's be honest. We all do that at times. Just watch the news and see how people act. Their hatred and anger, their desire to protest instead of discuss, and their insistence on legalizing actions diametrically opposed to God's will is rampant. When we watch them it's hard to love them. But we must. We must love them as people made in God's image who just like us are sinners in need of redemption. You don't have to like what they do or what they stand for, but we must love them by helping them understand the truth of the gospel. Whether or not they accept it is up to them, but we must share it with them and glorify our Lord when we. ***“...love your neighbor as yourself...”***. Otherwise we are committing the sin of ***“...partiality...”***.

Lesson #12

Quick Recap:

In the last section of his letter James reminded us, ***“8. If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well.”*** (James 2:8). The ***“...royal law...”*** is the sovereign word of our Lord and King, which from cover to cover reflects the fact that ***“...God is love...”*** (1 John 4:16). God's love is so profound that Jesus died for us even though we had sinned against Him. But loving ***“...your neighbor...”*** as God loves us can be down-right difficult. Particularly in a chaos ridden society where hatred and protest is often preferred to love and discussion. To love like this we need to look beyond our personal viewpoint and seek to love others by sharing with them the truth of the gospel of Jesus. That applies to everyone. No matter who they are. Otherwise, ***“9...if you show partiality, you commit sin...”*** (James 2:9).

Now, in the context of fulfilling ***“...the royal law...”*** by loving our neighbor, James will help us understand a key tenet of obedience.

That is; break one law and you break them all.

James chapter 2 verses 10-13

So what is the Biblical ***“...law...”***? Very simply, the ***“...law...”*** is God's commandments and desires for how His children should live. It describes what we should do and what we should not do. It's the difference between obedience and disobedience. Without the ***“...law...”*** we would not have a consistent basis for morality. So God gave us the ***“...law...”*** to act as our internal moral compass. It guides us on the road of life much like a GPS guides us in our travels. It gives us the best route to take and will warn us of the hazards or detours ahead. Even people who do not understand the ***“...law...”*** from a Biblical perspective will generally understand the difference between, right or wrong, good or bad, and moral or immoral. But as important as it is to us, the ***“...law...”*** has no power to save. Instead, it helps us recognize our sin in order to help us understand our need for redemption. And therefore, to recognize our need for a Redeemer. Paul explained this in Romans 3:20, ***“...Therefore by the deeds of the law [our works] no flesh will be justified [saved] in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”*** Our works do not bring salvation, but through the ***“...law...”*** we are given ***“...the knowledge of sin...”*** and through that ***“...knowledge...”*** we understand our need for forgiveness, ***“7. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.”*** (Romans 7:7). But the ***“...law...”*** also

reflects the unity of God's commands. They work together to help us live our life as the Lord intended. That's why James tells us, **"10. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. 11. For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law."** (James 2:10-11). In other words, *break one law and you break them all*. We don't get to pick which of God's laws we like or don't like. Our goal is to live our life in such a way we attempt to keep all of God's commandments. But the Lord knew that would be impossible. At least in our current earthly state. That's why James is telling us, if we could keep all of the **"...law..."**, but break just one, then in-effect we break them all. Why? Because in our sinful rebellion we break the intended unity of the commandments God has given us to live by.

But, even though we can't keep the whole **"...law..."**, they are there to help us understand where we fall short. We need to remember, as believers in the work of Jesus on the cross we are not saved by adherence to the **"...law..."**. We are saved by **"...grace..."** that was given to us by faith in Jesus, **"14. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."** (Romans 6:14). Even so, the intent of the **"...law..."** still applies because it helps us understand God's desires for an obedient life. That's because the **"...law..."** helps us understand how our actions constitute obedience or sin. To illustrate this point Paul used the sin of **"...covetousness..."** as an example in Romans 7:7. But why **"...covetousness..."**? Because it is a sin we all commit. Even if subconsciously.

So to dig a little deeper let's investigate the intent of the **"...law..."** in our lives by looking at the story of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22. Doing so will help us better understand James' comment, **"10. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all."** (James 2:10). This is a story we've probably all heard before but may not fully understand, A story that shows our inability to achieve the tenets of the **"...law..."** told through the eyes of a very self-righteous young man who thought he could. In Luke's version of the story the young man is called a **"...ruler..."** (Luke 18:18), which may indicate he had a position in the Jewish civil government, or maybe in the synagogue. But either way, he probably understood scripture and knew about the coming Messiah. Yet, it took a conversation with Jesus to help him understand that his lifetime of trying to adhere to the **"...law..."** was insufficient to gain eternal life. Why? Because as James tells us in verse 10, *If we break one, we break them all*.

So let's listen carefully to their the conversation:

A young man approached Jesus and asked, **"Good Teacher what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"** In other words, **"What can I do to earn salvation?"**. Jesus, always a patient teacher, simply replied, **"...if you want to enter into life, keep the**

commandments..." [the "...law..."]. But the young man asked for clarification, "...**Which ones?**". So Jesus gave him some clarity by repeating what the young man already knew, "**'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'**". For most people this list would have stopped them in their tracks. Particularly the command to, "...**love your neighbor as yourself...**". But not this brash young man. Instead, he confidently boasted, "**All these things I have kept from my youth...**". And yet, there must have been a tinge of doubt in his mind so just to make sure he was doing enough good things he asked, "...**What do I still lack?**". As if keeping the "...law..." might not be enough he wanted to know if he needed to do even more. So Jesus said, "...**If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven...**". And then, if selling his earthly belongings was still insufficient, Jesus hit him with a zinger and said, "...**come, follow Me.**". Jesus had given the young man something he had probably not expected. The invitation to be a disciple of the Messiah. But sadly, "...**when the young man heard that saying** ["follow me"], **he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions.**".

We often interpret this passage of scripture to show how our earthly treasures distract us from our walk with Jesus. There's nothing at all wrong with that interpretation, but if we look a little deeper we can bring out another important point. The point both James and Paul are trying to make. And that is, we can't achieve salvation through our own efforts. Even adherence to the "...law..." is insufficient because, if we, "**10... stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.**" (James 2:10b). No matter who we are, how hard we try, or how religious we might be, we cannot achieve the standard set by God. Why? Because, "**23. for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**" (Romans 3:23). We all break the "...law..." of God in one way or another because we can never achieve the "...**glory of God...**" measured by Jesus on the cross.

So, in that context, let's go back and listen to the conversation again to see what else we can learn.

As he approached Jesus the young man asked a logical question, "...**what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?**". That's a really good question, but pay attention to how he asked it. He wanted to know, "...**what good thing shall I do...**" to achieve salvation. Did you catch the subtle nuance? He assumed that doing a "...**good thing...**", for example, keeping the "...law...", would be good enough to earn "...**eternal life...**". He didn't ask about giving a sacrifice in the temple, or seeking forgiveness for his sin. He also didn't admit he is a sinner or the fact he needed redemption. Instead, he simply asked, "...**what good thing shall I do...**" with an emphasis on "...**I...**" and "...**do...**". This indicates he believed he could earn righteousness on his own by doing something. In his case, by adherence to the "...law...". But Jesus already knew what the man would say,

so he replied, **"...keep the commandments..."**. In other words, all you have to do is perfectly achieve all of God's rules set forth in the **"...law..."**. By this point in the conversation you would think the young man would have figured this out and realized he could not keep God's **"...law..."**. But he didn't and asked for further clarity, **"...Which ones?..."**. As if only a few might be good enough. So Jesus listed a few of the easier commandments most people comply with, and a few that are a little harder to keep. To which the young man confidently replied, **"...All these things I have kept from my youth..."**. He felt he had been doing good his entire life which he assumed meant he was probably good enough to achieve eternal life. So Jesus cut to the chase and simply said, **"...come, follow Me."** A simple request. An invitation from God to gain eternal life by giving his life to Jesus. A request most people today still find too difficult or unappealing to do.

The young man was shocked. He simply couldn't do what Jesus asked. Following Jesus would mean giving up something very important to him. So he completely missed the point of Jesus' request, and elected to prioritize his earthly possessions over the promise of, **"...treasure in heaven..."**. He walked away from the Lord's offer of free grace and in doing so, he broke the **"...law..."** he thought he was keeping. That's why the young man went away sorrowful. Not because Jesus asked him to give his treasures away, but because he realized that by coveting his possessions he was not keeping the whole **"...law..."**. That's the point Paul explained in Romans 7:7, **"...I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'" (Romans 7:7b)**. And it's the point James was making when he said, if we **"10... stumble in one point, he is guilty of all." (James 2:10b)**. By setting his wealth above all other things the young man committed the sin of coveting. Which meant he was unable to achieve all of the commandments. Which meant he failed them all. And that's the point James is trying to make. By coveting the young man broke both the first and tenth commandments. The first being, **"You shall have no other gods before Me"** and the last being, **"You shall not covet..."**, (Deuteronomy 5:7&21). By coveting, his boastful efforts to earn righteousness were worthless. Jesus didn't want the man's wealth, and He didn't care if the man sold his stuff. He wanted the young man to get his priorities straight and put his faith in Jesus above all other things,

So the young man, who thought he could gain eternal life by his works, will eventually be judged by his works at the Great White Throne Judgment. This is described in Revelation chapter 20 in a very sobering statement, **"12. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works."** (Revelation 20:12-13). This describes the

judgment of the lost at the end of time. But note how they will be judged, ***“...each one according to his works...”***. Everything the young ruler did in his life will be used to judge him. All of the great things he did that he felt were sufficient. But, being judged by, ***“...his works...”*** will be totally inadequate. Why? Because ***“...his works...”*** in life do not include Jesus' work on the cross. We see this situation explained very clearly in Matthew 7:21-23, ***“21. ‘Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23. And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”***. This passage is another description of the Great White Throne Judgment when people will try to convince Jesus they have done enough good works to earn entry into heaven. But sadly, they will be cast into hell because they did not know Jesus as their Savior.

As believers we will not be judged for our sin and will not participate in the Great White Throne Judgment. That's because our sin was judged on the cross and forgiven by our faith in Jesus. Instead, we will be judged based on what we did with our salvation, ***“10. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:9-10). Every believer will stand before our loving Savior and review how we lived our Christian life, whether ***“...good or bad...”***. This is not a judgment of heaven or hell, but is the judgment that determines whether or not Jesus says to us, ***“21...Well done, good and faithful servant...”*** (Matthew 25:21b). That's what James is talking about when he says, ***“12. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. 13. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”*** As believers in Jesus we are given ***“...liberty...”*** by the ***“...mercy...”*** of God. But for those who die lost there will be no ***“...mercy...”***.

But how can we live in a way that pleases God? By being in God's word and seeking to know His desires for our life. The ***“...law of liberty...”*** is God's word because it is through our faith in Jesus that we have ***“...liberty...”*** from the sin in our lives. As the Psalmist says, ***“45. And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts.”*** (Psalm 119:45). The ***“...precepts...”*** he's talking about is God's word, that gives us the ***“...liberty...”*** we need to, ***“1. Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”*** (Galatians 5:1).

So don't be like the rich young man who thought he could achieve an eternity in heaven by his own efforts. Get in God's word and understand what He requires.

As Jesus tells us, ***“31...‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’”*** (John 8:31b-32).

That's the “...*liberty*...” we need. The freedom of faith in Christ.

Lesson #13

Quick Recap:

In the previous section of his letter James makes an important point, ***“10. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.”*** (James 2:10). In other words, *break one and you break them all*. This is a very critical point to understand for people who believe they can earn salvation by works or religion. James explains this from the perspective of the ***“...law...”*** which are the commandments which define God's expectations for our life. To better understand this we discussed the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22. There we see the story of a brash young man who felt he could earn righteousness by adherence to the ***“...law...”***. But what he found rocked his world because his love for his earthly possessions over Jesus, which is the sin of coveting, meant his efforts were in vain. Why? Because James tells us – *break one and you break them all*.

Now in the next part of his letter James discusses the outward evidence of our salvation.

James chapter 2 verses 14-26

This passage in James is often misinterpreted to mean works based salvation is possible. So let's get that straight right up front. That's not what James is talking about. Salvation comes one way, through the confession of sin and faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Son of God. No amount of good works or religious activity can earn salvation. Paul clarified this in Ephesians 2:8, ***“8. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.”*** Additionally, Jesus confirmed this in John 14:6, ***“6. Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”***

So why is faith in Jesus the only way? Because, ***“23. for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** (Romans 3:23). Very simply, the ***“...glory of God...”*** is the standard by which we are measured, and that is a standard we could never achieve on our own. So Jesus died for us so that we, by faith in Him, can be measured by His standard on the cross. But despite two-thousand years of gospel teaching millions of people still base their eternity on being good enough or religious enough to somehow earn their way to heaven. But unfortunately those who die without faith in Jesus will one day stand before Him in judgment, and at that time they will be judged, ***“...each one according to his works...”*** (Revelation 20:13b). They will be judged on what they did for themselves, not for what Jesus did for them, and they will be cast into hell.

Of all the tactics our enemy uses to influence the mind of man, his efforts to make them believe they are good enough to earn salvation may be the most dangerous, and most successful.

So here in verse 14 James isn't talking about earning salvation. He's talking about our testimony and how it reflects our salvation. He does this by contrasting “**...faith...**” and “**...works...**”. Not from the perspective of earning salvation by “**...works...**”, but from the perspective that our “**...works...**” after our salvation provide physical evidence of our “**...faith...**”. Let's look at it this way. Suppose you got saved and the next day you continued to live a life of sin. Would people watching you see any indication of a changed life? Probably not. They would be looking for some outward indication your life had changed because of your new faith. To illustrate this James uses the example of someone who, “**...is naked and destitute of daily food...**”. But rather than clothing them or feeding them we simply wish them well and leave them in the same condition. Is that any indication we “**...love your neighbor as yourself**”. (James 2:8)? No. It's not. That's what James means when he says, “**17. Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**”. Our “**...faith...**”, without any evidence of a changed life would in essence be “**...dead...**” “**...faith...**”. That's because you might be a Christian in name alone, because your life shows no evidence of Jesus working in and through your life to bring about change. People in that situation may want to examine themselves to ensure they are truly saved because a life that has been born again is a new life with a new attitude, and our “**...works...**” should reflect that. We should want to be obedient to the Lord, which means we should want to serve, give, love and be the hands and feet of Jesus to a lost world. Otherwise, our “**...faith...**” has no application and is in essence “**...dead...**”.

In a nutshell James is talking about our testimony. Very simply, “**14...if someone says he has faith but does not have works...**” (James 2:14b) then their life doesn't represent the testimony of Jesus. They might be saved and even go to church but if that's the extent of their Christian life then their faith “**...is dead...**”. Not “**...dead...**” in the sense of being lost, but “**...dead...**” in their efforts to glorify our Lord with their lives and show Him to the world. As James bluntly tells us, “**17. Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**” (James 2:17). And frankly, that's a tragic place to be. Particularly in our fallen society where people so desperately need to see the reality of Jesus in our lives. So James challenges us, “**...Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works...**” (James 2:18). Note James doesn't say salvation by “**...works...**”. He says, “**...I will show you my faith by my works.**”. The key word here is “**...by...**”. In the original Greek the word used is “*ek*” which means, “*The source of knowledge*” or “*To declare, prove to be*”. Do you see the implication? James is simply saying, “**...by my works...**” we *declare* and *prove to be* a follower of Jesus. It's much more than just calling ourselves a Christian. It is reflecting Jesus through our testimony, our “**...works...**” after we're saved. It's the same thing James told us earlier in his letter,

“22. But be doers of the word, and not just hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”
(James 1:22). It's the outward expression of our lives through our faith.

In verse 19, James is speaking to belief in one God and may be referring back to Deuteronomy 6:4-5, **“4. ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! 5. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.’”**. But simply having head-knowledge about God doesn't result in salvation. Because, **“19...Even the demons believe—and tremble!”**. Jesus illustrated this in His conversation with the demon *legion* at the tombs of Gergesenes (Matthew 8:29 / Mark 5:7). When confronted by Jesus the demon acknowledged Him to be the **“...Son of God...”**, **“29. And suddenly they cried out, saying, ‘What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?’”**. The demons clearly understood who Jesus is, and in Mark's version they also recognized the Father, **“7. What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me.”** (Mark 5:7). This shows us that head knowledge of who Jesus is and even what He did does not result in salvation. In fact, satan and his demons are knowledgeable of the gospel. They know who Jesus is and are fully aware of His life, death and resurrection. But, they hate Jesus and would never admit their sin or seek His redemption. Likewise, there are people who clearly understand who Jesus is and are aware of His life, death and resurrection, but they have never come to Jesus broken over their sin, asked Him for forgiveness or surrendered their life to Him. That should be a scary thought to people who think they're saved but have never made a true profession of faith in Christ.

James then provides an illustration of **“...faith...”** seen in our **“...works...”** through two Old Testament figures; Abraham and Rahab. Unfortunately, this is another passage that can be misunderstood to support merit based salvation, but that's not what James means. For example, Abraham illustrated his belief in God's redemptive power when he agreed to sacrifice Isaac. But how? Because God had promised to bless the world through Abraham's offspring (Genesis 12:2-3), so Abraham believed God would do what He said. Abraham's salvation came through his **“...faith...”** in God's promise and not through his **“...works...”**. His agreement to sacrifice Isaac was obedience, and not a way to earn redemption. The key point to understanding this is the fact Abraham, **“6...believed in the Lord...”** (Genesis 15:6) and the promises He had made. The writer of Hebrews confirms this when he tells us, **“8...By faith Abraham obeyed...”** (Hebrews 11:8a). And Paul reconfirmed this fact in Romans 4:1-4, **“1. What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? 2. For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ 4. Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.”**. So if Abraham was saved by **“...faith...”** and not **“...works...”** then why does

James say, ***“...that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.”***? (James 2:24). Because he's using it as another example that, ***“...faith without works in dead...”*** (James 2:20). We see this in the Greek word James uses for ***“...justified...”***. When used as a verb, *“Dikaiooc”* means, *“To show that genuine faith proves itself by deeds...”*. So if had God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac and Abraham refused, then his faith would have been ***“...dead...”*** because it was not reflected by his actions; his ***“...works...”***. This was an important point for James to make. Particularly to his Jewish readers who had traditionally associated their heritage with Abraham as a source of righteousness.

Similarly, Rahab's redemption was seen through her ***“...works...”*** which were a testimony of her ***“...faith...”***. To better understand this lets go to Joshua chapters 2-6. Israel's leader, Joshua, sent two men to spy on the lands around Jericho. They entered the land and stayed at the house of Rahab, a harlot. Not long afterwards the king of Jericho uncovered their plot and sought to capture them, but Rahab hid them and helped them escape. But why? Somehow Rahab had heard about the God of Israel, ***“11. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. 12. Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the Lord, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father's house, and give me a true token, 13. and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.”*** (Joshua 2:11-13). From this we can see two things. First, Rahab believed in the God of Israel and the fact, ***“11...He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”***. But also, she asked in the name of the Lord that her life be spared from death. Now on the surface it might be difficult to understand how this equates to salvation. But the Lord clarifies her position through the writer of Hebrews, ***“31. By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.”*** (Hebrews 11:31). As with Abraham, the Bible confirms Rahab was made righteous ***“...By faith...”***. Just how much she understood is unclear, but what is clear is the fact Rahab had ***“...faith...”*** that God would deliver her from death. The fact she aided the men of Joshua was a ***“...work...”*** resulting from her ***“...faith...”***. It was her testimony put into action. That's why James says, ***“25. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?”***. Again, James is not talking about ***“...works...”*** based salvation, but is using Rahab as an example of ***“...faith...”*** in action through her testimony. Incidentally, the harlot Rahab is found elsewhere in the New Testament. In Matthew we find, ***“5. Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, 6. and Jesse begot David the king.”*** (Matthew 1:5). Rahab the redeemed, became the GGGGreat grandmother of king David and in the earthly lineage of our Lord Jesus.

James wraps up this thought with a reminder, “**26. For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.**”. Paul confirms this in Romans 8:9, “**9. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.**”. When we are saved we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. So, without the Holy Spirit we are not saved, but instead we are spiritually “**...dead...**”. Likewise, our “**...faith without works is dead...**” because there is no evidence of a changed life.

So where are we today? When the world watches us do they see evidence of Jesus in our lives, or would they see our “**...faith...**” as “**...dead...**”?

We need to really think about that.

Lesson #14

Quick Recap:

In the previous section of his letter James makes a statement that is often misinterpreted as the basis for works-based salvation, ***“14. What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?”*** (James 2:14). But James isn't talking about earning salvation. He's talking about our testimony and how it reflects our salvation to a lost world. He does this by contrasting ***“...faith...”*** and ***“...works...”***. Not from the perspective of earning salvation by ***“...works...”***, but from the perspective that our ***“...works...”*** after our salvation, provides physical evidence of our ***“...faith...”***. For example, suppose you got saved and the next day you continued to live a life of sin. Would people watching you see any indication of a changed life? Probably not. That's what James means when he says, ***“17. Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”*** Our ***“...faith...”***, without any evidence of a changed life would in essence be ***“...dead...”*** ***“...faith...”***, because a life that has been born again is a new life with a new attitude and a new outlook, and our ***“...works...”*** should reflect that. So here James is talking about our testimony by pointing out the fact, ***“14...if someone says he has faith but does not have works...”*** (James 2:14b) then their life does not represent a faithful testimony of Jesus.

James chapter 3 verses 1-12

Verse 1 should make every teacher of God's word pause and reflect on what we do, ***“1. My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”*** As followers of Jesus every Christian will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, ***“10. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:10). ***“12. So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”*** (Romans 14:12). This will not be a judgment of heaven or hell, because as believers our sin was already judged on the cross. Instead, it will be a ***“...judgment...”*** of our life when Jesus will review what we did with our salvation. He will look at our life after we were saved to see if our testimony represented genuine ***“...faith...”*** or was ***“...dead...”*** (James 2:17). This will highlight whether or not we sought to glorify Jesus through the testimony of a faithful life, or was our life a mockery of what He did for us on the cross. Every believer will go through this discussion with Jesus to determine, ***“...what he has done, whether good or bad.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:10b). But teachers of God's word will be held to, ***“...a stricter judgment.”*** (James 3:1b). That means I will be judged for how well I handled God's word. For example, did I take the time to study a passage before teaching it? Did I seek to clearly understand difficult passages

so I can help others understand? Did I try to explain God's word in a way that makes it clear? Did I encourage every believer to be in God's word daily as the guide-post for their life? Whether we're preaching, teaching or simply answering someone's question about scripture, this warning from God is one reason we work so hard at Southside to ensure we are doctrinally sound and Spirit led. There is no other option. We recognize the great honor we have of teaching God's word, but we also recognize the consequence of doing so without great care.

Although this passage applies primarily to pastors and teachers, could it also apply to you? In a sense, yes. Let's say someone asks you a question about the Bible. Do you give them your quick opinion, or do you take the time to do a little research so you can answer their question accurately and clearly? In this case, answering their question about scripture could be a form of teaching. Or what about when you share the gospel? Do you rush through it and hope they catch on, or do you explain the gospel clearly using scripture to support your discussion? Again, this can be a form of teaching God's word. In fact, there may be no more important teaching moment than the opportunity of accurately sharing the gospel with someone headed to hell. So whether you're a preacher, a teacher, or someone simply sharing God's word, we all have a responsibility to do it well.

Next James brooches a topic we all need to pay close attention to. Our tongue. This is important because the words we use, and how we use them, could be the primary factor in someone accepting or rejecting Jesus as their Savior. That also includes what we post on social media, because those are still our words, and when written down can never be taken back. That's a heavy responsibility we need to think about every time we communicate. So given that fact, let's ask ourselves a hard question. Does the lost world watching our life see and hear a testimony that shows them Jesus is real? This is important for us to reflect on because we cannot over-estimate how critical our testimony is in this fallen world. Simply because our testimony may be the single most important variable in someone's eternity. That's why we must remember that our testimony is what our lost family members see and hear. It's what our lost friends see and hear. It's what lost strangers see and hear. And therefore, there may be nothing more important for them to see and hear than a testimony representing a life lived faithfully for Jesus.

But how can our single testimony make such a profound difference to the lost world? Because our world is full of harsh people and harsh words. Angry people, angry politicians, angry organizations, angry ideas, angry agendas, and angry nations. Who all feed off of each other's angry actions and angry words. That means our testimony has to be different and our words have to be different. As Proverbs 15:1 tells us, “**A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.**”. So in the harsh and angry environment of our fallen and sinful society our testimony, including our words, may be the only thing left on earth that can show the world a different outcome is possible. But a

strong testimony like that can be so difficult to maintain in a fallen world because we often feel mistreated and persecuted and everywhere we look there seems to be a reason to fight back, to shout louder or just to give up. But that's not our calling. Our task is to be the Lord's representative on earth, and in order to do this we must act differently. We need to react to strife with sacrifice, react to persecution with promise and react to hatred with humility. This is the model we're to follow. Why? Because that's the model we see in our Savior Jesus. A model prophesied in Isaiah 53:7 showing how Jesus would react even as He was being crucified. ***"7. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth."*** Do you think that was easy? Remember, Jesus could have called down legions of angels to protect Him, or He could have simply destroyed His tormentors with a single thought. Instead, He was silent so that two thousand years later His silence speaks louder than words,

So how can we have a testimony like that? A testimony that can show the love of Jesus to a world who hates Him but so desperately needs Him? Let's consider 1 Peter 3:10 where Peter quotes from Psalm 34. A Psalm David wrote at a very difficult time in his life, ***"10. For "He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. 11. Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it."*** There's a key word in verse 10 critical to our testimony. It's our ***"...tongue..."***. Our words. The things we say that others hear. The things we say that can either build our testimony or destroy it. So the Lord tells us to, ***"...refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit."*** This reminds us of Psalm 141:3, ***"3. Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips."*** That's basically the same thing Jesus tells us in Matthew 15:10-11, ***"10. When He had called the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear and understand: 11. Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."*** Note what Jesus says ***"...defiles a man..."***. It's not what goes in his mouth, but ***"...what comes out..."***. That means our words can defile us and destroy our testimony. Simply by what we say or how we say it.

So in that context let's listen to the warning we get from James. A warning about the impact of our ***"...tongue..."***.

"3. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. 4. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. 5. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! 6. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell."

To understand what James is driving at let's think about the examples he uses:

- A small bit can turn a horse that weighs hundreds of pounds.
- And a small rudder can turn a giant ship.

Likewise, our tongue, our words, can turn our testimony from a witness into a disaster with very little effort. That's why James calls our tongue **"...a fire..."** and **"...a world of iniquity..."**, which, **"...defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell."** Let's make sure we catch what James is really saying here. The words we say can be so destructive it's as if they are, **"...set on fire by hell."**

But how is that even possible?

- What about repeating gossip?
- Or what about debating a social media post?
- Or criticizing someone?
- Or talking behind their back?
- Or simply making a comment that's better left unsaid?
- Maybe it's the words we choose?
- Or how we say them?
- Or maybe even the tone of our voice?

Bottom line, our words, possibly more than any other single thing can damage our testimony and drive our listener away from Jesus. That's why Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:29 what our testimony should look like and sound like, **"29. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impact grace to the hearers."** Paul, just like James, is talking about our testimony by telling us how we should act towards others and how we should talk to others so we can show them God's grace by what we say. Paul warns us about the **"...corrupt..."** words that **"...proceed out of your mouth..."**. He then defines what a **"...corrupt word..."** is in Ephesians 5:3, **"3. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor course jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks."** Paul lists sins like **"...fornication..."** and **"...filthiness..."** in the same list with **"...foolish talking..."** and **"...course jesting..."**. Have you ever really thought about that? The words we say, even in jest and meant as a joke, can be **"...corrupt..."** and sinful and damage our testimony.

So what are we supposed to do about that? Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:31-32, **"31. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."** That's what we need to do. The next time we're tempted to share gossip, or even listen to gossip, to join in a needless social media

debate, or criticize someone, to share an opinion that's better left unsaid, or raising your voice, or snapping at someone. We need to recognize that those things are sinful. So we need to work diligently and prayerfully to use words that represent the love of Jesus to a lost world.

Is this easy for us to do? Not at all. That's because our tongue, probably more than any other organ, is the most difficult to tame. A fact James reminds us of, ***“7. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. 8. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.”*** We have tamed animals as large as an elephant and yet we struggle to tame something as small as our tongue. But in reality our tongue is not the problem. It speaks nothing unless it first comes from our heart and our mind. That's the root of our problem. Our tongue simply repeats what we're thinking, so in order to tame the tongue we must first tame ourselves.

James closes this section by talking about another issue related to what we say. Being *double tongued*, or as it's often described, *“Speaking out of both sides of your mouth.”* He does this with two illustrations:

- ***“9. With it [the tongue] we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.***
- ***“10. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing.”***

Our words need to be consistent. That's what James means when he says, ***“11. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? 12. Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.”*** In other words, our speech should be consistent. It doesn't do any good to talk like a Christian on Sunday and talk like the world on Monday. All that does is confuse the world and discredit what being a Christian really means. That's because the words we say and how we say them are critical to being an effective witness with a solid testimony.

Of all the sins that tempt us an unbridled tongue is probably the most common, most difficult to control, and in some ways the most damaging. But it's also a temptation we can defeat if we'll simply watch what we say and how we say it.

That's something we need to keep in mind every time we speak.

Lesson #15

Quick Recap:

In the prior section of his letter James warns us about the damage done by our “...*tongue*...” (James 3:5). The words we say and how we say them may have more impact on the lost world than we can imagine. Why? Because our words are part of our testimony, and it's our testimony that can draw people to Jesus or drive them away. Few things in our life can impact our Christian testimony more than the words we use. They can be helpful or hurtful, encouraging or discouraging, or they can show love or hate. That means the words we say and how we say them can destroy our testimony with very little effort.

James chapter 3 verses 13-18

Now in the next section of his letter James continues with another topic directly related to our testimony. Our “...*wisdom*...”. But let's be clear about one thing, “...*wisdom*...” is not the same as *knowledge*. We've all met people who are well educated or highly intelligent, with lots of *knowledge*, but they struggle to apply their *knowledge* to life because they lack “...*wisdom*...”. Warren Wiersbe describes the difference very clearly, “*Knowledge enables us to take things apart, but wisdom enables us to put things together.*”. That's the reason we always search for practical application in our Bible studies. Not only do we want the *knowledge* we gain from God's word, but we want to understand its practical application for our life. We do that by seeking “...*wisdom*...” from the Lord.

At the beginning of his letter James talked about the source of true “...*wisdom*...”, “**5. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.**” (James 1:5-6 - Lesson #4). Although true “...*wisdom*...” comes from the Lord, we must ask for it because in doing so we recognize the fact our own *understanding* and *knowledge* is insufficient. But it is the “...*wisdom*...” that comes from God that will help us navigate through life in a way that will glorify the Lord. This is the spiritual “...*wisdom*...” we need to know God's will, the “...*wisdom*...” to follow God's direction, the “...*wisdom*...” to apply His word, and the “...*wisdom*...” to understand how the Lord can use the trials in our life to glorify Him. This is the type of “...*wisdom*...” we need in order to grow in our faith and stand steadfast during difficult times. It's a component of our Christian walk that's vitally important, but it's also a character trait missing in many Christians. Why? Because they rely solely on their own *knowledge* and that just won't work.

In verse 13 James begins by focusing on two words, “...*wise*...” and “...*understanding*...”. In the original Greek “...*wise*...” simply means someone who can bring practical application to their *knowledge*. In essence, the definition of “...*wisdom*...”.

Likewise, the Greek meaning of the word “**...understanding...**” is one who is intelligent and experienced, and able to apply those skills to a particular situation. By combining the two words, James is asking his readers to examine themselves to determine if they have the “**...wisdom...**” they need to use the “**...understanding...**” they have so they can live the life of an obedient believer. That's an important question to ask ourselves because “**...wisdom...**” in a believer is not seen in our talk, as much as it is in our walk. That's why James implores us to, “**Let him show by good conduct (our testimony) that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.**”. Christian “**...wisdom...**” does not need pride, boasting or ego. It needs a humble spirit that enables us to walk in step with Jesus through the testimony of our life by applying what He teaches us through His word.

So where do we get our “**...wisdom...**” from? There are only two sources; the world or the Lord. We often think we have “**...wisdom...**” because of our education, training or experiences, but that's *knowledge*, not “**...wisdom...**”. Our *knowledge* is the information and experiences we have, but “**...wisdom...**” is the way we apply our knowledge, and in the case of a believer, it's how we use it to glorify our Lord. As the writer of Proverbs tells us, “**5. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; 6. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. 7. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil.**” (Proverbs 3:5-6). We hear this passage quoted a lot but do we really grasp what it says? It tells us not to depend on our own *knowledge* or to be “**...wise in your own eyes...**”. Instead, we should seek “**...wisdom...**” from the Lord who will “**...direct your paths...**” through life. As believers that's the type of “**...wisdom...**” we need. The type of “**...wisdom...**” that only comes from the Lord and through His word. So given that, James asks, “**13. Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.**”. (James 3:13). Here James talks again about “**...works...**”, which as we have already discussed is the outward evidence of true faith. If our “**...conduct...**”, our testimony, is authentic, then we don't need pride, conceit or ego. We need, “**...the meekness of wisdom...**”. But “**...meekness...**” should not be confused with *weakness*, but should reflect a Christ-like humble attitude in our lives. In the original Greek “**...meekness...**” means, “*Gentle strength which expresses power with reserve and gentleness.*”. A good example might be a horse that has been broken to ride. It's still as strong as it ever was but its strength is now under control. That's important to understand because it is often our human nature to react in a way that could damage our testimony. But if we can learn to control our strength then we can show the world a humble Christ-like attitude. The problem is it's often easier to show our strength than to control it. So James uses the word “**...meekness...**” to define a testimony of reserved strength. Not by being combative, boastful or arrogant, but the strength that comes from walking with the Lord and being dependent on His power. Not our own.

To help us better understand James contrasts the two sources of “*...wisdom...*”:

- **“14. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. 16. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.”**

This type of worldly “*...wisdom...*” is characterized by “*...envy and self-seeking...*”. Characteristics often seen in our pride and boasting (our ego). This is not the type of “*...wisdom...*” provided by God, but by satan. The type of “*...wisdom...*” characterized as “*...bitter envy...*”, which in the original Greek meant *self-seeking and strife*. Certainly not a character trait that should be seen in a follower of Jesus. Instead, it is seen through three sinful influences, “*...earthly, sensual, demonic...*”, which means the *world* (“*...earthly...*”), our *flesh* (“*...sensual...*”) and the *devil* (“*...demonic...*”). That’s important to understand because the “*...wisdom...*” of the world is foolish in God’s eyes, **“Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”** (1 Corinthians 1:20). This type of false “*...wisdom ...*” is also a primary source of confusion that causes people to think they can earn salvation through works, religion or prosperity. At the core of works-based theology is “*...envy and self-seeking...*” because they try to gain through their own efforts something they cannot earn. That’s not Godly “*...wisdom...*”, **“17. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. 18. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”**

Godly “*...wisdom...*” is characterized by an attitude of purity, peacefulness, humility, mercy and love. This is the type of “*...wisdom...*” that needs to be seen in our testimony. A “*...wisdom...*” reflecting the character of Jesus and the “*...fruit of the Spirit...*”, **“22. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23. gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”** (Galatians 5:22-23). This is the type of “*...wisdom...*” seen in “*...the meekness of wisdom...*”. (James 13:3b), and is the type of “*...wisdom...*” the world needs to see in us.

So let’s go back to the question, “Where do we get our “*...wisdom...*” from? Most people, including many Christians, rely on the *knowledge* they get from the world and they assume that’s the same as “*...wisdom...*”. Now don’t misunderstand, *knowledge* is a good thing but it’s not the same as “*...wisdom...*”. Particularly for a follower of Jesus. In one sense this goes back to our discussions about the need to be in God’s word for the guidance and “*...wisdom...*” we need. To do that we need to understand what percentage of our *knowledge* and “*...wisdom...*” comes from the world, and what percentage comes from the word. The writer of Proverbs tells us, **“6. For the Lord gives**

wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; 7. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly. (Proverbs 2:6-7). So, if “**...wisdom...**” comes from the Lord, how do we get it? From His word. It comes, “**...from His mouth...**” which has been recorded for us in scripture. Through God's word we learn how to apply our “**...knowledge and understanding...**” through the “**...sound wisdom...**” the Lord will provide. But notice an important qualifier in this passage. The Lord provides, “**...sound wisdom for the upright...**”. The word “**...upright...**” means, *straight, level and pleasing*. Again, this is a reflection of our testimony. It is the “**...wisdom...**” for those who walk obediently with the Lord.

All of this is why we continually stress the importance of being in God's word. As we study and dig deeper into scripture we begin to realize the *knowledge* we gain is good, but the practical application of that *knowledge* is what truly changes our lives. And when that happens we move from *knowledge* to “**...wisdom...**” which is a gift from God for those who seek it.

As we wrap-up our discussion on “**...wisdom...**” let's take a moment to look at a portion of Paul's prayer for the Colossian church (see Colossians 1:3-18). A prayer asking for “**...wisdom...**”.

“9. For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; 10. that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; (Colossians 1:9-10)

Paul's letter was written to the early church at Colosse; a city in modern day Turkey (see Acts 19). It was initially intended for the Colossians but Paul also instructed them to read it to the congregation at Laodica (Colossians 4:16). A church that would fall so far away from the Lord that Jesus said of them, “**...I will vomit you out of My mouth...**” (Revelation 3:16). Likewise, the church at Colossae had its share of doctrinal issues. They had fallen into a heretical theology combining elements taught by the Judaizers and Gnostics. As a result, they began to follow a mix of Jewish legalism and pagan beliefs. So while in prison in Rome (Acts 28:16-31) Paul wrote them an instructional letter focusing on sound doctrine and the deity of Christ.

But what's interesting for our study of “**...wisdom...**” is his prayerful request, “**...that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding...**” and “**...increasing in the knowledge of God...**”. Here Paul isn't stressing earthly “**...knowledge...**” They already had too much of that. Instead, he wants them to have the “**...knowledge...**” of God's will coupled with the “**...wisdom...**” to apply that “**...knowledge...**” based on “**...spiritual understanding...**”. That's the type of

“...wisdom...” that draws us closer to the Lord, brings us to a point of true humility and makes our testimony much more effective. Paul's prayer is just as applicable to the modern church as it was to the ancient church at Colossae. Why? Because the majority of churches today are so focused on heretical doctrine and **“...self seeking...”** that they've lost the **“...wisdom and spiritual understanding...”** of the true gospel.

That's what James and Paul both want us to understand. The **“...wisdom...”** that comes from the Lord. And that's what we should be seeking too.

Lesson #16

Quick Recap:

At the end of chapter 3 James talked about “...**wisdom**...”. Unfortunately most people, including many Christians, assume that *knowledge* and “...**wisdom**...” are the same thing. But they're not even close. We often think we have “...**wisdom**...” because we have education or training, but that's worldly *knowledge* and does not provide what we need to live obedient to God's will. True “...**wisdom**...” is rare because it comes from God. For a believer, the “...**wisdom**...” we need comes only from the Lord and that's what we need to seek.

James chapter 4 verses 1-6

On December 13th, 1862, General Robert E. Lee sat on his horse *Traveler* on a hill overlooking the city of Fredericksburg Virginia. From there he could observe a large battle taking place below. At its conclusion the battle was a Confederate victory, but a very costly one, with over 18,000 casualties between the two sides. During the horrific battle General Lee is reported to have said to General James Longstreet, *"It is well that war is so terrible, or we should grow too fond of it."*

From ancient times war was often seen as glamorous. Large armies dressed in shining armor, gaudy uniforms, and accompanied by flags, banners, drummers and bands, sometimes overshadowed the grim reality of death. In many ways the American Civil War helped change that perception. At the onset of war both armies rode or walked into battle with a somewhat naive view of the campaign ahead. They thought the war would end quickly with each side gaining sufficient glory. But after four long years of brutal fighting, one and a half million casualties and over 700,000 dead, the view of war would never be the same. This realization was partly because the Civil War was the first major conflict captured on film. The camera, a relatively new invention at the time, was used to capture the aftermath of battle, and thousands of gruesome photographs were printed and sold around the country. For the first time American citizens were subjected to views of American soldiers, quite possibly their own family members and neighbors, laying dead and distorted on the field of battle. Those images helped the American people ask themselves, *"What have we done?"*

So with experiences like that why do people still go to war? Why can't we settle our differences with diplomacy instead of bloodshed? Very simply. War is the result of sin. Ever since the day satan influenced Cain to kill Abel (Genesis chapter 4) men have fought to the death over their differences. In fact, the Bible is full of conflicts, battles, military

campaigns and conquest. Most of which resulted in one way or another from sin. War sometimes occurs between two groups who both have sinful intentions. But more likely, war is the result of one side being in sin and the other side attempting to bring things back to normalcy. A good example of that would be World War II, where the Axis powers sought world domination through force, and the Allied powers sought to defend the countries being overrun and reestablish democracy.

Wars like that, while tragic, are somewhat understandable, but what is particularly troubling is the in-fighting we often see amongst believers. That's why James asks the question, **"1. Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?"** The phrase **"...among you..."** indicates strife within the church, and the qualifier, **"...from your desires for pleasure..."** points to our pride, jealousy and any other sinful action that results in discord. In the original Greek **"...wars and fights..."** can be translated as *disputes and quarrels*. Either way, that's a sad commentary when you consider the fact that of all the places where fighting should never exist it would be in the church. As the Psalmist reminds us of God's desire, **"1. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"** (Psalm 133:1). But unfortunately that's not always the case and our **"...unity..."** is often damaged or destroyed by our actions. Gossip, quarreling, backbiting, social media posts, and a dozen other things can be used by our enemy to drive a wedge between believers. And when that happens, we break the **"...unity..."** that is so hard to recover and the result is in a sense, **"...war..."**.

But why do believers do that? Why can't we just get along? James lists several reasons. Namely, **"...You lust..."**, which in the original Greek means our *desire*. As in our desire or envy for something we want but don't have, or maybe desiring that something be changed because we don't like it. The English word *hedonistic* is derived from the same Greek root, which means *strong internal passions*. Over time this type of *desire* has caused conflict over things like the style of worship music, the clothes people think we should wear to church or even a post made on social media. These types of issues can quickly cause conflict in the best churches and result in disunity amongst believers. This is what James describes as, **"...war in your members..."**. He isn't talking about church members but is describing our sinful **"...flesh..."**. Paul speaks to this in Romans 6:19, where he uses the same term to describe our sinful actions, **"19. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness."** To emphasize the seriousness of this conflict James also mentions **"...murder..."** which is a serious accusation but reminds us of the Lord's warning, **"21. 'You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'** **22. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a**

cause shall be in danger of the judgment..." (Matthew 5:21-22a). In other words, the physical sin of **"...murder..."**, can be seen in our hearts when we are **"...angry with his brother..."**. James goes so far as to call people behaving this way as, **"...Adulterers and adulteresses!..."** because their fleshly desires and conflict distract them from their role of honoring the Lord.

So how does **"...war..."** begin? Earlier in chapter 3 James had already warned us about the damage inflicted by our **"...tongue..."**, but he also reminds us, **"14. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth."** (James 3:14). Many of our actions, our words, our pride, jealousy, selfishness and a dozen other influences can cause **"...envy and self-seeking..."** in our hearts, which can result in **"...war..."** within the church.

James then discusses prayer. But why does he include prayer in a discussion about internal strife? Because prayer must be executed in the right frame of mind and in the right spirit in order to be effective. So let's think about that. Do you ever wonder why your prayers seem to go unanswered? Maybe you're asking for the wrong thing, or asking the wrong way. Or, maybe it's because you're harboring sin in your heart. Either sin you can't seem to get away from or maybe sin you don't even realize you're doing. But either way unconfessed sin like James is talking about may be damaging your communication with the Lord and causing **"...envy and self-seeking..."** within the body.

To help us understand the impact of sin on our prayer life let's look at three passages of scripture:

- Psalm 66:18 — **"18. If I regard iniquity [sin] in my heart, the Lord will not hear."**
- Isaiah 1:15 — **"15. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood [sin]."**
- Isaiah 59:1-2 — **"1. Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. 2. But your iniquities [sin] have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."**

So based on those verses why would we expect God to give us the things we ask from Him, if we don't first give Him the obedience He asks from us? And that would certainly include times when we are at **"...war..."** with each other. In that context James warns us, **"3. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures."** Whether we ask in the wrong attitude or ask for the wrong reasons, a prayer asked with a disobedient heart will not achieve the desired outcome. And a prayer asked while quarreling or in strife means we have a disobedient heart. But why would people in a church act that way? Simply because they're human, and sometimes we allow

our flesh to influence our actions and shift our focus on our own self interests. So James reminds us, ***“4. ...Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”*** In essence, ***“...friendship with the world...”*** is ***“...friendship...”*** with sin. Or, at least the primary source of sin. In fact, in the original Greek, the root word for ***“...world...”*** means, ***“The whole circle of earthly goods, endowments, riches, advantages, pleasures, etc., which, although hollow and frail and fleeting, stir desire, seduce from God and are obstacles to the cause of Christ”***. And yet, even given that definition it seems that churches today are frequently becoming, ***“...a friend of the world...”*** as they seek to be relevant with society. They might not admit that, but any time we put our own interests before Jesus we are in effect, ***“...a friend of the world...”***. Churches with heretical doctrine, works based gospels, a prosperity focus, ritualistic religion or any other non-Biblical platforms have put their own interests above their focus on Jesus. That means they are, ***“...a friend of the world...”***. A great example of this is the church in Ephesus. A church that had once been vibrant and faithful but lost their focus. Pay close attention to what Jesus says about them, ***“2. ‘I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3. and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. 4. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.’ (Revelation 2:2-4).*** Here Jesus commends their hard work, perseverance and labors done, ***“...for My name’s sake...”***, but then He chastises them for leaving ***“...your first love...”***. In other words, in their zeal to be an active and vibrant church they allowed their efforts, their ***“...envy and self-seeking...”***, to overshadow their focus on Jesus.

James ends this section by reminding us that war, whether on the battlefield or through strife within the church, starts in one place - in us, ***“5. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, ‘The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously’? 6. But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’”*** James is talking about our inner-person, our *flesh*. Our own will that is at battle with God's will. The apostle Paul speaks to this conflict in Galatians 5:17, ***“17. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.”*** This is the constant struggle we face when tempted with sin. The *spiritual warfare* pitting our own desires against those of the Lord. That's why Paul reminds us, ***“30. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”*** (Ephesians 4:30). That's why the Holy Spirit ***“...yearns jealously...”*** for us. He loves us and wants us to be obedient and faithful to God and not to our flesh. Why? Because, ***“7. Because the carnal [sinful] mind is enmity against God...”*** (Romans 8:7a). To live in intentional and habitual sin is rebellion against God. In essence, it is ***“...war...”*** against God. That's why unconfessed

sin in our lives disrupts our fellowship with the Lord and with other believers. Our sin is the “**...war in your members...**” James is talking about. The “**...war...**” started by our own envy, pride, ego and quarreling. So James reminds us that, “**...God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble...**”.

That is another reminder of what our testimony should be. A “**...humble...**” servant of our Lord.

Lesson #17

Quick Recap:

In verses 1 through 6 James talked about strife and disunity amongst believers, ***“1. Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?”*** (James 4:1). In this context a ***“...war...”*** is simply a conflict between two opposing forces. That's a condition that commonly exists in society, but it can also exist in the church. Pride, quarreling and our own egos can drive a wedge between believers. That's a sad commentary considering the fact the church should be a sanctuary set apart from the conflicts of our world. But churches are made up of people; sinners saved by grace, and we can quickly allow our flesh to take control. That's something we need to be alert to as we strive for unity within the body.

James chapter 4 verses 7-17

In this section of his letter James touches on three more topics related to our testimony:

- Humility
- Judging Others
- Boasting

Humility

So why is having a humble spirit so important to living a faithful Christian life? Because that's the example Jesus gave us, ***“29. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*** (Matthew 11:29). Jesus could have come to earth as a Mighty Warrior intent on destroying the Roman Empire. Instead, He came as a poor humble Servant intent on destroying sin. Jesus came ***“...lowly in heart...”***, a phrase translated from the Greek word *Tapeinos* which literally means, ***“humble”***. But our Lord's humble character is much more profound than a single phrase can adequately describe. As Paul confirms, ***“8. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”*** (Philippians 2:8). Pay close attention to what this verse actually says. Jesus ***“...humbled Himself...”***. He made the decision to come to earth as a Carpenter instead of a King, to be born in a stable instead of a palace, and to die on the cross for sins He didn't commit. And He did that for us. He did that in *humility* so that our focus would be on what He did. Not what He looked like or what title He might bear.

So given that, why do we often find it so difficult to “...**humble...**” ourselves? Because in our *flesh* we want what we want for ourselves, and we often put that above what Jesus wants from us. That's why James says, **”7. Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”** The things in our life that cause us to sin are the things that cause, “...**envy and self-seeking...**” (James 3:14), and the things that result in, “...**war in your members...**” (James 4:1). So James tells us to “...**resist...**” those things of the flesh that draw us away from God and draw us closer to the world. But how do we “...**resist...**” our sinful nature when its pull is so strong? The Lord gives us clear direction through the prophet Micah, **”8. He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”** (Micah 6:8). Very simply, we must “...**walk...**” obedient to God's will and do so “...**humbly...**”. That's yet another reminder of the importance of our testimony. Our life lived before the world in obedience to God so they can see Jesus through us. It's the same command our Lord gives us through Paul, **”16. I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”** It's our “...**walk...**” not our talk that will cause the enemy to, “...**flee from you...**”. And it is a “...**walk...**” we must do “...**humbly...**”.

So how do we do that? How do we “...**walk humbly with your God?...**”. We must “...**submit to God...**” and fully surrender to His will. Here the original Greek word for “...**submit...**” means *To be obedient and subject to*. In other words, *To be fully surrendered*. Given that, let's look back to the original sin in the garden as an example of how easily we can fail to “...**submit...**” even in the best of circumstances. God promised Adam and Eve a perfect life in fellowship with Him, if they were obedient. On the surface that seemed easy enough. Just do what God says. But then God introduced a qualifier. A test of sorts to prove whether or not they would “...**submit to God...**” and “...**resist the devil...**”. He put a tree in the garden and told them not to eat from it. Again, that seems simple enough. There must have been millions of trees on earth so avoiding one of them should not be that difficult. Particularly when God told them exactly which tree it was and where it was located. But they failed. Why? Sin. The enemy convinced Eve it was ok to defy God's wishes by telling her, **”5. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”** (Genesis 3:5). So Eve saw the temptation as, “... **a tree desirable to make one wise...**” (Genesis 3:6b), but her desire to be “...**wise...**” in her own eyes made her a sinner in God's eyes. Why? Her pride. She wanted something God told her she couldn't have, because satan convinced her she should have it any way. That was the sin of pride. A sin we all commit when we let “...**envy and self-seeking...**” (James 3:14) take its course in our life. But Eve's fall could have been any sin and the outcome would have been the same. Defy God and suffer the consequences, or be obedient to God and reap the rewards. Had Eve chose to “...**resist the devil...**” he would “...**flee...**”, but she didn't and ever since then all mankind has paid the consequences.

So what do we need to do? Very simply, ***“8. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”*** James is being real here. He's not pulling any punches. He calls for his readers to ***“...cleanse your hands...”*** and ***“...purify your hearts...”*** and he calls them ***“...sinners...”*** and ***“...double-minded...”*** people. His instructions include an exterior cleansing, ***“...cleanse your hands...”*** and an internal cleansing, ***“...purify your hearts...”***. That means don't appear to be righteous on the outside while still harboring sin on the inside. When we do that we're being ***“...double-minded...”*** which is a poor testimony for the lost world to see. That means to ***“...walk humbly with your God...”*** we must, ***“9. Lament and mourn and weep!”***. Which means we must be broken over our sin and come ***“...humbly...”*** before the throne of grace in confession and ask for redemption. That's what James means when he says, ***“...Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.”*** Just the thought of sinning against the God who created us, the God who died for us and the God who indwells within us should bring us to our knees as we ***“...lament and mourn...”*** over what we have done to the One who did so much for us. Our sin is no laughing matter. It is serious and has consequences. Why? Because we will have to answer for every action, every word and every thought, ***“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:10). One day every believer will stand before our Lord to discuss what we did with our salvation. This will be a face to face conversation with Jesus to discuss our obedience after we were saved. Did we squander what He did for us, or did we live a life that glorified Him? So what if He were to ask us about yesterday? How well did we do? What about today or tomorrow? Will we be obedient? Every day we have an opportunity to ensure our meeting will go well. It all depends on how well we live for Him. That's why we must, ***“10. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.”*** But why is this attitude so important? Because our Lord has commanded, ***“14. If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”*** (2 Chronicles 7:14).

It can't get any clearer than that.

Judging Others

We generally consider judging others as something we shouldn't do. In many cases that's true. As Jesus said, ***“1. Judge not, that you be not judged.”*** (Matthew 7:1) and Paul confirms. ***“1. Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.”*** (Romans 2:1). But Jesus and Paul are talking about hypocritical judgment done with the wrong intentions or while we ourselves are in sin.

Like the Pharisees who judged other people but only saw themselves through self-righteous eyes. Jesus illustrated this by using the example of our “...eye...”, **“3. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4. Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5. Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”** (Matthew 7:3-5). Our “...eye...” is often thought of as the window into our heart (see Matthew 6:22), so through that illustration Jesus is telling us not to judge someone else's failures when we fail to see our own. In other words, don't point out what someone else is doing, their “...speck...”, while failing to recognise our own sin, which is our “...plank...”. When we do that we're being a hypocritical judge and that's what our Lord tells us not to do. We need to ensure we see our own sin before we look for sin in others.

But *righteous judgement* done with love and mercy can help others recognize sin in their lives that must be dealt with. But before approaching them we should first examine our own hearts to remove any “...plank...” that blinds us of our sin and get our own life in order. Once we do that, then righteous judgment is no longer a sin because it's not meant to be critical. Nor are we pointing out someone else's failures with anger or ill intent. Righteous judgment is done with love and compassion because we care for another person's walk with Christ and we're trying to help them. Jesus explained the difference when He said, **“24. Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”** (John 7:24). This speaks to a process established in Leviticus 19:15, **“15. ‘You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.’”**. This is the same guidance we see in Proverbs 31:9, **“9. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.”**. Righteous judgment is not simply judging for the sake of judging. It's spiritual discernment for the opportunity to minister to another person. That's why Psalm 139:23-24 is so important for our own self reflection, **“23. Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; 24. And see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”**. Self reflection for the purpose of finding our own faults is much more than simply looking in the mirror. It's a spiritual autopsy that looks deep under the surface to identify the source of our own faults before pointing out the faults of others. That step is so important for us to take every day. Otherwise, how can we ever help others see their sin if we can't see our own?

So in that context James tells us, **“11. Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law.”**. If we judge someone while speaking “...evil of his brother...” we're not practicing righteous judgment but we're being hypocritical. Speaking “...evil...” is

sinful, and if we're being sinful while judging then we're not doing so in the righteous attitude of love. For example, if we see a brother or sister in Christ falling into intentional or habitual sin we can go to them about it. But first we need to remove any **"...plank from your own eye..."** and search our own heart for any sin that may disqualify us as a righteous judge. But if we have no unconfessed sin in our life, then approach them with love and compassion in order to help them understand what the Lord expects of them.

Boasting

There are few things more damaging to our testimony than our ego. Our ego feeds our pride. It causes us to be self-centered. It can cause us to judge others hypocritically, and most of all, it strains our ability to, **"...walk humbly with your God?"** (Micah 6:8). So James asks, **"13. Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'".** Here James may be speaking to those in the business world. Those who, **"...buy and sell, and make a profit..."**. But why would he speak specifically to them? Very possibly, because in their zeal to **"...make a profit..."** they may have lost their humility? Maybe they were hypocritically judging their competition? Or, maybe they were so busy with things of the world they had set aside the things of the Lord? Much like *"Climbing the corporate ladder"* which often results in climbing over others on the way up. But whatever the source it seems to have resulted in *boasting*. A clear sign of an ego that is out of control. So James digs a little deeper, **"14. Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."** This statement is taken from Proverbs 27:1, **"1. Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth."** Life is fleeting. Even the longest life on earth is insignificant when compared to eternity. And yet, we run around with our hair on fire to accomplish as much as we can, and if we're not careful those accomplishments become a source of pride, ego and boasting.

Think about it this way. How many times have we thought about, talked about or maybe even boasted about the things we've done? Now, compare that to the number of times we've thought about, talked about or boasted about the things Jesus has done. I suspect most of us would have to agree we can be very self-centered when we should be Christ-centered. So James suggests, **"15. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'"** We should be focused on God's will, not our own, and live according to His commands. Now don't misunderstand. There's nothing wrong with accomplishing things or even doing the things to, **"...buy and sell, and make a profit..."**. But, when we do that do we give all of the credit and glory to God, or do we want the accolades for ourselves?. So James warns us, **"16. But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin."** As a believer we know what the Lord expects of

us. We also know we should give all glory to God for whatever we do. I mean, let's be honest. Who gave us the skills and ability to accomplish what we've done? Who gave us the resources to acquire the things we have? It was the Lord, and yet, we take the credit and leave little for Him. That's the “...**arrogance**...” James is talking about.

That attitude reminds me of the song My Way made popular by Frank Sinatra:

*And now, the end is near
And so I face the final curtain
My friend, I'll say it clear
I'll state my case, of which I'm certain
I've lived a life that's full
I traveled each and every highway
And more, much more than this
I did it my way*

Really? Do we want to get to the place in life when “*the end is near*” and we “*face the final curtain*” and bank our eternity on living life “*my way*”? I don't think so. I've tried living life my way and it was a total train wreck.

Instead, we want to get to that point in life and be able to say, *I did it God's way*.

Lesson #18

Quick Recap:

At the end of chapter 4 James focused on three important elements of our testimony:

- The *humility* we need to humbly represent Jesus to this dark world.
- The error we make in *judging others* when we have unconfessed sin in our own lives.
- The risk of *boasting* when our ego gets out of control.

These are all things we must be aware of so our actions don't damage our witness for the Lord.

James chapter 5 verses 1-6

In Matthew 6:19-21 the Lord warns us. ***“19. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20. but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*** Wow! That commandment can be tough to follow because there are times when it seems like our whole life is focused on ***“...treasures...”***. Those things we've just got to have. But if we're not careful our focus on ***“...treasures...”*** can become so important we end up like the rich young ruler who placed his material possessions over a life of following Jesus (see Matthew 19:16–23, Mark 10:17–22, and Luke 18:18–23). So in that light James warns his readers, ***“1. Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! 2. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 3. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.”*** Obviously they didn't listen to the Lord's command but instead they ***“...lay up...”*** and accumulated ***“...treasures...”*** that will be ***“...moth-eaten...”*** and ***“...corroded...”***. What a waste.

So how can this scenario apply to us? Well, let's think about it.

- How many things do we have that when we first bought it we just had to have it, but now it's in the attic?
- Do we ever buy things and in no time they're out of style?
- Do we ever buy a new vehicle even though we know the value decreases significantly once we drive off the lot?
- Do we have things in our shed or barn we no longer use but someone else could? And yet, we just don't want to let them go.
- Or, do we buy things we really don't need just because we can?

Sure we do. We all do those things from time to time because we want or need things we feel are important, but eventually they all collect dust, rust or lose value. As we'll see, all of those types of actions can lead to sin if done the wrong way. But let's be clear, the accumulation of wealth is not the issue. Patriarchs in the Bible like Abraham, Solomon and Joseph of Arimathea were wealthy. Plus, nowhere does the Bible restrict the accumulation of wealth. But...the sin of wealth comes in how our wealth is acquired and what we do with it. As the Lord tells us through Paul, ***“10. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”*** (1 Timothy 6:10). It's not the money or the ***“...treasures...”*** that's the real issue. It's the value, ***“...the love...”***, we place on items that causes us to covet or abuse our wealth. Our wealth in itself is not sinful, but sin can result from how the wealth is acquired, what it is used for and when it negatively affects someone else.

We see indications of this in James' letter. First he addresses those he's writing to as, ***“1. Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!”***. He wants them to pay close attention to what he's saying. He then gets very direct and calls them. ***“...you rich...”***, but not in a complimentary way. Then he tells them to ***“...weep and howl...”*** for the punishment coming their way because of how they managed their wealth. But what did they do to deserve such a rebuke?

James lists a couple of key reasons:

They failed to pay their workers, ***“4. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. 5. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.”***. This was strictly forbidden by scripture as we see in Deuteronomy 24:14-15, ***“14. “You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether one of your brethren or one of the aliens who is in your land within your gates. 15. Each day you shall give him his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he is poor and has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the Lord, and it be sin to you.”***. All of James' readers should have understood this moral requirement, but particularly his Jewish audience who were raised under the Mosaic Law. In fact, in Jeremiah 22:13 God gives us a warning associated with this practice, ***“13. Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness And his chambers by injustice, Who uses his neighbor's service without wages and gives him nothing for his work.”***. Any time the Lord starts a statement with ***“...Woe...”*** we need to pay attention. It's a complex word that in the original Hebrew meant, *“A piercing exclamation that conveys grief, alarm, or impending*

judgment. The prophets employ it to awaken complacent hearts, announce covenant curses, and call God's people to repentance." Based on verse 6 some of James' *"...rich..."* readers were evidently living *"...in pleasure and luxury..."* while their workers toiled without pay. That was a sin of wealth.

It appears they had also abused others in court. Earlier in his letter James identified this problem, **"6. But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?"** (James 2:6). This indicates the *"...rich..."* he was writing to had abused their brethren in court. **"6. You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you."** Here the word translated as *"...murdered..."* comes from the Greek word *"etimasate"* which means, *"To treat dishonorably"*. Using that translation this verse could be said another way, *"You have dishonorably condemned those who were innocent but could not defend themselves."* Again this indicates sin by ill-gotten gains.

They hoarded what they had, **"3. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days."** It's interesting that James aligns their destruction with the *"...last days..."*. In chapter 18 of Revelation the apostle John describes the ultra-sinful society of the Tribulation period. Early in the Tribulation the world will worship the antichrist (Revelation 13:8) but near the end of the Tribulation they begin to worship themselves, or more accurately, their material belongings. The Bible labels this late Tribulation society using three titles, *"...the kings of the earth..."* (Revelation 18:9), *"...the merchants of the earth..."* (Revelation 18:11), and the *"...shipmasters..."* (Revelation 18:17). These titles describe every person who produces, trades or uses material wealth. But what is interesting is the list of goods and services society will accumulate to make them wealthy, **"12. merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; 13. and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men."** (Revelation 18:12-13). But sadly, as God destroys their sinful empire they do not cry over the loss of their leader, their government or even their lives. They cry over the loss of their material possessions, **"9. 'The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning.'**" (Revelation 18:9). **"11. 'And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore.'**" (Revelation 18:11). As the empire (*"...her..."*) of the antichrist is destroyed by fire they will *"...weep..."* over their material loss. This reminds us of what James says the outcome will be in verse 3, **"3. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their**

corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.”. In the end their wealth will be meaningless and will be destroyed.

As stated earlier in this lesson there's nothing in the Bible that prohibits wealth, but there are restrictions on how we earn it and what we do with it. That's something we should all be alert to in our own lives. Why? Because each of us will answer for our actions. Those who die lost will stand before Jesus at the *Great White Throne Judgment* (Revelation 20:11-15), and those of us who die in-Christ will stand before *The Judgment Seat of Christ* (Romans 14:10-12 / 2 Corinthians 5:9-10). Either way all of us will have to give an accounting of how well we managed what the Lord has given us.

Lesson #19

Quick Recap:

At the beginning of chapter 5 James warns us about ill-gotten gains. The Bible doesn't restrict the accumulation of wealth, but it warns us about the sin that can result when we acquire or use wealth in the wrong way. Pride, boasting, greed and coveting can all result from how we acquire wealth and what we do with it. To be in the right mindset we must remember that everything we have belongs to God, ***"10. For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills."*** (Psalm 50:10). But God allows us to be stewards of what He has given us. So we must acquire it and use it in ways that honor Him.

James chapter 5 verses 7-17

Several times in his letter James points to future events. In chapter 2 verse 5 he mentions God's promised kingdom. In chapter 3 verse 1 he talks about the future judgment of believers with a specific focus on teachers. Earlier in chapter 5 he discussed the punishment awaiting those who acquire wealth sinfully. Now in verses 7 and 8 he references another future event. The ***"...coming of the Lord..."***.

The ***"...coming..."*** James talks about is the Rapture of believers (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). An event we should all eagerly anticipate, ***"20. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."*** (Philippians 3:20). Paul encourages us to ***"...eagerly wait..."*** for our Lord's return but James encourages us to also be patient. As Peter confirms, ***"8. But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9. The Lord is not slack [slow] concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."*** (2 Peter 3:9-10). But why would James, Paul and Peter tell us to be patient for something we eagerly anticipate? Because every day our Lord waits to return is another opportunity for the lost to accept Christ. God is ***"...not willing that any should perish..."***. That's why the Lord admonished us through Paul through his letter to the church at Rome, ***"11. And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. 12. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. 13. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy."*** (Romans 13:11-13). And to the church at Ephesus, ***"14, Therefore He says:***

“Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.” (Ephesians 5:14). But how many believers are really ***“...awake...”***? That doesn't mean going to church on Sunday. It means investing our time, energy and abilities into walking in the Spirit and sharing the gospel while we still can. So James reminds us we're in the *Last Days*, and waiting for the ***“...coming of the Lord...”***, which simply means time is running out. As Paul describes, ***“11...our salvation [the Rapture] is nearer than when we first believed...”*** (Romans 13:11b). So patience means we are simply taking advantage of the time we have to share the gospel while we still can.

James illustrates patience with the example of a farmer who, ***“7...waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.”*** A farmer plants seed, waters it and keeps the weeds down, but doesn't expect an immediate crop. He realizes it takes time and rain for the seed to grow into a plant and bear fruit. The farmers' wait requires ***“...patience...”***. And so it is with us sowing the gospel seed. It often takes time before the seed we plant will produce a harvest. But as Jesus reminds us, ***“37...The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 38. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”*** (Matthew 9:37b-38). That's why we're told to ***“...awake out of sleep...”*** and become a faithful ***“...ladorer...”***.

But there may be another way to approach this passage. James' reference to the ***“...coming of the Lord...”*** reminds us of a promised event that has not yet occurred. But until it does we must be patient, like the farmer who plants seeds and waits for them to produce fruit. But between planting and harvesting there is a lot of hard work. The ground must be prepared, the seeds planted, the seedlings must be nurtured, the plants must be watered and pruned. And along the way comes bad weather, erosion, heat and pestilence. All making it difficult for the plants to mature.

In a way, doesn't that sound like our walk with Christ? Jesus told us, ***“33. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”*** (John 16:33). Our Christian life is not without trouble, but Jesus has promised to walk through those troubles with us. That's why James started his letter with a very encouraging thought, ***“2. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3. knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”*** (James 1:2-4). This is the ***“...patience...”*** James, Paul and Peter are talking about. The *endurance* we need to walk with Jesus and *persevere* even when the trials of life get in the way. But to do that we need to remember to, ***“8...Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”*** (James 5:8b). To be established is to be set firmly and faithful no matter the

situation. ***“8. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.”*** (Jeremiah 17:8). Like the tree we must be firmly planted in our faith and reaching out to draw closer to the Lord. The source of our nourishment. And like the farmer, we must patiently nurture our faith, water it in God's word, remove the weeds of the world, and stand steadfast and immovable during drought and storm. The faithful Christian life is one of endurance and constant work, but a life that along the way produces fruit and in the end results in an eternal reward.

So how do we do this? How do we endure the inevitable tribulations in life with steadfast faith? The entire Bible, from one end to the other, gives us clear guidance, but James gives us a great example, ***“9. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!”***. Unity within the body of Christ is critically important. As our Lord tells us through the Psalmist, ***“1. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”*** (Psalm 133:1). A point He emphasizes through the apostle Paul, ***“10. Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”*** (1 Corinthians 1:10). One of the most common ways satan attacks the effectiveness of believers and the church is to create disunity and conflict. Gossip, backbiting, social media posts and sharing our opinions, can often cause friction and discord and tear apart the fabric of our unity. And when that happens the storms and drought of life are much more difficult to contend with. We need to remember, James initially wrote his letter to encourage and instruct displaced Jews. People who were already living under the oppressive occupation of the Roman Empire but were now persecuted even more because they had converted to the new belief system of Christianity. Living their life required strong unity and great endurance to stay steadfast under such conditions. But their example should ring true for us as well. Across the world both Jews and Christians are under great persecution today. Even in the US, where Christianity was once accepted and nationally embraced, we find ourselves at odds with many of our leaders and society. We also see the “broader” church segmented and divided with a percentage staying focused on Jesus but probably the majority drifting into a self-serving unBiblical focus as they seek to be relevant to society. That means we need to learn to endure and persevere as we work hard to maintain the unity our Lord expects.

So as persecuted Jews James' original readers would understand his reference to the prophets, ***“10. My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience.”***. Prophets were spokesman for the Lord, and as such were in God's will. Sometimes they brought a promise of blessing, but more

often than not, they brought a message of dread and the consequences of disobedience. But in doing so they suffered greatly, often to death, and their message was often ridiculed. Something that happened even though they were being faithful to God's leading. Of the prophets Jesus said, ***“34. ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!’*** (Luke 13:34). And in his message to the sinful Jewish leadership, the martyr Stephen said, ***“51. ‘You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. 52. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers.’*** (Acts 7:51-52). The point is, the prophets were not being persecuted for doing something wrong. They were being persecuted for doing something right. The prophets understood faithful persecution so James uses them, ***“10 ...as an example of suffering and patience.”*** (James 5:10b). This again points us back to his earlier point, ***“...brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials...”*** (James 1:2b) by reminding us, ***“11. Indeed we count them blessed who endure.”***

There's that word again, ***“...endure...”***, a word that simply means *to persevere and be steadfast*, but we all know that's sometimes easier said than done. Whether we call it *endurance* or *perseverance* it can be tough to accomplish. So James encourages us with the example of ***“...Job...”***, ***“16b...You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.”*** The story of Job is a lesson in ***“...perseverance...”*** during extreme suffering. Job lost his family, his wealth and his health, but through it all he never lost his faith. Even when his wife encouraged him to walk away from the Lord and end his life he refused to do so. But of all the things we can learn from Job, what is the one thing that sticks out in most people's minds? His ***“...patience...”***; *“The patience of Job”*. It is his ***“...patience...”***, the endurance and ***“...perseverance...”*** we most often remember. As Warren Wiersbe describes our trials, ***“There are no victories without battles and no peaks without valleys.”*** That's what James wanted his readers to understand. Trials and suffering in life may be there to teach us and strengthen us, because it is often during our trials when we grow closer to the Lord and more faithful in our walk. Paul understood that when he was given a ***“...thorn...”*** that tormented him. We don't know exactly what that was but it reminds us of Job because Paul called it, ***“7...a messenger of satan to buffet [torment] me, lest I be exalted above measure...”*** (2 Corinthians 12:7b). Possibly because Paul had been given a unique view into heaven (2 Corinthians 12:1-6) he was also given a trial to keep him humble and draw him to the Lord. That way instead of being able to boast about what he had seen he had to ***“...endure...”*** a trial to keep him from becoming arrogant. So what did Paul do with his trial? The same thing Job did. He trusted God without stumbling and said, ***“10. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am***

strong." (2 Corinthians 12:10). Paul understood what Job understood. That our suffering in life is not a reason to turn away from God, but is a reason to draw even closer to God. That's why I find it so interesting how people are drawn to the Prosperity Gospel movement. They believe our Lord rewards them with material wealth and good health as a sign of their salvation. But nowhere in the Bible do we see that. Instead we see countless examples of people like Abraham, Moses, Jacob, David, Ezekiel, Job, John, James and Paul who were blessed by the significant trials in their lives. Prayerfully our own trials in life will draw us away from the material prosperity of the world and draw us closer to the spiritual prosperity of a life lived for Jesus.

James ends this section by pointing again to the importance of our testimony. He paraphrased the words of Jesus in *The Sermon on the Mount*, (Matthew 5:33-37), **"17. But above all, my brethren, do not swear [make an oath], either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment."** This isn't talking about swearing as in cussing, but means making an oath. Jews, and particularly Pharisees, were known to make long pronouncements. Often to overstate the true meaning with too many words. This can lead to confusion and the **"...boasting..."** James warned us about earlier in his letter (James 4:16). But this is not how a Christian should act. We should not have to rely on wordy explanations if we speak the truth. Therefore, our **"Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No,"**. We should be people of fewer words, but words of truth, that shine the light of Jesus.

Lesson #20

Quick Recap:

In the prior section of his letter James implores us to be patient. Although we eagerly await the return of our Lord we recognize the time we are given is intended for us to share the gospel. Like a farmer who plants seed and waits patiently for a crop to emerge, we too plant the seeds of the gospel and eagerly wait for the results. But whether farming or witnessing the waiting time is not idle. Hard work is involved to nurture the growth, remove the weeds and prune to gain the best harvest. But along the way we must endure drought and storm, and that requires perseverance. To illustrate this James uses the example of Job and the Old Testament prophets to help us understand that the greatest blessings of obedience often come during the most difficult times in life.

James chapter 5 verses 13-20

Now James will end his letter by talking about prayer. What better way to close an instructional letter to suffering believers than to remind them that the power of prayer will carry us through the tribulations of life. But how often do we think about the privilege that prayer really is? As followers of Christ and children of God we are allowed the opportunity of talking to our holy Creator. We don't have to go through a priest, a medium or an idol. We can go face to face with our Lord and share with Him our thanksgiving and praise, our wants and needs, our cares and woes, and our victories and challenges. Whatever the situation, God is always there and ready for us to seek His face.

Prayer is a privilege like no other, ***“16. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*** (Hebrews 4:16). We have the amazing opportunity to go directly to God but we must approach prayer in the right mindset. Our Lord isn't a fast food restaurant waiting for our order. He's an all-holy sovereign God who gives us the privilege of praying, but He does so intent on accomplishing His will through us. To better understand this let's explore a couple of key verses:

- In 1 John 5:14 we are told, ***“14. Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”*** This passage is often misunderstood and has led to false doctrine and even false hope. In one sense, the entire *Prosperity Gospel* movement and the emerging belief in *“Manifesting”* come from this verse because people believe God will give them ***“...whatever we ask...”*** for. But, that's not the

way it works. God certainly hears our prayers (Psalm 145:18). In fact, God already knows what we're going to pray before we ask (Matthew 6:8), but God answers prayer the way He wants, and not necessarily the way we want. That's why John clarifies **"...if we ask anything..."** it must be asked **"...according to His will..."**. Not according to our will. That's the point the Prosperity Gospel folks seem to miss. They pray for what they want and they pray God will do their will, but God is going to provide what He wants and it will always be **"...according to His will..."**.

- Jesus explains this very clearly in the second verse, **"13. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it."** (John 14:13). When you put these verses together we see the qualifiers required for answered prayer. We get **"...whatever you ask..."** when we ask **"...according to His will..."** and when we ask in a way **"...the Father may be glorified..."**. That should cause us to step back and think about the type of things we ask for.

We have to remember, God's will may be different than our will, but His will is always perfect because He knows what we need much better than we do. For example, we can pray for physical healing, and there's nothing wrong with that, but God may choose not to heal us in this lifetime. And yet we can still be comforted in the knowledge of His healing power because as a believer we will one day be healed in ways we can't even imagine. The Lord affirms this in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, **"42. So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."** After we die or are Raptured we will be given a perfected, incorruptible and immortal body. But that won't happen in this life. In that sense, our prayers for healing will always be answered, but maybe not during our earthly life. If they were Christians would never die and go to be with the Lord.

So, if God can heal us, why are there times when He doesn't? Because there may be times when the challenges and struggles in this life are there so **"...the Father may be glorified..."**. That may be hard to understand, but think about how many people we have met who during an illness or other challenge in life grew closer to the Lord, dug more deeply in His word, or were more fervent in prayer. And what about the people whose challenge becomes a witnessing tool by bringing credibility to their testimony? James has already given us the example of Job and the Old Testament prophets and how their suffering brought glory to God. Glory because our illness or other challenges in life may fortify our testimony and allow us to show the world the power of God through our endurance. That's why Paul could say about his trials, **"10. Therefore I take pleasure in**

infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:10). The reality is the Lord may allow us to walk through a trial in life if that trial accomplishes His will, strengthens our faith and brings glory to Him. So as we pray we need to consider whether or not our prayer is ***"...according to His will..."*** so that ***"...the Father may be glorified..."***.

Now, in that context James gives us several examples of how to use the power of prayer.

Prayer for Suffering

"13. Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms." At some point in our lives we will all suffer. Some will suffer more than others, but to some extent life has its share of challenges. But one of the things we have to remember is that God is already aware of our trials and will walk through them with us even if He decides not to take them away. It is during those times of ***"...suffering..."*** that we often draw closer to the Lord, ***"71. It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes."*** (Psalm 119:71). James has already told us about the power of faith seen through Job and the persecuted prophets. Through them we see the endurance and perseverance we need in life, but there's another element of our inner strength we shouldn't overlook. Prayer. So James tells us to ***"...pray..."*** when we are ***"...suffering..."*** and to praise, ***"...sing psalms..."*** when we are ***"...cheerful..."***. But the real joy comes when we can do both and praise while we are ***"...suffering..."***. The apostle Paul spoke to this when he said, ***"11. Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*** (Philippians 4:11-13). We see this attitude in action when Paul and Silas sang praises in a Roman prison, ***"25. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 26. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed."*** (Acts 16:25-26). Clearly Paul understood that no matter how difficult or easy our life may be we should be content and praise the Lord. Whether ***"...suffering..."*** or ***"...cheerful..."*** we should be confident through Christ who gives us strength.

Prayer for Sickness

“14. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” This verse is often misunderstood when taken out of context. Some believe it means they can be healed if pastors pray over them with anointing oil. But in reality a pastor's prayer is no more powerful than anyone else's, and the oil has no magical or spiritual powers. In this case they could be praying over someone who is ill, someone in sin, or both. Paul speaks to this condition in 1 Corinthians 11:29-30 when he addresses those who are sick for violating the ordinance of communion, **“29. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 30. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep [death].”** But here James is probably talking about pastors participating in intercessory prayer for someone in their church, and that can be done for many reasons.

There are various opinions about the use of olive oil in the Bible.

- Leviticus 14:18 speaks to oil being used for anointing, **“18. The rest of the oil that is in the priest's hand he shall put on the head of him who is to be cleansed. So the priest shall make atonement for him before the Lord.”** But generally this is interpreted to be part of symbolic cleansing.
- Since olive oil has some medicinal properties it was also used for soothing and refreshing, to comfort those who were sick. We see an example of this in the story of the Good Samaritan, **“34. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.”** (Luke 10:34).
- Additionally, oil could be used to symbolize the power of the Holy Spirit, **“13. Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.”** (1 Samuel 16:13a). In this case the oil represents the indwelling of the Holy Spirit when we are saved.

But whatever the intended purpose, praying over a person and anointing their body could indicate they were addressing either a spiritual and physical need. But again, let's be clear, there are no magical properties in the oil. Prayers are not answered just because pastors pray or someone is anointed. The power of prayer comes from a **“...prayer of faith...”** James reminded us of this at the beginning of this letter, **“6. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.”** (James 1:6). A prayer acknowledging complete faith in the Lord is

a powerful tool. Even if the Lord chooses not to reveal that power at this time or even during our earthly life.

In addition to the pastor's prayer James also tells us to, ***“16. Confess your trespasses [sins] to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”*** This speaks to unity amongst believers and points to the process found in Matthew 18:15-17. The Lord expects us to reconcile any offense ***“...to one another...”*** that is affecting our relationship. This serves to restore the unity in the body when we pray together for each other's healing and strength.

Prayer for our Nation

The Bible often cites Israel as an example of a nation falling away from God. Israel was given everything they needed to remain obedient - the patriarchs, the prophets, their own land, the system of atonement, the written word and the Messiah were all given to Israel to guide them, and yet they continuously fell into cycles of sin. The apostle Paul confirms this in Romans 9: , ***“4. who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; 5. of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.”*** And yet, even with all of this preparation Israel failed - still fails - to be obedient. To illustrate this James uses the story of Elijah the prophet in 1 Kings chapters 17 and 18, ***“17. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.”*** Elijah was a righteous man who sought to follow the Lord's will even when his life was at stake. Elijah lived during the reign of king Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel, the daughter of the pagan king Ethball of the Sidonians. Through them Israel fell into the worship of Baal a pagan Canaanite god. Through prayer Elijah declared a drought on Israel for three and a half years. He then prayed to bring about rain. But it was also the prayer of Elijah that brought fire from heaven to consume the priests of Baal. Yet James points out that Elijah was just like us; a normal man, ***“...a man with a nature like ours...”*** The power of his prayer was the power of God seen when he ***“...prayed earnestly...”*** and prayed within the will of God. Elijah prayed fervently and repeatedly that God's power would be seen and God would be glorified.

Our prayers need to be the same way. Instead of expecting wealth we should ask God to be glorified in our poverty. Instead of expecting healing we should glorify the Lord through our illness. And instead of expecting God to remove the trials in our lives we should seek ways to glorify Him through our challenges. In the end the Lord may prosper us, heal us

and remove our trials, but if He doesn't we should **"...pray earnestly..."** that His will be done and His name glorified in and through us.

Prayer for Those who Have Wandered Away

"19. Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20. let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins." For context, let's first look at Paul's description of **"...falling away..."** in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, **"3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition."** Although this is talking about the attitude of man in the Last Days it also describes those who turn away from the Lord. So are they saved or lost? As true born-again believers in Christ it is impossible for us to lose our salvation. Ephesians 1:13-14 confirms this, **"13. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14. who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory."** Note carefully what it says: having **"...believed..."** the gospel **"...of truth..."** we are **"...sealed..."** with a **"...promise..."** and **"...guarantee..."** until our **"...redemption..."**. It doesn't get any more clear than that. At salvation our **"position"** as a child of God is established and cannot change. That's an assurance further confirmed by 2 Corinthians 1:21, **"21. Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, 22. who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."** So if it's impossible to lose what God promised us then who are those who have **"...fallen away..."**? The apostle John gives us an indication in 1 John 2:19, **"19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us."** John is speaking about those who turned from the faith but were never truly saved to begin with. They were **"...were not of us..."** which means they were never true born again believers even though they may have thought they were. So where do we see this type of **"...falling away..."** today? In those who follow ritual based gospels, prosperity gospel, works based gospels and any other teaching that removes Jesus as the only source of salvation. People who believe those things call themselves "Christians" but base their faith on something other than Jesus have **"...fallen away..."** from the truth.

So given all of that, who is James describing? He appears to be discussing those who have **"backslidden"**. They do not deny the truth, nor refute it, but they have wandered **"...from the truth..."**. Not an abrupt reversal, but a slow progression as sin or apathy replace their zeal for serving the Lord. Maybe they fell into sin, or they may have broken fellowship with other believers, but either way they have wandered away.

Let's consider this from the perspective of *"position"* and *"condition"*. If we're truly saved and in-Christ, our *position* will never change, and our salvation can't be lost. But in our pre-glorified flesh we can certainly fall into sin and change our *condition*. The Bible is full of examples of Godly people who for a time fell away from the Lord (*backslidden*) but they repented and returned. Some quickly, and some after years of struggle, but in a backslidden state we don't lose our salvation. We lose our joy. We are constantly under conviction and we know we are wrong. How? Because the Holy Spirit will challenge us and convict us of our sin. When that happens we often feel like we have a huge void in our chest that cannot be filled with anything in life.

But not all is lost. Think of the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). He fell away from his father's direction and fell into a life of sin. He took everything his father had given him and squandered it in a sinful life. But, his father never disowned him or rejected him. Instead, when the son returned and repented of his sin, ***"20. 'And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. 21. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22. 'But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.'"*** (Luke 15:20-22. His father, joyful for his son's return *"...ran..."* to him, embraced him and forgave his son. And so it is with our heavenly Father. If we ever fall away He will not forsake us. Instead, He will draw us to Him and restore our relationship when we repent. But the tragedy of backslidding is what we miss during our time of disobedience. The word tells us our days are *"...fashioned..."* before we're ever born, ***"16. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them."*** (Psalm 139:16). That means God has things planned for us to do, so during our backslidden season what amazing things He could have planned to do that we're not done through us?

That's why at Southside we focus so much on *"unconfessed sin"* (1 Corinthians 11:27-32). It's our unconfessed sin that damages our fellowship with God (our *condition*) even though it doesn't remove our salvation (our *position*). That's because we can't walk in the Spirit and the flesh at the same time so we confess our sin and restore our relationship. That's why James directs us to help turn them back to the Lord through repentance and confession of their sin. It is our responsibility as a mature believer to share the gospel and draw the lost to Christ, but also to seek the fallen and draw them back in.

Conclusion

The Book of James is a journey into our testimony. In it, the author, inspired by God, seeks to guide us to walk through life focused on our Lord. He instructs us along the way with both the encouragement of obedience and the consequences of wandering away.

So what did we learn from James? A great deal, particularly as it applies to using our life to show Jesus to a world who so desperately needs Him.

Chapter 1

In chapter 1 we were told to find joy in our trials because it is those very trials that can shape us and mature us in our walk with Christ. We were also told to ask for wisdom. Spiritual wisdom, not the knowledge of the world but the wisdom of God. But we must do this in faithful prayer without doubting. We learned to endure temptation and trials because in doing so we can defeat the enemy and his schemes. Lastly, we were commanded to be *doers* and *keepers* of God's word and not just *listeners*. For it is God's word applied to our lives that will make us complete.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 started with a discussion on favoritism. Our society thrives on titles and accolades to the point many people are better known for what they are called rather than who they are as a person. But believers are simply sinners saved by the same grace through the same God and we're all equal at the foot of the cross. Chapter 2 also discussed the often misinterpreted comparison of works and faith. Our study confirmed that salvation cannot be earned by our works, but that our works, our service, our attitude, our actions, after we're saved is a reflection of our true faith.

Chapter 3

This chapter probably hit home with many people. Our tongue, the words we say and how we say them have more influence than we can imagine. Our words can build bridges of relationships, or tear them down, our words can encourage or discourage, and our words can heal or hurt. But most importantly, our words can draw people to Jesus or drive them away. James then reflected back to Chapter 1 and helped us understand the difference in Godly wisdom and the demonic wisdom of the world.

Chapter 4

In Chapter 4 James talked about the sin of pride. The condition we're in when our ego gets out of control. To combat this situation he talked about the necessity to be humble so that the characteristics of Jesus can be seen in our lives. This led to a discussion of sinful judging versus righteous judgment and the trap of falling into boasting.

Chapter 5

James closes his letter with instructions on prayer. Prayer for those who are suffering or sick, prayers for our Nation and prayers for our own perseverance. He also discussed our need to lovingly and gracefully approach those who have fallen away and help them return to a life of obedience.

I pray you have enjoyed this journey with James and have learned more about how to have a testimony worthy of our Precious King.