

# Practical Teaching From James

Adapted by Matt Dabbs from the Pleasant Valley Church of Christ's  
Small Group Curriculum

## **Schedule:**

Sept 12 – Introduction to James (1:1-4)

Sept 19 – Seeing the Trials of Life in a Different Light (1:5-8)

Sept 26 – Satan's Playground (1:9-18)

Oct 3 – Words, Words, Words (1:19-27)

Oct 10- Don't Play Favorites (2:1-13)

Oct 17- Faith Without Works is Dead (2:14-26)

Oct 24- Oh, the Power of Words! (3:1-12)

Oct 31 – Two Kinds of Wisdom (3:13-18)

Nov 7- A Holy War (4:1-10)

Nov 14- A Proper Perspective on Life (4:11-17)

Nov 21- Warning to Rich Oppressors (5:1-6)

Nov 28 - Singing

Dec 5- Be Patient and Stand Firm (5:7-12)

Dec 12- The Prayer of Faith (5:13-20)

Dec 19- Wrap-up

Dec 26 - Singing

# Lesson 1 - Introduction to James

## Read James 1:1-4

### Welcome / Prayer

Some have called James the most practical book in the New Testament, a book that empathetically calls us as Christians to a radically different lifestyle than those in the world.

### The message

Getting real with your faith. James believed that Christ-followers should not only wear the outfit, but they must run the race! They must walk the talk!

Be prepared. James is harsh and dogmatic. You will feel the sting of his words. Expect this study to be difficult; not because it is hard to understand but because it is all too easy to understand.

### Who was James?

Two men in the New Testament named James who were prominent enough to have written this letter:

1. James the brother of John, one of the twelve apostles
2. James the brother of Jesus.

The first as Luke tells us, was executed by Herod Agrippa I in A.D. 44 (Acts 12:2) and this letter was probably not written this early. So we are left with James the brother of the Lord as the most likely author (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). This James did not at first believe in Jesus' messianic claims (John 7:5), but was apparently converted as a result of Jesus' resurrection appearances (1 Corinthians 15:7). He became a leader of the early church in Jerusalem.

### Who was James written to?

James describes the people he is writing to very generally: "the twelve tribes scattered among the nations" (1:1). James is writing to Jewish Christians who had been scattered across many nations. It is possible James is written to Christians in general, both Jew and Gentile.

Acts 11:19 tells us how these Christians had been scattered, "Those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews." With this scenario then, the Jewish Christians James addresses are living as exiles in areas near Palestine because of their faith in Jesus. Their status as exiles explains why they are experiencing some of the trials James mentions:

1. they are poor (5:1-11)
2. they are hauled into court by wealthy people (2:4-6)
3. they are oppressed by large landowners (5:5-6).

### James 1:1-7 – Trials and Temptations

James jumps right into the reality that Christians will face trials and temptations. From a worldly point of view it seems strange to consider it pure joy when you face the trials of

life. *Is joy an emotion you have ever experienced in the midst of a storm? What is the "joy" he is talking about here?*

That we can have joy in the face of trials can only be understood by the verses that follow. In these verses James tells us what our trials result in if we have faith in God. *What does James say results from the testing of our faith in 1:3-4? How would that produce joy in our lives?*

- The testing of the believer's faith produces perseverance;
- Perseverance produces spiritual maturity.

God is working in our lives, often through trials, to build our faith, character and integrity. Once we understand that, we are able to have perseverance, "because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (1:3-4).

*How would you define perseverance? Why is it important in the life of a Christian?*

- If we give up, no longer persevere, it shows we don't really believe God is going to make good on his promises in the end.

*How does this give you a new perspective on why we as Christians should welcome trials?*

We have to cooperate with God's maturing process. Sometimes God uses trials and difficulties to make our faith stronger. *Does knowing that help you deal with the problems you are currently facing? How might God be using something you are going through right now to grow your faith?*

**Application:**

*What characteristics have we discussed that James says are important in becoming a mature follower of Jesus Christ?*

- Faith
- Perseverance
- Wisdom

*Which challenges you the most? How would it stretch your faith to grow in that area?*

*What situations in your life do you need the group to pray for so God can use it to grow your faith rather than diminish your faith?*

**Prayer** - Spend time praying for each other so that God will make us all mature followers of Jesus Christ.

**Assignment:** Read James by next Sunday

## Lesson 2 - Seeing the Trials of Life in a Different Light

### Read James 1:5-8

**Exercise:** Allow different ones in the group to share what has been a trial (an unwanted and un-welcomed experience) they have gone through in recent months.

*When you have undergone trials and difficulties, to whom do you turn for help and encouragement?*

Last week we talked about joy in difficult circumstances and developing perseverance. This week we are going to focus on the wisdom God grants us that helps grow our faith. Notice that God doesn't leave us alone in the middle of trials and struggles to figure this out. *What does James say we should do and how will God respond in 1:5-8?*

- Ask God for wisdom and not doubt God will do it
- God will give it generously, without finding fault

*Why do you think James includes that God won't find fault in those who ask for wisdom?*

- Sometimes we just don't want to bother God or think we just have to figure it out ourselves. James is telling us that God really does want us to ask and He really does want to answer that prayer because God will give it "generously".

*Have you ever prayed for wisdom, did God provide?*

*How do you think God will provide the answers?*

- Through his Word, the Bible
- Through others
- Through situations, doors opened and closed

And then James says, "But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord: he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does" (1:6-8).

*Under pressure, how does the mature Christian (vv. 5-6a) contrast with the person described in verses 6b-8?*

*What does it mean to be a double-minded person?*

- We ask, as if God would answer, but then don't really believe he will...that is double-minded. Well, then why ask in the first place.
- Either we ask and believe he cares or we should realize just how silly it is to ask if you figure he won't answer you anyway.

*What will wisdom do to help us with the difficulties we face in life?*

His encouragement was for believers to endure trials faithfully and stand steady through the storms of life. When such steadfastness has its full effect, then God's faithful people will be "mature, not lacking anything."

*Why is it important to see the trials of life that we experience as being a part of the maturing process?*

*How do the trials that we experience expose our need for God's wisdom?*

**Application:**

*How would these verses change your prayer the next time you are having difficulty?*

- We typically ask for a way out. Maybe we need to ask for a way through the storm. But first we need to ask for wisdom.

*In what area of your life do you need wisdom from God right now?*

*From this discussion, what are those things you feel compelled to pray about tonight?*

**Close praying for these things**

## Lesson 3 - Satan's Playground

### Read James 1:9-18

After unveiling a more appropriate way of looking at trials, James then jumps straight into a discussion of finances. Here again, he turns things upside down. From the very beginning of his letter, James seems determined to highlight our self-reliant tendencies! And now the penetrating question is “Is financial status a good measure of a man?” To keep everything in this letter in its proper context, the whole thrust of James’ letter is his emphasis on spiritual maturity. He wanted people to know how to have an authentic faith.

Consider for a minute your Christianity as if you were building a spiritual portfolio. *How can handling a trial with joy and faithfulness result in a deposit in our account? Can maintaining a proper attitude toward the stewardship of money count as a deposit in our account?*

#### **The poor:**

*What surprising thing does James say about those in humble circumstances?*

- They are actually in a high position

*What makes someone who has less material possessions more likely to be in a higher spiritual position than the wealthy?*

- They recognize their need to rely on God instead of self

The world gives more credibility and attention to the rich but God is not a respecter of persons. “The ground at the foot of the cross is level!” Rich or poor, God wants us to trust him. It doesn’t make being poor any more righteous than being rich but James does make us aware that it is our reliance on God that will see us through in life.

#### **The rich:**

The rich and the strong are to rejoice that God has helped them down from their rickety ladder of self-reliance and self-love. James told the rich that they need to humble themselves against the temptation of trusting in their wealth rather than placing trust in God.

*Why is it foolish to place our trust in temporary things? (1:11)*

James could be speaking out about injustice of the rich against the poor in their communities. This is not something that is a modern phenomenon but has taken place among all generations and is something we have to resist.

#### **Facing Temptation:**

Next, James raises an important question - *How are temptations different from trials? (1:12-13)*

- Trials come from outside of ourselves. They are an inevitable part of living in a fallen, sin-cursed world.

- Temptations, however, spring from within when a person is tempted by his or her “own evil desire” (v. 14).

Temptation to sin is the operation of evil forces and the devil. Without question, James is combating a false notion that God is the source of temptation:

- God is the source of “every good and perfect gift” (v. 17).
- God allows for us to experience the trials of life and these prove to be test of our faith (vv.2-8)

Satan tempts us to do wrong. *What tool does Satan use to get that done? (1:14)*

- Notice that evil desires originate from within the believer.
- *What do you think about that?*

*Do you think Satan identifies in us our weaknesses and vulnerabilities in order to make his temptations more effective?*

Because temptation comes from Satan luring us by our own evil desires we cannot blame God for anything bad that happens as a result.

*Where does James say sin comes from?*

*What is the ultimate result of these evil things?*

It is a good lesson to learn again...sin has consequences. Evil has consequences and what we do really does matter in life and matters to God.

*How is God the ultimate example of goodness and dependability?*

At first 1:16-18 seem out of place but they really do fit so well here. God is the opposite of these things. Sin results in death but God brings us birth and life. Evil desires result in a curse but God gives all good gifts.

The answer to sin is God.

*How does God’s Word, the Bible, play a role in our having lives? (1:18)*

### **Application:**

*What have you found helpful in dealing with temptation?*

James tells us that scripture is a good starting point for dealing with sin. Take some time every day this week to meditate on some verses or a chapter of the Bible. Ask God for wisdom as you do so.

**Prayer:** Are there areas of desire in your life that are unhealthy and need to be addressed? Spend some time in silent prayer for those things. If anyone has one they want the whole group to pray for offer that to the group.

## Lesson 4 - Words, Words, Words

### Read James 1:19-27

We all do it. While someone else is talking, we're thinking about what we're going to say next instead of listening to the person talking to you. We know others are worth more care and attention. God wants us to slow down and listen.

*Anyone had a conversation this week that you would acknowledge you are not pleased with how you listened?*

James states his conviction in 1:18 that God chose to give us "spiritual birth" so that we can become a "kind of firstfruits of all he created." God wants us to be new and different. From this point forward in his letter, James specifically asked his readers to "take note" of three things:

1. Be quick to listen
2. Be slow to speak
3. Be slow to anger

*How can being "quick to listen and slow to speak" help us to be "slow to become angry" (vs. 19)?*

Listening is powerful, but it is a learned commodity. We should listen more than we speak. It's pretty obvious; God designed us with two ears and only one mouth. But so many of us just don't listen well. *Is it possible this really all starts with our failure to listen to God?*

**Exercise** - Try something. In your prayer life this week, instead of talking to God so much about your own stuff, try listening to God. That may take you to scripture. It may demand you just be still and listen for God's gentle voice!

Have you ever tried to have a relationship with someone who talks all the time? As much as you try, it is hard to get close to someone where only one-way communication is taking place. Some of us are that way in our relationship with God and we never really get to know Him!

*How do you feel about the thought that maybe we don't listen to God as well as we should?*

*What does anger tell us about the inner quality of a person's heart?*

We are to uproot anger and disrespect for others and replace it by planting God's Word in our lives (vs. 21)

*How do you actually do that in real life?*

**Read 1:22-25** - In your own words explain how the person who merely listens is different from the one who puts God's Word into practice.

**Look in the Mirror:**

1:23-25 gives us a key to understanding this section of James' letter.

James implied two mistakes that occur when the believer fails to act upon the word:

1. the believer doesn't treat the truth of the word as reality
2. the believer ignores the message of the word.

*According to verses 26 and 27, how do people who think they are religious differ from those who are truly religious?*

- It is sometimes much easier to follow a rule than to love your enemy or pursue justice, mercy, and the weightier matters of the law.

*Could it be that someone could actually feel secure and righteous while pursuing an unrighteous life?*

- The evidence of this is overwhelming, as people behave unjustly, unmercifully, and un-lovingly.

Rule following can open the door to people becoming desensitized to their arrogant, selfish, mean-spirited behavior that evidences itself in the junk that comes out of our mouths. We should always check ourselves and make sure that pursuing justice and mercy are primary acts of "religion".

**Application:**

*How are you doing on the "slow to speak" thing? What would help you accomplish that?*

*If you find yourself talking way more than listening, what is the reason you talk too much?*

*Have you ever let rule keeping hide deeper issues in your heart? For example, someone might rationalize doing things that are evil because they do more good than they do bad or because they went to church twice in a week.*

*Have you ever deceived yourself on something? How can you keep honest with yourself to avoid that in the future?*

Last, James used a graphic word, "pollution," to make his final point in this section about the contaminants of ungodly actions and attitudes that we allow into our lives. *Why is the idea of pollution an appropriate word picture?*

## Lesson 5 - Don't Play Favorites

### Read James 2:1-13

Let's all be honest about ourselves, most of us have others they would prefer to spend time with and some they would rather not.

*What kind of things make you favor one person more than another?*

### Read James 2:1-13

James tells us plainly - "Don't show favoritism." Favoritism is probably the least talked about sin there is. If you doubt it is a sin look at 2:4, 9. *How does James describe that kind of thinking?*

So why is favoritism such a serious problem? The issue is alluded to in 2:1 where he says those who believe in our glorious Lord Jesus should not show favoritism. Bottom line – favoritism runs counter to what Jesus Christ modeled in his life on earth.

Before you jump to the conclusion that one more time the Scriptures are slamming rich people. That's not the point. James is not criticizing the rich. He is being critical toward those who react and salivate and stumble and fumble all over themselves to impress and hang out with the rich folks.

*Why are we prone to show preferential treatment to those who have money?*

*Why is this offensive to God?*

James gives us four results of showing favoritism, find them in the following verses:

- 2:4 – you become judges with evil thoughts
- 2:6 – you insult the poor
- 2:9 – you sin and become a law breaker
- 2:13 – you will be judged

We are so prone to think the rich are on top and the poor are at the bottom. We often portray our belief that leaders are important and that servants are less. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is constantly talking about an upside-down kingdom:

- If you want to be great, you've got to become a \_\_\_\_\_
- If you are weak, then you'll be \_\_\_\_\_
- The poor will be \_\_\_\_\_
- The first will be \_\_\_\_\_

*What two gifts does God give the poor (v. 5)?*

*What did James identify as being the "royal law" (v. 8)?*

We have all heard that phrase thousands of times. We don't need to hear it for the 1001<sup>st</sup> time. We just need to put what we already know into practice. The reason we don't is because we think there is something in it for us to be associated with the financially well off than with the poor. *What is "in it for us" that can draw us away from being loving of all people?*

- Attention
- Prestige
- Honor – people to think we are “something” because of those we associate with

Let's get this right-side-up again. God loves and blesses the poor. If we want to have good associations, wouldn't it make sense that we would love and honor those God loves and honors. That means we, like God, are also to not be respecters of persons and to show equal love for all, whether rich or poor.

We need to love our neighbor as ourselves – rich or poor. This does not mean rich = bad and poor = good. These verses are here to challenge the way most people view what is valuable in life and get us to have a more Christ-like view.

*How can the royal law guide out treatment of others in all circumstances of life?*

James brings up two necessities in the closing verses in this section (vv. 12-13) that might be the motivation we need to see how serious this issue really is:

- Accountability
- Judgment.

James warns us that God will show to us in the end the same kind of mercy that we showed to others.

*When have you been hurt by favoritism?*

**Application:**

*As a disciple of Christ, how can you better show mercy this week? How merciful are you with your spouse? With your children? Around your office? With the cashier in the checkout line?*

*Who in your life do you find yourself avoiding and how can you bless them this week?*

## Lesson 6 - Faith Without Works is Dead

### Read James 2:14-26

In this section James discusses deeds as the outward expression or evidence of our faith. James' point is that living and active faith in us will show itself through the way we live. Imagine believing in Jesus and claiming to be a Christian but having never changed the way you lived since you were baptized. *Why would that not make sense?*

James is not saying that we are saved as a reward to our deeds. He is not saying God will save us if we do enough good. He does say that living and active faith will be demonstrated by visible deeds and a difference in the way we live. James uses the example meeting someone who is hungry and needing clothing. *What does James say is an unacceptable way to treat that person?*

*What makes that unacceptable for a Christian to treat someone that way?*

The way we act reflects what is on the inside. Someone who treats another person poorly does not understand just how valuable that other person is to God and shows that their faith is weak or non-existent. *What does James say that faith without action is?*

That would imply that a living, active, and vibrant faith would be one that is outwardly visible and accompanied by action. Jesus was not a well wisher. Jesus was a man of action and his action was based on his mission and how he valued others. *What does it mean to be a "disciple of Jesus Christ"?*

- A disciple is someone who follows another person to learn what they know and act how they would act.

If Jesus was a man of action, then we are to be people of action. If Jesus embraced the poor and hurting then we too need to embrace the poor and hurting. When our faith produces action, we are showing that we understand what it means to have faith in Christ and be a follower/disciple of Christ.

### **Application:**

*What areas of your faith need strengthened?*

*In what areas do you believe your faith is strong?*

*What opportunities do you have before you to let your faith show through with good deeds?*

### **Read 2:20-26**

In these verses James continues to talk about how faith and works goes hand in hand. He uses two examples. The first example is Abraham. *What did God tell Abraham to do? (James 2:21 & Genesis 22:2)*

*How would that be a tremendous test of faith?*

Previously, God promised Abraham that he would have a son and that son would have children that would eventually turn into a great nation (Genesis 15:1-6). Abraham believed this promises as it says in Genesis 15:6. So when God told Abraham to take Isaac, who did not yet have children of his own, and sacrifice him Abraham had enough faith to do what God said. *What would it say about Abraham's faith if he said, "God I believe your promise that I will have descendants through Isaac...but I don't believe you enough to sacrifice him like you told me to do."?*

*What would it say about our faith if we believed all the right things but didn't care about changing the way we live?*

Actions serve as a thermometer for our faith. Elsewhere we learn that Abraham believed so strongly in God that he figured God would raise Isaac from the dead if he sacrificed him (**Hebrews 11:18-19**). Faith is only faith if it is active. Faith must produce new actions within us.

A few questions to ask out loud for the group to consider but not necessarily discuss:

- *Do you believe the promises God has made to you?*
- *Do you believe he will forgive your sins?*
- *Do you believe he will resurrect you from the dead in the last day? Do you believe just in your head...or does can your belief be seen in the things you do?*

The second example of faith in action James points to is Rahab (**James 2:25**). *What did Rahab do that showed she had faith?*

What if Rahab had just thought, "well, God can save you. I better not involve myself in this." The spies in Joshua 2 & 6 would have died. Remember what James said in 2:16 – we can't just say to poor people to be well fed and clothed. We have to take action and realize that we have responsibility because of our faith in God and Christ.

**Application:**

*What responsibilities do you have because you believe in Christ?*

*What areas have you been quick to take action in and which areas have been slower?*

*What things do you know you really should do that you have been holding out on? What is holding you back? What would motivate you to turn your belief into action?*

## Lesson 7 - Oh, The Power of Words! Read James 3:1-12

James starts off this section about taming the tongue with the warning that not many of us should presume to be teachers. He intensifies this statement with this reasoning : “because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (v. 1).

*What’s the point?*

- Teachers are the most vocal people in the congregation. But they aren’t just speaking on their own. They should be trying to help people understand God’s Word. That takes special care and James is reminding them how great a responsibility this really is.

But James’ words are not just for teachers. He goes on to say, “We all stumble in many ways” (v. 2) and the most common way we do that is through our words.

Listen to Paul’s words on this subject. Read **Colossians 3:8-10, 4:6** and **Ephesians 4:29-32**

*What do you learn from reflecting on these words from Paul?*

Some of our biggest regrets have to do with hurtful words we have said. We wish we could recall those words, but we can’t. The damage is done. Conversely, some of our greatest joys can come from encouraging words we have heard others speak to us. Words have the potential for doing great harm or great good. *What are some of the most memorable words that have been spoken to you? Why do you remember them?*

### **Illustrations:**

James uses three illustrations to help us see how powerful our tongue (the words it produces) really is:

1. A horse has a wild nature. A horse wants to go his own way, but amazing enough, a bit in a horse’s mouth can control this huge animal.
2. A small rudder is the instrument that steers a boat.
3. A small spark can start a huge forest fire.

Having given these three examples, James then says, “Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts . . . it is a world of evil among the parts of the body” (v. 5, 6).

*What’s James’ point?*

- Our words have power and can be used to control ourselves and others. We must use them with care.

Some people are verbal arsonists. They strike a match - a little bit of slander; gossip; a verbal jab; a lie; or an insult and oh the fire it starts! James calls all this “a restless evil, full of deadly poison” (v. 8).

*Why are verbal attacks like poison?*

There are many ways our tongue can be like a wild animal. Some struggle with cursing or profanity. Others struggle with gossip. Still others have an issue with boasting about themselves.

*In what ways have you found it difficult to keep control of the words you choose to say?*

**Hypocrisy:**

As if James hasn't already called us out, he then speaks to the hypocrisy of one minute finding us praising God and then not a minute from the church house we are enraged by someone's actions on the interstate and we are cursing them, "Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be" (v. 10).

*Why are we so easy to lose our focus like this?*

When we hear "cursing" we think profanity. It could also be that James is saying people were quick to praise God and then "curse" someone, which would mean ask God to harm them. That makes sense of James examples of a well that cannot have both fresh water and salt water or a fig tree that bears olives (v. 11). "Cursing" someone is asking God to do something he is not going to do.

**Revealing who we really are:**

Here is the point. Our tongue reveals our true person. It reveals our bitterness, volatility, selfishness, judgmental attitude, hateful spirit, evil thoughts, self-righteousness, hardness of heart, hypocrisy, etc. It reveals our spirituality or lack thereof (Mt. 12:33-37; 15:16-20; Lk. 6:43-45)!

Why is there such a close connection between the heart of a man and what comes out of his mouth (Ps. 34:12-14; 37:30; Prov. 10:20; 20:10)?

Why is what we say the "real revealer" of our true spiritual maturity?

**Application:**

*Does anything you have said this past week trouble you after hearing these words from James?*

*Are there certain people, times, or situations where you struggle with what you say the most? How would you address that?*

## Lesson 8 - Two Kinds of Wisdom

### Read James 3:13-18

*Describe someone you know that you would characterize as wise and understanding?*

Wisdom is something that is rated very highly in the Bible. It is mentioned over one hundred times in the Book of Proverbs and many more times in the rest of the Bible. And so we shouldn't be surprised to find James having something to say on this important subject. Right living begins with right thinking. Often, we mess up by confusing wisdom with knowledge.

*What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge?*

- Knowledge gives us all the data, all the facts, and we can recite them verbatim. Wisdom takes those facts, puts faith into them, and gives them feet.

Proverbs, the book of wisdom, says, "Wisdom is supreme; therefore, get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding" (**Prov. 4:7**).

Job, who had some reason to know about this said, "the price of wisdom is beyond rubies" (**Job. 28:18**).

You obviously can't pay cash and receive wisdom (colleges can't even do that). *What is the real cost of wisdom, how do you "pay" for it?*

Wisdom is worth all you have, and true wisdom will bring humility. Wisdom is the power of knowledge applied, directed, and focused.

*How can you tell the difference between someone who is wise and someone who is just knowledgeable?*

#### **Godly vs. worldly wisdom:**

There is a vast difference between Godly wisdom and worldly wisdom. Sometimes we want to have a little bit of worldly wisdom mixed in with the Godly wisdom, a little chaos with the control. This will never do!

James even says that worldly wisdom is "of the devil" (v. 15). *How do you react to this statement?*

James brings up two things that are signs of worldly wisdom (3:14):

- bitter envy
- selfish ambition

*Of all the things he could have mentioned, why do you suppose he brings up these two worldly characteristics?*

*What about these two attitudes stands in conflict with Godly wisdom?*

**Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.**

*What does all this have to do with our own “boastings”?*

Notice the harvest of worldly wisdom: “For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice” (v. 16).

Look closely at each of the descriptive terms that James uses to describe “the wisdom that comes from heaven” (v. 17-18)

- pure
- peace-loving
- considerate
- submissive
- full of mercy and good fruit
- impartial and sincere

Look closely at these qualities one by one. *Are they the qualities to which you have devoted your life? What makes the life filled with Godly wisdom so attractive?*

And then James closes this section with this comment: “Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.”

*How is all this talk of wisdom related to being a peacemaker?*

- A wise person will likely have less trouble and be able to bring peace than the foolish one

**Application:**

*What are some things you are going through right now that are a result of unwise decisions made in the past?*

*Which have you put more of a premium on in your life, godly wisdom or worldly wisdom? How can we have more godly wisdom to guide us?*

*What decisions do you have ahead of you that you will need wisdom for? Close this lesson for a prayer for these.*

## Lesson 9 - A Holy War

### Read James 4:1-10

There are three different wars that James introduces in this section:

- An internal war (we fight with ourselves)
- An external war (we fight with others)
- A Holy War (me versus God)

James identifies the source of their conflicts as their “desires” (probably better translated “cravings”).

*James says these desires have the potential to lead to what? Why is that such a scary thought?*

#### **The War Within:**

Within our bodies there are feuding desires that cause internal war. One desire that causes internal war is our desire to control. *How does our desire to control the outcome or control others lead to a war with our desires?*

Another desire that contributes to the war is covetousness. *How would you define covetousness?*

- a desire to possess the possessions of others.
- This comes from being discontent with what God has already blessed us with

What might be some other desires that cause internal war?

James gives us a solution for this battle. *What does he say we should do when we feel like this? (4:2-3). Why do we sometimes resist or hesitate to ask God for what we want?*

- When we selfishly want something we know God doesn't really want us to have it so why ask Him?

If we are unable to ask God for something maybe that is a sign to us that we don't really need it.

Next, James addressed his readers harshly as “adulterous people” (v. 4). This term is especially used in the Old Testament and is synonymous with unfaithfulness. By making this correlation, James implied that his readers were having an “affair” with the world.

*How can our desires lead to unfaithfulness with God?*

Describe in your own words the nature of this “affair with the world.”

The root cause of all the wars we fight is pride. It is pride that causes us to be at battle with God, within ourselves, and with other people. *If pride is so pervasive, what can we do to rid ourselves of it?*

James provided the antidote to spiritual adultery by quoting from Proverbs: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (Proverbs 3:34).

Building on the foundation he laid in v. 6, James gives us a series of 4 commands that are his recipe for humility:

- Submit yourselves to God (this is a military term used to highlight a position on an organization chart)
- Resist the devil
- Come near to God (we’ve got to relationally place ourselves next to God)
- Wash your hands and purify your hearts (we’ve got to deal seriously with sin).

*Which of these are the most difficult for you?*

Humility is important – Have you ever really humbled yourself before God, flat on your face kind of prayer, for example?

When we humble ourselves before the Lord, God does some special things in our lives. What keeps you from humbling yourself before the Lord?

**Application:**

*Have you had a fight/conflict with someone you are close to lately? If someone is willing to share, what caused it?*

*In what areas of your life do you still need to submit to God? What desires need to be brought under God’s control?*

*How has pride played a role in your life, how can you submit to God this week to get a handle on your pride?*

## Lesson 10 - A Proper Perspective on Life

### Read James 4:11-17

How subtly we convince ourselves that we control our lives. *What are specific ways that you try to control your life? Have you been successful?*

Before we get into the actual content of this section, *what is the link you see between James' instruction against slandering (vv. 11-12) and the following section on "boasting about tomorrow" (vv. 13-17)?*

- Both are about pride...which also links it to last week's lesson

*Why do people try to build themselves up by criticizing others?*

- People have been doing this for thousands of years. It is nothing new!

*How is this improper attitude toward others reflective of an improper attitude we have about ourselves . . . and even worse, of an improper attitude toward God?*

#### **Slander:**

To slander is to speak evil about another person in their absence and thus they are unable to defend themselves. Slander might come in the form of false accusation. Or it might just be harsh criticism. When a person judges someone else, it is a violation of the royal law of love (2:8)! *Why is this judgmental attitude and action so offensive to God?*

#### **Boasting/Arrogance:**

Remember several weeks ago we discussed the problem of "boasting" and referenced it would come up again in this study. Well here it is again! Boasting about what will happen tomorrow is another example of human arrogance. It is in the same category as judging others (vv. 11-12).

*What makes judgment arrogant?*

- Judgment is arrogant because God is the only legitimate judge
- Judgment of others often assumes we are better than they are

*What makes boasting about the future arrogant?*

- It assumes we are in control of tomorrow
- God is the only one who knows what will happen in the future.

Back to last week's lesson, such arrogance is the opposite of humility, which is one of the primary virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ!

#### **Leaving God out of our Plans:**

James lets us listen in on the plans of a group of businessmen. They are planning for the future. What are the four agendas on their mind (v. 13)?

- Where they will \_\_\_\_\_
- How long they will \_\_\_\_\_

- What they will \_\_\_\_\_
- How much \_\_\_\_\_ they will make

In contrast to prayerful planning, James uses these businessmen who represent all those who are very proud of what they do on their own. James is not condemning international trade or the wealth it brings. *What is he concerned about?*

- the one who does all this in a spirit of boastful arrogance without giving any credit to God's provisions in his life.

*To contrast that worldview, what is James' perspective on life and what is his caution against adopting the worldly approach to life that he describes in this section (vv. 13-17)?*

If you have been in church for any significant length of time you have probably heard 4:17 on many occasions, "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins."

*But, how does this verse relate to the this section of James?*

- Take out the boasting and bragging and fill up that space with all the good opportunities that surround us daily.
- Yet, much of what draws us is based on making self greater over doing the good that is all around us.

The hunger to be significant is a dominant drive that God placed within the heart of each one of us. It was God's intent for this hunger to be satisfied by living in covenant relationship : first with Him and then in relationship with others that He places in our lives. It was never his intent for our significance to be found through worldly pursuits.

That's the reason James says, "As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil" (v. 16). **DON'T MISS THIS POINT.** The hunger to be significant can destroy us. If you don't believe it, take a quick look at what happened to Saul after David killed Goliath (1 Samuel 18:5-10). We long to have significance in this world and for someone to take notice of us. Let that be found and filled in God! Everything else is empty and hollow!

### **Application:**

*What have you found yourself boasting about? Have you ever boasted about God?*

*What plans have you made lately that didn't include God or God's will?*

*How can we more regularly remind ourselves to be in tune with God and pray over our lives and over what tomorrow holds for our lives?*

## Lesson 11 - Warning to Rich Oppressors

### Read James 5:1-6

In this section James has some words to say toward those who exploit others to make themselves wealthy and/or those who have wealth but fail to use it in a way that honors God. Remember, letters were written to a specific group of people with specific needs and issues to be addressed. It is like we are “reading someone else’s mail” at times. So if you read 5:1 by itself, without consider the specifics he gives to follow you would come to the conclusion that riches are evil and that all rich people will face severe judgment. But if you read the rest of this section there is more to the story:

5:4-6 tells why that harsh judgment will be brought upon them. Let’s look at these first and then see the result:

- 5:4 – Oppressing those who have earned their wages
- 5:4 – Those they ripped off cry out to God and God hears
- 5:5 – They have placed a high priority on self-indulgence at the expense of those who have made them wealthy (the workers)
- 5:6 – they were murderers. Not sure if this is literal or figurative but it seems pretty literal here.

5:1-3 tell what will happen to the wealth of people like this:

- 5:1 - They will wail in misery
- 5:2 – Their wealth will rot away
- 5:3 – they themselves will be consumed just like their wealth

Clearly James is not teaching that all rich people are evil or self-indulgent. *What is he teaching us about wealth?*

- James is telling us that wealth has to be used ethically or else it will testify against us.

#### **Putting it in Perspective:**

We often think of wealthy people in the U.S. as having a huge home, nice cars, and at least \$1 million+ in the bank. But by the world’s standards, even the poorest American is wealthy. If you are reading this on a printed page, you probably got it off the internet through a computer and are reading this in an air conditioned room. You know how to read English and are probably in the top 5% of the world’s population when it comes to wealth. So the call is not just on the few among us who have a tremendous amount of wealth relative to the rest of us. This call is to all of us to use what we have ethically, wisely, and in a way that pleases God.

In other words we can’t see the word “wealth” and think James is talking to someone else. These verses should be heard by us all and appropriate action taken to keep our priorities in check.

Notice also, James has twice said that those he was writing to had killed/murdered people (4:2 & 5:6). Have you ever noticed that before in James. *Do you think they had really physically killed others?*

- It is impossible to say. Maybe they did or maybe James is talking about how extreme their attitudes have gotten that he has to describe them as a murderous bunch.

*How might we murder someone without actually killing them?*

*In what ways can you use what you have to be a blessing to others?*

*In what ways has it been a challenge to you to use your wealth to bless others?*

*What is hardest for you to let go of, money, time, or talents?*

**Application:**

*What would be the most difficult possession you have to give away? What would make it so hard?*

*Could you if you really felt God wanted you to?*

We won't have an application exercise to go home and do that this week but we do have to evaluate whether we are the ones possessing our things or if our things are actually possessing us.

*Have you ever struggled with being ethical with your finances? How did you deal with this?*

## Lesson 12 - Be Patient and Stand Firm

### Read James 5:7-12

We don't like pain and suffering. We'd like to escape it, but the reality is that trouble and heartache is just a part of living here on planet earth. The big question is how to deal with the pain and suffering that comes our way! James gives us an answer that at first glance seems shallow. He just says, "Be patient."

Patience? Have you noticed this is a place where your faith in God gets tested? How have you noticed that as you bear through the trials you have faced with patience that God worked within you and matured you into His likeness? With many of his readers being farmers and laborers, James' reference to a farmer would have been a very appropriate illustration. *What are some of the reasons you can identify that make farming a profession that demands patience?*

*Would you do well as a farmer?*

Through all of the sufferings and trials that we endure through life, *what is the one thing that we are waiting for (v. 7)?*

*Why should we live our life with a greater anticipation of the Lord's coming?*

*Why do you think in this section that James makes a point that amidst the trials we face we should keep in mind not only the Lord's Second Coming (vv. 7-8) but also the fact that He is also beside us right now (v. 9)?*

*How does impatience lead to grumbling and complaining about our circumstances . . . or about the actions of others? Are you a grumbler?*

James' reference in this section of the patience and perseverance of the prophets and Job are worthy of our imitation. The central message is that those who persevere will be blessed by God : "the Lord who is full of compassion and mercy" (v. 11).

And then there is a command in verse 12 that we don't give much attention : "Above all, my brothers, do not swear : not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your 'Yes' be yes, and your 'No' no, or you will be condemned."

Note the emphasis James places on these two points:

- Above all . . ."
- ". . . or you will be condemned" : meaning to ignore such comes with stiff consequences

#### **Oaths/swearing:**

So what exactly is swearing?

- In times of distress, Christians can easily use God's name in a careless and irreverent way.

But the bigger issue is that of taking an oath to guarantee a promise. It seems his primary point is to call Christians to a standard of truthfulness and control that just saying "yes" or "no" is a binding promise, a guarantee of truth. Several times in James' letter he made the point that there is no room for careless, half-baked talk, or promises unfulfilled.

How would you sum up this passage in one sentence?

**Standing firm:**

James' instruction in verse 8, "Be patient and stand firm . . ." seems to be the central message of this section. While we've given most of our attention in this discussion to the idea of patience, describe in your own words what it means to "stand firm."

Describe some ways that you have seen God bless your life through your perseverance through some significant trial in your life.

**Application:**

*How might your patience be tried this week?*

*Do people trust what you tell them? Are you a man/woman of your word? What might help you improve on that if you aren't?*

*What things in your life do you need prayed for so you can stand firm for God?*

## Lesson 13 - The Prayer of Faith

### Read James 5:13-20

This last section is one of the most famous in James. In this section James gives us a series of things to do under various circumstances in order to take care of each other. *How have you been taken care of by the church in the past?*

The one thing in this passage that comes up the most is prayer. *What things does James encourage them to pray about in these verses?*

- If someone is in trouble
- If they are sick
- Pray for each other

James is saying prayer is effective. *Why does prayer some times not seem so effective?*

- Sometimes we pray to God and don't see instant results
- Sometimes we never get an answer.

*When we pray for sick people do we really expect God to heal them on account of our prayer or is it just something we are "supposed to do" without really expecting an answer?*

- Obviously God can use doctors but the point is, our faith is in God and so we pray to him for help and healing.

James is saying in 5:15 that prayer really does work...there can be a visible, physical result because of God answering our prayers for the sick.

*What other kind of healing does he say prayer can bring in 5:16? Do you pray more for physical healing or spiritual healing (from sin)? Why?*

"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (5:16). That is one of the most quoted verses in James. Obviously this is true of women as well and not just of men.

*How does it make you feel that when you pray, something really is happening?*

- Your words really do reach God's throne room in heaven. They aren't just bouncing off the ceiling never to be heard by God.
- This should give us comfort that God hears and God cares.

What makes the prayers powerful is God because God is all powerful. But James does seem to say there is some sort of partnership between our faithfulness and God's when it comes to answering prayers. *Have you ever considered that your morality and ethics might impact how God views some of your prayers?*

James concludes talking about bringing reconciliation of other people with God. *What does the word reconciliation mean?*

- Making things right

*What does James say is the result of bringing someone to repentance (5:20)?*

*Does this motivate you to talk to the people you know who need God the most? Why?*

**Application:**

*What has stood out most to you in the book of James?*

*What is something you learn that changes the way you see God, others, or yourself?*

*What one thing can you put into practice that is in line with what James has taught us in this letter?*

In answering this next question, keep in mind that it is okay to talk about our struggles and our shortcomings with one another because we have all struggled with something at some point and have to be considerate of each other and take care of each other when we make ourselves vulnerable.

*Is there anything in your life you need the group to pray about in regard to things that need to be confessed?*