

WORK IN PROGRESS

a study through the book of James

James

This letter of the New Testament was one of the earlier writings, being completed somewhere between the late 40's and early 50's AD. It was written to believers from the twelve tribes of Israel who were now living outside of Israel in the regions around the Mediterranean.

The author gives his name as James. The only other thing we know for certain is that he is a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many scholars believe that this James was one of the four half-brothers of Jesus listed in Mark 6:3. In part, they believe this because the writing style is reminiscent of Jesus' preaching style. James introduces subjects abruptly with a statement or an instruction. Then he explains more about the subject giving illustrations, examples, and more commands. In this letter, he does not teach doctrinal propositions or even add insight into the central truths of the gospel. James' emphasis is on action. The letter can easily be summed up with the theme, "As a result of works, faith is perfected". As you read through, look for the words: faith, sin, wickedness, evil, law, tongue, speak, prayer, and judgment. These words are used to convey meaning and illustrate the theme.

However, James did not sound anything like Jesus in John 7. He along with his other brothers did not believe Jesus was the Messiah. They mocked him, urging Jesus to "show Yourself to the world". I guess they thought their older brother was seeking mere fame. James is not mentioned again in the Bible until it highlights the turning point of his life. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:7 that the resurrected Jesus appeared to James. From there, you see James listed with the disciples in Acts 1:14 while they were praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Later in Galatians 1:9 we see that James even becomes an apostle who is prominent in the Jerusalem church. He served that church until he was martyred sometime around 62 AD.

Week 1, Day 1 – James 1:1

"James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings."

The James in question is most likely Jesus' brother. Some evidence has been given in the introduction. Most importantly though, James the brother of John was martyred in 44 AD as recorded in Acts 12. The letter was most likely written sometime around 50 AD. Added to that, Jesus' brother James appears in Acts 15 as a leader of the Jerusalem church. Comparing James' language in that passage to the language in this letter illustrates striking similarities. It's so close that it would be hard to imagine these being different people.

With the author's identity out of the way let's focus our attention to what he says. He does not appeal to his high reputation in the church. Paul describes him as a pillar of the church in his letter to the Galatians. There is no mention that he is physically related to Jesus, which is something he could do if he wanted to emphasize status. Instead, he describes himself as a bond-servant. The word translated here is "doulos". It means a slave, a person who is permanently, voluntarily bound to and consumed with the will of the master. He describes himself as not only a bond-servant of God, but also of the Lord Jesus Christ. If indeed the speculation is true that he was a brother of Jesus, it is especially significant in that he does not

even mention the physical relationship. He views himself strictly relative to his spiritual relationship to Jesus Christ.

How do you identify yourself in relationship to Jesus? It's easy I think, especially in our culture to see Jesus primarily as a friend; to see Him as one of us, and not as also entirely other, completely holy, the one and only Lord. In Hebrews 7:26, scripture describes Jesus as the ultimate "high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens" who has offered up Himself for us. Do we see Jesus that way? How would that change the reality of who we are in relationship to Him if we did? Let's just ask God to give us the wisdom to see Jesus correctly, to see Him as He is. We can rest assured that when we see Him for who He is, we will also see ourselves as we ought to.

Week 1, Day 2 – James 1:2-4

"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

The letter immediately starts off with a command, "consider it all joy". To consider means to lead your mind into what it should believe, to set before your mind the thing you know is true. In this case, we are to consider that all of our tough times in life are all joy. That is a hard idea to accept. How can we relate the catastrophes and temptations we go through to joy? My natural tendency is to try to escape those things as fast as I can!

However, that is not what God tells us to do. He does this because He knows the great effect trials can have on our life. If all we do is try to escape trials, we will never develop the valuable trait of endurance, which means to remain under a load. As burdens weigh us down, endurance allows us to continue following God while our circumstances attempt to pry us away. Endurance says, "I will never surrender"!

Next, James explains that endurance is not idle. Once you have it, it works towards an ultimate goal. James says there is a perfect result and that result is a follower of Jesus who is spiritually mature, who has a completed faith.

Let's spend time thinking about the nature of temptation. They often deceive us into thinking that we need something that we do not have, or to spark an unquenchable thirst for something that we desire. It's usually painful to withstand temptation because we often feel as though we *need* this thing. We think if only it was within our grasp we would be complete, we'd be full, fulfilled, and whole. Brothers and sisters, this is a lie. Peter also discusses how we are to respond to trials. He offers encouragement to everyone who is going through trials.

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation" 1 Peter 4:12-13.

What trials and temptations has God allowed in your life? What do you consider them, as joy? As unintuitive as it sounds, let's thank Him for those things. Realize that there is nothing more joyful than seeing God's love and power demonstrated in your life in times of real need. Praise God!

Week 1, Day 3 – James 1:5

“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

James shows us more about the path to maturity in these verses. Endurance is just one of the ingredients that we need. Wisdom is another trait, which we are to desire. It not only includes intellectual understanding of many different subjects, but also how to use that understanding. A wise man is aware of his state before God. He is familiar with natural and man-made processes. He is observant in all situations. When presented with an issue, he draws upon his reservoir of knowledge, formulates the correct course of action, and skillfully resolves the problem. Wisdom is both sensible and spiritual; it is both deep and practical.

While endurance comes by the testing of our faith, wisdom is given when we ask God for it. In Proverbs 2, it says that God stores up wisdom for the upright person. He is waiting to give to those who ask. We should not be shy with our requests because God is generous. Our prayers are not a burden to him. He does not get tired of providing what we need. It says He gives without reproach, so we've got to know that God does not shame us for not knowing, for “He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust” (Psalm 103:14). God knows that apart from Him, we have no understanding. We need wisdom in order to see our correct position before Him. We need wisdom in order to see what He is doing through trials and temptations. We need God to provide wisdom, so that we can see, that He would open our minds and give us supernatural understanding.

Notice also that it says “and it will be given to him”. It *will* be given to you. God is responsive, this blows me away all the time and it shouldn't really, but it does. We do not have an unresponsive heavenly Father. When we ask for something, we can trust Him that He *will* respond. When we ask God for wisdom, we can trust that it *will* be given. Scripture does not say that about everything that we ask for. But this implies that asking for wisdom is always within the will of God and He will always give it, so as you pray, pray with confidence that you will receive from the Lord the wisdom that you are asking for. Our Father loves imparting wisdom to His children!

Week 1, Day 4 – James 1:6-8

“But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, {being} a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

Yesterday we were told to pray for wisdom according to what we know about God’s character. Now James instructs us to how to pray, in faith without any doubting. The issue is how can we doubt a God so willing to give? Doubt is described as being like the surf, tossed each way by wind, and unstable. Paul uses the same imagery in Ephesians 4 of waves and wind to describe the spiritually immature. Both James and Paul urge us away from that mindset. James also describes this person as double-minded. A double-minded person tries to believe two opposites at once. He believes that God is powerful enough to be able, and caring enough to follow through. At the same time, he believes that either God is unable or unwilling or too uninterested to provide. We must be single-minded with respect to God. If not, the doubter is commanded to not suppose he will receive anything.

This is convicting, because we are so often double-minded. This is easy to get caught up in, because in the church we often don’t call it for what it is, it is easily viewed as an acceptable way to think, but this is not how scripture sees it. If we believe something about God based on scripture, we must believe it entirely, whole-heartedly, without reservation. If we do not believe in this way, our prayers are ineffective. This is a big deal. When our prayers are ineffective we are not walking in all of the spiritual resources that are needed in order to labor to bring forth God’s kingdom here on earth. We will indeed be unstable in all of our ways, and we *feel* that when we are double-minded. We feel insecure and lost.

Be reminded of the character of God, that He is responsive! This is hard for some of us, who have maybe grown up with unresponsive or passive parents, fathers especially. But you’ve got to know that our heavenly Father is not that way, that He will respond, that we need not doubt with Him (in the hopes that we won’t be too greatly disappointed). We need not fear. For scripture says that “whoever believes in Him will *not* be disappointed” (Romans 10:11). Are you trusting God to hear? Do you believe he is eagerly waiting to answer? Our Father is trustworthy. Let’s approach Him that way. We can draw near to Him with confidence.

Week 1, Day 5 – James 1:9-11

“But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; and the rich man {is to glory} in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.”

James does not want us to be unstable regardless of our situation in life. Maybe life has been tough lately. We have little endurance during trials. We exhibit more foolishness than wisdom. We doubt as we pray. Then our thoughts need to be taken off the temporal and placed on the eternal. With an eternal perspective, we are reminded of our exalted position in

Christ. The word exalted is also used to described the highest heaven where God lives. No longer will we be overwhelmed by our failures or circumstances. We will boast in the glory we possess as followers of Christ.

On the other side, what if life has been one big accomplishment after the next? The more success we experience, the higher our opinion of ourselves can become. The Pharaohs of Egypt because of their position believed that they were gods on the earth. Satan was corrupted with pride and therefore sinned when he noticed just how beautiful and powerful God had made him. Let us not follow their example. Instead, we need to boast in that which humiliates us. There are things that remind us of that now. Remember how quickly everyone's grass died this summer due to the drought. That is what we're like. When pride starts to creep in, remind yourself that you are only human.

Let us ask for the wisdom to see that our years spent here are not meant to be full of the pleasures of this world or how much riches we can acquire. Ask that God would give us spiritual wisdom to not run after the things of this world, but to boast in humble circumstances that we've been given. We need no more, we just need Jesus. Knowing this we can glory in Him, because although we are but grass, He has given us an exceedingly great position in the heavenly places where we are seated with Him even now (Ephesians 2:6). We do not need to rush about vainly chasing the wind, because we are laboring hard for a kingdom that has come, is coming, and will come, in which we will partake of all the greatest treasures, namely Christ, for all of eternity!

Week 2, Day 1 – James 1:12

"Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

We need to remember our lesson from last week that we have an exalted position as children of God and at the same time we are frail humans. That attitude added to endurance and wisdom will help prepare us for the next trial.

Next, James focuses on the result of successfully persevering under trials. He describes those who persevere as blessed. Blessed means you possess the favor of God. Aristotle contrasted the blessed one with the needy one. We are blessed because we know that Christ is our portion. We have no need He can't satisfy. Our blessing is tied to our circumstances.

There is also a future aspect to this blessing. James says God will present us with the crown of life. The word for crown is where we get the name Stephen or Stephanie. It is not the golden crown inlaid with jewels we usually associate with the word. It was a garland worn on the head usually made by weaving together things like oak, ivy, myrtle, olive leaves, or flowers. It was given to people to celebrate victory, valor, or festivals. Those whose life is in Christ will receive this crown. We will celebrate with Him all that He has accomplished in us.

Are you facing any trials? Do you feel you are persevering or merely surviving? In what ways can Christ receive glory through this trial you are facing? Have you been finding satisfaction in the presence of God or in earthly circumstances? God promises present and future reward to all who are satisfied by Him. What an encouragement that can be when we are afflicted.

Week 2, Day 2 – James 1:13

“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”

The word translated “tempt” in this verse is the same one translated as “trial” previously. The difference is the implied intent. In the first couple of verses, the positive intent of passing a test was emphasized. Now the negative aspect of causing one to fall into sin is in view. When we fall into temptation and sin, we are not to assume that God is responsible. To think He is responsible for our temptation is to misunderstand two things.

First, we misunderstand God’s character, for if God’s intent is that we sin, then He must also be affected by temptation. We know that is not the case because James clearly tells us that evil things do not tempt God like they tempt us. Our second misunderstanding is that God does not ever act in contradiction to His character. Sometimes we sin despite being free from sin in Christ. The same is not true of God. John says “God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.” John also says that we can “walk in the Light”, but we must still “confess our sins”.

The story of Job is a great illustration. Satan’s intent was to get Job to curse God by using afflictions. God’s intent was to prove that Job would always be faithful to Him.

When temptation comes, how have you understood the situation? Do you despair that sin is inevitable, that you are being set up to fail? Or do you trust that God is giving you an opportunity to succeed?

Week 2, Day 3 – James 1:14-15

“But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

If God is not involved in our temptation, then what is going on? James answers this question in the next two verses. Two times in verse 14 he calls attention to the individual referring to “each one” and “his own”. He lays the blame on the lust that each one of us carries around in our flesh. The effect is that a person is carried away. He is drawn out into a place where he is

vulnerable. Our mind has been taken off of Christ's glory and placed upon the object of desire. That object is bait, which Satan has placed to trap us.

You see this often with stories of sin. I don't think any of us deliberately seek out temptation and actively pursue sinful activities. But it always starts small. Once we take our eyes off Christ our perspective becomes skewed and our purpose blurred. Our desires suddenly shift. Our habits suddenly change. Before long we are on the path of destruction and our desire to live in Christ is forgotten.

When we have decided to leave God behind, the lust takes complete hold of us. When that happens, sin is born, meaning we act upon that desire. The progression continues. When sin accomplishes all that is sets out to do, the result is death. It could be the death of a relationship or a promise or our future or our life, but the result is the same - a sudden realization we were fooled. I think James is using irony. One thing gives birth to another until the ultimate result is death. This shows the unequivocal link between sin, sickness, and death. But don't despair. Look at 1 Corinthians 10:13. When Satan sets the bait in the trap, God never allows the temptation to be more than what you can endure. He always provides a way of escape.

What is your focus? Are you battling against any temptation? Are you trusting Christ for redemption and rescue? Rest in Him. Look to Him. Only *through* Him will you notice and recognize the escape He provides.

Week 2, Day 4 – James 1:16-17

“Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”

James did not want his brothers to confuse where temptation comes from. So he warns them against wandering from the truth after giving it in vv. 13-15. Now that they know what God does not do. It is important to explain what He *does* do.

The Father gives good gifts. “Every good thing given” highlights the act of giving. When you see any act of giving, it is the Father – whether it is Him directly or using some other means. Next, “perfect gift” refers to the object. It is a gift that fulfills every need or desire. Our Father in heaven is responsible for the generous act and the actual thing received.

These gifts come not from nature nor the logical progression of events that we see, but from God. The imagery is clear, *from heaven to earth*. Just to be sure we have not missed the point, we see that God does not change. He gives us every good thing and that is never untrue. Not only that, the last phrase “shifting shadow” means not even the slightest trace of change.

Have you ever experienced a brilliant sunrise? You know the ones I am talking about - rich in color with clouds fighting for their place in the sky? In moments like these, where we easily forget to breathe because of the sheer beauty before us, it's important to remember our

Father's heart. This sunrise? It's for you. The cool breeze caressing your face after a rough day? It's Him reminding you of His presence. The unexpected check in the mail when you just spent your last penny? His provision. The needed joke or the welcomed smile are from Him as well - He knows our hearts and He *wants* to bless us. Read Zephaniah 3:17. He loves to sing over us and reveal Himself to us. What a great God we serve!

Is there anything you have been given for which you have not thanked God? Is there anytime when you might have discounted God's involvement in providing for your needs or causing you to smile? Remember God did it. This is our God. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

Week 2, Day 5 – James 1:18

"In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures."

God is the giver of all good gifts. What would be the best gift of all? Anything on this earth will eventually pass away, including our lives. Eternal life while being at peace with our Creator far surpasses anything else we can receive. It is to this gift that James turns our attention.

Who gets credit for our salvation? Is eternal life something we can lay claim to? James as always gives us a direct and simple answer. First, God desired it. We did not. A relationship with God is not something we seek after on our own. Second, He made it happen. He did so by the word of truth. Can mankind find some credit in this? Only if a man came up with this word. Again, the good news that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again to free us from our sins is divine in origin. Last, God did this for a purpose, so that we would be dedicated to Him. The first fruits are the first of the harvest to ripen. In the nation of Israel, the first fruits were dedicated by the people to God. The produce was used as sacrifices to the Lord and to feed the temple priests. Now we are used to carry out God's work on the earth.

Let's thank God for desiring us and saving us. It should humble us to know that we have nothing to do with our salvation. How does that affect your attitude about yourself and God? Now that we have been brought forth, are you being used to do God's work in the world? Are you involved in spreading the word of truth?

Week 3, Day1 – James 1:19-20

“This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.”

After describing how God saves, James shifts to the subject of the attributes faith should produce. When we receive the word of truth, what kind of behavior will follow? The ones he addresses are his brothers which he loves. James gives these instructions not as a drill sergeant but a close relative.

He draws their attention to the subject by either reminding them that they know what follows or by telling them they must. Then he makes sure no one thinks they are exempt. Everyone must be ready to listen, both to other people and to God. Even though it can be more difficult, listening to God is much more important. Jesus emphasizes its magnitude often throughout the Gospels when he states “he who has an ear to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 11:15). Our hearts cry should be “Lord, help us to hear!” Isaiah speaks of a heart like this when he says, “... He [the LORD] awakens me morning by morning, He awakens my ear to listen as a disciple. The Lord God has opened my ear; and I was not disobedient nor did I turn back” (Isaiah 50:4-5). These were Jesus’ thoughts when He was on the earth. Let us follow His example and pray for this kind of hearing, that God would open our ears to listen as a disciple.

To really hear you must sometimes train yourself to let go of anger. This anger does not refer to a hot temper. It is a continual, mental state of resentment which will block us from accepting the hard truths we need to admit about ourselves. The reason is simple. Harboring selfish anger inside never leads to God’s righteousness. Many times anger is accompanied by a sense of being right. Here we see that many times it is a false sense. The issue that comes to mind that produces this type of anger is unforgiveness. It is rooted in the perception that we know what is right, and someone has wronged us and therefore deserves punishment. In order to achieve the righteousness of God we must not be *given* to anger. In order to be slow to anger, we must have understanding, which only God provides. In order to be given understanding we must hear. God is calling us to reflect His character. Even though He is right about every issue with no equal, even God is slow to anger. Listen to Psalms 145:8-9 to understand what Our God is like and how he wants us to be, He Himself is “gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness...He is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works”. You can only be slow to speak and slow to anger if you are listening carefully to God and following after Him with great haste!

Does your current mind-set allow you to hear what God has to say? Does your need to immediately respond get in the way? Does anger lead you to seek your own interests rather than God’s? Is there any unforgiveness in your heart that is making it hard to listen either to God or people?

Week 3, Day 2 – James 1:21

“Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.”

Today's verse is the logical progression from vv. 19-20. Because anger does not allow us to accomplish God's righteousness, we need to remove it from our minds. The action described is something we do actively and continually. We are to take away any obstacles, and lay them out of our way. This is incredibly difficult, right? In Hebrews 11, we find that there are many examples of people like us who had the same sinful nature but were victorious in this effort, “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1). The obstacles here are filthiness and the overflowing amount of our wickedness. Filthiness is the external sin people see which makes us metaphorically dirty. Wickedness is the inherently evil nature of our flesh. James describes it as overflowing or in great abundance. Doesn't he know us well? They are not hard to see. I am faced with my own filthiness and wickedness every day, and I pray to God continually that I would not be blind to it. Because when we see these things in ourselves we can rejoice in laying them aside, in confessing our very present weakness and tendencies to move toward these things, and we can humbly receive the help we need from Jesus.

Our attitude is to be one of meekness, not weakness but submission to God. Aristotle defined this word as the middle between two extremes. One extreme is getting angry for no reason. The other is never getting angry at all. The balance is getting angry at the right time, in the right measure, for the right reason. It is interesting that Aristotle defines the word “humility” in terms of relationship to anger. So by submitting our wills to God and only showing anger when appropriate, we can eagerly accept the word of God. It is a word God has been put inside of us and it is always able to save. In context, this is talking about people who are already believers. Even those of us who are “saved”, need to be saved from trials. Jesus is the only one we can turn to. He alone is able to “rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father” (Galatians 1:4). He is how we endure. Reflect on what true humility is and how God is continuing to save us through the word He has implanted inside us.

Week 3, Day 3 – James 1:22-24

“But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.”

Once we have removed the obstacle of our sin, we can properly receive the word. When we receive it, there is another important step, to apply it. The command is to show proof that you are in fact someone who obeys and not just listens. James describes the one who only listens as a person who incorrectly applies logic to a situation. You are missing an important fact if you believe that the only important thing is for you to listen.

James illustrates this point. He lists step by step what this kind of person does. He looks at his natural face in a mirror. He doesn't just glance at it. He carefully considers what he sees. Up to this point, the person has done well. The problem is that once he turns around from the mirror, the careful consideration has no merit. Every observation he made about his face is forgotten, what he once so carefully considered. This is a metaphor for a person who studies the Word, then goes on about his business without the Word having any affect on his life. Somehow *doing*, attests that we are *truly understanding* scripture.

How often do we handle the bible in this way? It seems like day after day as we rush along to get the day's business sorted, we'll read some verses and think "that's nice" or "that's deep". Yet we go on about our day, totally forgetting the things that we've read. We get to the end of the week, or the end of the month and someone asks about our time with Jesus. Then we feel it, although we have been in the word, we have not really *seen* Him or *known* Him the way that it is described in Scripture when Jesus says "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me" and He goes on to say "You are My friends if you *do* what I command you...This I command you, that you love one another" (John 15:4, 14, 17).

How would you describe what the man saw about his face? Did it have any true value? If not, what can we then conclude about things we see in the Bible and do not put into practice? Are they of any genuine value? What would help you to start doing what you are reading about?

Week 3, Day 4 – James 1:25

"But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does."

We continue on the subject of receiving and applying God's truth. Previously we saw the description of the person who hears but does not apply. Now James depicts a person who uses what he hears.

The first thing we learn is that this person looks intently at the law. The law in this case is another reference to what is first called the word of truth in verse 18. To picture what this means, think about what a person does when they lose a contact lens. It is somewhere on the ground, so they bend over or stoop down to get close. Then they closely examine every square inch of the ground. That is the kind of action in view here. We are motivated to do this because there is nothing missing from this law. It speaks to every aspect of life. Usually when we think of laws, we think of limits, constraints, oppression, and punishment. This law is not of the same nature. It belongs to the realm of freedom and produces blessing. The law in view here is the law of the Spirit found in Romans 8:2, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death." In order to receive the blessing, we have to constantly remain beside it in our minds and do deeds that are in agreement with it. Then our deeds will be blessed.

This blessing is not the blessing described by the world, let us take our example from Christ who did not even have a place to lay His head (Matt. 8:20). Additionally he was rejected by men, a man of sorrows and ultimately died an awful death at the hands of sinful men. Does that look like a blessing? This is so counter intuitive right?

This is what Jesus says about our blessing, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the humble, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:3-12) and in the same way Jesus was persecuted and died, but behold, He rose! Our blessing is tangible and real, and it is reserved for us in the heavenly places with Jesus.

We all want our deeds to be blessed, right? What does it look like in real life to look intently at the perfect law? Can you honestly use that phrase to characterize your study of Scripture? What are you doing practically to remain beside this law? When doing this, have you seen an effect in the types of deeds you do? Is your idea of blessing the same as Jesus’?

Week 3, Day 5 – James 1:26-27

“If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless. Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this; to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

Today we are looking again at the type of behavior true faith creates and what kind it does not. We start with the example of a person who thinks that they worship God. If he does not bridle his tongue, somehow he has deceived himself.. A bridle is used to restrain the wild instincts of a horse and guide it to where the rider wants to go. The tongue must be controlled in the same way. If not, any “religion” a person expresses does not account for anything in God’s eyes. Jesus also spoke of the relationship between the heart and the tongue. He said, “the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart” (Matt. 12:34). Isaiah understood this as well. When he was confronted with the holiness of God he immediately proclaimed “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5). Isaiah acknowledged that his lips and the lips of those around him declared the very ungodliness of their hearts. David also recognized that the heart and the mouth are intertwined when he prays “Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer” (Psalm 19:14).

In God's sight, what really counts is that we reflect His character by our actions. Only then can we say our acts of worship are unmixed with any kind of contradiction. The attribute of God emphasized here is that He is a provider. Both the widow and orphan do not have someone to provide for their needs. God calls us to take care of them when they are distressed. "To visit" doesn't mean to just spend a few minutes chatting. It means to take care of them during their time of need. God's other attribute mentioned here is holiness. We are to remain separate from all the things of the world which can enter our lives and cause moral impurity. This is impossible to apart from Christ! Only by His Spirit's work can we do anything that pleases Him. Let us take encouragement from Paul when he says, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is *God* who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13).

Is your worship genuine? Are you controlling your tongue? Do you help people in need? What things have you allowed to "stain" your worship of God? What simple ways can you find to help the less fortunate? What step can you take by the Spirit's guidance and power today to remove whatever "stain" is on your life?

Week 4, Day 1 – James 2:1-4

"My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?"

Continuing the idea of true religion, James presents an example showing how not to act within the church. He says not to hold our faith in Christ with favoritism towards certain people. He sets up the situation by pointing out that Jesus is glorious. His appearance is dazzling. It is too much for a human to behold. We would all cover our eyes and fall to the ground if you saw Jesus in His full glory. Understanding Jesus' glory should help us to see no difference between people. Compared to Jesus, a person with a gold ring and radiant clothes looks no different than someone wearing dirty clothes

Of course, in our society this is hard to do. We *recognize* the implications of this verse. We may even make an internal decision to not be so rash with our judgments. But the poor we meet on the street are greeted with us quickly pushing our children to "safety", away from the threat who smells like old beer and stale bread. We applaud others who decide to leave everything behind and serve the impoverished. Yet when the finger points to us to help too, we hastily turn the other way. James warns in this passage that allowing public opinion to influence our behavior is a dangerous game.

Our admiration should be saved for Jesus whose appearance and character is far above that of any human. If our eyes are kept on Jesus, then rich and poor will be treated alike. If not, we will fix our eyes on those who are wealthy and give them special privilege. Look at the different things said to the hypothetical rich and poor man. The rich man gets to sit somewhere near where he can see and hear things easily. The poor man is told to stand over there away from the speaker or sit where he places his feet, a place of degradation.

This type of action creates division in the church belittling those who don't have as much as the others. It also exposes the thoughts of the one who created the division. These thoughts are nothing short of evil. Do you think by showing favoritism to the rich that you will be rewarded by them? Is that from whom we are to seek approval? No, our approval is to be sought in the glorious Lord Jesus who rewards us in the proper time and for proper reasons. So let's think for a moment. If a someone who is visibly poor walks into your church or your neighborhood this week, what will be your attitude toward them? Will you actively welcome such a person?

Week 4, Day 2 – James 2:5-7

"Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?"

After somewhat harsh words, James reminds them that he still considers them brothers and loves them. The truth needs to be spoken and sometimes it can be harsh. James gives us a good example of how to walk the fine line of speaking the truth in love. Then he explains why believers need to be careful favoring the rich.

Each of the three questions which follow should have a positive answer. God did choose the poor. The rich do drag them into court. The rich do blaspheme the name of God. These are the reasons why believers should not show preferential treatment to the rich over the poor. First, God Himself chose the poor to love Him. He has given them an abundance of faith. They will receive from God the greatest inheritance known to man. In the world, poor men do not receive kingdoms. In Christ, they do. Yet these believers have dishonored the ones that God has chosen to bless. It does not make sense for us to do that, does it? Second, it is the rich who oppress believers not the poor. They are the ones who bring lawsuits against them for imprisonment or for taking their possessions. Third, these are the same people who blaspheme, speak vilely of, God. See the irony. They speak against the One who has a truly good name. The one who blasphemes does so in order to ruin the recipient's reputation. By speaking against God's name, they have spoken against ours. We have accepted God's call, therefore we are identified by it.

Haiti is a country of beauty and horror. Known for its beautiful beaches and incredible landscapes, many of the world's elite flock to Haiti's shores for vacations. But, these people never see the *true* Haiti. Resorts are blocked off with stone edifices too high to see the raging city life. Taxis dot the roads with tinted windows. In an effort to bring business in, Haiti's

government takes great care in protecting the privileged from the harsh realities outside the plush hotels. Kids walk miles to school with no books and rocks and sticks as writing tools. Moms, in fear of their children starving, resort to mixing rice with dirt and cookies made out of mud. However, one could be blinded by the horror and miss the hope. Church services are unique and authentic and breathtaking. Men, women and children dance in the aisles unabashedly, praising the One who saved them. Families rip voodoo beads from their necks in realization of Christ's saving power. Smiles brighten up the room revealing the vibrant soul inside. Haiti is poor. Haiti is starving. But, Haiti's believers are thriving, hanging on to the inheritance they know is waiting.

What is our attitude toward people with less money or status than us? How do we treat people whom our society looks down upon? Are you proud to call as brothers and sisters those from around the world who are poor in money but rich in faith?

Week 4, Day 3 – James 2:8-9

“If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,” you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.”

We are still dealing with the issue of partiality or playing favorites. We have seen the negative example and why it is not the correct path. Next, James writes some simple statements that will conclude the discussion on the topic.

Doing well in regards to partiality is defined as fulfilling the royal law. Again, the law has already been referred to as the word of truth and the law of liberty. Now we see that it is related to our king. Our law comes from Him. James correlates fulfilling the royal law with loving your neighbor as yourself. The kind of love in mind is worth clarifying. The word used for love is agape which is very unique. It is a love not based on feelings or on the worthiness of the object of love. It is based on the will of the one doing the loving. Agape is a love that chooses to work for the benefit of a person regardless of whether or not they are lovable. The pleasure of agape is found in giving the love not in the attributes of the thing loved. It best describes God's love for humanity. It should describe ours as well. We should not love as the world loves which is strictly based on how smart, strong, beautiful, helpful, or beneficial the object of love is to the lover. In some situations, that kind of love is appropriate from our human perspective, especially with our relationship to Jesus Christ. However, our heavenly call is to demonstrate the same kind of love the Father has shown to us. We see this kind of love in effect in Romans 5:6-10:

“For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

From today's verses, our love is to be focused on a neighbor. It literally means whoever is close. Where ever you are and whomever you are with, you are supposed to love them. That is how to truly avoid favoritism. On the other side, if a person does show preference for one type of person over the other, they are sinning. That does not seem like such a big thing does it? But it is. Sin is what separates us from God. Maybe that is easier to see when comparing partiality to the royal law. Favoring a person over another breaks the command to love whoever is next to you.

Do you recognize that everyone deserves love and we are commanded to give it? Do you see the Scripture as the law passed down to us from our King? Do you understand that to break this commandment is not a small thing but a sin? Who are the people in our lives which we most readily love? Are there people from whom we withhold love for one reason or another? In God's power, how can you start to make the change?

Week 4, Day 4 – James 2:10-11

"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

If you are still wondering if showing favoritism is too small a thing to be concerned about, the next few verses should give the final answer. Here we learn God's exact standard for righteousness. How much sin can we commit and still have fellowship with God? The answer is black and white, none.

You can obey every commandment except one, even less apparently important than favoritism, and sin has bound you to await your punishment. Does that sound cruel? How can that be? The truth is that there is one source for every law and one judge to enforce this law. Notice that the author of the law is mentioned in addition to the points of the law itself. "He" prohibits both adultery and murder. Whether you break one or the other or even another is not the issue. What is important is that you have offended the law-giver and judge. You have become a law breaker regardless of the offense. Maybe you are not so concerned because in your mind you have never even come close to committing adultery or murder. Oh really? Let's remember Jesus' definition for both. According to Jesus in Matthew 5:21-28, a person is guilty of adultery when they desire it whether or not they act upon the desire. Jesus also says that anyone who calls someone else a fool is guilty of murder.

Is there any question how serious the subject of showing favoritism is now? It brings guilt personally and division within the church. Is it clearer to see how sin offends God on a relational level? Based on all that is said above, how righteous must one be to not be guilty before God? Perfectly. It should be obvious that we can only rely on His forgiveness for acceptance. Pause a moment to think about the uselessness of our so-called righteous works.

Week 4, Day 5 – James 2:12-13

“So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.”

James calls believers to attention. Based on what we have studied above, he says we are about to be judged according to the law of liberty. He stresses how close in time or proximity our judgment is. If you knew, which you now do, that judgment is coming soon how would that affect your speech and actions? Would you be a little more intentional about how you lived? At this point, there needs to be a reminder that the judgment in view here is not for punishment. We know this because the recipients of this letter have been identified as believers, and therefore have been rescued from punishment. Within the verse this is hinted at by using the phrase “law of liberty” again. In context, the law does not destroy. It makes free. However, Jesus Christ will evaluate our lives and hand out rewards based on what we have done in faith. Jesus makes mention of this future event in Luke 14:12-14.

The judgment of Christ will not be merciful to believers who have not practiced mercy on earth. That likely means a stricter evaluation, less leniency for whatever your failings, and therefore less reward for your faithful acts. The opposite can be said for believers who were compassionate during their life. The statement at the end should read that mercy rejoices against judgment. Almost like it nullifies judgment to a certain degree. Jesus takes into account that you have shown compassion to others and so He grants it to you.

Let's dwell on this concept for a moment. Mercy is not in our nature. As humans, we typically do not have the most compassionate hearts. A mistake made is rarely completely forgiven. A harsh word tends to overplay itself like a broken record. What is it that God is calling you to do to step out of the knee jerk reaction of judgmental assumptions? How do we treat people who wrong us? Do we make sure they feel the pain we felt in equal to or greater measure? Or do we take the suffering and accept it, not pursuing revenge on any level? In Ephesians 4:26, being angry is not a sin in and of itself, it is understandable, but in no way are we supposed to hang on to our anger, even for just a day. When we do, it is often used as fuel for revenge. Consider the last time you sought revenge. How did seeing someone else in pain make you feel? How does freedom in Christ and His mercy compare? May we always see the sweetness of His mercy as a far greater reward than the experience of someone else's pain.

In what ways have you been wronged? How can you show mercy to someone today? What is more important: getting pay back or receiving Christ's reward?

Week 5, Day 1 – James 2:14-16

“What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?”

We have seen how important it is to act upon what we hear whether that is the command to show no favoritism or to stay clear from all other sin. James asks a question to get us to look at the same issue from another angle. The question is, is there any benefit to you if you say you have faith but have no works? Then the supporting question is can faith without works save you? The word “save” in the Bible can mean two different things. First, it can mean eternal salvation from God’s punishment which we deserve due to our sin. That is how we most often think about it in church. However, it many times means rescue or safety from earthly threats like extreme weather, sickness, or violence. I think both definitions of the word can be used here. The core issue is the nature of true faith. Is it active or not?

Next he uses an illustration from everyday life to help us understand the correct answer. The situation is that a brother or sister comes up to you and has no clothes or food. They do not have enough clothes to keep warm. They are also literally “leavers of their food needed for the day”. This can refer to someone who is very poor and completely out of food. It can also refer to someone who has traveled and left the food they needed behind. “Daily”, shows how immediate the need is. There is a desperate need here for the basic needs of life.

How beneficial would the words “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled” be to the people in need? Peace would be the last thing from their minds. Despair would probably describe their emotions better. How do you think they would answer the question, “what help is that”? Obviously it’s none. The disciples had a similar attitude in Matthew 14. They wanted to send the crowds away to nearby villages when they saw that they were hungry and needed food. But Jesus says in verse 16, “They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat!”. We need Jesus to do a major work in our hearts, because if you’re anything like me, you saw people with real needs today and did not act.

Are you seeing those around you who have desperate needs? If you’re not, it would be good to examine why. Are you focused mainly on yourself? Are you seeing needs and not responding, either spiritually or practically? Ask God to reveal what you are missing. If you are aware of other peoples needs, what do you give, empty words or real help? It is only possible to give so much, but is what are you giving valuable?

Week 5, Day 2 – James 2:17-18

“Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, {being} by itself. But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

In these verses, we see an analogy drawn between words without giving food and clothing from the illustration in verse 16 to faith without works. James starts by comparing verse 16 with what follows in verse 17 by writing “even so” or “in like manner”. Just like mere words is of no benefit, so faith is dead without works. Works are not introduced as something outside of faith. They are possessed by faith, faith has or does not have works. You could even say that faith produces these works like an artist produces a painting. Looking back at the original questions in verse 14, can dead faith save you? Of course not, dead means it is not able to do anything.

Now that we understand that faith can not exist apart from works. Let's look at it from the other direction. Can works exist without faith producing them? James explains by writing what a person could say to make the point. This hypothetical person says that he has works. The other person has faith. That is followed up by a challenge to show his faith without works. Is there any way to do it? I don't think so. Faith exists immaterially in the mind. The only way to show it is to say something or do something on the basis of that faith. Once you do that, you've done a work. The person speaking says that his works will put his faith on display. In the initial statement, he didn't even mention having faith, only works. However, this shows us that if there are works some kind of faith is presupposed. It was always there because works would also not happen without the faith.

Some of this may seem strange, because we have heard for so long that we are saved by faith and not by works. Now it may appear that James is saying the opposite. He is not. James is stating that we are saved by faith, but James clarifies for us what this faith really looks like. In our culture this can be difficult to understand since there are so many nominal Christians, who say they believe the gospel, but have no works. Paul says in 2 Corinthians to “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you-unless indeed you fail the test?” (13:5). Faith and works are entirely intertwined, which is not a characteristic thought about much in our society. In America, you can say one thing and do another and that's totally acceptable due to the way we have compartmentalized our lives. But that is not consistent with scripture. Faith is made evident by works.

What do you believe? What are the actual details you believe about the nature and activity of God? What you believe affects the things you do. What are you doing that is the result of your belief that God is holy and humanity is sinful and in need of a savior? ? If you are indeed genuine in your faith, but you don't see works in your life, ask God for wisdom concerning why. Ask Him to move your faith to action.

Week 5, Day 3 – James 2:19-20

“You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?”

“You believe that God is one” is a statement of faith in the one, true God. That statement declares a very important fact about God. Moses declared it to the people of Israel just before

they entered the promised land like this, "The LORD is our God, the LORD is one". It asserts that there is no other God but He who revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Later He appeared to Moses and gave His name as YHWH, the self-existent One. James affirms that this belief is correct.

Yet, is an intellectual belief all you have? The demons have more than that. They believe and shudder. They are so confident of God's righteous character and judgment that they tremble with fear. They know for certain what awaits them. Their faith has produced an effect.

The person whose faith does not work is described as a foolish fellow, literally an empty man. There is nothing of value within him. James challenges him to know this reality about himself. It is like the person is deceived into thinking that he has enough. James is really trying to make a point here. He literally writes that faith without work is without work. The remark covers the nature of the faith and its effect. He wants us to know that the problem with unworking faith is that it does nothing for us.

Let's take a step back to put this in the right perspective. God is the creator of the universe. He has called us out of darkness, out of slavery to the enemy, out of war with Himself. He then brings us into His household where we are given an eternal inheritance and unexplainable love. How can we believe all of that and still not act, not even shudder in reverential awe? He called us that we might be vessels to be used for His amazing plans while we are on this earth. We know this from Ephesians 2:10, "For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so that we might walk in them." We'd be correctly labeled as fools if we take ourselves out of the work which God has prepared for each of us.

What kind of faith do you have? Are you foolish in that you have faith that does nothing? Do you believe like the demons and shudder, knowing your guilt before God? Or do you believe that God is your Lord and Savior and that he created you in Christ for good works and prepared them beforehand for you to walk in them? There are reasons why we may truly believe but don't produce works. Keep asking God to reveal the reasons in your life. Confess and ask Him diligently to remove these things, whether it's fear, selfishness, or pride. Remember God is pleased to remove these things.

Week 5, Day 4 – James 2:21-23

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God."

We now move to two Biblical examples of people who had a working faith. Tomorrow focuses on the story of Rahab. Today we look to Abraham to see what kind of faith he had. Not only is

Abraham the father of the Jewish people, he is our father in terms of faith. Paul says that those who have faith are sons of Abraham.

In Genesis 22, God told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac on a mountain. If you have never heard the story. Abraham obeyed God, but before he killed Isaac God intervened. He provided a ram to sacrifice in place of Isaac. Abraham was willing to offer Isaac to God because He knew that God could raise him from the dead as we read in Hebrews 11:19. We also see Abraham's confidence in Genesis 22:5, "Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you." Abraham knew what he intended to do, but still said that "we will worship and return".

James comments on what was happening behind the scenes "faith was working with his works... and faith was perfected". This is how true faith works. The quotation which follows is from Genesis 15, at least 12 years before Abraham offered up Isaac in Genesis 22. Faith which is complete is accompanied by works. When Abraham gave up his son, it says that he was justified. Justified can mean several things, but at its most basic level it means to be declared righteous. It is used to described a pardoned criminal. In this case, it is not saying that Abraham had just received forgiveness from God. He had received faith and righteousness from God years before and therefore forgiveness. However, what he did spoke loud and clear to us all. Abraham's faithful action declared the righteousness which he had already possessed. It says that by this action, Abraham's faith in Genesis 15:6 was brought to completion. The concluding statement is something we all want. Abraham was God's friend. What happened that caused him to be called that? He acted upon his faith and obeyed God. Abraham's actions created a deep friendship with God marked by fellowship and trust.

What if our entire life's motivation was to develop our relationship with God? What if we moved toward God past fear, pride, and selfishness, to display our faith, so that our friendship with God would deepen? What can you do today that will demonstrate your faith?

Week 5, Day 5 – James 2:24-26

"You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."

Looking at the example of Abraham, we see what it means that he was justified by works and not by unworking faith. Abraham was Jewish, righteous, and a man. Does this same concept apply to someone who is a Gentile, or immoral, or a woman? For that we need to look at the story of Rahab.

Even though Abraham and Rahab were so different, in one way they were equal, in terms of faith. Rahab was a prostitute from Jericho. The Israelites planned to conquer it while they were entering the promised land of Canaan. They sent spies to gather information about the city. When they showed up at Rahab's door, she hid them overnight to escape from the king's

guards. Then after sending the guards on a false trail, she helped them escape through a window in the city walls. If you read the story in Joshua 2, you will see that she believed in the God of Israel. Joshua 2:11 says that when she heard all that God had done through Israel, she declared, "When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath". It was her belief that caused her to act this way. When the Israelites destroyed the city, she and her family were spared. They lived the rest of their lives with Israel.

She had already believed and received forgiveness from God. However, this brave act justified her publicly. In Hebrews 11:31 she is listed in the "Hall of Faith", "by faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace". Notice that it is mentioned she was saved by faith, but her *works* are highlighted as evidence of her faith. This is the same pattern for everyone mentioned in the "Hall of Faith". Her righteousness was made obvious to all by her actions. If you want confirmation that God saw her as righteous, look at Jesus genealogy in Matthew 1. Rahab was the mother of Boaz who is listed as an ancestor to Jesus in verse 5. That is what I call transformation!

If you are still not convinced of the critical nature of a faith that works, James has one last analogy. He parallels a body without a spirit to faith without works. Is a body without a spirit able to accomplish anything? Then how can you expect faith unaccompanied by works to save you?

Please spend some time thinking about what you have learned about faith. Does this passage teach that we have to earn our salvation? Absolutely not! James is vividly describing true faith, a faith motivated by real friendship with God that is proven by displaying trust through our actions, a faith which results in incredible purpose in this life as well as crazy adventure and joy! This should be great motivation to press on toward God for a deeper faith which produces righteous acts!

Week 7, Day 1 – James 4:1-3

"What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures."

In chapter 3, James contrasts heavenly wisdom with earthly. One of the characteristics of earthly wisdom identified is bitter jealousy. Jealousy produces the quarrels and conflicts we see here, which is included in the disorder and every evil thing James mentions earlier in chapter 3 verse 16. Both the words translated "quarrels" and "conflicts" often refer to physical altercations or warfare. Any kind of conflict is in view. The opening question assumes that in fact there is conflict. It's just a matter of where they are coming from.

The implied answer of the next question is a firm "yes". There is a battle on two fronts. Believers are battling each other because they are pursuing physical pleasure. Additionally, believers and their desire for pleasure are waging war internally in their bodies. Here James is talking about what is known as indwelling sin, which means that sins resides in our physical bodies. Even after being born again and having the Holy Spirit live inside of you, your body is still sinful, and it will be until it dies. Paul uses similar language in Galatians 5:16-17 when he describes this same battle between Spirit and flesh.

Next, we see just how severe the conflict becomes. Believers have committed murder in order to get what they want! In Matthew 5:22, Jesus said that whoever calls another person a fool is guilty of murder. This could be what James is talking about. However, the statement is plain and simple without anything requiring a figurative meaning. Our sinful desires for pleasure can lead us to commit the most hideous act possible, murder. It is a grim warning we all must listen to.

Because we know fighting and arguing is not the means by which to get things, does that mean we are not to pursue anything on earth at all? No, we must remember that God is generous. He generously gives wisdom as we saw in chapter 1 and now we see God gives other things as well. Instead of fighting and stealing from others, we are simply to ask God to provide what we need. Just don't ask incorrectly. If you ask for more money simply so that you will have more money to spend on earthly pleasures, do not expect God to honor that request? A much better way would be to ask for whatever it is you want while patiently waiting to receive from our Father. If He gives it to you, great. If not, we much accept His will.

What kinds of desires can you detect in your heart that are waging war against you? Are you having conflict with people and do not know why? Is it because you do not have what you want? Take some time to think through this,. Pray that God will reveal what is in your heart and that He will provide a feeling of contentment.

Week 7, Day 2 – James 4:4-5

"You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"?

We saw in verses 1-3 that James was writing to people who were pursuing worldly pleasure. Instead of seeking peace and righteousness in accordance with wisdom, they were arguing and fighting with other believers in an attempt to fulfill all their personal desires. Some even went as far as murder, whether figuratively or literally. What is a good name for people who turn their back on God to chase after their own desires? Adulteresses. It is what God called the people of Israel when they chose to serve idols rather than Him. It symbolizes anyone who abandons their promise to seek after something or someone else. How beautiful is it that we serve a God who so fiercely and jealously loves us? He expects every part of who we are to look to him for satisfaction. But we're human, and the world can offer bright and shiny things, distracting us from the glory of God. When we look elsewhere, we cheat on God. We settle for second best which results in a cheap imitation of the intimacy He desires with his children. James isn't saying "sometimes when we look to idols it symbolizes adultery." He clearly calls these people adulteresses. But, can we blame him? Consider the last time you allowed your flesh to go free and you pursued your desires above all else, even Christ. Isn't that a good description?

Is it possible to put all your effort into attaining individual gratification and still be considered in right relationship with God? No. You can either love God or the world, not both. This does not mean it is wrong to enjoy nature and other good things in this life. God has created those things for us to enjoy. This statement is about those things that bring pleasure and are against God's design. Those desires that wage war in our bodies cause us to be at war with God. It is much better to let go of those desires. That way we can be God's friend. Why is it that seeking sinful pleasure makes us God's enemy? It is because God has put His Spirit in those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Therefore, he has a legitimate jealousy that desires to be together with us. It is like how we are jealous for our spouses' time and attention. There is nothing wrong with that attitude. In fact, more often than not, this jealousy we have of our spouses' time can be seen as a protective and righteous feeling, if used in the correct context. Such is Christ's jealousy for us. He sees our wayward thoughts and knows how prone we are to "wander and leave the God we love". What a testament to his faithfulness and love for us to know He desires to have such a relationship with us to not only build intimacy, but also to protect us from the damaging results of sin.

If the Spirit dwells in us, that means we are God's. That fact should guide our every thought. What things take your thoughts off God and onto worldly desires? Whatever it is, just remember that our identity is as God's friends. Let's believe that fact whenever temptation arises.

Week 7, Day 3 – James 4:6-7

“But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says. “GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.” Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

Verses 4-5 focus on God's judgment of the world. To be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God. It explains that this dynamic is based on the fact that God's Spirit lives in us. He requires our obedience as He jealously desires His Spirit within us. With all this talk of being God's enemy and jealousy, it would be very easy to forget God's merciful side. He most definitely hates sin and punishes it without exception. At the same time, we know from other parts of the Bible that He is merciful, caring, and forgiving.

It is God's compassionate side that James focuses on in these verses. It starts off with the statement, “But He gives a greater grace.” The word “but” is key here because it lets us know that James is going to contrast verses 4-5 with 6-7. God's grace is contrasted with His jealousy. Which is greater? Grace. Even when we show hostility to God, we can receive His grace and be restored to a friendly relationship. What's more, this grace supersedes anything we have experienced. His love is far better than anything we could try and find elsewhere.

How can we receive God's grace? To answer that James quotes Proverbs 3:34. If we are arrogant, then God's disposition toward us is opposition. The word which “opposes” comes from means to arrange in order to prepare for battle. It carries the connotation that God is actively planning out how to fight against you. That is a recipe for destruction! Grace comes when you change your mind-set. Think of yourself as low, unworthy, and helpless. God gives grace to that kind of person. Think of about this, God is still showing you grace even when He is fighting against you. This is how he produces humility in us, and from there we are ready to receive grace. If we understand this concept though, we can avoid a lot of heart ache by placing ourselves under God's authority from the start.

When we are submitted to God, we are in a position to resist the devil and the temptations he sends our way. When temptation comes, we are to stand against it, not run away frightened or run toward it angrily. Paul explains how to do this in more detail in Ephesians 6:12-18 using the illustration of the armor of God. He says that under his instruction you will be able to, “stand firm against the schemes of the devil”. When you stand against the devil while submitted to God and humble, it will be he who runs away from you.

Remember, be humble, submit, and resist. During your prayer time today, ask God to train you for battle.

Week 7, Day 4 – James 4:8-10

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”

These verses are a continuation of what James was writing in verse 7. There are around 9 different commands in these 3 verses which instruct us how to endure through trials and stand firm against the pleasures that wage war in our souls. We have already seen that we are to submit ourselves to God and resist the devil. Next, we are told to draw near to God because we are promised that He will respond in kind. Then, James tells us to wash our hands, figuratively. When we sin, we are to wash it off like we do dirt from the garden. First, you must stop sinning. Whatever it is must be stopped. Then, tell God what you did and agree with Him that it is wrong. When you confess like this, He forgives and cleanses us according to 1 John 1:9. When we become double-minded, placing our attention on God and our circumstance, James says to purify your mind. That means to remove every thought not related to your faith in Jesus Christ and then dedicate your mind to Him. That is how you can change from double-minded to single-minded.

The first two commands called for action whether mental or physical. Now, James instructs us to be in a specific mood. It all sounds very depressing: be miserable, mourn, weep, exchange laughter for sadness and joy for gloom. After talking about giving greater grace, how can all these commands be so negative? Because James is writing to those who are fighting and murdering other believers so that they can attain more money to spend on earthly pleasure. In order for them to receive grace, first their course of life must be turned around the opposite way. It is called repentance. When you are guilty of sin, feeling miserable and crying is an appropriate response. This is how we are to humble ourselves before a perfectly holy God. Once we lower ourselves in humility, it is not God's intention to leave us in despair. From this position, God lifts us up. Our joy is restored, not through worldly pleasures but by His supernatural grace.

When you realize you are sinning, what is your response? Do you repent and humble yourself, so that God can lift you up? How can we practically let God exalt us without trying to exalt ourselves?

Week 7, Day 5 – James 4:11-12

“Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

While on the topic of being humble and seeing the blessing we receive in humility, James informs his readers that speaking against one another does not reflect humility but pride. In his concern for them and us, he gives the direction to quit. The issue is about believers talking bad about each other. This is not about those of us who follow Christ speaking about the evils of the world or even complaining about people outside the church. I am not saying it is a good idea to look for unbelievers' faults and tell them or others. However, the subject here is dealing with people within the church.

In the next verse, speaking against a believer is equated to judging. Judging can have a positive connotation, but here the intent is to highlight the negative, meaning to condemn or cause shame. The reason James gives for his instruction is because judging a brother is much like judging the law. Keep in mind that the law in this letter is “the perfect law of liberty” and obeying the command “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” fulfills this law. It should be obvious from this how judging is opposed to that law.

What is the effect of disobeying this instruction and judging? First, you are not a doer of the law. We have already seen in chapter 1 verse 25 that only the doer of the law receives God's blessing. This also corresponds to verses 6 and 7 of this chapter. We saw that God is in active resistance to the proud. Someone who judges the law has placed himself in superiority over it. They think they are the authority and the law must bend according to their opinions. Placing yourself above God's law is the ultimate in pride.

Once again, James points our minds back to our Lord Jesus. There is only one Lawgiver and we are not Him, therefore we are not in a position to offer judgments. Our place is to simply obey. What qualifies God to be the Lawgiver and ultimate authority? His power. He has the power to save or destroy, and He gets to choose. We, the brethren, are not going to be destroyed. On the other hand, our reward and our works can be destroyed. Listen to Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:14-15, “If any man's work which he has built on it [the foundation of Jesus Christ] remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet as through fire.” With God in His proper place, we will assume our proper place. We are not superior to our neighbors. We are at best equals. So why would we presume to be able to judge?

Have you become a judge of God's law of liberty and love? Do you see yourself as superior to your neighbor? As God's loyal subject, do you know His law? Have you made changes in your life so that you will be a doer and not a judge?

Week 8, Day 1 – James 4:13-14

“Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanished away.”

Pride appears in various ways. It can take the form of judging people or criticizing God's declarations. It can also be in the shape of proclaiming things over which we have no control. The example James uses in verses 13 and 14 is a group of people claiming they will travel to a city and make a lot of money as merchants. Apparently, you respond to someone you do not quite believe the same way in Greek as we do in English. “Come now” is usually an introduction we use to get some one to stop and think about what they have said. Maybe they have told an obvious lie. Maybe they have exaggerated something.

There are several suppositions that need to be challenged in the statement. First, they say that the trip will start very soon. A trip as described here would be a very expensive and dangerous trip. Many plans would have to be drawn up and provisions made for survival. Christopher Columbus searched for a sponsor for a considerable amount of time when he was planning to sail for the new world. The speakers in James 4:13 do not seem to recognize the difficulty of the task they are undertaking. Second, there is an air of certainty about where it is they are going and how long they will stay. Completing a long journey is never a certainty and even less so in the ancient world, whether because of bandits or other natural dangers. Third, they claim that they are going to be successful. No one goes into a situation without some expectation of success, but what is more risky than business? New business ventures are never a sure thing. These people though do not seem to share that perspective. Most real estate investors were confident about their business making profit up until the market sank suddenly last year. Now even major banks are suffering with over one hundred going bankrupt. Paul says that riches are uncertain in 1 Timothy 6:17. Let's not put our hope in them.

Reality is that no one knows what will happen tomorrow, not even weathermen or psychics. What is our true nature with respect to time. Are we stone monuments like the pyramids erected for generation after generation to see? Not exactly. Our true nature is that of mist or even a single breath. The word translated “appears” is where we get the word phenomena, something that is able to be observed. It usually is something temporary like a solar eclipse or a phase of the moon. That idea is supported by the last phrase, “appears for a little while and then vanishes away.” Our time on the earth is brief and then we are gone.

How often do we put ourselves in the position of Lord, determining our days and times? But how arrogant are these mindless thoughts? Does the example in these verses help you to see just how little we can be certain of anything? How then should we think about our dreams and plans? Are we living for personal gain or to follow Christ?

Week 8, Day 2 – James 4:15-17

“Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.” But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

As we have come to expect James gives us both sides of the coin. In the previous verses, he shows us how not to speak, and now we see the proper way. Verse 15 starts with the word “anti”, which can mean against but also in place of. In this case, we are to say something else in place of boasting about what it is we plan to do.

First, we must acknowledge God’s total control over every aspect of life. This attribute of God is called sovereignty. By doing this we also admit our lack of control. Notice also that it is not bad to plan. Our plans are contained in the statement “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that”, but so is God’s sovereignty. We are to prepare for the future. We are to make wise choices. We are to use the physical and mental gifts that God has given us while at the same time remembering that God’s will not ours be done. That was Jesus prayer the night before He was crucified.

Sadly, the people James was writing to did not share Jesus’ attitude. They were boasting like the hypothetical merchant in verse 13. Literally it says they are boasting in their false boasting. False boasting is claiming you have something that you do not like when someone sells a car they know to be a lemon. James delineates this type of behavior clearly as evil.

Now that they have been informed, there is no excuse. Maybe for someone who is unaware, they can boast about their future plans without guilt. We are no longer in that category. We know the truth and are therefore responsible to live by it.

Do you fully utilize all the talents God has given you to both provide for your life and bring glory to your Creator? Do you ever consider that God is the only one in control and we will only accomplish what He grants to us? We need repentance, we need Jesus. How can we daily recognize and surrender ourselves to God as the sovereign Lord of our lives? This requires a heart transformation and a laying down of our own lives saying “*You* are Lord and order my steps, where *You* lead, I will go and I will *not* move apart from *You*!”

Week 8, Day 3 – James 5:1-6

“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.”

We have learned something about the people James calls “the rich” in chapter 2 verses 6 and 7. They are the ones who oppress and drag believers to court in addition to blaspheming God. They antagonize the Jewish brothers to whom James is writing. First, James pronounces judgment on these rich oppressors of the faith. Then, he gives more detail about their abuse of the brethren.

James tells them how to respond to the judgment that God is sending. They are to weep and howl. Weeping does not just include tears but everything which expresses grief. Picture someone who has suddenly lost a loved one. That whole picture is what the word “weeping” conveys. The word “howl” refers to loud cries directed to God, even shrieking.

The grief seems to come from the destruction of their possessions. Everything has decayed. It is now worthless. The rust itself will declare them guilty and become a fire that consumes them. Rust judges them because all they did was accumulate stuff for themselves. There is so much of it sitting around to rot and rust. If they would have given it away to provide for other’s needs, there would be nothing to rot. Now their life is over and they will never be able to enjoy their treasure. In this statement, we are reminded of Jesus’ parable in Luke 12:16-21. Read through it and see what comparisons you can draw between the rich landowner in Jesus’ parable and the rich oppressors in James. Greed is not their only problem. They also demonstrate unethical business practices. They do not pay the people who are working for them. They have all they need but they still try to get something for nothing. These people live extravagantly because they are thieves. They are so driven by greed that they will kill to support their lifestyle.

God’s patience has a limit. God has heard the victims’ cry and seen the offense. God’s name for us in this circumstance is the Lord of Sabaoth which means armies even armies of angels. In the end, no one gets away with their crimes. Examine your own life. Do you see the roots of greed in yourself, or materialism? Ask the Lord to search your heart and reveal areas in your own life that are maybe not as blatant. Also, take encouragement that we worship a God who knows how we are suffering. Those who have abused us and cheated us will be held accountable for what they put us through. God is faithful to His children in many different ways.

Week 8, Day 4 – James 5:7-9

“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.”

God is aware of all the suffering they, and you, are experiencing at the hands of others. Because they know judgment is coming for their enemies, believers receive encouragement which equips them to wait until that time comes. To be patient is to bear someone's anger on yourself for a long time without responding in like manner. We must learn to exhibit patience as we continue to receive abuse. Then one day Our Lord Jesus will rip the sky open and set every record straight, rewarding his faithful children and punishing those who have rebelled against Him.

The model we all must follow is the farmer who waits for his crop. It is very valuable to him because without it, he will have nothing. Yet, all he can do is watch expectantly for rain to come. Typically in Israel the rain came at two distinct times of the year. The first season of rain, the early rain, came in October. The later rainy season came in March. With the appearance of rain, the farmer's wait would come to an end. He would indeed collect a bountiful harvest.

In the same way, as we suffer here on earth, we can look to the sky with our minds set firmly on Jesus, our hope. The fulfillment of our hope will be Jesus' bodily return to earth to judge unrepentant sinners and reward those who have believed in Him. Carrying this hope in a future certainty, we can be strong and unmovable in our minds with the outcome of enduring such trials. While enduring such affliction coming from the outside, it could be devastating to also have conflict within the church. Our spiritual family is designed to be a source of help and encouragement. When we complain about each other, we cease to encourage our brothers and sisters. Even worse we open ourselves up to some kind of judgment. We will not receive the same judgment as unbelievers, but Jesus will be more strict when handing out our reward. To understand this concept better, I will again suggest 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 for your reading. The Judge is nearer than you think. He is right at the door waiting to enter in, and His wait is growing shorter by the day. Be encouraged saints that we are drawing closer to the day in which we will meet the Savior.

Week 8, Day 5 – James 5:10-12

“As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful. But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.”

We are once again looking at the subject of enduring affliction. The prophets of the old testament give us examples of how to be patient through suffering. They all spoke on God's behalf to the people of Israel. You would think that everyone would appreciate such a valuable service. Instead, the people were often annoyed by the prophet's message or worse. Prophets regularly had to proclaim to Israel that they were wrong and were going to be punished. No one likes to be told that. It is hard for all of us to receive criticism no matter how true or needed it is.

The prophet Jeremiah repeatedly had to tell the kings of Judah to stop their evil ways or destruction would come not only to them but the whole nation. For years Jeremiah brought this warning and for years he was ignored. Over time everyone grew tired of being warned and mistreated him in various ways. At one point in Jeremiah 38, several officials took Jeremiah and threw him into a dry well in Jerusalem. Though it contained no water, it was full of mud, and Jeremiah sank down into it. He was stuck in the mud down in a well, left to die of starvation. So how can we say that Jeremiah was blessed? We can because God would not allow His faithful prophet to die in that well. A servant in the king's court heard about what happened. He then goes to the king asking for help to rescue Jeremiah. This was the same king which told the officials to do whatever they wanted to him. Surely, he would not allow it. Inexplicably, king Zedekiah shows mercy and gives orders for thirty men to pull Jeremiah from the well. He is saved! But that is nothing, soon afterwards the whole city of Jerusalem is destroyed, the king is imprisoned, and the people taken captive back to Babylon. At the same time, the lives of Jeremiah and the servant are spared, and both are allowed to live where ever they desire. Moreover, king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon gave orders that Jeremiah should be found, freed, fed, and given a gift. In the midst of absolute destruction, Jeremiah received a gift. That's what I call blessed! How can the heart of God be so moved that He would perform such a miracle for just one person? The answer is that he endured in faith. No matter what the consequences were, Jeremiah spoke nothing but the words God gave him, even when he knew they would result in being thrown in a well.

The whole book of Job shows his endurance through extreme suffering. He lost his wealth, his children, his health, and was being accused of sin by those who were supposed to be his friends. Did Job ever stop obeying God? No. Did he ever accept the advise of his wife and friends to curse God? No. In the end, God restored all that was taken away. In fact, God gave back to Job more than he had lost. Again, those who faithfully endure through suffering receive God's mercy and compassion. Reflect on the areas in your life where endurance is slim. Let us ask God to deepen us in real and intimate trust towards Him. He is full of compassion and mercy.

Week 9, Day 1 – James 5:13-14

“Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

We now move from suffering to the issue of prayer. James asks if any of three conditions are true of anyone in the church. Then he offers instruction to anyone who is suffering, cheerful, or sick.

First, James asks if anyone is suffering, which was described in chapter 5 verses 4, 6, 10, and 11. Those who are suffering need to pray. The word for prayer here implies it is directed towards God. It does not mean to hopelessly or aimlessly cry out into a void. What should we pray about? Anything that will help. Specifically from James, the ability to be joyful, wisdom, endurance, and hope.

What about someone who is feeling well? They need to approach God too, this time to express their joy through singing. Singing is a great way to show our thanks to God. It is a great way to involve our minds, emotions and voices together to glorify God.

What about those who are sick? The word “sick” here has a very broad definition. It means any kind of weakness: physical, emotional, economic, relational, or anything that weakens you to the point of great despair. People in this state are often unable to pray for themselves adequately. Therefore, they are not told to pray, but to call to the elders of the church. It is the job of the elders to pray for them, like a shepherd has to carry a sheep when it is no longer able to walk by itself. The last phrase “anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” has been interpreted many different ways, but let’s look closely at what is written. “Anointing” is an aorist participle in the Greek. This means the anointing was to occur before the elders prayed. Therefore we can conclude the anointing is not the prayer itself. Another thing to remember is that there are two different words in the Greek which mean to anoint, one used when describing sacred acts and the other more everyday kinds of things. The word here is for regular everyday kind of things. Therefore, it is not talking about a spiritual or religious act. The purpose of the anointing here is most likely medicinal as oil was used to heal and relax the body by the Jews as well as the Greeks and Romans. The last thing to notice is that the oil in question is literally olive oil. The elders are to come to those who are weak and take care of their body, soul, and spirit, so that they will be strengthened and able once again to take care of themselves.

No matter how we are feeling, the answer is to always present yourself to God and be in His presence. He will comfort you, rejoice with you, and make you completely whole again. How are you doing right now? Are you consciously involving God in your circumstance?

Week 9, Day 2 – James 5:15-16

“and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. ”

Prayer is such a powerful thing. Through prayer we have access to God's resources. When we pray we can see God respond to our request in miraculous ways. This is what we see in verses 15-16, the effect of praying for one another. From the previous verses, we know that the elders are praying “the prayer offered in faith” on behalf of those who are incapable of doing it themselves or who just simply need it. In chapter 1 verses 5-8, we saw were warned not to doubt while we pray. When we are certain of God's generosity and power, we receive what we ask for according to His will.

We see how effective a single-minded prayer is in this verse. It restores, literally saves, the person who was weak from sickness or fatigue or stress. Maybe part of the problem was consequence for some sin. If so, it is removed away. All of this can occur when believers pray for another. That is why the next thing James writes is to direct us to confess and pray for each other. When we confess our sins to one another it does two things. One thing is it sets our minds in agreement with God on the issue. To confess is to have the same opinion and stance on a topic. It is important to call a sin a sin and a virtue a virtue. The other thing confession does is that it communicates to others how they should pray for us. If the sick person never calls the elders to come over, they never receive prayer and therefore healing. Confessing sin to someone can be scary. You may think that you can not do it because of feelings of shame or embarrassment. James is informing us that despite the fear and embarrassment, confession is a very important factor if we are going to become mature disciples of Christ. Plus, we all want to experience healing in our lives. We can be healed of swine flu, depression, and even the painful consequences of our sin. That does not mean we will not receive the consequence of sin, but our identity, conscience and emotions can be restored to a place of holiness and blessing.

Week 9, Day 3 – James 5:17-18

“The effective prayer of righteous man can accomplish much. 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 earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.”

James continues writing about prayer and how through it much can be accomplished. If we ask for anything while trusting God to answer it according to His will and nature, it can be described as working, active, or producing an effect. All we do is think words or if we really need something maybe we pray out loud. In the economy of the world, prayer really counts as nothing. Have you heard the saying, “spit in one hand, wish in the other, and see which one fills up faster”? The imagery is not the most pleasant but it accurately depicts the wisdom of

the world, "Quit praying and get to work!" James is saying the exact opposite. If you want something, you better start praying! This does not diminish the importance of action though. As a reminder, James already wrote of the importance of meeting physical needs in James 2:15-16. James is amplifying the importance of going to God for the things we need.

An illustration of this truth is found in 1 Kings 17-18. It is the story of Elijah the prophet. Many things occur in those 2 chapters. James focuses in on the first and last parts of the story. We first see Elijah in 1 Kings 17:1 telling king Ahab that there would be no rain unless he calls for it. King Ahab was an evil king who worshipped many other gods. The drought was to punish the unfaithfulness of the king and people of Israel. After years of drought, king Ahab continued in his sin, but God prompted Elijah to go to Ahab so that God could send rain once again. Elijah defeated 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah at Mount Carmel. Immediately after that in 1 Kings 18:42, Elijah climbs back to the top of the mountain and "He bent down toward the ground and put his face between his knees." It doesn't say that he prayed, but he was preparing to pray and directly afterwards God sent the rain. James' brother must have sent direct revelation to His little step-brother. God's power on display through prayer. Elijah prayed, God withheld the rain. Elijah prayed, God sent rain after 3 and a half years. The power of the prayer is not dependent on the person, it depends on the God prayed to.

We need God to act on our behalf, everyday. In order to live a life of faith, to endure trials, to withstand temptation, to live on mission, to articulate the gospel, to live the gospel, to love those who have harmed you; God must give us His resurrection power. Prayer is the breathe of the saint.

Week 9, Day 4 – James 5:19-20

"My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

James ends by briefly discussing people who wander from the faith. These are people who are considered brothers as seen from the phrase "any among you". They once were walking on the path of truth, but have now veered off track into error. Think about the fact that these people are now following lies. No one follows what they know is a lie, do they? Here we see that sin by its nature is deceptive. The deeper you get into it, it can cause you to think up is down and right is left. What is the only thing that can point out you are going the wrong direction? God's truth. It will set everything back in order.

The problem is that if a person is actively going down the wrong path, they probably will not seek out the truth or be sensitive to its call. That makes it necessary for another believer to come up beside them and talk frankly about the truth. Paul writes about the same thing in Galatians 6:1, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will

not be tempted." Notice that Paul cautions the spiritual one to be careful not to fall into the same temptation. This is a result of the principle quoted in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "... bad company corrupts good morals." It is so important that believers watch out for and lovingly share truth with one another. Jude writes about the same subject in verse 23 of his letter emphasizing again the caution we must use when helping other believers escape sinful choices, "...save others, snatching them out of the fire' and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh."

The purpose of course is to bring the brother or sister back into fellowship with God and the church. When this happens James makes sure that we know that a soul has been saved from death. This can mean physical death only but most likely includes God's eternal judgment for a sinner. Along those lines, a multitude of sins are covered most likely meaning those of the returning wanderer. It is true that once you believe that you can not lose your salvation. This is clear from Jesus' words in John 6:37-40:

"Everyone whom the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never send away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. Now this is the will of the one who sent me – that I should not lose one person of every one he has given me, but raise them all up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father – for everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him to have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

In these words, we have assurance that when we place our faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, the deal is done. We will not be disappointed. On the other side, to enter heaven one must continue in faith to the end. You can not reject Jesus and live a life of open rebellion, and expect eternal life. Read Hebrews 10:36-39 below and see how important it is to persevere on a practical level.

" For you need endurance in order to do God's will and so receive what is promised. For ***just a little longer*** and ***he who is coming will arrive and not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith, and if he shrinks back, I take no pleasure in him.*** But we are not among those who shrink back and thus perish, but are among those who have faith and preserve their souls."

With this backdrop of understanding, it should be easier to understand the situation James is writing about here at the end. For those who are already saved but are not obeying their Lord Jesus, someone must come to rescue them. It is important that we be on the lookout for those who are wandering, so that they may be preserved from judgment.

Week 9, Day 5 – James Summary

How can we summarize what we have learned in James? It is important to remember what the letter was about. I have summed it up in the phrase "As a result of works, faith is perfected". How would you summarize the central theme of James' letter? Take some time to read

through it again. Pray that God would show you how to answer this question in your own words.

Next, let's look at how faith is perfected according to James. The subjects that he discussed are in a list below:

- Enduring trials
- Temptation
- Anger
- Speaking
- Attitudes toward the poor and the rich
- Possessing heavenly wisdom
- The nature of true faith
- Judgment and mercy
- Pride vs. humility
- Speaking against and fighting against other believers
- Prayer

There are probably others I have missed. What else can you find? What have we learned about each of the issues above? To do this, you can list every verse that relates to the subject, or find one verse that best sums it up, or put into your own words what you have learned. Make sure you know where in the letter the ideas have come from though. I have listed where each subject can be found in James below to get you started.

- Enduring trials: James 1:2-4, 12; 4:7-8; 5:1-8, 10-11
- Temptation: James 1:13-18; 4:1-5
- Anger: James 1:19-20
- Speaking: James 1:19, 26; 3:1-12
- Attitudes toward the poor and the rich: James 1:9-11; 2:1-9
- Possessing heavenly wisdom: James 1:5; 3:13-18
- The nature of true faith: James 1:21-26; 2:14-26
- Judgment and mercy: James 2:10-13; 5:19-20
- Pride vs. humility: James 4:6-17
- Speaking and fighting against other believers: James 4:1, 11-12; 5:9
- Prayer: James 1:6-8; 4:2-3; 5:13-18
