

THE END OF HYPOCRISY: THE BOOK OF JAMES

SERMON GUIDE ANSWERS WEEKS 1-3

Week 1: James 1:1-11 -- Faith and Trial

Memory Verse: Romans 5:3

Questions:

1. *James, is the half-brother of Jesus. However, to open his letter James labels himself as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. What does James' label convey to his readers?*

James knew Jesus better than most. He shared a table with him growing up, watched him age, played in the same places, and probably even shared the same room. They were brothers. How easy would it have been for James to be like Cain – and envy his brother for being the Messiah of all creation? For all of Jesus' ministry James was not his follower. It was not until after Christ's death and resurrection that James became a convert. James became a great leader within the church in Jerusalem and to the church abroad. In his letter we see that he describes himself as a servant of God and Lord Jesus Christ. This is significant for three reasons. First, James labels Jesus as "Lord," this is James affirming his brother's deity. Second, he calls his brother "Christ." This was not his brother's last name, but Christ in Greek means "Anointed One." James is saying, his brother was the anointed one of God that was sent to take away the sins of the world. And lastly, James describes himself as a servant of his Lord Jesus, the Christ. James could have said anything. He could have said, "that's my brother the anointed one, God in the flesh, you better listen to me." Instead he claims that he is nothing more than his servant. This says something about the transformation that took place in James' heart. There is no rivalry, only submission and service. He of all people could have said anything other than servant, but even Jesus' own brother humbles himself. He does show to show us the true heartbeat of the church and the mission we are all called into. We are called to be servants of the most-high God by taking his good news to the ends of the earth.

2. *James is writing this letter to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion, referring to exiled Israel. Does that mean this letter is irrelevant for the church today?*

In the Old Testament we learn that Jacob (The son of Isaac, the grandson of Abraham) had 12 sons that formed the 12 tribes of Israel. Throughout Old Testament history Israel was conquered by foreign nations and forced to leave their land and be exiled to other regions. As a result many theologians are split on the rendering of this text. Some say James' is speaking to Jewish Christians that are in literal exile outside of Jerusalem. Other's says James is writing to Jew and Gentile Christians that are in spiritual exile experiencing persecution as a result of their faith in Jesus. Even if this letter is written specifically to the dispersed Jewish Christians it's application is no different than us reading Paul's letter to the Corinthian church. Even though the letter may be written to a specific people, it's message is still inspired by the Holy Spirit and useful for equipping the church and teaching and training in righteousness.

3. *What do trials produce in the life of a believer?*

Trials and suffering produce faithfulness in the life of a believer. When someone experiences loss, persecution, disease, or a broken relationship they easily try to cling to an anchor as they weather the momentary storm. However, it is in those storms and trials that we see what our true anchor in life is. It's not money, careers, popularity, health, or even family. All of those things can be taken from us. Trials strip away the temporary things in this life and allow us to focus on eternal ones. In the midst of storms we can only find our rest and rescue in God. Tim Keller says, the most fruitful place to be in the Christian life is in the midst of suffering that has no known end. When our suffering has no light at the end of the tunnel is when are left to trust and have faith in the Light of the World. All of our suffering is driving us to a greater trust in God. All of our suffering is producing something within us, it is conforming us into the image of Christ.

4. *How does James tell us to obtain wisdom?*

There are two ways in which we obtain wisdom. First, we are to ask God. In James 4:2 he writes, "You do not have because you do not ask." James makes it clear that we have access to god and not only that we can make this request him. If we are not sure how to handle decisions in life, we have the ability to ask God to give us wisdom to guide us through it. Secondly, it's important that we ask God for wisdom, but we must also be mindful of how we ask God for wisdom. We can't do it half-heartedly or selfishly. We must come before God unlike the prodigal son, that demanded his inheritance, but we must be respectful and full of faith. We must believe that God is able and that he will provide what we ask. He does this not because he owes it to us, but because he is a loving Father who loves to give good gifts to his children.

5. *In v.9 James is referring to poverty stricken Christians that were low in the world's eyes because of their faith. Yet, James describes them as exalted. Why?*

James' idea is countercultural. No one would ever boast in his or her demotion, humiliation, or poverty. However, James says the Christian life is one of exaltation in those things. It is only when experience trials that we can truly understand wisdom from above. People with great wealth and earthly gains are often blinded by their possessions and security. James makes it clear that true wisdom comes when someone puts their trust in something they cannot lose, namely Jesus Christ. When someone is low, deprived, and poor they are at a great disadvantage in the world's eyes, but they have a great advantage in God's eyes. Therefore, they should boast, because the temporary treasures of this life are not blinding them to eternal treasures in Christ.

6. *In v.11 James says the rich man will fade away like grass in the scorching sun. What does that say about a life built on wealth and prosperity?*

A life built on prosperity is a life built on temporal joys. Even the flower in the field is beautiful for a season. However, when trials come the beauty crumbles and fades. So to does the rich man that puts his hope in his possessions.

7. *To open his letter, James encourages the believers to count all their trials in life as joy, because each their trials produce spiritual maturity in their lives. Have you had trials that produced growth?*

Additional Texts:

Romans 2:7, 8:24-25, 2 Cor 6:3-7, 2 Peter 1:3-9

Week 2: James 1:12-18 -- Faith and Temptation

Memory Verse: Hebrews 4:15

Questions:

1. *What is the difference between testing and temptation?*

God does not tempt us, but God does test us. Temptation is being enticed or allured to sin. James 1:13 makes it clear that when we are tempted to sin it is not from God. However, it is clear that God will test our faithfulness to him, specifically in trials.

2. *Where do temptations come from?*

Since the Garden of Eden all temptation has come from the Evil One, Satan. His desire from the beginning was to see mankind rebel against God by sinning against Him. Thankfully, even when we face temptation, God steps in to provide help. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it." Every single time Satan tempts you to sin, God steps in to provide a way of escape.

3. *James says there is a progression from temptation to death. What are the steps and at what point does it become sin?*

There are three steps to temptation:

- A. Desire – We all have natural desires and crave things God designed us to crave. That can range from food, to possessions, to sex. None of those things are wrong to desire in and of themselves. However, any desire can turn into a lust. Desire is not a sin, but when desire turns to lust, then sin is conceived in our hearts.
- B. Lust – Lust is a longing in our hearts to have something that is not part of God's design. Jesus teaches in Matthew 5:28, "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Anyone that desires something beyond god's design for it has already committed that sin in their hearts.

C. Action – When we act on our lusts, is when we invite death into our lives. That’s the points of James’ statement in v.15. Sin is born when we lust, and it grows into its mature form, death, when we put our list into action.

4. In v.16, James warns his readers against being deceived. What type of lies were they being led to believe? What type of attitude would those lies produce in their hearts?

Jewish Christians were being deceived by false teachers that taught God was always not good. If God was a good God, then why were they suffering? It is also a common question in the church today. However, James says God is not like shifting shadow that switches the areas in which he provides shade and comfort. God is constant, his grace and mercies do not change. He encourages his readers not to understand that any good thing they have is because he gave it to them. Their life, breath, food, and salvation all came from God above.

5. James says that every good and perfect gift is from above. How should we define “good” in that statement? Is God capable of giving evil?

God is not capable of having evil originate from him. In v.13 James makes it clear that no evil can flow from God, just as darkness cannot flow from light. Therefore we should define all of God’s good gifts as holy, righteous, and pure.

Additional Texts:

Matt 4:1-11, 26:41, Luke 22:40, 46, 1 Cor 10:13, Heb 4:15, 2 Tim 2:22, 1 Peter 5:8

Week 3: James 1:19-27 – Faith and Action

Memory Verse: Matthew 5:16

Questions:

1. Based on James instructions in v.19-20, what actions would not produce righteousness in our lives?

We ought to be people that take time to listen to others, before ever opening our mouth. Solomon writes in proverbs 14:29, “Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.” Our speech is a barometer for our anger. If we are someone with anger in our hearts our tongues will be the first place our anger reveals itself.

2. *How can the actions of a believer, specifically their tongue, destroy their witness?*

For the Christian, the use of the tongue must be a matter of careful forethought and discipline. The Bible warns that believers who do not bring restraint to their tongue and speech have been deceived, and without such control over their words, their religious acts are worthless and hypocritical. “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless” (James 1:26). It is a deception for any of us to think that Jesus can be Lord over our life, without also becoming Lord over our tongue.

3. *In what way does v. 21 provide an antidote for anger?*

The antidote for sin is finding peace and thankfulness in Christ’s death and resurrection. The way we find peace in Christ is by turning from our sin and placing our faith in Jesus and the Gospel. James states that if we receive the good news of God’s word, with humility, it will save our souls. Meaning if we place our faith in Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection from the dead in our place, then we will find ultimate rescue. When we have experienced the grace of God we have no need to be angry, we only have reason to be grateful and humble.

4. *Explain the point of James’ metaphor in v. 23-24 comparing God’s word to a mirror. According to this metaphor, what is the consequence of hearing without obeying God’s Word?*

If we do not do what the word of God says, we run the risk of being deceived by the enemy, and forgetting what we look like. We are made in the image of God and are a new creation in Christ. As a result we are to look like Him. When we fail to follow his word we simultaneously fail to bear his image to the world around us. The same way a many can remember his image while looking in a mirror at home and forget what he looks like while he is at work, is the same way a believer can bear Christ’s image while reading the Bible in a quiet time and yet forget to live it out while around his peers.

5. *Why does James call the Law a “law of liberty” (1:25; see also 2:12; Mt 11:28-30)? Don’t laws reduce our liberty (John 8:31-32; Rom 6:15-16; 1 Peter 2:16)?*

James here refers to the gospel, which, although it is called here a law, is not a law comprised of requirements and enforced by sanctions. Rather, it is a declaration of righteousness and salvation by Christ, an offer of peace and pardon by Him, and a free promise of eternal life through Him. The juxtaposition of the two contradictory terms “law” and “liberty” made a point to the Jewish Christians that this was an entirely new covenant with God. Paul uses this same technique when he refers to the “law of faith” in Romans 3:27. The perfect liberty found in Christ fulfills the “perfect law” of the Old Testament because Christ was the only one who could. Those who come to Him in faith now have freedom from sin’s bondage and are able to obey God. Christ alone can set us free and give us true liberty (John 8:36).

6. *Why does James focus our attention on widows and orphans in v.27 (see Deut 10:18 and Isaiah 1:17)?*

Recent scholars have argued that when James uses the word “poor” in his letter he is not referring to a socioeconomic status. Rather, it refers to people who have suffered a setback in life that has rendered them incapable of maintaining the status they had before. That is why the poor in the Bible are associated so often with widows and orphans. James says believers are called to encourage the disadvantaged poor and care for them in their weakness.

Additional Texts:

Hebrews 11:6, Titus 1:16, Ephesians 2:10

THE END OF HYPOCRISY: THE BOOK OF JAMES SERMON GUIDE ANSWERS WEEKS 1-3

Week 4: JAMES 2:1-13 FAITH AND FAVORITISM

Memory Verse: Romans 2:11

1.) Why does James say it's wrong in verses 1-3 to show partiality toward the rich?

Partiality puts man in place as judge instead of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ (2:1-4). James opens with the command, that we not hold our "faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism." This is one of only two references to Jesus Christ by name in this entire epistle (see 1:1), and so it should capture our attention. By focusing our attention on Jesus Christ in His glory, James addresses the problem of favoritism in two ways.

First, he gets us to see how petty our distinctions between the rich and poor (or any other distinctions) really are. Even the most powerfully rich men on earth are nothing compared to the glory of Jesus Christ, the King of kings. King Nebuchadnezzar thought that he was great, but God humbled him so that he ate grass like a beast of the field. When he came to his senses, he acknowledged that God alone is great (see Daniel 4, esp. vv. 34-37).

When we exalt men on account of their wealth or power or status, we rob glory from Jesus Christ, who sovereignly gives us everything that we are and have (1 Cor. 4:7). Rather than exalting the rich, we should exalt the supreme glory of Christ alone. We all are just His unworthy servants. Focusing on the glory of Christ puts us all in our proper place before Him. Of course we should grant honor to whom honor is due (Rom. 13:7), but honor toward Christ and honor toward men are on two different planes.

Second, when James ascribes glory to the Lord Jesus Christ, it probably points to His coming in power and glory to judge the earth (Matt. 26:64; Peter Davids, *Commentary on James* [Eerdmans], p. 107). James will mention judgment at the end of his argument (2:12-13). In 2:4, he says that when we make distinctions among people based on outward factors, we set ourselves up as judges with evil motives (or, thoughts). We don't see the hearts of men, as God does (1 Sam. 16:7). To judge a man based on his outward appearance is to usurp the place of Jesus Christ in His glory as judge of all the earth.

We would be mistaken to conclude that James is saying that the rich are categorically bad and the poor are categorically good. Some rich men are very godly and some poor men are very evil. But James' point is that any judgments based on outward factors alone are wrong judgments, because they do not discern the heart. Only God can judge the heart, and so we are wrong to usurp His place as judge.

2. How does showing partiality reveal "an evil intent" in the heart (Vs 4)?

If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? James 2:3, 4

The better chair is taken and now the poor person has nowhere to sit. Now he has two choices, 1) stand while others are sitting, or 2) sit at your feet.

If you understand the context of the times, the first option – despite being uncomfortable – is far superior to the second. The reason for this is that sitting at another person's feet is a sign of subjugation. As it says in the 110th Psalm –

The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

By telling the poor man to "sit by my feet" it's showing that you feel better than him and that he is subordinate to you. How often we do this to others in many subtle ways! And yet we're told that by doing this, we become judges with evil thoughts.

Be careful how you look on others and accept them as God's image-bearers regardless of their status according to the world. Instead of degrading others, let us ever exalt the Lord –

"Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool..." Psalm 132:7

3) If God has chosen the poor to be "rich in faith", then what does that say about us when we show favoritism for the rich over the poor (Vs 5)?

Whatever we favor speaks to a deficit in our affections. We admire the rich because we long to be rich. We admire the beautiful because we long to be beautiful. We admire the smart because we long to be clever. We long for these things not only because they are good gifts in themselves, they act as self-salvation project. With them, we've replaced Christ with lesser things so that we do not have to have as much faith.

4) How does showing favoritism reveal the depth of our sinfulness (Vs 8-11)?

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? James 2:5

This is one of the wonders of God's workings in humanity. All people are separated from God because of their sins. This is just the way it is. But God sent His Son to reconcile us to Him. In order to receive this, we need to acknowledge that we can't save ourselves and that we're totally dependent on His mercy through Jesus Christ.

The problem is that those who are rich naturally feel secure and also competent to handle all of life's problems, including reconciliation with God. This leads to smugness about God and a careless attitude towards salvation – "I've got it all under control."

In a similar fashion, people tend to feel that God will look on them differently than the next guy who has such obvious faults. But God doesn't grade on a curve and salvation isn't human originated. The poor will understand this. If the world looks down on them and their lowly position, then how much more God! And so it is that the poor, the weak, the lowly, and the broken are those who come to Jesus in faith, completely empty handed. "O God, is there room for me?" It's when one comes to God through Jesus in this manner that God is exalted.

When someone arrives with a list of their great accomplishments, wealth, or fame then God receives no glory – and they receive neither mercy nor salvation. God longs to look on the lost sinner and lavish His grace upon them, if they will only drop every pretense that blocks the way.

Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! Isaiah 30:18

5. How can we avoid showing favoritism in the future (Vs 8-11)?

But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. James 2:9

Remember the context, James has been talking about showing favoritism and then equated it with the “royal law” which says “Love your neighbor as yourself.” By showing favoritism, we’re violating one precept of God’s highest law. Jesus Himself said that all the law and the prophets (the entire Old Testament) hang on our loving God with all our being and loving our neighbor’s just as we would love ourselves. The good news is that although we all have fallen short of this, Jesus didn’t. As He said – “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Matthew 5:17

Make sure you get what Jesus is saying right – He was being accused of violating the very law He came to fulfill. Instead, He fulfilled it. This was done on our behalf and is the reason that we are not under the law. The law was not made obsolete by Jesus’ inactions; it was made obsolete by His actions. This still doesn’t excuse us when we show favoritism, but it allows forgiveness because we do. It should be our aim to live a life of honoring God and loving our neighbor, but when we fall short, there is mercy and forgiveness in the blood of Christ.

6) What principle should guide our actions and thinking going forward (Vs 8-11)?

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. James 2:8

James is quoting Leviticus 19:1: Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

James calls it the “royal law.” Why has he done this? He did it because, as many know, Jesus exalted it to a pre-eminent position. When questioned by an expert in the law concerning which was the greatest commandment, we read –

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Matthew 22:37-40

Because James is dealing with treating others fairly as a sign of true Christian devotion, he repeats Jesus’ words. If “all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” then we need to be extremely careful how we treat others – particularly in matters of judgment about their suitability in our lives. If Christ has accepted them, how much more should we.

THE END OF HYPOCRISY: THE BOOK OF JAMES SERMON GUIDE ANSWERS WEEKS 1-3

Week 5: JAMES 2:14-26 FAITH AND WORKS

Memory Verse: James 2:26

1. What does Jesus say about faith and works (Read Matthew 7:26-27)?

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. Matthew 7:26-27

Jesus urges you to hear His words, but He doesn't stop there. He goes on to say that you must act upon His words. If you are going to build on a solid foundation you must actually do what Jesus wants you to do. Hearing His words is not enough. You are building your life on His words *only* as you obey them (see Jas 1:22).

When personal storms come many lives will be destroyed and left in shambles. Most people don't find the narrow gate (7:13–14). Most people don't build on the foundation of Christ's words. But if you construct your life according to Christ's building codes you will not be disappointed. While obedience to Jesus' words is not a protection *from* the troubles; it is a protection *in* the troubles. You may lose some windows and the house of your life may be shaken but it will not collapse and be swept away.

Storms will come and go. You are either in a trial, coming out of a trial, or entering into a trial. Nevertheless, if you've built your life on the foundation of Christ, you have nothing to fear. A good storm will demonstrate the stability of your foundation.

2. In your own words, explain the meaning of James 2:18.

But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. James 2:18

Most people make the mistake of separating faith and deeds. In the sequence of things, faith always comes before deeds. If works come first, we are trying to produce righteousness in our own name. Faith or trust comes first because it's a gift of God. Works flow out of a heart that's being changed by Jesus. Works are the evidence of the Holy Spirit — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

3. Was Abraham saved by his faith or his works (Genesis 15:3-6, Romans 4:3)?

Abraham was saved by his faith entirely — it was his faith in God that credited to him as righteousness, not the things he did in obedience to God. His works were simply a result of his faith. He followed God because he trusted God. Faith always precedes works.

4. What is the point of James 2:19 when he says even the demons have faith?

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. James 2:19

There are different kinds of faith. There is saving faith and there is assenting faith. Assenting faith is acknowledgement that something is true without intimacy. Saving faith is a trust and reliance upon God. The demons believe that God is who He says he is because they have actually experienced Him firsthand, but it has done nothing to change their behavior. It has not led them to rely on God.

5. Which comes first faith or works? (Ephesians 2:8-10)? What are the three steps?

Faith always comes before works. Without exception!

- 1) Grace
- 2) Faith
- 3) Works

6. Explain the job description God gives us in Colossians 3:23-24.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Colossians 3:23-24

We work for the Lord and not for men. Because we have been chosen in Christ, all of our labors have meaning — they are for God first, from the grandest calling to the smallest detail. Works that arise from faith have purpose and they have reward.

THE END OF HYPOCRISY: THE BOOK OF JAMES SERMON GUIDE ANSWERS WEEKS 1-3

Week 6: JAMES 2:14-26 FAITH AND WORKS

Memory Verse: James 2:26

1. **Why are teachers judged with greater strictness “... not many of you should become teachers ...” (vs. 1)? In light of the context that follows this statement (vs. 2-12), would you say James was (a) attempting to limit the number of people who aspire to be teachers (period) or (b) trying to prevent the entry of immature disciples into the role of teaching? Explain.**

James is setting the role of teacher apart from the other gifts. Because of the nature of teaching or preaching God’s word, it should not be undertaken by those who are neither trained or gifted or called. He is trying to limit those who teach, as well as caution those who are training to teach. Doctrinal issues can determine whether somebody is worshipping the right or wrong God. The judgment teachers receive is based upon how closely they follow God’s word as it has been handed down by the apostles.

2. **After reading vs. 4 tell us about a time you ran your “ship” aground, as it were, simply because you failed to think before you spoke.**

Personal.

3. **What does James mean when he says “the tongue ... is set on fire by the flames of hell” (vs. 6c)? Is he saying “the devil makes me do it,” or what?**

The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. James 3:6

Just as the small spark in the dry forest can burn up many miles of land, so is the tongue a force for great destruction in the world. When the tongue isn’t restrained, it “corrupts the whole person.” When the person is corrupted, everything he or she comes into contact with is also affected by that corruption.

Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormons, rejected the words of Paul in Galatians 1:6-8 and proclaimed “another gospel” and has deceived millions of people in successive generations by his false teachings. Adolph Hitler invoked the name of “Jehovah” when railing against the Jewish people. His evil words led to the destruction of many millions of Jewish people and even more Christians and other “undesirable” people in the lands he controlled. His words came not from God, but from hell itself. His tongue received the instruction of the devil and repeated it to the destruction of not only the lives of those he fought against, but the lives of his own people. Germany was laid waste by one small tongue – a spark in an immense forest.

Such large examples tend to make us overlook our own destructive tongues though. Let us even in the smallest ways conduct our tongues in reverence of God, in building up our friends, and in the tender care of our children.

4. In what specific ways do you audibly “bless the Lord and Father” (vs. 9a)?

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. James 3:9

James set up a contradiction in the way many of us live our lives. We normally speak well of God and acknowledge our respect, adoration, and love for Him. Professing Christians in particular feign to misuse His name. And yet we tend to not act in the same way towards people we dislike. James indicates this is contradictory thinking because man has “been made in God’s likeness.”

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:27

The very next words in the Genesis account are, “And God blessed them...” Man is God’s image-bearer and has been blessed by God; therefore, we show disrespect to God when we curse others, whom He has blessed.

Any curses on man are at God’s prerogative – violations of His law, for example. But for us to flippantly curse our leaders because we disagree with them, our supervisors because they’re overbearing, our neighbors because we’re tired of them, or any others for whatever reason, we only bring discredit upon ourselves.

Instead of curses, let’s shower our enemies with blessing. This is what Jesus expects of us in Luke 6:28 and is what Paul repeats in Romans 12:14. Bless, and do not curse.

5. What is the most difficult battle you have fought and largely won in trying to bring your tongue into submission to God? How did you gain this victory in the Lord?

Personal.

THE END OF HYPOCRISY: WEEKS 7-9

James 3:13-18: Faith & Selflessness

Memory Verse: *“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere” (James 3:17).*

1. What does the original language reveal about what James means by the terms “wise” and “understanding” in verse thirteen? Who is he talking to?

The two terms “wise” and “understanding” seem interchangeable, so that it could appear that James is both redundant and over-intellectualizing the faith. But “wise” has its background in the Hebrew word *hokma*, in which theory and practice intersect. In the Old Testament, “wisdom” leads to the fear of God, not merely cognitive knowledge. The second term, “understanding” seems to have a more practical bent, pertaining to being knowledgeable in a way that makes one effectual in the exercise of such knowledge.

James likely uses these terms similarly to refer both to the leaders of the church and to the entire congregation. Not only the leaders of a church, but every Christian ought to seek both knowledge about God as well as practical moral and spiritual insight. James is asking his congregations to evaluate themselves and discern whom the truly wise ones among them are, who both know what is right and practice it (Craig Blomberg, *James*).

2. How have you seen a mature Christian put into practice the Biblical knowledge he or she possesses in a constructive way? Give an example.

Personal.

3. “Bitter jealousy” and “selfish ambition” are common terms in the twenty-first century. How would James’ audience understand these two negative traits in the first century?

The type of “jealousy” seeks the best for oneself, regardless of what might be good for another person, always wishing for others to have less than oneself, whether with possessions or with opportunities. In a group setting, “bitter jealousy” may manifest a fierce desire to promote one’s own opinion to the exclusion of those of others.

When the word translated “bitter jealousy” is combined with “selfish ambition,” a word commonly used in settings of sectarian rivalry or partisan politics, the image appears of people in angry competition, undermining one another and each fighting for their own rights. This would be a far cry from “the meekness of wisdom” seen earlier in this passage.

These problems of “bitter jealousy” and “selfish ambition” originate in the heart. Most likely James implies that the problem involves a rotten core of key individuals within the church. At the very least, each entire congregation is, for the most part, being viewed collectively as reflecting wrong attitudes. Because the images of “bitter jealousy” and “selfish ambition” are often linked to competition among various leaders (Craig Blomberg, *James*).

4. In what ways have you allowed bitter jealousy and selfish ambition to cloud your judgment and keep you from being wise in certain situations? Give an example.

Personal.

5. James describes true wisdom being “wisdom from above.” What is significant about that particular statement?

It means one may be peaceful, gentle, full of mercy, and the like, but unless these character traits come from genuine Christian faith, they prove meaningless from the eternal perspective of God’s kingdom. True wisdom is a gift from God. To be wise and advance the gospel and the kingdom of God, wisdom must come from a Christ-centered motivation. Wisdom from above does not originate from selfish ambition or any other worldly motive. Wisdom from above is powered by the Holy Spirit and has one motivation, the kingdom of God and its advancement through the proclamation of the Word.

6. In what ways will you apply the message of the sermon to your life this coming week? Who will keep you accountable?

Personal.

James 4:1-12: Faith & Double-dealing

Memory Verse: “Humble yourself before the Lord, and he will exalt you” (James 4:10).

1. Clearly, quarrels and fights are the antithesis of a unified body. What does James point to as the origin of these divisive realities?

The fact that James refers to no specific dispute might signal to us a situation so rife with tensions that the church was at a standstill. In any event, the conflict is clearly within the Christian community, as this is certainly the meaning of “among you.” In other words, certain

teachers had won a following by offering a philosophy that encouraged the pursuit of status as taught by society and unbridled by any authentic Christian witness. This in turn allowed a false belief to germinate and flourish that all of one's old prejudices could exist and thrive within the church. For this reason some were showing favoritism, while others were exploiting the poor. Arrayed against these were believers loyal to the gospel, who correctly understood the treat. The members of this group reacted variously to those following the teachers of false wisdom – some wanting peace at any price, others advocating a fight for the soul of the church.

In the second part of verse 1, James wisely points to a two-layered interpretation, just like the one sustained throughout 3:1-12. Just as there are mixed within each of us as individuals motives and emotions wholesome and unwholesome, so within the Christian community there is a wide variety of impulses. James says their disputes come from the desires within them. The rabbis believed that the impulses had their seats in various organs or "members" of the human body; therefore, the members of the body were "at war" with on another – pulled one way by conscience, then another way by the evil desire.

It is the passions, or more properly the decision to cultivate rather than control the passions, that have contributed to the problems within the church. These passions (untrammelled desire for power and authority, a desire for popularity within the eyes of the powerful, etc.) constitute a state of double-mindedness. The members of a congregation are pushed this way and that, first by their conscience, then by the evil impulse (David Nystrom, *James*)

2. Think of a recent fight or quarrel you've had, when you dug beneath the surface what were the root causes? How could you prepare yourself to biblically handle conflict in the future? Explain.

Personal.

3. It seems harsh that James calls his readers "adulterous people!" What is he saying? How would his audience understand his rebuke?

In verse 4 James adopts the mantle of elder and offers a rebuke as to errant children. By designating them "adulterous people," he recalls a frequent Old Testament rebuke, offers an echo of the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 12:39, and artfully holds out to his readers inclusion even as he wields the whip of chastisement. James is trying to shame them by reminding them of their commitment to faith.

James's reference to friendship with the world closely parallels a phrase employed by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:4 ("lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God") and by John in 1 John 2:15 ("Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him"). We are, then, in touch with a broad tradition. "The world" here assumes its semantic function as the forces and elements opposed to God, or, more precisely, the whole complex human institutions, values, and traditions that knowingly or unwittingly are arrayed against God.

In reality, some choose friendship with the world in the full knowledge that this constitutes enmity with God, and some of these continue to maintain the façade of a relationship with the Christian community. Perhaps James suspects this of the teachers he opposes. But many choose friendship with the world without realizing that it means enmity with God. This is probably his chief point, for the phrase "adulterous generation" is always used in Scripture of

those who assume they are in a covenant relationship with God. Why else would James seek to win them back by argument and then rebuke (David Nystrom, *James*)?

4. In what ways have you been tempted to live a duplicitous life? A life where you claim Christ, but are closely attached with the “world.” How has the Holy Spirit convicted you of this?

Personal.

5. It seems like James is calling his readers to perpetual mourning, what is he trying to communicate here?

James was calling readers, who had compromised with the world by following hedonism, to get right with God. There is laughter and joy in the pursuit of personal desires, but we must abandon these in the process of repenting. James was not saying Christians must be *constantly* miserable, mourning, weeping, and gloomy. These are only the outward signs of repentance from a formerly sinful attitude and lifestyle (cf. Matt. 5:3-4).

6. In what ways will you apply the message of the sermon to your life this coming week? Who will keep you accountable?

Personal.

James 4:13-5:6: Faith & Flesh

Memory Verse: “What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes” (James 4:14b).

1. James relates life to a “mist” that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Why would this imagery stick in the minds of his audience?

James points out the folly of succumbing to the temptation to make plans without God. A mist or “vapor” formed a natural analogy for the ephemeral in the dry Palestinian climate, in which water droplets in the air formed from condensation near the sea but then quickly disappeared. Mist was a prevalent Old Testament metaphor for the transitory, drawn from the world of nature (along with other like grass, shadow, cloud, and smoke). Augustine elaborates: “Restoring health for a time to a man’s body amounts to no more than extending his breath for a little while longer. Therefore it should not be considered of great importance, because it is temporal, not eternal.” James here employs another play on words, using the same root word in Greek for both the positive appearing and the negative disappearing. Since we have these similarly parallel terms in English, it is worth preserving the wordplay in translation (Craig Blomberg, *James*).

2. How does the brevity of your life cause you to embrace the biblical concept of eternity? Why is it important for you to spend your life living for things of eternal significance? How do you do this? Explain.

Personal.

3. James instructs his readers to say, “If the Lord wills.” How should one use this phrase day to day?

This expression should be interpreted neither as a pious addendum to be repeated mindlessly nor as an expression of fatalism that excuses us from taking responsibility for our actions. Rather, it ought to convict our hearts of God’s sovereignty in every area of our lives even as we seek to please him by following his will as best as we can discern it. The third-class condition introduced by “if” here is significant in that this phraseology is clearly not presuming on God’s grace – one’s own plans may or may not reflect the Lord’s purposes. The verb “we will live” shows that we should not take even living for granted, because our very lives depend on God’s grace for their continuance. Motyer argues that the verbs in this verse point to our own ignorance, frailty, and dependence on God, essential attitudes for all believers (Craig Blomberg, *James*).

4. What is your process for making decisions? How could you incorporate James’ teaching into said process? Explain.

Personal.

5. Is it wrong for a Christian to be rich?

Clearly, James is discussing hoarding. He is talking to men and women who have accumulated so much wealth that it is literally rusting and being eaten by moths. God is the giver of all good

things, including finances. He calls believers to be good stewards of what he gives. Some will make way more money than others. They will be responsible to the Lord for how they steward it and use it to advance God's kingdom. Some will not have lots of money, and they too will be judged for how they steward it to advance God's kingdom. It is not about how much money you have, it's about how much of you your money has. Do you control it, or does it control you. God is not opposed to wealth. He is opposed to greed, and not taking care of your neighbor. If God calls you to give, give. No matter how much money you make each month. The bottom line is this: Are you a good steward of what God has given you?

6. In what ways will you apply the message of the sermon to your life this coming week? Who will keep you accountable?

Personal.

The End of Hypocrisy

Week 10: Faith and Patience, James 5:7-12

Read: James 5:7-12

7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. 10 As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

12 But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

Memory Verse: Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. When, in this life, do we become impatient for Christ's return?

A question such as this is sure to evoke a variety of responses.

Some Christians think often about the return of Christ - praying, longing, waiting, anticipating. This has been a common theme throughout church history.

In fact, the New Testament concludes with the words:

"Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen. (Rev 22:20-21)

However, in modern times and in our current culture, the coming of the Lord seems to be something we think about less frequently and possibly never long for or anticipate. This may be largely a result of the circumstances of life in 21st Century America. Historically, people have longed for Christ's return, when life in the next world would certainly be better than life in this world. While we may know this as a truth (heaven will be better than this life), we may not feel this as a reality (this life is still - for the most part - very good).

Yet, for James' Jewish Christian audience - people who had been persecuted and scattered from family, friend, land, tradition, religion - the next life had a very real appeal. In your conversation consider - not only, when in this life you long for the return of Christ? But also, what about this world has a greater appeal to you than life in the next? What things do you cling to in this life? What do you fear missing out on if Christ returned tomorrow?

2. What truths does James offer as a source of encouragement to believers who are seeking to be patient in suffering? (v. 7-9)

James offers two truths for us to hold onto through times of suffering.

The first is a basic principle, observable through the life of the farmer. A farmer plants and then waits patiently for the crop to produce the fruit of the harvest. It will come, but only after a certain amount of time and under the right conditions. So too, our faith, is a product of our lives - it comes to us and grows as we walk through seasons of difficulty and suffering, but must be carefully tended and cultivated. There are times we must work hard for it and other times where it seems to flourish. However, in the midst of difficulty, James admonishes us to wait patiently, to endure because not only is our faith being impacted, but also because the Lord is coming. He will return and with him, will come an end to all suffering.

Additionally, James reminds us that when the Lord returns, He does so as a judge. This provides both a warning and a promise. A warning to us who will have our deeds and works judged (see 2 Cor. 5:9-10; 1 Cor. 3:9-15) to be mindful that Christ is coming again and will judge our works. But we also find in this a promise of justice. All people will be judged - either as Christians clinging to the atoning work of Christ to cover their sins, or as unbelievers standing guilty before God. Because we know that Christ will return and because we know he will judge all people, it frees us from the necessity of retaliation, of unforgiveness, of fear. For we can rest confidently knowing that God the righteous judge, will right every wrong and restore all things as he has promised.

3. James mentions “the prophets” as examples of those who patiently suffered. What prophets can you recall who might encourage us in this way?

Personal to each person. For examples please refer to Hebrews 11.

4. When reflecting on the prophets - at what point in the story does God usually make himself known?

Time and time again, we see God show up in response to the faith of the prophet. He doesn't always rescue his people from the need to take a stand, but he often intervenes and rescues his people from the imminent danger at hand.

He doesn't show up when Goliath taunts the Israelites. He shows up when David stands up to the taunting. (1 Samuel 17)

He doesn't show up when King Nebuchadnezzar threatens the three Hebrew children (Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego). He shows up after they have declared: *“our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”* and after the king has thrown them in the fire. (Daniel 3)

He doesn't stop King Darius from throwing Daniel into the lion's den. He shows up in the lion's den and shuts the mouths of the lions. (Daniel 6)

He doesn't stop Abraham from willingly laying his son, Isaac, on the altar. He shows up after, but before he plunges the knife into his son. (Genesis 22)

He doesn't stop Jesus from being crucified. He shows up on Easter Sunday, resurrecting Jesus from the dead, and providing a means for our salvation. (Luke 23-24)

God continually shows up not to relieve our need for faith, but to confirm our faith as legitimate. And so it seems, in our darkest hour, God shows up. He is there. Waiting and walking through the trouble with us, delivering us on the other side of our struggle, and lovingly walking with us through the moments that build true faith.

5. In what ways has God demonstrated faithfulness to you in times of suffering?

Personal response.

6. Throughout the New Testament, Christians are commanded to be thankful. How can the discipline of thankfulness or gratitude augment our patience and faith in suffering?

For many a season of suffering can become even more intense because the suffering is all we are capable of seeing at the time. We find ourselves drowning in sorrow and pain with no evident means of escape. However, the Scriptures call us to be people of thankfulness and gratitude.

Though difficult to practice, this discipline can provide a path to freeing our hearts and minds from the weight of suffering. Instead of focusing exclusively on the suffering, it demands we turn our eyes and attention elsewhere, looking for and acknowledging the good that is always around us. In doing so, we find a renewed capacity for hope and small reminders that God is good and eventually, the suffering will end.

One friend, suffering through a difficult marriage, made gratitude a daily practice - finding something to express thanks for - a kind word from a friend, something beautiful in nature, an encouraging Scripture, a fun moment with her children. In doing so, she found her heart lifted from the weight of the failing relationship and a renewed ability to offer love and grace to a difficult spouse. Others have successfully practiced this through various seasons of hardship - the loss of a loved one, an unexpected job transition, extended illness, etc.

Additional Scriptures:

Hebrews 12:1-17

Hebrews 5:5-10

Psalm 37:1-40

2 Peter 3:1-13