

# 3. James – The faith-works life



## 3.1 Dealing with the hard times – *In this life there will be tests, hardships and trials*

### OVERVIEW

#### CONTEXT

**Author:** James the brother of Jesus

**Date:** AD 48-62

**Background:** James became a leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13-21). The language of his epistle is similar to James' speech in Acts 15, distinguishing him as the author from the other 4 'James' mentioned in the New Testament.

Jewish historian Josephus tells us that James was stoned to death in AD 62.

#### CONTENT

**Structure:** 108 verses that contain 54 commands

- 1) Trials and temptations
- 2) Hearing and obeying the Word
- 3) Showing compassion to all
- 4) How a follower of Christ lives
- 5) Appeal for patience, pure speech, and prayer

**Purpose:** A call to practical and ethical living based on our faith in Christ – that doctrine and duty walk hand-in-hand.

#### COMPONENTS

##### Themes:

- 1) Faith that works
- 2) The duty of godly living
- 3) Personal spiritual growth and sensitivity in social relationships

##### Outline:

Practical religion and trials 1a	Ch	Practical religion and speech Ch 3	
Practical religion and God's Word Ch1b		Practical religion and worldliness 4a	Ch
Practical religion and human relationships Ch 2		Practical religion and business affairs 4b-5	Ch

#### CHRIST REVEALED

- Our Lord whom we are indebted to as bondservants (1:1)
- The Rewarder of those steadfast in trial (1:12)
- The object of our faith and the Lord of glory (2:1)
- The Coming One who we wait patiently for (5:7-9)

## Blueprint for a great life

James gives us a practical blueprint for living a successful Christian life. The principles or commands that he shares are worthy of regular attention.

1. Trials and troubles will be seen as an opportunity for joy in the long run 1:2
2. Enduring trials will help me grow and build strong character 1:4
3. The answer to godly wisdom is simply asking for it and expecting an answer  
1:5-6
4. Happiness is not based on what I have or don't have but on the promises of God  
1:9-11
5. Temptations lure comes from the enemy or my evil desires but not God 1:12-16
6. Ears need to be quickly attentive and the mouth slow to speak  
1:19
7. Anger must always be harnessed by self-control  
1:19
8. Evil is eradicated from life by replacing it with God's message (Word)  
1:21
9. God's Word needs to be acted upon with obedience  
1:22-24
10. Religious belief means nothing without caring for the needy  
1:27
11. Neighbourly love cannot be swayed by favouritism or discrimination  
2:1-9
12. Words and actions are judged by the law of love and mercy  
2:12-13
13. Faith is not just demonstrated but completed with good deeds  
2:14-26
14. Self-control starts with the tongue 3:2
15. A consistent life is made steadfast by goodness and wisdom  
3:13

16. Boastfulness will quickly rob you of wisdom  
3:13
17. Humility should clothe your every move 4:7
18. Righteous resistance to the Devil's schemes will force him to flee 4:7
19. The closer you get to God, the closer He'll draw to you 4:8
20. Life is lived in repentance to God and dependence on God  
4:8-10
21. Don't flippantly use words to condemn, criticise, judge or speak evil  
4:11
22. Claims for tomorrow must be according to God's will 4:13-16
23. Financial dealings with others must be reputed as fair and honest 5:4
24. Patience, courage and expectation rules our heart in waiting the Lord's return  
5:7-8
25. Grumbling and complaining about fellow believers brings judgement to us 5:9
26. If words and motives are clear and straight-forward, there is no need for oaths  
5:12
27. Prayer, praise and thanksgiving should be ever present  
5:13
28. Mature Christ-followers should pray for and anoint the sick 5:14-15
29. Confession of sin accompanied by earnest prayer brings healing 5:16-18
30. Helping the prodigal return brings salvation and forgiveness  
5:19-20

## Testing of faith

James 1:2-16 - Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. <sup>3</sup>For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. <sup>4</sup>So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

<sup>5</sup>If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. <sup>6</sup>But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup>Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. <sup>8</sup>Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.

<sup>9</sup>Believers who are poor have something to boast about, for God has honored them. <sup>10</sup>And those who are rich should boast that God has humbled them. They will fade away like a little flower in the field. <sup>11</sup>The hot sun rises and the grass withers; the little flower droops and falls, and its beauty fades away. In the same way, the rich will fade away with all of their achievements.

<sup>12</sup> God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. <sup>13</sup> And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. <sup>14</sup> Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. <sup>15</sup> These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.

<sup>16</sup> So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. [NLT]

Verse	Explanation
1:2	<p><i>'brothers and sisters'</i> – this is addressed to Christian believers</p> <p><i>'when'</i> – not <i>'if'</i> or <i>'should'</i>. – troubles are inevitable. Jesus said, 'On this earth there will be trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.' – John 16:33</p> <p><i>'trouble of every kind'</i> (Gk: peirasmos – 'diverse trials; temptations; adversity; provocation.'</p> <p><i>'opportunity for joy'</i> – Why joy? For what it will eventually produce in your life</p>
1:3	<p><i>'For'</i> – Because this is what happens when faith is tested – this test is of faith – <i>'Where is God in this? Can I trust Him?'</i></p> <p><i>'your endurance has a chance to grow'</i> – doesn't automatically grow but has a chance to do so, producing patience</p>
1:4	<p><i>'So let it grow'</i> – for endurance to grow we have to let it – to give in and allow the process to take place. (Often we fight the process by looking for quick fix, short-term solutions).</p> <p><i>'for when your endurance/patience is fully developed'</i> – not just a once-off in this particular situation but a pattern of behaviour in the way you live</p> <p><i>'perfect and complete (strong in character and ready for anything), needing nothing'</i> – Endurance builds the character you need to face any situation that comes your way</p>
1:5	<p><i>'If you need wisdom'</i> – if the trial you face involves you having to make a significant decision or follow a clear direction.</p> <p><i>'Ask God'</i> – Jesus gave us a pattern – 'Ask, seek, knock' – Matthew 7:7-12. James says to simply ask.</p> <p><i>'He will give it liberally/tell you'</i> – The picture here is of God ready and waiting to share the answer with you</p> <p><i>'He will not rebuke/reproach/resent you for asking'</i> – It is not audacious to ask God. He expects it just as a child asks the mother or father a myriad of questions expecting responses.</p>
1:6	<p><i>'when you ask be sure your faith is in God alone (be sure you expect Him to answer – with no doubting)'</i> – Asking requires expectation. There is no Plan B. There is no <i>'perhaps God may speak.'</i> There is an assurance in faith that God will answer.</p>

	<p><i>'divided loyalty/doubtful mind is unsettled as a wave of the sea tossed by the wind'</i> – doubt causes you to consider options, even options that contradict or oppose each other, the result being total confusion. The metaphor of a wind-tossed sea is perfect – no direct current, tossed about by every change, not being able to find calm or safe harbour.</p> <p>If you're believing God for an answer, put your total, unwavering trust in Him.</p>
1:7	<p><i>'People like that should not expect to receive from the Lord.'</i> – Why? Because keeping options open means ultimately that your trust is not in God but in yourself to control and choose what you would prefer.</p>
1:8	<p><i>'Then loyalty is divided between God and the world (they can't make up their minds – double-minded in all their ways)'</i> – A divided loyalty always leads to instability. God's ways are not the ways of the world and to consider both is to contradict and vacillate. Often the result is to do nothing.</p>
1:9	<p><i>'Believers who are poor have something to boast about (be glad) for God has honoured them.'</i> – How is there honour in being poor? In Matthew 5 Jesus tells us that the poor in spirit are close to the kingdom of heaven – they can rejoice in their position as a child of God without the lure of prosperity tempting them away.</p>
1:10	<p><i>'Those who are rich should be glad for God has humbled them.'</i> – This humility comes from knowing that all they have fades and is temporal as opposed to the eternal benefits of spiritual possessions.</p>
1:11	<p>The metaphor of grass, flowers, beauty fading away is a picture of the seasonal satisfaction of wealth and achievement – 'Here today, gone tomorrow.'</p>
1:12	<p><i>'God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation.'</i> – James is now speaking of temptation and testing that comes from the enticement of evil</p> <p><i>'Afterward'</i> – again the reward comes after a period of endurance</p> <p><i>'they will receive a crown of life'</i> – James writes here in present tense – this crown not referring to life hereafter but to life now – a sense of greater fulfilment and abundance.</p> <p><i>'God has promised to those who love Him'</i> – John 10:10 – 'I have come that you might have life and life abundantly.'</p>
1:13	<p>James makes clear that God is not tempted by evil nor does He tempt anyone else by evil. So then, where does temptation for evil come from?</p>
1:14	<p><i>'Temptation comes from the lure of our own desires.'</i> – Notice James doesn't blame Satan. Rather, we need to take notice of our own sinful nature that gives birth to wrong desires and not bow down to its perversions.</p>
1:15	<p><i>'Evil desires lead to evil actions which lead to death.'</i> – Focusing on evil desire will always spiral downwards to acting on it. This is why the mind is our greatest battle ground.</p> <p>Ultimately, the consequence of such sin is death.</p>
1:16	<p><i>'So don't be misled/deceived'</i></p>

	'dear brothers and sisters' – James makes clear that he is speaking out of love and not judgement.
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In summary, the tests of faith pointed out by James are:

- Test of patience
- Test of endurance
- Test of trust
- Test of asking in faith
- Test of divided loyalty
- Test of poverty
- Test of prosperity
- Test on temptation



For consideration ....

Which blueprints for a great life particularly resonate with you? Why do you think that is?

Which blueprints for a great life are a struggle for you? What can you do about this?

What challenges you about the tests of our faith written about by James? What are some of your answers in facing these tests?

## 3. James – The faith-works life



### 3.2 Walk what you talk – *We are to be hearers and doers of the Word*

Prejudice and the law of love

James 2:1-13 - My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favour some people over others?

<sup>2</sup>For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewellery, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. <sup>3</sup>If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor"—well, <sup>4</sup>doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?

<sup>5</sup>Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? <sup>6</sup>But you dishonour the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? <sup>7</sup>Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?

<sup>8</sup>Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbour as yourself." <sup>9</sup>But if you favour some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law.

<sup>10</sup>For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God's laws. <sup>11</sup>For the same God who said, "You must not commit adultery," also said, "You must not murder." So if you murder someone but do not commit adultery, you have still broken the law.

<sup>12</sup>So whatever you say or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law that sets you free. <sup>13</sup>There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you. [NLT]

Prejudice is an unjustified or incorrect negative attitude towards an individual based solely on the individual's membership of a social group. Discrimination is the resulting behaviour or action towards this individual or group.

The most common forms of prejudice are:

- Race
- Wealth or class
- Religion
- Sexism
- Belief/world view/lifestyle choice
- Age
- Xenophobia – Nationalism/Country

The fact that the Bible deals with this subject in a number of New Testament books or letters indicates that this isn't just a secular or social issue – it existed within the church.

The answer to prejudice according to James, particularly within the body of Christ, is to judge according to the law of love and act with the same mercy that God has extended to us.

## Principles of the law of love

1. We may not agree or accept a person's lifestyle choice or position but we must still extend love and mercy.

2. Tolerance is NOT a Biblical principle. If it were God's justice, righteousness and love (law and grace) would be compromised.
3. The 'royal law' to 'Love your neighbour as yourself' is our foundation. A mature Christ follower can disagree with the way someone may live or their world view but still extend the law of love to them. This is not a compromise.
4. A result of Christ's sacrifice was to reconcile alien groups to each other in one body. Ephesians 2:11-13 - Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. <sup>12</sup>In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. <sup>13</sup>But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ. [NLT]

Therefore racism is an unacceptable prejudice according to God and it should be to His followers. In '*Brothers, we are not professionals,*' John Piper states:

'The issue of racial prejudice and snubbing and suspicion and mistreatment is not a social issue; it is a blood-of-Jesus issue...

The point is that God aims to create one new people in Christ who are reconciled to each other across racial lines. Not strangers. Not aliens. No enmity. Not far off. Fellow citizens of one "city of God." (2013:228;236).

5. If our world view or belief is presented in a judgemental way that causes a weaker brother or sister to stumble, we are committing the sin of prejudice.

1 Corinthians 8:9-13 - But you must be careful so that your freedom does not cause others with a weaker conscience to stumble. <sup>10</sup>For if others see you—with your "superior knowledge"—eating in the temple of an idol, won't they be encouraged to violate their conscience by eating food that has been offered to an idol? <sup>11</sup>So because of your superior knowledge, a weak believer for whom Christ died will be destroyed. <sup>12</sup>And when you sin against other believers by encouraging them to do something they believe is wrong, you are sinning against Christ. <sup>13</sup>So if what I eat causes another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live—for I don't want to cause another believer to stumble. [NLT]



For consideration ....

What are some practical ways that we can extend love and mercy to those who may have a different view to us?

How do we extend the law of love to those who show animosity or hatred towards us because of our belief?

## Hearers and doers of the Word



James 2:14-26 - What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? <sup>15</sup> Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, <sup>16</sup> and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

<sup>17</sup> So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

<sup>18</sup> Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." But I say, "How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds."

<sup>19</sup> You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. <sup>20</sup> How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless?

<sup>21</sup> Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. <sup>23</sup> And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." He was even called the friend of God. <sup>24</sup> So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

<sup>25</sup> Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. <sup>26</sup> Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works. [NLT]

James emphasises conduct more than creed. His book is primarily practical and ethical, emphasising duty rather than doctrine. Rather than speculating or debating on religious theories, James directs his readers towards godly living.

Obedience to the Word of God brings about the work of God. We are to hear the Word and do the work. To hear and to do nothing is one sign of a deceived heart. The key verse of James (1:22) states:

<sup>22-24</sup> Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear! [MSG]

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. [NKJV]

We are not saved **by** good works, (Ephesians 2:8 makes this clear) but we are saved **for** good works.

Ephesians 2:10 – 'For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.' [NKJV]

Hearing and doing must go hand-in-hand.

Faith Hearers	Faith Doers
Faith is given voice in our creed	Faith is given credibility in our conduct
Faith is expressed in our words – 'talking the talk'	Faith is outworked in our actions – 'walking the walk'
Faith requires verbal allegiance	Faith results in practical fruitfulness
Faith is initiated through our trusted relationship and communion with God	Faith is made complete through obedience and activation to what God says
Faith is our possession to enjoy	Faith is our responsibility to share

**What implications does being a hearer as well as a doer have?**

If you just hear but don't do you become a believer but not a disciple; a philosopher but not a practitioner; a hypothesis but not a proof of faith. As James makes clear, both hearing and doing are requirements of the Christian life. When you hear and do, the following evidences are in your life:

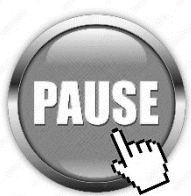
1. INTEGRITY – People see that you seek to live what you believe.
2. ACCOUNTABILITY – What you say is backed up by the proof of your lifestyle.
3. FRUITFULNESS – Sincere truth acted upon will always produce lasting fruit.
4. PURPOSE – You will see the purposes of God on display through your life.
5. CLARITY – As you act upon His Word, the voice of the Holy Spirit comes with greater clarity.
6. EXAMPLE – You start to represent/imitate Jesus to a lost world and become an example they can trust.
7. INFLUENCE – People watch and listen to this kind of life.

James gives us two examples of faith and works in action – Abraham and Rahab.

EXAMPLE	ACT	RESULT
Abraham (2:21-24) Father of the nation of Israel	Prepared to offer his own son as a sacrifice in obedience to God	- Faith made complete - Declared righteous by God - Called 'Friend of God'
Rahab (2:25) Prostitute from Jericho	Hid messengers/spies from the tribes of Israel in Jericho and then sent them safely away	- Made right with God - Spared with her family when Jericho was invaded - Listed in the genealogy of Jesus

In these two examples of faith and work in action we can see God's favour:

- His declaration of righteousness for those who honour Him
- His desire for relationship with His children
- His protection and deliverance
- His acceptance and forgiveness
- His fulfilment of plan and purpose that goes beyond our understanding



For consideration ....

How can we become better hearers and doers when it comes to our faith?

# 3. James – The faith-works life



## 3.3 The most dangerous weapon – *Words are powerful and can build or destroy*

### Taming the tongue

James 3:1-12 - Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. <sup>2</sup>Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.

<sup>3</sup>We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. <sup>4</sup>And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. <sup>5</sup>In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches.

But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. <sup>6</sup>And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.

<sup>7</sup>People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, <sup>8</sup>but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup>Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. <sup>10</sup>And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! <sup>11</sup>Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? <sup>12</sup>Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring. [NLT]

James tells us that our words are powerful. This word power, (our tongue), can be used for good or evil and reflects the inconsistencies of our heart. To emphasise this power, James uses a number of metaphors:

- The horse that turns due to a bit in its mouth
- The boat that turns due to a small rudder
- The great fire caused by a tiny spark

Out of our mouth can come both curses and praises. Again, James uses three metaphors:

- Fresh vs salty/bitter water flowing from the same source
- Olives (salty) and figs (sweet) coming from the same tree
- Figs (sweet) and grapes (sour) coming from the same vine

The Bible has a great deal to say about words.

Proverbs 21:23 - Watch your tongue and keep your mouth shut, and you will stay out of trouble. [NLT]

Matthew 12:33-34 - "A tree is identified by its fruit. If a tree is good, its fruit will be good. If a tree is bad, its fruit will be bad. <sup>34</sup>You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you speak what is good and right? For whatever is in your heart determines what you say. [NLT]

Proverbs 12:18 - Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing. [NLT]

Psalms 141:3 - Take control of what I say, O LORD, and guard my lips. [NLT]

We are warned that we will be held accountable for what we say but also told that the tongue is humanly untameable. So if the tongue can't be tamed, how do we go about controlling our words?

Someone defined taming the tongue as, *'putting a guard over your mouth and ensuring that what comes out is in line with God's Word and His own heart and the good fruits of the Holy Spirit.'* This is no simple thing and can't be met with human discipline alone. Ultimately, the control of our words must be a work of the Spirit of God within us.

## How do we tame the tongue?

1. Dedicate your heart, mind and tongue to the Lord daily.
2. Pray that God would give you an awareness of your words.  
Psalms 19:14 - May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. [NLT]
3. Surrender your 'right' to complain.
4. Ask for forgiveness for any unloving words or attitudes.
5. Practice speaking words that encourage, edify and inspire.  
Ephesians 4:29 - Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. [NLT]
6. Watch your input.  
What we allow our mind to think on will find expression in our words and actions.  
Philippians 4:8 - And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. [NLT]
7. Surround yourself with a supportive community who speak the language of life and faith.

## Avoiding worldliness

James 3:13-4:10 - If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honourable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying. <sup>15</sup> For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. <sup>16</sup> For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.

<sup>17</sup> But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favouritism and is always sincere. <sup>18</sup> And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.

### Drawing Close to God

What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? <sup>2</sup> You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. <sup>3</sup> And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

<sup>4</sup> You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God. <sup>5</sup> Do you think the Scriptures have no meaning? They say that God is passionate that the spirit he has placed within us should be faithful to him. <sup>6</sup> And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say,

“God opposes the proud  
but gives grace to the humble.”

<sup>7</sup> So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. <sup>9</sup> Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honour. [NLT]

KEYS IN OVERCOMING WORLDLINESS
A commitment to steady goodness assists wisdom to operate in your life (3:13)
Jealousy and self-ambition carry worldly and ungodly motivation and leads to disorder in your life (3:14-16)
You recognize Godly wisdom in operation in your life by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Its purity and wholeness</li> <li>- Its peace and gentleness</li> <li>- Its willingness to yield to others for the sake of love</li> <li>- Its mercy in action</li> <li>- Its impartiality and sincerity (3:17)</li> </ul>
Motives that are ruled by selfish pleasure create a war with you and with others around you (4:1-3)
You can't have worldly pleasure as your goal and be a friend of God (4:4)
We have strength to overcome evil desires through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (4:5-6)
To resist the Holy Spirit's help and strengthening is to allow pride to rule in our life (4:6-7)
Drawing close to God – us making the move towards Him in deep repentance and dependence is required for us to be lifted from despair (4:8-10)

We are in the world yet not of it. In fact, the world's principles quite often are a contradiction to God's Kingdom principles and we must learn with the Holy Spirit's guidance to operate by God's standards.

The world says, 'Put yourself first'; God says, 'Put others first.'

The world says, 'Seek pleasure and success'; God says, 'Seek first the kingdom of God.'

The world says, 'Greatness is in getting to the top'; God says, 'Greatness is in learning to be the servant of all.'

The world says, 'I'll do what I want to do'; God says, 'Submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.'

The world says, 'Discover the real you'; God says, 'Lose your life for my sake and you will find it.'

## The danger of judging and boasting

James 4:11-17 - Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you. <sup>12</sup> God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbour?

<sup>13</sup> Look here, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit." <sup>14</sup> How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone. <sup>15</sup> What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that." <sup>16</sup> Otherwise you are boasting about your own pretentious plans, and all such boasting is evil.

<sup>17</sup> Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it. [NLT]

<sup>11-12</sup> Don't bad-mouth each other, friends. It's God's Word, his Message, his Royal Rule, that takes a beating in that kind of talk. You're supposed to be honouring the Message, not writing graffiti all over it. God is in charge of deciding human destiny. Who do you think you are to meddle in the destiny of others?

### Nothing but a Wisp of Fog

<sup>13-15</sup> And now I have a word for you who brashly announce, "Today—at the latest, tomorrow—we're off to such and such a city for the year. We're going to start a business and make a lot of money." You don't know the first thing about tomorrow. You're nothing but a wisp of fog, catching a brief bit of sun before disappearing. Instead, make it a habit to say, "If the Master wills it and we're still alive, we'll do this or that."

<sup>16-17</sup> And this is the sin that is full of sin—knowing what you ought to do and then not doing it. Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it. [NLT]

We must remember that James is addressing his letter to the church – the scattered Jewish Christians throughout the nations (1:1). So when James is writing about judging and boasting, he is writing to bring correction to the church.

### About judging others:

Jesus talked a great deal about not judging each other, perhaps His most famous treatise being about removing the speck in someone else's eye when you have a beam in your own (Matthew 7:5). I'm sure James had this in mind when he commented on judgement. In typical fashion, James made his position (command) on judgement very clear.

- Criticizing and condemning each other is ultimately criticizing and condemning God's law at work in and through other believers.
- We are in no position to judge whether God's law at work is right or wrong in someone's life.
- Our position is simply to obey God's law.
- Only God can judge.

Some people make a distinction between judgement and discernment and the Word of God indicates that we are to be discerning. So what is the difference?

*Judgement is based on opinion that brings condemnation. It determines how others should bear fruit and comes from a position of perceived superiority.*

*Discernment is based on the evidence of bearing fruit. It looks at the quality of the fruit and offers assistance as to how greater productivity could occur. Discernment comes from a position of willing support.*

### **About boasting:**

James claims here need reflection. He claims that:

- It is a boast if we claim our ownership of tomorrow. Because we have no control over tomorrow which is in God's hands, claiming our plans without His promise is evil. It is us trying to determine what God does rather than submit to His purpose.
- Rather we should say, 'If the Lord wills...' This is not fatalistic or compromising faith but putting our trust in the sovereign work of God.
- If we know what is right but then don't follow this, it is sin. James finishes with this general principle – Obedience to God rather than willing disobedience enables us to approach life with humility and allows no foothold of pride, arrogance or boast into our way of thinking.

John Dickson in 'Vital Signs: The wisdom of James for a life of faith' says, 'Those 'on the move' must remember that life is contingent upon the will of God. (2006:179)

We can all too quickly take ownership of what God has allowed us to steward by His grace. We boast in our achievement and success as if He had no part to play or was a silent observer. We claim for tomorrow what is not ours to claim and forget that it is His gift of faithfulness towards us.



For consideration ....

What are you going to do to help tame the power of your tongue?

Why can't we live with one foot in the world and the other as a follower of Christ?



## 3. James – The faith-works life

### 3.4 Stay the course – *Through blessing and trial, we are to remain steadfast*

#### Dangers of wealth

James 5:1-6 - Look here, you rich people: Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. <sup>2</sup>Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. <sup>3</sup>Your gold and silver are corroded. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fire. This corroded treasure you have hoarded will testify against you on the day of judgment. <sup>4</sup>For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The cries of those who harvest your fields have reached the ears of the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

<sup>5</sup> You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every desire. You have fattened yourselves for the day of slaughter. <sup>6</sup> You have condemned and killed innocent people, who do not resist you. [NLT]

The tone at the beginning of chapter five of James is bold and angry, known as a prophetic lament. Some may question: *'If this letter is addressed to the church, why is James showing such vehemence towards the wealthy?'* The purpose of this prophetic lament is to comfort the oppressed, the victims of the rich.

It is clear in this passage that wealth in and of itself is not the issue but what the wealthy have done with their position of privilege. There are three crimes commented on:

- Field workers who have been cheated of their pay
- Living in the lap of luxury at the expense of others
- Condemning and killing of the innocents. (This last may not be direct murder but the indirect result of withholding earned wages, or false accusation or testimony given in order to prevent payment and penalise the victim).

One thing is made very clear - God always hears the cry of victims of injustice.

#### **10 injustices that we should get righteously angry about**

1 Human trafficking - 35 million victims per day, 20% children (according to PRESSAT 2021)



- 2 Slave labor – 40 million people trapped in slavery (according to Free the Slaves 2017)
- 3 Leadership greed in countries that keep the population in poverty
- 4 War that targets the innocent (EG. Russia towards Ukraine)
- 5 Martyrdom of Christians for their faith - (5898 reported killings according to Open Doors 2021). Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world.
- 6 Domestic violence – 70,000 recorded assaults in Australia (Up 8.8% and rising 2021)
- 7 Racial discrimination
- 8 Social bullying – class or caste systems
- 9 The suppression of women (through unrighteous law, chauvinism, economic and educational inequality)
- 10 Corrupt misuse of economic or political power for personal gain

\* *The above injustices are listed in no particular order of importance*

## Remaining steadfast

James 5:7-12 - Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen. <sup>8</sup> You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near.

<sup>9</sup> Don't grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. For look—the Judge is standing at the door!

<sup>10</sup> For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup> We give great honour to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy.

<sup>12</sup> But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned. [NLT]

Now that James has dealt strongly with the issues of taming the tongue, avoiding worldliness, judging, boasting, and greed, (dangers and injustices that were facing the church), he now addresses the question of how to remain steadfast, how to endure through these trying situations and times.

KEYS TO REMAINING STEADFAST	
PATIENCE	James encourages the church to look to the examples of the farmer who sows and then waits for harvest; the prophets who endured suffering while declaring the word of the Lord; and Job, a righteous man who showed great endurance.
COURAGE	James states that we are to take courage for the Lord is near. This 'near' not only refers to the imminent return of Christ but can also refer to the closeness of His presence while enduring difficult times.
DON'T COMPLAIN	'Don't grumble or cast judgement.' James reminds his readers and listeners that God ultimately is the Judge and He observes closely – He is standing at the door.

GOD'S MERCY	We are to remind ourselves of God's tenderness and mercy. The Amplified Version adds 'pity and compassion.'
DON'T TAKE OATHS	James who has already emphasized the power of our words encourages us to not take oaths or swear to an agreed promise. His reason is that by breaking an oath, we sin and are condemned according to our word. Rather, we are to respond with a simple yes or no.
PERSISTENT PRAYER	James finishes his letter by drawing our attention to perhaps the greatest key to remaining steadfast – persistent prayer



For consideration ....

Why are these keys so important to remaining steadfast?

## The prayer of faith

James 5:13-20 - Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. <sup>14</sup> Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven.

<sup>16</sup> Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. <sup>17</sup> Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! <sup>18</sup> Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.

<sup>19</sup> My dear brothers and sisters, if someone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back, <sup>20</sup> you can be sure that whoever brings the sinner back from wandering will save that person from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins. [NLT]

It is fitting that James completes his letter by encouraging the saints to pray – not just petition prayer but active prayer that combines faith with works. This prayer is powerful! James' encouragement in regards to prayer is to 'keep on' praying and praising 'continually'.

### Keep on keeping on ...

- Keep praying - in suffering - (5:13)
- Keep singing - in thankfulness - (5:13)
- Keep calling for elders - in sickness - (5:14)
- Keep anointing with oil - in the name of the Lord - (5:14)
- Keep offering prayer - in faith - (5:15)
- Keep confessing - in humility - (5:16)
- Keep earnest - in righteousness - (5:16)

- Keep believing - in God's miraculous power - (5:17)
- Keep interceding - in prayer and action for restoration - (5:19-20)

### **In conclusion:**

"The only way to escape stereotyped, lifeless and futile prayers is to view prayer as a vital sustaining friendship with a God who cares for us individually."

- Harry Emerson Fosdick – *The meaning of prayer*

"Prayer is keeping company with God."

- Clement of Alexandria