The Letter of James

Introduction

The Letter of James is treasured by some for its simplicity and instruction. Others, alongside the likes of Martin Luther, struggle to see past its apparent contradictions with other passages of Scripture and stay away from it. While James does write some rather inflammatory observations about faith (and the rich, and words), when observed in their context, they harmonize seamlessly with the rest of inspiration. Observing the words of James closely is a focal point of this quarter. That said, this quarter does not focus on defending the validity of James. Instead, it is a verse-by-verse study of his bite-sized counsel and how it continues to apply to modern-day believers. The parallels with the Gospels and other books of the Bible (both Old Testament and New) confirm its validity and reveal its unique way of exploring “old” truths.Following the poetic theology of Hebrews, James can be a startlingly practical book. His abstract parables serve only to better inform the reader of the practical conclusions he is explaining. Writing to believers “scattered abroad,” his counsel ranges from interacting with people at dinner parties to planning future business ventures to the personal struggle with sin. His counsel bears evidence of a close acquaintance with real life, both the joyful and the devastating. In all these things, he maintains one central point: true faith is expressed in the believer’s life. Faith is not a mental assent; it is something testable, even something to be withheld out of prejudice (James 1:3; 2:2–4). Faith is access to a tangible reality not yet realized, and yet it is the essential ingredient in living a life that matters now (James 2:5, 26; 5:7, 8). When real, it cannot help but be expressed in the life; any faith that is not seen gives evidence of its inauthenticity (James 2:20, 26). James cuts to the root of sins that are often glossed over: selfishness, unsanctified speech, and a fixation on wealth. He wastes no time in pointing out how destructive these sins are, even though—or especially because—they are acceptable by worldly standards. Faith implicitly works for the good of others (James 2:14–16). If a mouth praises God and curses other people, it is unacceptable and gives evidence of a contrary heart (James 3:9–12). The wealthy may barricade themselves with their gold and silver, but they cannot escape the consequences of what they do with what they have (James 5:1–6). James explores these three areas in focused sections, but also brings them up throughout the rest of the book. Though some of his instruction can be construed as harsh, James’s pastoral heart is threaded throughout as he appeals to his “brethren” to listen to his counsel. With an inspired and eternal perspective, he lays plain the consequences of an unyielded, unsurrendered life. Like a watchman observing the horizon, he pleads with the believers to live the life that Jesus died for them to have while it is still available to them. If still in wickedness, turn away, he says; if surrendered, be patient until “the coming of the Lord” (James 5:8). Though detailed, this study is nowhere exhaustive for the same reason that no human-made study can be exhaustive of even the shortest passage of Scripture. As you study this quarter, remember the overarching themes and the God who inspired them all. Observe your life and ask if your faith can be seen by others. When conviction comes from one point or another, remember that all works are to be done by faith in Jesus Christ. Works are done as a result of salvation by faith, not to merit it. When you depend on Him, your life can glorify God, just as Jesus said it would all those years ago (Matt. 5:16).

IT’S A JOY TO FALL

inTro

The Benefit of Weakness  
Read This Week’s Passage: James 1:1–8

**James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are of the Dispersion, greeting.Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations;knowing that the proving of your faith worketh patience.And let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing.But if any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting: for he that doubteth is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed.For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord;a doubleminded man, unstable in all his ways.**

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Benefit of WeaknessHumanity, with its natural tilt toward illusory self-sufficiency, will go out of its way to hide weakness and struggle. People rejoice over such experiences only in the context of clear accomplishment: sleep deprivation for the sake of a job promotion or exhausted muscles for the sake of a personal record marathon. James had a better accomplishment in mind, though: the growth of character. When faith is tested in trials, weakness and struggle are often exposed. According to James, this is a good thing.James is so sold on the value of this experience that he encourages the brethren to “count it all joy when [they] fall into various trials” (James 1:2

**Faith and Wisdom 2 My brothers and sisters, when you have many kinds of troubles, you should be full of joy,**

, emphasis supplied). Don’t just let it happen, he says. Enjoy it. This joy occurs with the understanding that “the testing of your faith produces patience” (v. 3). Pain with a purpose, like fatigued muscles for a marathon, becomes bearable, even enjoyable. James continues, advising that when someone lacks wisdom—when they see something as beyond their ability to comprehend, figure out, or grapple with—instead of despairing, questioning their calling, or self-censuring for their lack, they should ask God for wisdom, knowing that He gives it liberally to all who ask (v. 5). This lack or weakness in wisdom should be seen as an invitation to come near to God and draw from His abundance of grace and gifts. All weaknesses, struggles, and lacking should be treated the same way.

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How to Respond to Affliction  
Without further credentials than being a slave of God and Jesus, James opens his letter by addressing believers who are “scattered abroad” (James 1:1

**From James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To all of God’s people who are scattered everywhere in the world: Greetings.**

). He then immediately dives into practical advice and maintains this focus for all five chapters: live this way, not that way, because of clear realities that God has revealed. While some scholars believe that James is simply a collection of abrupt maxims without a cohesive theme, other scholars agree that Jesus’ brother James wrote this to real people in real circumstances for a real purpose: encouragement and practical advice in adverse circumstances.The author writes to an audience that is enduring deep trials, finding themselves in need of wisdom, and struggling to hold onto their faith consistently. These circumstances hold credible mirroring amidst the social turmoil and injustice of the late 40s and 50s ad. Faced with poverty, violent injustice, and no end in sight, even the most devout of Christians could have been tempted to use the weapons of the world to defend themselves. This reality deeply troubled James and drove him to write an epistle rich with relevant and practical advice.Though his counsel is strong, James’s endearing term of “my brethren” has the effect of camaraderie and empathy. He can see the violence and suffering they are experiencing, and he knows that they can control only their response. Instead of following the examples of rage and revenge, his readers are invited to allow the growth of patience within them, to endure and persevere in Christ-like response instead of reverting to the short-term non-solutions of the world. Wisdom was needed in these harsh conditions, and James affirms its abundant availability from God. His only counsel was for them to ask “with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. . . . He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6

**6 But when you ask God, you must believe and not doubt. Anyone who doubts is like a wave in the sea, blown up and down by the wind.**

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**7–8 Such doubters are thinking two different things at the same time, and they cannot decide about anything they do. They should not think they will receive anything from the Lord.**

). The tossing wave parallels the instability of someone without faith to anchor them. Thus, circumstances default to the deciding factor: when circumstances look favorable, the believer thrills with joy and peace; when circumstances look dark or trials come, the believer’s so-called faith departs from him. This mentality permeates every aspect of life and “all his ways.” Thus, James counsels, allow for faith to be tested but not taken, even in the worst of circumstances.

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Are Trials a Good Thing?  
When James tells the believers to “count it all joy when [they] fall into various trials,” it can sound a bit insensitive (James 1:2

**Faith and Wisdom 2 My brothers and sisters, when you have many kinds of troubles, you should be full of joy,**

). In addition to all their suffering, are they supposed to be happy about it? Are they to hide their discomfort and pain behind a fixed smile? How can such an injunction be shared from Christ-like love? It’s helpful to observe his wording in this straight counsel. Joy comes from knowing the effect of trials, not from the trials themselves; it comes from seeing the long-term effect rather than the short-term experience. Like Paul, James is not saying that all things are good, but that all things can work together for good (Rom. 8:28

**28 We know that in everything God works for the good of those who love him. n They are the people he called, because that was his plan.**

). Instead of focusing on the difficulties, he urges them to focus on their response (the only part they can control) and to notice the development of essential Christ-like traits within them. Pain and discomfort often cause a hyper-focus on oneself: that is, when someone is in pain, it is hard for them to see anything else. Believers can be tempted to do whatever it takes to avoid suffering altogether; but then they would miss out on essential growth in faith and in grace, or worse, resort to causing suffering in others to avoid it themselves. Look at the long term, James urges, and do not be caught up with the various trials of the present. Lean into them for what God can do with them, and do not fixate on the trials themselves. We are not saved through relishing trials; we are saved by the One who sees us through them.James goes on to append the guarantee for wisdom with the condition of unwavering faith, that is, faith “with no doubting” (James 1:6

**6 But when you ask God, you must believe and not doubt. Anyone who doubts is like a wave in the sea, blown up and down by the wind.**

). Instead of prescribing an arbitrary punishment for the one who doubts, James describes the reality that faith is required in order to receive anything from God. Faith is a convicted realization, a confidence in unseen realities (Heb. 11:1

**What Is Faith? 11 Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that something is real even if we do not see it.**

). Because God does not currently walk this earth in a physical and visual form, we require faith to interact with Him and thus also to receive gifts, including wisdom.Just as a wave whipped about by wind provides no stability, neither does a heart and mind without faith in God’s character and His power. Faith means to be convinced of both His existence and ability as well as His willingness to reward “those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6

**6 Without faith no one can please God. Anyone who comes to God must believe that he is real and that he rewards those who truly want to find him.**

). With faith, the believer can benefit from various trials, lean on the Source of wisdom, and have an abiding joy in God all the while.

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How do the following verses relate to the primary passage?James 3:13

**True Wisdom 13 Are there those among you who are truly wise and understanding? Then they should show it by living right and doing good things with a gentleness that comes from wisdom.**

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**17 But the wisdom that comes from God is first of all pure, then peaceful, gentle, and easy to please. This wisdom is always ready to help those who are troubled and to do good for others. It is always fair and honest.**

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Corinthians 1:30

**30 Because of God you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God. In Christ we are put right with God, and have been made holy, and have been set free from sin.**

Romans 5:3–5

**3 We also have joy with our troubles, because we know that these troubles produce patience. 4 And patience produces character, and character produces hope. 5 And this hope will never disappoint us, because God has poured out his love to fill our hearts. He gave us his love through the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to us.**

1 Peter  
4:12–19

**Suffering as a Christian 12 My friends, do not be surprised at the terrible trouble which now comes to test you. Do not think that something strange is happening to you. 13 But be happy that you are sharing in Christ’s sufferings so that you will be happy and full of joy when Christ comes again in glory. 14 When people insult you because you follow Christ, you are blessed, because the glorious Spirit, the Spirit of God, is with you. 15 Do not suffer for murder, theft, or any other crime, nor because you trouble other people. 16 But if you suffer because you are a Christian, do not be ashamed. Praise God because you wear that name. 17 It is time for judgment to begin with God’s family. And if that judging begins with us, what will happen to those people who do not obey the Good News of God? 18  “If it is very hard for a good person to be saved, the wicked person and the sinner will surely be lost!” n 19 So those who suffer as God wants should trust their souls to the faithful Creator as they continue to do what is right.**

Romans 8:18

**Our Future Glory 18 The sufferings we have now are nothing compared to the great glory that will be shown to us.**

1 Peter 1:6–9

**6 This makes you very happy, even though now for a short time different kinds of troubles may make you sad. 7 These troubles come to prove that your faith is pure. This purity of faith is worth more than gold, which can be proved to be pure by fire but will ruin. But the purity of your faith will bring you praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is shown to you. 8 You have not seen Christ, but still you love him. You cannot see him now, but you believe in him. So you are filled with a joy that cannot be explained, a joy full of glory. 9 And you are receiving the goal of your faith—the salvation of your souls.**

What other verses come to mind in connection with James 1:1–8

**From James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To all of God’s people who are scattered everywhere in the world: Greetings. Faith and Wisdom 2 My brothers and sisters, when you have many kinds of troubles, you should be full of joy, 3 because you know that these troubles test your faith, and this will give you patience. 4 Let your patience show itself perfectly in what you do. Then you will be perfect and complete and will have everything you need. 5 But if any of you needs wisdom, you should ask God for it. He is generous to everyone and will give you wisdom without criticizing you. 6 But when you ask God, you must believe and not doubt. Anyone who doubts is like a wave in the sea, blown up and down by the wind. 7–8 Such doubters are thinking two different things at the same time, and they cannot decide about anything they do. They should not think they will receive anything from the Lord.**

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Jesus Knows  
When Jesus sent out the twelve disciples, He commissioned them with practical instruction, including this principle: “ ‘A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master’ ” (Matt. 10:24

**24 “A student is not better than his teacher, and a servant is not better than his master.**

). His disciples had already seen the religious leaders’ harsh treatment of Him, and He reminded them not to expect anything different. If they treated the Master this way, won’t those bearing His name be treated the same? (v. 25). He ends this warning with encouragement, though: do not be afraid in these experiences, because all truth of the matter will be known in the end (v. 26).Many experiences of suffering are only known by those going through them. Some resort to wearing their suffering as a badge, seeking validation and affirmation for their “patiently born trials.” Others hide their trials out of a desire to not appear ungrateful, weak, or in discomfort. No matter if the experiences are exaggerated or hidden, there is One who sees all things as they are.Words fail, human sympathy wanes, and it can be difficult to bring another into a full understanding of one’s own suffering. But there is One who needs no words, whose sympathy is abundant, and who can come into a full understanding sans articulation. By the trials endured at the hands of those He came to save, starting in being hunted as a child and culminating in a shame-ridden public death, Jesus has associated Himself with the most mistreated of humanity. Jesus knows what it’s like to endure unmerited ill treatment, to be misunderstood by those closest, and even to be watched at every turn for an opportunity for ruin. His encouragement for the twelve remains for those today: the experiences that seem to be secret will be known. Even when no other human heart can know, Jesus knows. This too can inform the joy that James calls us to: we take joy in knowing that nothing is wasted (Rom. 8:28

**28 We know that in everything God works for the good of those who love him. n They are the people he called, because that was his plan.**

) and that God is overwriting the trials to work out eternal benefits of character (James 1:3

**3 because you know that these troubles test your faith, and this will give you patience.**

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**4 Let your patience show itself perfectly in what you do. Then you will be perfect and complete and will have everything you need.**

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inSight

The Discipline of Spirituality  
Life is disciplinary. While in the world, the Christian will meet with adverse influences. There will be provocations to test the temper; and it is by meeting these in a right spirit that the Christian graces are developed. If injuries and insults are meekly borne, if insulting words are responded to by gentle answers, and oppressive acts by kindness, this is evidence that the Spirit of Christ dwells in the heart, that sap from the living Vine is flowing to the branches. We are in the school of Christ in this life, where we are to learn to be meek and lowly of heart; and in the day of final accounts we shall see that all the obstacles we meet, all the hardships and annoyances that we are called to bear, are practical lessons in the application of principles of Christian life. If well endured, they develop the Christlike in the character and distinguish the Christian from the worldling. There is a high standard to which we are to attain if we would be children of God, noble, pure, holy, and undefiled; and a pruning process is necessary if we would reach this standard. How would this pruning be accomplished if there were no difficulties to meet, no obstacles to surmount, nothing to call out patience and endurance? These trials are not the smallest blessings in our experience. They are designed to nerve us to determination to succeed. We are to use them as God's means to gain decided victories over self instead of allowing them to hinder, oppress, and destroy us. . . .Let us remember that Jesus knows us individually and is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He knows the wants of each of His creatures and reads the hidden, unspoken grief of every heart. If one of the little ones for whom He died is injured, He sees it and calls the offender to account. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He cares for His feeble, sickly, wandering sheep. He knows them all by name. The distress of every sheep and every lamb of His flock touches His heart of sympathizing love, and the cry for aid reaches His ear. . . . Jesus cares for each one as though there were not another individual on the face of the earth. As Deity He exerts mighty power in our behalf, while as our Elder Brother He feels for all our woes. The Majesty of heaven held not Himself aloof from degraded, sinful humanity. We have not a high priest who is so high, so lifted up, that He cannot notice us or sympathize with us, but one who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. (Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, 344–347.)

inQuire

When is a time that you felt especially weak, and God saw you through? Share.What is a difficult experience you endured and can now see how good came from it? Share.What can be said to those who have not seen any good?How can you ensure that you respond to afflictions in a Christ-like way rather than a worldly way?Why do you think James focused on receiving wisdom in the main passage this week? Why not courage or strength?Why is faith necessary to receive the promises of God?What is the difference between having faith in God’s promises and “supposing” He will give?How does patience “work in us”? Why that attribute specifically?

ALL IS NOT AS IT SEEMS

inTro

When Perceptions Lie to Us  
Read This Week’s Passage: James 1:9–18

**But let the brother of low degree glory in his high estate:and the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.For the sun ariseth with the scorching wind, and withereth the grass; and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his goings.Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which promised to them that love him.Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempteth no man:but each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed.Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin: and the sin, when it is fullgrown, bringeth forth death.Be not deceived, my beloved brethren.Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning.Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.**

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Perceptions Lie to UsThere is an interesting phenomenon in couples, in which the same pattern of slight disagreements seems to arise. The wife will be telling a story and mention that they left a restaurant at 5:00 p.m. No, the husband will argue, it was at least 5:15; she disagrees, certain that it was 5:00. To the listeners, this detail is unimportant, but it becomes vital to those telling the story because they’re both certain that their perception of the situation was correct. When the stakes are higher—for example, when two people disagree on what the other said out of anger—the tension intensifies. If someone can’t trust their own perception of what happened, whose can they trust? Humanity defaults to trusting self from an early age. Born with a natural inclination to selfishness and self-reliance, we can stop this trend only by Divine intervention and dependence. Despite our noble intentions for honesty, integrity, and clear vision, it’s easy for us to be confused by the false narratives shared by media, peers, and our selfish nature. It’s hard to distrust our own (learned or natural) perception of reality and trust God’s instead. The irony is that humanity’s natural perception of reality is wrong, in more ways than one. While we are learning self-distrust, it is essential to learn God-trust. Only then can we see clearly.

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The Poor, the Rich, and the Tempted  
James opens his perception readjustment by focusing on two economic extremes. He juxtaposes the lowly poor with the rich in a manner inconsistent with both his era and the modern-day, because he seems to mix up their commands. The “lowly brother” is told to “glory in his exaltation,” while the rich should glory “in his humiliation” (James 1:9

**True Riches 9 Believers who are poor should take pride that God has made them spiritually rich.**

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**10 Those who are rich should take pride that God has shown them that they are spiritually poor. The rich will die like a wild flower in the grass.**

). Here James brings out the correct perception: the lowly can glorify and praise God even without earthly wealth, because that is not where true exaltation or joy originate. Furthermore, the rich man can be thankful in affliction and trial and have a humble heart before God, because his riches cannot last long enough to produce true exaltation. Wealth, in whoever’s hands, can rise as easily as a flower after rain but then disappear with the heat of the noonday sun (v. 11). The lowly should not wait for wealth in order to glory in his exaltation, nor should the rich become haughty by accruing wealth.James follows up this comparison with one of the most systematic explanations in the Bible of how individuals fall into sin. He somewhat startlingly calls the tempted individual “blessed”; this blessedness comes from enduring the temptation out of love for God (v. 12). The phrasing is intensely pragmatic: temptation is endured, not bartered with or coaxed away. Furthermore, in increasing one’s endurance of temptation, the focus should be in increasing one’s love for God. The idea of being tempted by God is impossible, James affirms. Instead, “each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed” (v. 14). There is a distraction, and one’s attention is captured based on desires. It’s important to note that it only says “desires,” labeled neither good nor bad. One can assume that only bad desires lead to sin, but healthy desires can, too. When following the healthy desire for food, one can be enticed into eating things harmful for the body. When following a healthy desire to relax, one can be enticed into a relaxation brought on by illegal substances. When following a healthy desire for intimacy or even sex, one can be enticed into damaging sexual experiences. Still, desires are truly bad: desires for revenge, to harm someone, to lie, to take from someone else. Both the desires and the carrying out of them can be harmful. When the desire is given into, this is sin (notice that being tempted is not sin) (v. 15). Left unchecked and unrepented of and unforgiven, sin leads to death. James closes this practical walkthrough with pathos: “Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren” (v. 16). Sin requires deception, faulty perceptions of realities, in order to thrive; the individual has to believe a lie, to walk in that lie, and leave space for that lie in their life. Blessing comes from not walking down that path at all, but instead enduring the idea through a love for God, strengthened by His power, love, and a right perception of reality.

inTerpret

Testing vs. Tempting  
Certain Christian clichés are more harmful than helpful. One example, for some, is, “God doesn’t tempt us, but He tests us.” Though technically true, this has led some believers to rephrase it practically as, “If the devil causes something bad to happen, it’s temptation; if God causes it, it’s a test.” This oversimplification and blending of two non-identical concepts skews perception of both God and reality. There is a biblical difference between the two that deserves attention.James says that God can neither be tempted “nor does He Himself tempt anyone” (James 1:13

**13 When people are tempted, they should not say, “God is tempting me.” Evil cannot tempt God, and God himself does not tempt anyone.**

). As explored in yesterday’s lesson, temptation utilizes deception surrounding either a harmful fulfillment of a legitimate desire or the fulfillment of a harmful desire. Put another way, the goal of temptation is harm: to harm the individual, at least for the here and now, and preferably permanently. Drawn away by her desire for “something more,” Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, and the devil gained access to our world and our hearts. Under the dizzying effect of power, lack of accountability, and sexual desire, David took Bathsheba and slayed her husband, leading to untold woe throughout his kingdom and family, cutting at the very heart of God’s chosen people. Fearing for his life and possibly his reputation, Peter denied even knowing Jesus, fulfilling a pitiful prophecy uttered only a few hours prior, leading to his own guilt and shame. In all of these examples, the purpose of the temptation is revealed when conceived: destruction of relationships, harm to body and mind, and an estrangement from God.In contrast, God has explicitly said that He tests His people. When He gave manna to the Israelites on a Sabbath schedule, He did so to test them (Exod. 16:4

**4 Then the Lord said to Moses, “I will cause food to fall like rain from the sky for all of you. Every day the people must go out and gather what they need for that day. I want to see if the people will do what I teach them.**

). In fact, the entire wilderness experience was used as a test (Deut. 8:2

**2 Remember how the Lord your God has led you in the desert for these forty years, taking away your pride and testing you, because he wanted to know what was in your heart. He wanted to know if you would obey his commands.**

). The goal has always been clear: “To know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not” Instead of harm, the goal of testing is to provide a correct perception of oneself, to deepen dependence and trust in God, and to show how trustworthy God really is. Each test, threaded throughout Scripture, can be rephrased as a question from the heart of God. To Abraham He asked, Will you trust Me with your beloved son Isaac? To Israel He asked, Will you trust Me to guide and provide in the wilderness? To Martha and Mary, grieving the death of their brother, He asked, Will you trust Me when My timing is not yours? In all tests, God is desiring to show the believer their heart and their need, and that He is a trustworthy resting place for their hearts. It’s true that “God doesn’t tempt us, but He tests us.” The purpose of temptation is for the devil to destroy; but the purpose of testing is for God’s hands to preserve and build.

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How do the following verses relate to the primary passage?  
Hebrews 13:5

**5 Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be satisfied with what you have. God has said, “I will never leave you; I will never abandon you.” Deuteronomy 31:6**

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**6 So we can be sure when we say, “I will not be afraid, because the Lord is my helper. People can’t do anything to me.” Psalm 118:6**

Luke 12:33

**33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Get for yourselves purses that will not wear out, the treasure in heaven that never runs out, where thieves can’t steal and moths can’t destroy.**

1 Timothy 6:6–10

**6 Serving God does make us very rich, if we are satisfied with what we have. 7 We brought nothing into the world, so we can take nothing out. 8 But, if we have food and clothes, we will be satisfied with that. 9 Those who want to become rich bring temptation to themselves and are caught in a trap. They want many foolish and harmful things that ruin and destroy people. 10 The love of money causes all kinds of evil. Some people have left the faith, because they wanted to get more money, but they have caused themselves much sorrow.**

1 Corinthians 10:13

**13 The only temptation that has come to you is that which everyone has. But you can trust God, who will not permit you to be tempted more than you can stand. But when you are tempted, he will also give you a way to escape so that you will be able to stand it.**

1 Peter 4:12–19

**Suffering as a Christian 12 My friends, do not be surprised at the terrible trouble which now comes to test you. Do not think that something strange is happening to you. 13 But be happy that you are sharing in Christ’s sufferings so that you will be happy and full of joy when Christ comes again in glory. 14 When people insult you because you follow Christ, you are blessed, because the glorious Spirit, the Spirit of God, is with you. 15 Do not suffer for murder, theft, or any other crime, nor because you trouble other people. 16 But if you suffer because you are a Christian, do not be ashamed. Praise God because you wear that name. 17 It is time for judgment to begin with God’s family. And if that judging begins with us, what will happen to those people who do not obey the Good News of God? 18  “If it is very hard for a good person to be saved, the wicked person and the sinner will surely be lost!” n 19 So those who suffer as God wants should trust their souls to the faithful Creator as they continue to do what is right.**

John 3:16

**16 “God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life.**

What other verses come to mind in connection with James 1:9–18

**True Riches 9 Believers who are poor should take pride that God has made them spiritually rich. 10 Those who are rich should take pride that God has shown them that they are spiritually poor. The rich will die like a wild flower in the grass. 11 The sun rises with burning heat and dries up the plants. The flower falls off, and its beauty is gone. In the same way the rich will die while they are still taking care of business. Temptation Is Not from God 12 When people are tempted and still continue strong, they should be happy. After they have proved their faith, God will reward them with life forever. God promised this to all those who love him. 13 When people are tempted, they should not say, “God is tempting me.” Evil cannot tempt God, and God himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But people are tempted when their own evil desire leads them away and traps them. 15 This desire leads to sin, and then the sin grows and brings death. 16 My dear brothers and sisters, do not be fooled about this. 17 Every good action and every perfect gift is from God. These good gifts come down from the Creator of the sun, moon, and stars, who does not change like their shifting shadows. 18 God decided to give us life through the word of truth so we might be the most important of all the things he made.**

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The Best Gift  
After dwelling on the bad extreme of sin, James switches to effusively describing the good: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17

**17 Every good action and every perfect gift is from God. These good gifts come down from the Creator of the sun, moon, and stars, who does not change like their shifting shadows.**

). Notice that he chooses the word gift over the alternatives of thing or experience. All good things come from God, and all good and perfect things are gifts. Though a seemingly trivial substitution of words, understanding something as a gift changes one’s attitude toward it. When something is earned or owed, there is less reason for gratitude to the giver; some would even say a “thank you” would be superfluous in such situations. But when something is gifted, especially to someone who has no other way of gaining it, humility and joy rush to the surface.All of these good gifts come from one Source. Parents, friends, or even strangers may be conduits of these blessings and gifts, but their origin never wavers. The joy of a new baby’s life, the gentle breeze on a summer evening, the opening of a young flower, laughter shared throughout decades of friendship, and the joy of a fulfilling purpose all are gifts from God, given through the merits of another Gift. The best and perfect gift ever given was and is Jesus Christ Himself. He was not owed to the earth, asked for, or even conceived of in humanity’s imagination. He was a gift from the Father’s hand out of a love-driven desire for the redemption of earth (John 3:16

**16 “God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life.**

). Just as it was impossible to merit a Savior before He came, so it is impossible to merit His grace, mercy, or forgiveness today. All the blessings in His train are as much gifts as He is. Some have framed the salvation story as Jesus somehow convincing the Father to let Him go and save the earth. But this is not the narrative of Scripture. The Father has consistently been lavishing humanity with gifts since the dawn of time, and He has no variation in this (James 1:17

**17 Every good action and every perfect gift is from God. These good gifts come down from the Creator of the sun, moon, and stars, who does not change like their shifting shadows.**

). Furthermore, it was “of His own will” that humanity was redeemed from destruction through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. He was not strong-armed into it; there was no begrudging compliance. Thus, beyond being loved, the creatures made in His image are wanted. They are wanted not only once but twice over: through creation and redemption. Being wanted and enveloped in such a Divine love is the gift that encompasses all the others.

inSight

Neither Flattery nor Fury  
To hate and reprove sin, and at the same time to show pity and tenderness for the sinner, is a difficult attainment. The more earnest our own efforts to attain to holiness of heart and life, the more acute will be our perception of sin and the more decided our disapproval of any deviation from the right. We must guard against undue severity toward the wrongdoer, but we must also be careful not to lose sight of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. There is need of showing Christlike patience and love for the erring one, but there is also danger of showing so great toleration for his error that he will look upon himself as undeserving of reproof, and will reject it as uncalled for and unjust.Ministers of the gospel sometimes do great harm by allowing their forbearance toward the erring to degenerate into toleration of sins and even participation in them. Thus they are led to excuse and palliate that which God condemns, and after a time they become so blinded as to commend the very ones whom God commands them to reprove. He who has blunted his spiritual perceptions by sinful leniency toward those whom God condemns, will erelong commit a greater sin by severity and harshness toward those whom God approves.By the pride of human wisdom, by contempt for the influence of the Holy Spirit, and by disrelish for the truths of God's word, many who profess to be Christians, and who feel competent to teach others, will be led to turn away from the requirements of God. Paul declared to Timothy, “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” The apostle does not here refer to the openly irreligious, but to the professing Christians who make inclination their guide, and thus become enslaved by self. Such are willing to listen to those doctrines only that do not rebuke their sins or condemn their pleasure-loving course. They are offended by the plain words of the faithful servants of Christ and choose teachers who praise and flatter them. And among professing ministers there are those who preach the opinions of men instead of the word of God. Unfaithful to their trust, they lead astray those who look to them for spiritual guidance. (Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles, 503–505.)

inQuire

How can we learn to distrust our own perceptions and trust the way God presents situations?Why is deception required in order for us to fall into sin?Share a situation where you were tested. What happened? How did you respond?How is God currently teaching you to trust Him more? In what areas?Focusing on the inSight section, how are we to respond to others as our perceptions grow in clarity?Is it possible to be content, but still strive for more? Why or why not?How does seeing all good things as a gift alter our everyday life?

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE OUTWARD MAN

inTro

A Public Religion  
Read This Week’s Passage: James 1:19–27

**Ye know, my beloved brethren. But let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves.For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a mirror:for he beholdeth himself, and goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.But he that looketh into the perfect law, the of liberty, and continueth, being not a hearer that forgetteth but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing.If any man thinketh himself to be religious, while he bridleth not his tongue but deceiveth his heart, this man’s religion is vain.Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, to keep oneself unspotted from the world.**

A  
Public ReligionWith the cultural shift toward the privatization of religion, faith practices have become more and more inward focused. Children are told to silently accept Jesus into their heart; prayers of thanksgiving for a meal are said with a bowed head and unmoving lips; and some believers may even search for another way to answer the question, “What are you doing this weekend?” when their plans are filled with ministry and godly fellowship. Silent prayers of surrender are welcome, and even tactful conversations about spirituality are a good thing; the danger comes when small habits build up a mindset of, I don’t share this part of my life. It’s just private. James, as a whole, is a practical book. Philosophy and abstract concepts are only touched on as a precursor for the explanation of a tangible expression in the Christian life. This life of surrender and following Jesus has consequences: real, in-your-face, pervasive consequences. If it doesn’t look as though it does, there’s something wrong on the implementation part. Living the Christian life shouldn’t just have internal consequences either. Spheres of influence should be dramatically impacted for good, constantly touched by the outpouring of a life of love for God. Such a life cannot be kept private; it naturally bears expression.

inGest

Godly Reactions  
Knowing the passions that often arise in human hearts, James gives a template for reaction: “Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19

**Listening and Obeying 19 My dear brothers and sisters, always be willing to listen and slow to speak. Do not become angry easily,**

). This instruction is given to “every man,” so no one is exempt from its importance. It places an emphasis on understanding, patience, and receiving rather than defending, being understood, or passionate expression. What is the underlying reason why believers should do this? “The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (v. 20). Even when fueled with the most intense feelings and desires to set things right, natural human anger does not lead to the tenor of reaction that is glorifying to God. Humans make bad judgment calls, get caught up in biases, and even take things too far. It is better to focus on listening, understanding, and patience, and then slowly react. But true hearing isn’t wholly passive. God’s children are called to receive His Word into their lives and then to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (v. 22). The idea of deception comes up again, first about sin (in the previous week’s lesson), and now about deviating from the outworking of the Word in one’s life. Being a hearer of the Word and not a doer runs parallel to receiving all manner of life-changing paradigms, truth, and beauty and yet forgetting them, not letting them change one’s life. What good is that? Blessing doesn’t come in knowing; blessing comes by living according to that knowing. As life is made up of days in and days out, blessings come from living according to the word in a consistent, ever-expanding way. In addition to reactions to our own emotions and reactions to truth, believers are also called to a godly reaction to the world. Instead of side-shuffling or cowering in the sight of the suffering of others, humanity is called to visit such sufferers in their trouble. Instead of giving them a wide berth, believers should join them in community. Suffering does not sideline anyone from the gospel; it’s where the gospel is most appreciated. Finally, the last reaction that James touches on is to the wickedness of the world itself. The response of the individual members and collective church should be to remain unspotted from it. Thus, in everything from one’s emotions to the throes of surrounding suffering, there is a godly reaction possible through “receiv[ing] with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (v. 21).

inTerpret

Useless Religion  
James doesn’t mince words when it comes to an effective religion. It’s possible to think oneself religious and yet not bridle one’s tongue, but this requires deception and bears evidence of a useless religion (James 1:26

**The True Way to Worship God 26 People who think they are religious but say things they should not say are just fooling themselves. Their “religion” is worth nothing.**

). True religion, James emphasizes, must change the most basic and pervasive parts of one’s being. It is not a top layer of “goodness” to spread over all the rest. It is a digging up and transforming of everything, even the way one talks. Jesus Himself confirmed this line of thinking when He rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for appearing “beautiful outwardly” but being “full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matt. 23:27

**27 “How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You are hypocrites! You are like tombs that are painted white. Outside, those tombs look fine, but inside, they are full of the bones of dead people and all kinds of unclean things.**

, 28

**28 It is the same with you. People look at you and think you are good, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and evil.**

). Their religion was useless because it did not change them; all it did was thinly veil their wickedness. There is a level of self-deception required to hold a useless religion. Why would someone hold onto something that’s useless, even harmful, if they knew better? Self-deception is different from ignorance, in that ignorance is an “unknowing,” whereas self-deception is a willful and intentional “not knowing.” Taken a step further, self-deception usually holds the truth in some unacknowledged recess of the mind, but it is intentionally pushed away from the consciousness. This can be because the truth is too painful or the repercussions are unwelcome. Self-deception can be a welcome detour from acknowledging the truth when it allows the individual to close their eyes to their own weaknesses, even when they’re stark and harmful. Willful ignorance is an easier path than handing over wounds to be thoroughly healed by the hands of Jesus; at least, it’s an easier short-term path. What looks good for a moment (ignoring the bad) only intensifies the wounds, furthers the bad traits of character, and can have far-reaching negative ripple effects throughout one’s sphere of influence. The expressions of one’s heart, the words from one’s mouth, can be an excellent litmus test of the usefulness of one’s religion. Is there a Christlike way of speaking? Is there a compassionate tone? Generous forgiveness? Understanding questions? Or instead is the path of Peter followed, with his calling down of curses to distance himself from association with Christ? (Luke 22:54–62

**Peter Says He Doesn’t Know Jesus 54 They arrested Jesus, and led him away, and brought him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed far behind them. 55 After the soldiers started a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat together, Peter sat with them. 56 A servant girl saw Peter sitting there in the firelight, and looking closely at him, she said, “This man was also with him.” 57 But Peter said this was not true; he said, “Woman, I don’t know him.” 58 A short time later, another person saw Peter and said, “You are also one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not!” 59 About an hour later, another man insisted, “Certainly this man was with him, because he is from Galilee, too.” 60 But Peter said, “Man, I don’t know what you are talking about!” At once, while Peter was still speaking, a rooster crowed. 61 Then the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. And Peter remembered what the Lord had said: “Before the rooster crows this day, you will say three times that you don’t know me.” 62 Then Peter went outside and cried painfully.**

). It’s possible to not have the motivations of Peter and yet achieve the same effect—it’s possible to appear as if one has never even known Christ, let alone spent three years with Him, just by not bridling one’s tongue. The answer here is not to buckle down or to try harder. That’s the way of the Pharisees. The answer is to have a useful religion that is found in a relationship of surrender and love with Jesus Christ.

inSpect

What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?Proverbs 15:1

**A gentle answer will calm a person’s anger, but an unkind answer will cause more anger.**

Ephesians 4:26

**26 When you are angry, do not sin, and be sure to stop being angry before the end of the day.**

Luke 11:28

**28 But Jesus said, “No, blessed are those who hear the teaching of God and obey it.”**

Matthew 7:24–27

**Two Kinds of People 24 “Everyone who hears my words and obeys them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. 25 It rained hard, the floods came, and the winds blew and hit that house. But it did not fall, because it was built on rock. 26 Everyone who hears my words and does not obey them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 It rained hard, the floods came, and the winds blew and hit that house, and it fell with a big crash.”**

Matthew 5:16

**16 In the same way, you should be a light for other people. Live so that they will see the good things you do and will praise your Father in heaven.**

Matthew 4:23

**Jesus Teaches and Heals People 23 Jesus went everywhere in Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the Good News about the kingdom of heaven, and healing all the people’s diseases and sicknesses.**

Luke 15 (especially verses 1, 2)  
  
What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with James 1:19–27

**Listening and Obeying 19 My dear brothers and sisters, always be willing to listen and slow to speak. Do not become angry easily, 20 because anger will not help you live the right kind of life God wants. 21 So put out of your life every evil thing and every kind of wrong. Then in gentleness accept God’s teaching that is planted in your hearts, which can save you. 22 Do what God’s teaching says; when you only listen and do nothing, you are fooling yourselves. 23 Those who hear God’s teaching and do nothing are like people who look at themselves in a mirror. 24 They see their faces and then go away and quickly forget what they looked like. 25 But the truly happy people are those who carefully study God’s perfect law that makes people free, and they continue to study it. They do not forget what they heard, but they obey what God’s teaching says. Those who do this will be made happy. The True Way to Worship God 26 People who think they are religious but say things they should not say are just fooling themselves. Their “religion” is worth nothing. 27 Religion that God accepts as pure and without fault is this: caring for orphans or widows who need help, and keeping yourself free from the world’s evil influence.**

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inVite

A False Dichotomy  
While useless religion has clear characteristics, so does pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father. It encompasses visiting the most vulnerable of society and keeping oneself “unspotted from the world” (James 1:27

**27 Religion that God accepts as pure and without fault is this: caring for orphans or widows who need help, and keeping yourself free from the world’s evil influence.**

). This verse took on flesh and walked among humanity in the life of Jesus. Jesus visited and ministered to the most vulnerable and also maintained a perfect adherence to righteous living. The Greek word for “visited” in this verse is not a casual meeting of two parties. Throughout its usage in the New Testament, the word emphasizes a visiting for the benefit of someone, to help, minister to, or redeem them (Matt. 25:36

**36 I was without clothes, and you gave me something to wear. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.’**

; Luke 1:68

**68  “Let us praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to help his people and has given them freedom.**

; 7:16

**16 All the people were amazed and began praising God, saying, “A great prophet has come to us! God has come to help his people.”**

; Acts 15:36

**Paul and Barnabas Separate 36 After some time, Paul said to Barnabas, “We should go back to all those towns where we preached the message of the Lord. Let’s visit the believers and see how they are doing.”**

; Heb. 2:6

**6 It is written in the Scriptures, “Why are people even important to you? Why do you take care of human beings?**

). Jesus certainly visited humanity when He walked the earth, and He continues to visit the hearts of His children. Jesus visited people in their physical needs, often feeding them miraculously or healing them of illness or ailment (Matt. 14:13–21

**More than Five Thousand Fed 13 When Jesus heard what had happened to John, he left in a boat and went to a lonely place by himself. But the crowds heard about it and followed him on foot from the towns. 14 When he arrived, he saw a great crowd waiting. He felt sorry for them and healed those who were sick. 15 When it was evening, his followers came to him and said, “No one lives in this place, and it is already late. Send the people away so they can go to the towns and buy food for themselves.” 16 But Jesus answered, “They don’t need to go away. You give them something to eat.” 17 They said to him, “But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish.” 18 Jesus said, “Bring the bread and the fish to me.” 19 Then he told the people to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and the two fish and, looking to heaven, he thanked God for the food. Jesus divided the bread and gave it to his followers, who gave it to the people. 20 All the people ate and were satisfied. Then the followers filled twelve baskets with the leftover pieces of food. 21 There were about five thousand men there who ate, not counting women and children.**

; Mark 1:32–34

**32 That evening, after the sun went down, the people brought to Jesus all who were sick and had demons in them. 33 The whole town gathered at the door. 34 Jesus healed many who had different kinds of sicknesses, and he forced many demons to leave people. But he would not allow the demons to speak, because they knew who he was.**

). He visited people in their spiritual needs, teaching them the truth of God and Himself as the Messiah (Matthew 5, 6; John 3:1–21

**Nicodemus Comes to Jesus 3 There was a man named Nicodemus who was one of the Pharisees and an important Jewish leader. 2 One night Nicodemus came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, we know you are a teacher sent from God, because no one can do the miracles you do unless God is with him.” 3 Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot be in God’s kingdom.” 4 Nicodemus said, “But if a person is already old, how can he be born again? He cannot enter his mother’s womb again. So how can a person be born a second time?” 5 But Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born from water and the Spirit, you cannot enter God’s kingdom. 6 Human life comes from human parents, but spiritual life comes from the Spirit. 7 Don’t be surprised when I tell you, ‘You must all be born again.’ 8 The wind blows where it wants to and you hear the sound of it, but you don’t know where the wind comes from or where it is going. It is the same with every person who is born from the Spirit.” 9 Nicodemus asked, “How can this happen?” 10 Jesus said, “You are an important teacher in Israel, and you don’t understand these things? 11 I tell you the truth, we talk about what we know, and we tell about what we have seen, but you don’t accept what we tell you. 12 I have told you about things here on earth, and you do not believe me. So you will not believe me if I tell you about things of heaven. 13 The only one who has ever gone up to heaven is the One who came down from heaven—the Son of Man. n 14 “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, n the Son of Man must also be lifted up. 15 So that everyone who believes can have eternal life in him. 16 “God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life. 17 God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world guilty, but to save the world through him. 18 People who believe in God’s Son are not judged guilty. Those who do not believe have already been judged guilty, because they have not believed in God’s one and only Son. 19 They are judged by this fact: The Light has come into the world, but they did not want light. They wanted darkness, because they were doing evil things. 20 All who do evil hate the light and will not come to the light, because it will show all the evil things they do. 21 But those who follow the true way come to the light, and it shows that the things they do were done through God.”**

). He even ministered to those in need of emotional healing, bypassing cultural restrictions in order to speak a word of encouragement to an aching soul (John 4, 8). Jesus met people where they were and ministered to them, even the neediest and most ignored of society (Luke 5:12

**Jesus Heals a Sick Man 12 When Jesus was in one of the towns, there was a man covered with a skin disease. When he saw Jesus, he bowed before him and begged him, “Lord, you can heal me if you will.”**

, 13

**13 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man and said, “I will. Be healed!” Immediately the disease disappeared.**

). It’s interesting how the religious leaders interpreted Jesus’ proximity with the world. They labeled Him a drunkard and a glutton, and they complained about His seemingly relaxed approach to accepting sinners (Matt. 11:19

**19 The Son of Man came, eating and drinking, and people say, ‘Look at him! He eats too much and drinks too much wine, and he is a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved to be right by what she does.”**

; Luke 15:1

**A Lost Sheep, a Lost Coin 15 The tax collectors and sinners all came to listen to Jesus.**

, 2

**2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to complain: “Look, this man welcomes sinners and even eats with them.”**

). Jesus lived a perfect life, which means He also kept Himself unspotted from the world in all ways (1 Peter 2:21

**21 This is what you were called to do, because Christ suffered for you and gave you an example to follow. So you should do as he did.**

, 22

**22  “He had never sinned, and he had never lied.” Isaiah 53:9**

). The religious leaders’ reaction to His proximity, then, reveals more about themselves than about Jesus. They had a faulty understanding of what pure religion looked like. Jesus’s life proves that ministering to the world and being unspotted from the world are not two dichotomous options: either help people (and get dirty) or be clean (and don’t help anyone). When viewed through this faulty paradigm, both extreme options either miss the heart or the power of the gospel. Emphasizing outward adherence has its place, but an untransformed life is useless. Emphasizing inward transformation has its place, but an unlived life is not what God asks for. Instead, communion with God leads to transformation, and this transformation leads to a life of ministry.

inSight

Doers of the Word  
From the pulpits of today the words are uttered: “Believe, only believe. Have faith in Christ; you have nothing to do with the old law, only trust in Christ.” How different is this from the words of the apostle who declares that faith without works is dead. He says, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22

**22 Do what God’s teaching says; when you only listen and do nothing, you are fooling yourselves.**

). We must have that faith that works by love and purifies the soul. Many seek to substitute a superficial faith for uprightness of life and think through this to obtain salvation.The Lord requires at this time just what He required of Adam in Eden—perfect obedience to the law of God. We must have righteousness without a flaw, without a blemish. God gave His Son to die for the world, but He did not die to repeal the law which was holy and just and good. The sacrifice of Christ on Calvary is an unanswerable argument showing the immutability of the law. Its penalty was felt by the Son of God in behalf of guilty man, that through His merits the sinner might obtain the virtue of His spotless character by faith in His name.The sinner was provided with a second opportunity to keep the law of God in the strength of his divine Redeemer. The cross of Calvary forever condemns the idea that Satan has placed before the Christian world, that the death of Christ abolished not only the typical system of sacrifices and ceremonies but the unchangeable law of God, the foundation of His throne, the transcript of His character.Through every device possible Satan has sought to make of none effect the sacrifice of the Son of God, to render His expiation useless and His mission a failure. He has claimed that the death of Christ made obedience to the law unnecessary and permitted the sinner to come into favor with a holy God without forsaking his sin. He has declared that the Old Testament standard was lowered in the gospel and that men can come to Christ, not to be saved from their sins but in their sins. But when John beheld Jesus he told His mission. He said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29

**29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him. John said, “Look, the Lamb of God, n who takes away the sin of the world!**

). To every repentant soul the message is, “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18

**18  The Lord says, “Come, let us talk about these things. Though your sins are like scarlet, they can be as white as snow. Though your sins are deep red, they can be white like wool.**

). (Ellen G. White, Faith and Works, 89, 90.)

inQuire

Should our religion be private? What about our spirituality? Does it matter? Why or why not?Why does “the wrath of man” not produce the righteousness of God? Does that mean we should never get angry? Why or why not?Why do you think James talks about bridling the tongue specifically when explaining a useless religion?Give an example of a time you tried to deceive yourself about something.Give an example of someone who exemplifies pure and undefiled religion. What’s the difference between hearing and listening to truth?Why does it require meekness to receive truth from God? Why does “Just believe!” fall short of encompassing God’s will for us?

THE SIN OF TREATING SOMEONE WELL

inTro

Less than and Greater than  
Read This Week’s Passage: James 2:1–13

**My brethren, hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, of glory, with respect of persons.For if there come into your synagogue a man with a gold ring, in fine clothing, and there come in also a poor man in vile clothing;and ye have regard to him that weareth the fine clothing, and say, Sit thou here in a good place; and ye say to the poor man, Stand thou there, or sit under my footstool;do ye not make distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?Hearken, my beloved brethren; did not God choose them that are poor as to the world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to them that love him?But ye have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you, and themselves drag you before the judgment-seats?Do not they blaspheme the honorable name by which ye are called?Howbeit if ye fulfil the royal law, according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well:but if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors.For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all.For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou dost not commit adultery, but killest, thou art become a transgressor of the law.So speak ye, and so do, as men that are to be judged by a law of liberty.For judgment without mercy to him that hath showed no mercy: mercy glorieth against judgment.**

Less  
than and Greater than When Christians categorize sins as “grievous” and “bad, but not so bad,” there seem to be a few that are often categorized the same way. Drinking and smoking are grievous, as are sexual sins. Telling lies isn't that bad, as long as the lies aren’t too big, and being prideful is something to get over but also not that bad. Showing favoritism or partiality—is that even a sin? Everyone has their preferences and their viewpoints. It’s interesting how the so-called not-so-bad sins rank worse in the Word of God than they often do in humanity’s view. The serpent of old used a lie to entice Eve into the first sin in history. The devil was kicked out of heaven for being prideful and refusing to let go of his faulty view of himself. Showing favoritism and partiality denies the inestimable value Jesus has placed on every life by giving His own. It also shows a worldly mindset based on worldly standards. Put that way, it’s easier to see how it actually is quite grievous.Instead of telling his listeners to simply “not be partial,” James gives a clear example of how it can look: When people come over to your house, and you give preferential treatment to someone who appears to be rich, and then treat someone who looks poor in a negative way, you’re showing partiality (James 2:2–4

**2 Suppose someone comes into your church meeting wearing nice clothes and a gold ring. At the same time a poor person comes in wearing old, dirty clothes. 3 You show special attention to the one wearing nice clothes and say, “Please, sit here in this good seat.” But you say to the poor person, “Stand over there,” or, “Sit on the floor by my feet.” 4 What are you doing? You are making some people more important than others, and with evil thoughts you are deciding that one person is better.**

). Furthermore, you’re holding “the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . with partiality” (v. 1). This is not just a social issue. It’s a spiritual one. Without the example, it can be easy to allow one’s internal narrative to sidestep any blame. I don’t think rich people are better than poor people. Not really. But evidence doesn’t lie in internal narratives. It lies in one’s actions. Though James’s focus is on economic comparisons, this principle extends to all comparisons. Giving preferential treatment to those perceived as prettier, smarter, taller, shorter, thinner, bigger, more articulate, or any other comparison that society brings to one’s attention is just as damaging and just as contrary to the faith of Jesus. It uses a worldly paradigm of categorizing people as less than or greater than one another. In the kingdom of God, all are bought by the same unfathomable price of the blood of Christ. No amount of money, looks, communication, or status can alter a human’s value one bit—neither to increase or lessen it.

inGest

Dangerous Favoritism  
In James’s example of the assembly gone wrong, he zeroes in on all that a human has to go on in judging someone else: appearances. Gold rings, fine apparel, and filthy clothes are used to determine how someone should be treated. Can’t this be terribly inaccurate? Not all who are rich wear nice clothes (hello, Mark Zuckerburg), and not all who are poor wear filthy clothes. One of the key reasons to not judge others is not just that it isn’t nice, but that humans make awful judges. Unlike God, who sees the heart and can judge clearly (1 Sam. 16:7

**7 But the Lord said to Samuel, “Don’t look at how handsome Eliab is or how tall he is, because I have not chosen him. God does not see the same way people see. People look at the outside of a person, but the Lord looks at the heart.”**

), humanity is only able to see the surface level, which does not provide enough information to make a fair, let alone righteous, judgment.James says that showing favoritism is equivalent to “becom[ing] judges with evil thoughts,” and it denies the reality of how God deals with the poor, namely, for them to be “rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him” (James 2:4

**4 What are you doing? You are making some people more important than others, and with evil thoughts you are deciding that one person is better.**

, 5

**5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters! God chose the poor in the world to be rich with faith and to receive the kingdom God promised to those who love him.**

). He then pivots and asks two pointed questions about the rich: “Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?” (vv. 6, 7). Said another way, Why are you trying to impress people who don’t even care about you? Why are you seeking to elevate those who oppress you? Why are you honoring those who dishonor the God who is supposed to be most important to you? Even from a selfish perspective, this does not make any sense. Why worship those who degrade? Why put people on a pedestal who are not worth emulating? By oppressing their brothers and sisters and blaspheming God, the so-called successful give evidence of a bankrupt soul, a success that is nominal alone. This skewed perspective invariably affects the spirituality of those who hold it. Caught up in the standards and paradigms of the world, it’s possible to show partiality to those who are successful in the world and yet sideline the God who created them. God is treated as “poor,” passed over for His lack of worldly popularity and acceptance. This does not need to be so. Humanity is not categorized by the haves and the have-nots, sifted for possessions or talents that determine their value. This perspective is a sin that brings countless delusions in its wake. Seeing fellow humans and God as they really are, with the eyes of faith, helps preserve God on the throne of one’s heart, as well as an accurate view of all humans—one of compassion and truth.

inTerpret

Selective Obedience  
James reminds the believers that the royal law can be summed up and followed as, “ ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ ” and it is enough (James 2:8

**8 This royal law is found in the Scriptures: “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.” n If you obey this law, you are doing right.**

). Partiality is a definite deviation from this strict adherence and, if indulged, will lead the transgressor to be convicted of sin (v. 9). He then seems to change topics completely, mentioning murder and adultery, and focusing on complete obedience to the law. Without context, verse 10 can sound as though any slip-ups in the Christian life disqualify the individual for all communion with God, because messing up “one point” makes them “guilty of all.” However, knowing the stories of Abraham (lied), David (murdered, committed adultery), Solomon (how many women?), Peter (denied Jesus), and Paul (killed Christians), that conclusion can’t be right. Looking closer at the following verses, the meaning becomes apparent: “For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law” (v. 11). Here, James is warning against a selective obedience, one that says, “Well, I struggle with partiality, but I don’t lust over anyone, so I’m not that bad off.” In the same way that lack of adultery does not excuse murder, lack of some other sin does not excuse partiality. Allowing God to change us in nine out of ten ways is equivalent to not allowing Him to change us at all. We are either wholly His or not at all. The “law of liberty,” James continues, is the standard that humanity will be judged by (v. 12). It is “of liberty” because it is not burdensome; it is freedom that Jesus secured by His death and resurrection. The freedom of Jesus should be taken as an opportunity to love others, not to judge them or treat them unfairly (Gal. 5:13

**13 My brothers and sisters, God called you to be free, but do not use your freedom as an excuse to do what pleases your sinful self. Serve each other with love.**

). James concludes with his own version of Matthew 7:2

**2 You will be judged in the same way that you judge others, and the amount you give to others will be given to you.**

, “For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy” (James 2:13

**13 So you must show mercy to others, or God will not show mercy to you when he judges you. But the person who shows mercy can stand without fear at the judgment.**

). On the mountainside, Jesus said that the merciful receive mercy, and those who judge will be judged with their same standard (Matthew 5:7

**7  They are blessed who show mercy to others, for God will show mercy to them.**

; 7:2

**2 You will be judged in the same way that you judge others, and the amount you give to others will be given to you.**

). Of even more relevance, the author of Proverbs warned that those who ignore the poor will themselves be ignored in their time of need (Prov. 21:13

**13  Whoever ignores the poor when they cry for help will also cry for help and not be answered.**

). God has called us to be an integral part to the cycle of blessing. He originates all blessings by giving first and without reservation, and He expects His children to give of the blessings He has shared with them. While free from the bondage of the law, God calls His people to use the law of liberty as an opportunity to reveal His character: that of inestimable love.

inSpect

How do the following verses relate to the primary passage?Matthew 18:1–5

**Who Is the Greatest? 18 At that time the followers came to Jesus and asked, “Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” 2 Jesus called a little child to him and stood the child before his followers. 3 Then he said, “I tell you the truth, you must change and become like little children. Otherwise, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 The greatest person in the kingdom of heaven is the one who makes himself humble like this child. 5 “Whoever accepts a child in my name accepts me.**

Luke 18:9–14

**Being Right with God 9 Jesus told this story to some people who thought they were very good and looked down on everyone else: 10 “A Pharisee and a tax collector both went to the Temple to pray. 11 The Pharisee stood alone and prayed, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people who steal, cheat, or take part in adultery, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast n twice a week, and I give one-tenth of everything I get!’ 13 “The tax collector, standing at a distance, would not even look up to heaven. But he beat on his chest because he was so sad. He said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ 14 I tell you, when this man went home, he was right with God, but the Pharisee was not. All who make themselves great will be made humble, but all who make themselves humble will be made great.”**

Galatians 5Matthew 6:26

**26 Look at the birds in the air. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, but your heavenly Father feeds them. And you know that you are worth much more than the birds.**

James 4:17

**17 Anyone who knows the right thing to do, but does not do it, is sinning.**

What other verses come to mind in connection with James 2:1–13

**Love All People 2 My dear brothers and sisters, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, never think some people are more important than others. 2 Suppose someone comes into your church meeting wearing nice clothes and a gold ring. At the same time a poor person comes in wearing old, dirty clothes. 3 You show special attention to the one wearing nice clothes and say, “Please, sit here in this good seat.” But you say to the poor person, “Stand over there,” or, “Sit on the floor by my feet.” 4 What are you doing? You are making some people more important than others, and with evil thoughts you are deciding that one person is better. 5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters! God chose the poor in the world to be rich with faith and to receive the kingdom God promised to those who love him. 6 But you show no respect to the poor. The rich are always trying to control your lives. They are the ones who take you to court. 7 And they are the ones who speak against Jesus, who owns you. 8 This royal law is found in the Scriptures: “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.” n If you obey this law, you are doing right. 9 But if you treat one person as being more important than another, you are sinning. You are guilty of breaking God’s law. 10 A person who follows all of God’s law but fails to obey even one command is guilty of breaking all the commands in that law. 11 The same God who said, “You must not be guilty of adultery,” n also said, “You must not murder anyone.” n So if you do not take part in adultery but you murder someone, you are guilty of breaking all of God’s law. 12 In everything you say and do, remember that you will be judged by the law that makes people free. 13 So you must show mercy to others, or God will not show mercy to you when he judges you. But the person who shows mercy can stand without fear at the judgment.**

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inVite

Undesirable  
In one of the most famous prophecies of the Messiah, Isaiah painted a picture of One who was to come:“For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant,And as a root out of dry ground.He has no form or comeliness;And when we see HimThere is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men,A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;He was despised, and we did not esteem Him” (Isaiah 53:2

**2  He grew up like a small plant before the Lord, like a root growing in a dry land. He had no special beauty or form to make us notice him; there was nothing in his appearance to make us desire him.**

, 3

**3  He was hated and rejected by people. He had much pain and suffering. People would not even look at him. He was hated, and we didn’t even notice him.**

).Though no explicit physical features are mentioned, the evaluation is: without beauty and comeliness, nothing outward to draw exaltation or attraction. Instead, He is despised and without esteem, rejected and ignored. By human standards, there is nothing in Jesus for humanity to desire Him. He walked this earth with the lowly fishermen and hated tax collectors, the loose women and the fringes of society. When He gave up His life on the cross, He died the most humiliating death possible, seeming to have failed at every turn: no friends, no power, no money. He was not rich, and His power was never demonstrated in a way that met the standards of worldly greatness. Jesus didn’t display favoritism. He accepted the fellowship of rich and poor alike, whoever would have Him with sincerity of heart. He instructed both in the kingdom of God, even revealing coveted truths to an ostracized woman while at the well and to a convicted religious leader by night. He didn’t love people more if they did more ministry or religious activities. He seemed to completely ignore the comparative hierarchy He saw around Him, and instead insisted on living the kingdom of God on earth. The world may see some people as undesirables. But Jesus came as someone apparently undesirable in order to demonstrate the intense desire He has for all to be redeemed by His grace. Whether someone is rich or poor, talented or less so, does not matter. What matters is one’s view of the rich or the poor. Neither one validates or invalidates, elevates or pushes down. All are equal recipients of His unrelenting love and grace in the kingdom of God. He invites His followers to continue living out this reality.

inSight

A Different System of Value  
The apostle Jude says: “Of some have compassion, making a difference.” This difference is not to be exercised in a spirit of favoritism. No countenance should be given to a spirit that implies: “If you favor me, I will favor you.” This is unsanctified, worldly policy, which displeases God. It is paying favors and admiration for the sake of gain. It is showing a partiality for certain ones, expecting to secure advantages through them. It is seeking their good will by indulgence, that we may be held in greater estimation than others fully as worthy as ourselves. It is a hard thing to see one’s own errors, but everyone should realize how cruel is the spirit of envy, rivalry, distrust, faultfinding, and dissension. (Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, 221, 222.)I have been looking over some of my writings, and I find that warnings on this point were given years ago. It is plainly stated that the buildings in Battle Creek should not be enlarged, that building should not be added to building to increase facilities there. We were instructed not to accumulate interests in that one place, but to enlarge our sphere of labor. There was danger that Battle Creek would become as Jerusalem of old—a powerful center. If we do not heed these warnings, the evils that ruined Jerusalem will come upon us. Pride, self-exaltation, neglect of the poor, and partiality to the wealthy—these were the sins of Jerusalem. Today when large interests are built up in one place, the workers are tempted to become lifted up in selfishness and pride. When they yield to this temptation they are not laborers together with God. Instead of seeking to increase our responsibilities in Battle Creek, we should bravely and willingly divide the responsibilities already there, distributing them to many places. (Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, 133.) We can understand the value of the human soul only as we realize the greatness of the sacrifice made for its redemption. The word of God declares that we are not our own, that we are bought with a price. It is at an immense cost that we have been placed upon vantage ground, where we can find liberty from the bondage of sin wrought by the fall in Eden. Adam’s sin plunged the race into hopeless misery; but by the sacrifice of the Son of God, a second probation was granted to man. In the plan of redemption a way of escape is provided for all who will avail themselves of it. God knew that it was impossible for man to overcome in his own strength, and he has provided help for him. How thankful we should be that a way is open for us, by which we can have access to the Father; that the gates are left ajar, so that beams of light from the glory within may shine upon those who will receive them! (Ellen G. White, Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene, 15, 16.)

inQuire

What are some ways that you’ve seen people categorized as greater than or less than? What truths do these categorizations miss?How can we overcome ingrained stereotypes or ways of treating people with partiality?Share a time that you were treated unfairly and/or less than. What did you learn from the experience?How can we learn to distrust our judgments of other people and trust God’s view and justice instead?What are a few examples of things God has asked you to do that are relatively easy for you? What are a few that are harder?How can we know if we’re “selectively obeying” Christ? How was Jesus’ ministry countercultural to today’s culture and ways of doing ministry?

WE’RE JUSTIFIED BY WORKS

inTro

True Faith  
Read This Week’s Passage: James 2:14–26

**What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but have not works? can that faith save him?If a brother or sister be naked and in lack of daily food,and one of you say unto them, Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled; and yet ye give them not the things needful to the body; what doth it profit?Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself.Yea, a man will say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith apart from thy works, and I by my works will show thee faith.Thou believest that God is one; thou doest well: the demons also believe, and shudder.But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith apart from works is barren?Was not Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?Thou seest that faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect;and the scripture was fulfilled which saith, And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God.Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith.And in like manner was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works, in that she received the messengers, and sent them out another way?For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead.**

True  
Faith It is undeniable that one common struggle of the church—any church—is legalism. Legalism is the idea that there are requirements for salvation beyond repentance and faith, especially when those supposed requirements are merit-based. This heretical belief cuts at the heart of the gospel, implying that Jesus’ death and resurrection was somehow insufficient, or that humans are able to merit salvation (at least in part) by their own efforts. Legalism is completely unbiblical.In an attempt to flee legalism, though, sometimes Christians have allowed the pendulum to swing too far in the other direction. The definition is broadened to, “Any outward following of a biblical standard is legalism.” And that’s just not true. In this week’s passage, James’s focus is not to convince anyone of a life of legalism. His words are not contrary to the fact that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ. His point is simply to answer the question, “What is true faith?” Faith is neither all action nor all inaction. Instead, it is an inward change that results in an outward change. Although the outward change is not all there is, it can give evidence of whether or not there was an inward change. Humanity is not saved by works; instead, we are saved by faith. What that faith truly is, then, is indeed a salvific issue and one worthy of close consideration.

inGest

Faith Profits  
A common refrain throughout this week’s passage is the question, “What does it profit?” or, “Can it save him?” James’s line of questioning reveals his central question of, What good is this kind of faith that we’re describing? It’s a faith that notices a hungry or naked brother or sister and only offers them words without power and without action. A faith that is said to be in the heart but has no bearing, expression, or evidence in the life. What is the profit of such a “faith”?True faith profits something. It yields meaningful communion with God (Heb. 11:6

**6 Without faith no one can please God. Anyone who comes to God must believe that he is real and that he rewards those who truly want to find him.**

), salvation (Eph. 2:8

**8 I mean that you have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God.**

), and good works that bless others (v. 10). Claiming to have faith is not proof that the claim is true. James bifurcates faith and works in 2:14 to show how foolish that separation is. Can someone have faith and have it not show up in their lives? Is that the kind of faith we’re told to hold? Can that kind of faith result in salvation? he seems to ask. The answer is a resounding “No.” Not because faith is insufficient, but because faith without works is no faith at all. It is “dead” and useless (James 2:17

**17 In the same way, faith by itself—that does nothing—is dead.**

). The jarring example of verse 19 shows what a lack of true faith can be. Even the demons believe and know that God is more powerful than them, that He is to be feared, that He is the Creator God. But they do not submit to that truth and live by it. Instead, they live in the servitude of the devil. They somehow mentally sideline it in order to continue the life that they have. A mental assent to the existence of or even the character of God is not enough. True faith doesn’t stop at trembling with knowledge. True faith is not satisfied until surrender. Unlike God, humans are limited to outward expressions of faith in order to see faith. It’s true that people can pretend to have faith by accruing badges of preaching, donating clothes, giving money, and even saying Christ-like things. But it is just as true that true faith cannot be hidden from humanity’s eyes—it naturally bears fruit in the life by outward expressions of love to God and to others (John 15:1–8

**Jesus Is Like a Vine 15 “I am the true vine; my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch of mine that does not produce fruit. And he trims and cleans every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the words I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch cannot produce fruit alone but must remain in the vine. In the same way, you cannot produce fruit alone but must remain in me. 5 “I am the vine, and you are the branches. If any remain in me and I remain in them, they produce much fruit. But without me they can do nothing. 6 If any do not remain in me, they are like a branch that is thrown away and then dies. People pick up dead branches, throw them into the fire, and burn them. 7 If you remain in me and follow my teachings, you can ask anything you want, and it will be given to you. 8 You should produce much fruit and show that you are my followers, which brings glory to my Father.**

). It is these outward expressions that lead people to glorify God (Matt. 5:16

**16 In the same way, you should be a light for other people. Live so that they will see the good things you do and will praise your Father in heaven.**

), leading them to know Him, accept His love, and walk with Him.

inTerpret

Paul Versus James (or Is It?)  
James 2:24

**24 So you see that people are made right with God by what they do, not by faith only.**

seems to affirm the very definition of legalism: “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” When read alongside Ephesians 2:8

**8 I mean that you have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God.**

, 9

**9 It was not the result of your own efforts, so you cannot brag about it.**

, it becomes even more problematic: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast” (emphasis supplied). Looked at like that, these two verses can lead to some troubling conclusions. Do Paul and James believe in separate gospels? Is the Bible contradicting itself? For something as essential as salvation, this is not something to gloss over or ignore.These two verses reveal the importance of understanding context instead of taking two or three sentences as standalone assertions. James’s concern here is not to add onto the requirement of faith but to explain it. As has been explored throughout this week, James is focused on giving practical details of what faith is and how it looks. Faith is not a simple mental assent. When a belief is truly held, it changes the believer. Not because they have to make it so, but because that’s what belief does.Suppose there was a little boy in his bedroom playing with his toys. His father comes in and tells him, “Look out! There are snakes in your room!” If the little boy believes his father, what will he do? Depending on his view of snakes, he’ll either scramble to the highest point in the room for safety or get on all fours to find them. Either way, he will act on that belief. Is it because he mentally said to himself, My father said there are snakes. I believe him. To prove my belief, I will act on this belief? Not at all! Instead, his belief in what his father said will immediately lead to action simply because that’s what belief does. Similarly, James’s point is that people saying that they have faith and not having it show up in their lives is an example of a dead or useless faith. They’re like a little boy who says, “I believe you, father,” but it becomes clear by their actions that they do not believe. It’s not faith at all. And lack of faith does have salvific ramifications. Faith looks like Abraham: he believed God, which led to the natural expression of these beliefs in his actions. Actions, then, are not to be added. They’re simply to be unhindered as they happen from a natural result of belief and trust in Jesus.

inSpect

What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?  
Ephesians 2:8–10

**8 I mean that you have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God. 9 It was not the result of your own efforts, so you cannot brag about it. 10 God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God made us to do good works, which God planned in advance for us to live our lives doing.**

Hebrews 11Philippians 3:7–11

**7 Those things were important to me, but now I think they are worth nothing because of Christ. 8 Not only those things, but I think that all things are worth nothing compared with the greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him, I have lost all those things, and now I know they are worthless trash. This allows me to have Christ 9 and to belong to him. Now I am right with God, not because I followed the law, but because I believed in Christ. God uses my faith to make me right with him. 10 I want to know Christ and the power that raised him from the dead. I want to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death. 11 Then I have hope that I myself will be raised from the dead.**

Matthew 5:16

**16 In the same way, you should be a light for other people. Live so that they will see the good things you do and will praise your Father in heaven.**

Galatians 5:22

**22 But the Spirit produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,**

What other verses come to mind in connection with James 2:14–26

**Faith and Good Works 14 My brothers and sisters, if people say they have faith, but do nothing, their faith is worth nothing. Can faith like that save them? 15 A brother or sister in Christ might need clothes or food. 16 If you say to that person, “God be with you! I hope you stay warm and get plenty to eat,” but you do not give what that person needs, your words are worth nothing. 17 In the same way, faith by itself—that does nothing—is dead. 18 Someone might say, “You have faith, but I have deeds.” Show me your faith without doing anything, and I will show you my faith by what I do. 19 You believe there is one God. Good! But the demons believe that, too, and they tremble with fear. 20 You foolish person! Must you be shown that faith that does nothing is worth nothing? 21 Abraham, our ancestor, was made right with God by what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. 22 So you see that Abraham’s faith and the things he did worked together. His faith was made perfect by what he did. 23 This shows the full meaning of the Scripture that says: “Abraham believed God, and God accepted Abraham’s faith, and that faith made him right with God.” n And Abraham was called God’s friend. n 24 So you see that people are made right with God by what they do, not by faith only. 25 Another example is Rahab, a prostitute, who was made right with God by something she did. She welcomed the spies into her home and helped them escape by a different road. 26 Just as a person’s body that does not have a spirit is dead, so faith that does nothing is dead!**

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inVite

The Evidence of Fruit  
In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned His listeners about false prophets who “ ‘come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves’ ”—people who look good, innocent, or helpful but actually mean to do harm (Matt. 7:15

**People Know You by Your Actions 15 “Be careful of false prophets. They come to you looking gentle like sheep, but they are really dangerous like wolves.**

). Jesus did not offer to lend the God-held ability to read hearts and minds. Instead, He gave a reliable test that anyone can do: evaluate the fruit, the long-term expressions of their lives. He knew that people could sound good, if only temporarily, and deceive. But fruit is impossible to fake. Just as good trees bear good fruit and bad trees bear bad fruit, the condition of an individual’s heart cannot be hidden by its own expressions (Matt. 7:16–18

**16 You will know these people by what they do. Grapes don’t come from thornbushes, and figs don’t come from thorny weeds. 17 In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit.**

). “ ‘Therefore,’ ” Jesus concluded, “ ‘by their fruits you shall know them’ ” (Matt. 7:20

**20 In the same way, you will know these false prophets by what they do.**

). If this test can be used on others, why not on believers themselves? Sometimes people will say, “Just accept Jesus; that’s all we need.” That’s actually true. Accepting Jesus, though, is more than words spoken. It is a supernatural experience. Still, it bears repeating ad nauseum that these expressions of faith are not fruit that are stapled to the leaves of the tree of one’s heart. It is not human strength, grit, or determination that produces this fruit. It only comes through truly believing in, trusting, and loving Jesus. As always, Jesus is a perfect example of how this walk with God happens day to day. When overwhelmed by something like the death of His cousin or the rigors of ministry, Jesus withdrew into a deserted place alone or with His close friends to commune with God, knowing His deep need of strength from His Father. He told His disciples to pray for God’s will to be done, and then prayed that same prayer in the throes of despair in the Garden of Gethsemane. He commissioned His followers to share God’s love and the news of His kingdom with everyone, and He shared with multitudes, outcasts, and religious leaders alike. He showed how to fulfill His commandment to love others by loving them in action. Jesus’ life is a vivid and practical example of all that He said and all that He believed. Because that’s how belief works. Jesus is a perfect picture of living faith, and He gives the power and grace for it to be mirrored in the life of His children.

inSight

The Faith That Works  
“Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.... For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:24–26

**24 So you see that people are made right with God by what they do, not by faith only. 25 Another example is Rahab, a prostitute, who was made right with God by something she did. She welcomed the spies into her home and helped them escape by a different road. 26 Just as a person’s body that does not have a spirit is dead, so faith that does nothing is dead!**

). It is essential to have faith in Jesus, and to believe you are saved through Him; but there is danger in taking the position that many do take in saying, “I am saved.” Many have said: “You must do good works, and you will live”; but apart from Christ no one can do good works. Many at the present day say, “Believe, only believe, and live.” Faith and works go together, believing and doing are blended. The Lord requires no less of the soul now, than He required of Adam in Paradise before he fell—perfect obedience, unblemished righteousness. The requirement of God under the covenant of grace is just as broad as the requirement He made in Paradise—harmony with His law, which is holy, and just, and good. The gospel does not weaken the claims of the law; it exalts the law and makes it honorable. Under the New Testament, no less is required than was required under the Old Testament. Let no one take up with the delusion so pleasant to the natural heart, that God will accept of sincerity, no matter what may be the faith, no matter how imperfect may be the life. God requires of His child perfect obedience. In order to meet the requirements of the law, our faith must grasp the righteousness of Christ, accepting it as our righteousness. Through union with Christ, through acceptance of His righteousness by faith, we may be qualified to work the works of God, to be colaborers with Christ. If you are willing to drift along with the current of evil, and do not cooperate with the heavenly agencies in restraining transgression in your family, and in the church, in order that everlasting righteousness may be brought in, you do not have faith. Faith works by love and purifies the soul. Through faith the Holy Spirit works in the heart to create holiness therein; but this cannot be done unless the human agent will work with Christ. We can be fitted for heaven only through the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart; for we must have Christ’s righteousness as our credentials if we would find access to the Father. In order that we may have the righteousness of Christ, we need daily to be transformed by the influence of the Spirit, to be a partaker of the divine nature. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to elevate the taste, to sanctify the heart, to ennoble the whole man. (Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, bk. 1, 373, 374.)

inQuire

Do you naturally lean toward legalism or cheap grace? How can we guard against either one?In your own words, what is faith?How can we remember the importance of works but keep it in the context of faith?Share a time your faith was expressed in works. How was it still “of faith”?Why do you think people say Jesus doesn’t care about how we act? Does He? In what way?What sentences stuck out to you in this week’s inSight? Explain why. Share another Scripture that is explained by its context. How can we learn to be balanced students of the Bible?

THE MOST DANGEROUS PART OF THE BODY

inTro

Contrary Hearts  
Read This Week’s Passage: James 3:1–12

**Be not many teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment.For in many things we all stumble. If any stumbleth not in word, the same is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also.Now if we put the horses’ bridles into their mouths that they may obey us, we turn about their whole body also.Behold, the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by rough winds, are yet turned about by a very small rudder, whither the impulse of the steersman willeth.So the tongue also is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how much wood is kindled by how small a fire!And the tongue is a fire: the world of iniquity among our members is the tongue, which defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the wheel of nature, and is set on fire by hell.For every kind of beasts and birds, of creeping things and things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed by mankind:but the tongue can no man tame; a restless evil, full of deadly poison.Therewith bless we the Lord and Father; and therewith curse we men, who are made after the likeness of God:out of the same mouth cometh forth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.Doth the fountain send forth from the same opening sweet water and bitter?can a fig tree, my brethren, yield olives, or a vine figs? neither salt water yield sweet.**

Contrary  
HeartsFor most people, speaking is one of the easiest actions in the world. The mouth opens, vocal cords vibrate, the lips and tongue form sounds, and, voilà: communication. Though easy to do, it’s much harder to control. When strong feelings come, it’s easy to give them expression through regrettable words and harsh tones. This problem is not limited to non-Christians. As James aptly pointed out, “With [our tongues] we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so” (James 3:9

**9 We use our tongues to praise our Lord and Father, but then we curse people, whom God made like himself.**

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**10 Praises and curses come from the same mouth! My brothers and sisters, this should not happen.**

). Just because this is a common problem, that does not make it acceptable. It goes against the reality of nature: how can a spring of water yield both fresh water and bitter? How can a fig tree bear olives? (vv. 11, 12) They have to yield one or the other. Contrary words—a mixture of blessing and cursing from the same tongue—gives evidence of a contrary heart, one that is still in need of deeper surrender, a deeper cleansing by the hand of God. Instead of focusing on the fruit of the problem (words), it is essential to yield to God the root of the problem (the heart).

inGest

The Origin Behind the Words  
Not stumbling in word is a sign of heightened Christian maturity (James 3:2

**2 We all make many mistakes. If people never said anything wrong, they would be perfect and able to control their entire selves, too.**

). It gives evidence of an individual’s deep surrender to the transformational change wrought by Christ Himself. The words of an individual show this because it is “out of the abundance of the heart [that] his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45

**45 Good people bring good things out of the good they stored in their hearts. But evil people bring evil things out of the evil they stored in their hearts. People speak the things that are in their hearts.**

). Jesus also said that defiling comes from what is expressed from the mouth, because “those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart” (Matt. 15:18

**18 But what people say with their mouths comes from the way they think; these are the things that make people unclean.**

). Therefore, clean speech is evidence of a clean heart. The tongue, though anatomically small, has an overwhelming impact. Just as an entire horse can be moved by its bit and a large ship by its rudder, the speaker is moved and impacted by his or her own words. Not only them, but others are impacted too. People can be built up and fortified by words of kindness, receiving them as life-giving water or sweet honey to the soul (Prov. 16:24

**24  Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, making people happy and healthy.**

; 18:4

**4  Spoken words can be like deep water, but wisdom is like a flowing stream.**

). Conversely, the same people can be stirred to anger and deeply wounded by a misspoken word, especially when expressed in the heat of anger (Prov. 12:18

**18  Careless words stab like a sword, but wise words bring healing.**

; 15:18

**18  People with quick tempers cause trouble, but those who control their tempers stop a quarrel.**

). Interestingly, some of Jesus’ harshest rebukes to His disciples came as a result of what they said. After trying to dissuade Jesus from going to the cross, Peter received the response, “ ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men’ ” (Matt. 16:23

**23 Then Jesus said to Peter, “Go away from me, Satan! n You are not helping me! You don’t care about the things of God, but only about the things people think are important.”**

). Jesus clearly saw to the root of the problem: Peter was not mindful of or prioritizing the right things, which led to what he said. Earlier, after Jesus was snubbed by the residents of a Samaritan village, James and John suggested calling down fire from heaven to consume them. Jesus rebuked them again, adding, “ ‘You do not know what manner of spirit you are of’ ” (Luke 9:55

**55 But Jesus turned and scolded them. [And Jesus said, “You don’t know what kind of spirit you belong to.**

). Again, the issue gave expression in their words: they were being prompted by the wrong spirit. James does not recommend any self-help techniques for this problem. Instead, rather dismally, he concludes that “no man can tame the tongue” (James 3:8

**8 but no one can tame the tongue. It is wild and evil and full of deadly poison.**

). It is impossible for humans to change their words for the same reason it is impossible for them to change their own hearts. Only God can cause such a supernatural change. Along with Isaiah, any child of God can see the uncleanness of their own lips and of those around them (Isa. 6:5

**5 I said, “Oh, no! I will be destroyed. I am not pure, and I live among people who are not pure, but I have seen the King, the Lord All-Powerful.”**

). The same child of God can be given a new heart that is promised to all who will surrender to Him (Ezek. 36:26

**26 Also, I will teach you to respect me completely, and I will put a new way of thinking inside you. I will take out the stubborn hearts of stone from your bodies, and I will give you obedient hearts of flesh.**

). This deep heart change is what brings lasting changes in both word and deed.

inTerpret

Not to Be Underestimated  
James opens this chapter by recommending his listeners not to seek out a teaching position. Back then (and sometimes in the present day), teachers were synonymous with prestige and an enviable position. Such authority gave them the aura of power and importance. Teachers were looked up to, held in high esteem, and their words could be taken, unfiltered, straight to the heart. It was this last quality that prompted James to steer people away from clambering toward being a teacher—it brings an awesome responsibility, and that is sometimes overlooked. Part of this responsibility is being held to a “stricter judgment” (James 3:1

**Controlling the Things We Say 3 My brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.**

) with words, since words have even more power when coupled with more influence. Becoming a teacher, especially a spiritual teacher, is not something to be sought after for worldly reasons or power; it is something that should only be pursued with God’s calling and strength. A few verses later, James seems to be swept along by his own imagery and waxes poetic about the dangers of the tongue, calling it a “world of iniquity” that “defiles the whole body” and “is set on fire by hell” (v. 6). He seems to be stressing that words do more than they seem to, and therefore the tongue has more power than we give it credit for. Words have been used to take a righteous person’s life (1 Kings 21:1–16

**Ahab Takes Naboth’s Vineyard 21 After these things had happened, this is what followed. A man named Naboth owned a vineyard in Jezreel, near the palace of Ahab king of Israel. 2 One day Ahab said to Naboth, “Give me your vineyard. It is near my palace, and I want to make it into a vegetable garden. I will give you a better vineyard in its place, or, if you prefer, I will pay you what it is worth.” 3 Naboth answered, “May the Lord keep me from ever giving my land to you. It belongs to my family.” 4 Ahab went home angry and upset, because he did not like what Naboth from Jezreel had said. (Naboth had said, “I will not give you my family’s land.”) Ahab lay down on his bed, turned his face to the wall, and refused to eat. 5 His wife, Jezebel, came in and asked him, “Why are you so upset that you refuse to eat?” 6 Ahab answered, “I talked to Naboth, the man from Jezreel. I said, ‘Sell me your vineyard, or, if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard for it.’ But Naboth refused.” 7 Jezebel answered, “Is this how you rule as king over Israel? Get up, eat something, and cheer up. I will get Naboth’s vineyard for you.” 8 So Jezebel wrote some letters, signed Ahab’s name to them, and used his own seal to seal them. Then she sent them to the elders and important men who lived in Naboth’s town. 9 The letter she wrote said: “Declare a day during which the people are to fast. Call the people together, and give Naboth a place of honor among them. 10 Seat two troublemakers across from him, and have them say they heard Naboth speak against God and the king. Then take Naboth out of the city and kill him with stones.” 11 The elders and important men of Jezreel obeyed Jezebel’s command, just as she wrote in the letters. 12 They declared a special day on which the people were to fast. And they put Naboth in a place of honor before the people. 13 Two troublemakers sat across from Naboth and said in front of everybody that they had heard him speak against God and the king. So the people carried Naboth out of the city and killed him with stones. 14 Then the leaders sent a message to Jezebel, saying, “Naboth has been killed.” 15 When Jezebel heard that Naboth had been killed, she told Ahab, “Naboth of Jezreel is dead. Now you may go and take for yourself the vineyard he would not sell to you.” 16 When Ahab heard that Naboth of Jezreel was dead, he got up and went to the vineyard to take it for his own.**

), discourage an entire group of people from God’s work (Neh. 6:5–9

**5 The fifth time Sanballat sent his helper to me with the message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter. 6 This is what was written: A report is going around to all the nations, and Geshem says it is true, that you and the Jewish people are planning to turn against the king and that you are rebuilding the wall. They say you are going to be their king 7 and that you have appointed prophets to announce in Jerusalem: “There is a king of Judah!” The king will hear about this. So come, let’s discuss this together. 8 So I sent him back this answer: “Nothing you are saying is really happening. You are just making it up in your own mind.” 9 Our enemies were trying to scare us, thinking, “They will get too weak to work. Then the wall will not be finished.” But I prayed, “God, make me strong.”**

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**19 These important people kept telling me about the good things Tobiah was doing, and then they would tell Tobiah what I said about him. So Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.**

), and even to deny a relationship with Jesus (Luke 22:54–62

**Peter Says He Doesn’t Know Jesus 54 They arrested Jesus, and led him away, and brought him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed far behind them. 55 After the soldiers started a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat together, Peter sat with them. 56 A servant girl saw Peter sitting there in the firelight, and looking closely at him, she said, “This man was also with him.” 57 But Peter said this was not true; he said, “Woman, I don’t know him.” 58 A short time later, another person saw Peter and said, “You are also one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not!” 59 About an hour later, another man insisted, “Certainly this man was with him, because he is from Galilee, too.” 60 But Peter said, “Man, I don’t know what you are talking about!” At once, while Peter was still speaking, a rooster crowed. 61 Then the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. And Peter remembered what the Lord had said: “Before the rooster crows this day, you will say three times that you don’t know me.” 62 Then Peter went outside and cried painfully.**

). It’s common to hear, “I didn’t mean it,” or, “I was only joking,” appended to harsh or un-Christ-like expressions. Phrases like these cannot undo the damage of words (though, of course, apologies are intensely appropriate in the aftermath of such expressions). There is no “backspace” when it comes to what one says that can truly undo the effect. Words can deeply affect an individual’s life that aren’t even used as an insult. After David had killed Goliath and been welcomed into King Saul’s inner circle, David and Saul were the recipients of a song by the women celebrating: “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands” (1 Sam. 18:7

**7 As they played, they sang, “Saul has killed thousands of his enemies, but David has killed tens of thousands.”**

). This comparison gave opportunity for the birth of resentment and long-term hatred of Saul toward David (v. 8). Later, on two separate occasions when David was seeking refuge from foreign (and enemy) nations, these very words were used by the servants of these foreign kings to explain why David was not someone to be trusted: Hadn’t they heard the song? Didn’t they know who David was? (1 Sam. 21:11

**11 But the servants of Achish said to him, “This is David, the king of the Israelites. He’s the man they dance and sing about, saying: ‘Saul has killed thousands of his enemies, but David has killed tens of thousands.’ ”**

; 29:5

**5 David is the one the Israelites dance and sing about, saying: ‘Saul has killed thousands of his enemies, but David has killed tens of thousands.’ ”**

). Knowing full well these stories, as well as the teachings of Jesus, James urges his listeners to not underestimate the power of one’s words and their far-reaching effect—whether for good or evil.

inSpect

How do the following verses relate to the primary passage?Ephesians 4:29

**29 When you talk, do not say harmful things, but say what people need—words that will help others become stronger. Then what you say will do good to those who listen to you.**

Proverbs 13:3

**3  Those who are careful about what they say protect their lives, but whoever speaks without thinking will be ruined.**

Proverbs 12:18

**18  Careless words stab like a sword, but wise words bring healing.**

Ezekiel 36:25–27

**25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your uncleanness and your idols. 26 Also, I will teach you to respect me completely, and I will put a new way of thinking inside you. I will take out the stubborn hearts of stone from your bodies, and I will give you obedient hearts of flesh. 27 I will put my Spirit inside you and help you live by my rules and carefully obey my laws.**

Matthew 15:11

**11 It is not what people put into their mouths that makes them unclean. It is what comes out of their mouths that makes them unclean.”**

Luke 6:45

**45 Good people bring good things out of the good they stored in their hearts. But evil people bring evil things out of the evil they stored in their hearts. People speak the things that are in their hearts.**

What other verses come to mind in connection with James 3:1–12

**Controlling the Things We Say 3 My brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. 2 We all make many mistakes. If people never said anything wrong, they would be perfect and able to control their entire selves, too. 3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can control their whole bodies. 4 Also a ship is very big, and it is pushed by strong winds. But a very small rudder controls that big ship, making it go wherever the pilot wants. 5 It is the same with the tongue. It is a small part of the body, but it brags about great things. A big forest fire can be started with only a little flame. 6 And the tongue is like a fire. It is a whole world of evil among the parts of our bodies. The tongue spreads its evil through the whole body. The tongue is set on fire by hell, and it starts a fire that influences all of life. 7 People can tame every kind of wild animal, bird, reptile, and fish, and they have tamed them, 8 but no one can tame the tongue. It is wild and evil and full of deadly poison. 9 We use our tongues to praise our Lord and Father, but then we curse people, whom God made like himself. 10 Praises and curses come from the same mouth! My brothers and sisters, this should not happen. 11 Do good and bad water flow from the same spring? 12 My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree make olives, or can a grapevine make figs? No! And a well full of salty water cannot give good water.**

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inVite

No Man Ever Spoke Like This Man!  
Among many other qualities, Jesus was known for how He spoke. Unable to arrest Jesus, the officers defended themselves with the confession, “ ‘No man ever spoke like this Man!’ ” (John 7:46

**46 The guards answered, “The words he says are greater than the words of any other person who has ever spoken!”**

). His listeners were also astonished at His teaching, because He taught them with an authority they weren’t used to (Matt. 7:29

**29 because he did not teach like their teachers of the law. He taught like a person who had authority.**

; Mark 1:11

**11 and a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love, and I am very pleased with you.”**

). He had a balance they had never seen before: His righteousness and intimacy with God clearly transcended that of their religious leaders, but His intimate compassion and closeness to all levels of humanity was contrary to what they’d experienced in such holy men. Instead of the expected words of condemnation, Jesus explicitly and tenderly told the woman caught in adultery that He did not condemn her, and sent her into a life of freedom from sin (John 8:1–12

**The Woman Caught in Adultery 8 Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 But early in the morning he went back to the Temple, and all the people came to him, and he sat and taught them. 3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery. They forced her to stand before the people. 4 They said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught having sexual relations with a man who is not her husband. 5 The law of Moses commands that we stone to death every woman who does this. What do you say we should do?” 6 They were asking this to trick Jesus so that they could have some charge against him. But Jesus bent over and started writing on the ground with his finger. 7 When they continued to ask Jesus their question, he raised up and said, “Anyone here who has never sinned can throw the first stone at her.” 8 Then Jesus bent over again and wrote on the ground. 9 Those who heard Jesus began to leave one by one, first the older men and then the others. Jesus was left there alone with the woman standing before him. 10 Jesus raised up again and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one judged you guilty?” 11 She answered, “No one, sir.” Then Jesus said, “I also don’t judge you guilty. You may go now, but don’t sin anymore.”] Jesus Is the Light of the World 12 Later, Jesus talked to the people again, saying, “I am the light of the world. The person who follows me will never live in darkness but will have the light that gives life.”**

). When sought after by a religious leader under the cover of darkness, He gently rebuked him for not knowing the basics of salvation, and yet shared some of the most gospel-centric and truth-condensed verses in all of Scripture (John 3:1–20

**Nicodemus Comes to Jesus 3 There was a man named Nicodemus who was one of the Pharisees and an important Jewish leader. 2 One night Nicodemus came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, we know you are a teacher sent from God, because no one can do the miracles you do unless God is with him.” 3 Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot be in God’s kingdom.” 4 Nicodemus said, “But if a person is already old, how can he be born again? He cannot enter his mother’s womb again. So how can a person be born a second time?” 5 But Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born from water and the Spirit, you cannot enter God’s kingdom. 6 Human life comes from human parents, but spiritual life comes from the Spirit. 7 Don’t be surprised when I tell you, ‘You must all be born again.’ 8 The wind blows where it wants to and you hear the sound of it, but you don’t know where the wind comes from or where it is going. It is the same with every person who is born from the Spirit.” 9 Nicodemus asked, “How can this happen?” 10 Jesus said, “You are an important teacher in Israel, and you don’t understand these things? 11 I tell you the truth, we talk about what we know, and we tell about what we have seen, but you don’t accept what we tell you. 12 I have told you about things here on earth, and you do not believe me. So you will not believe me if I tell you about things of heaven. 13 The only one who has ever gone up to heaven is the One who came down from heaven—the Son of Man. n 14 “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, n the Son of Man must also be lifted up. 15 So that everyone who believes can have eternal life in him. 16 “God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life. 17 God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world guilty, but to save the world through him. 18 People who believe in God’s Son are not judged guilty. Those who do not believe have already been judged guilty, because they have not believed in God’s one and only Son. 19 They are judged by this fact: The Light has come into the world, but they did not want light. They wanted darkness, because they were doing evil things. 20 All who do evil hate the light and will not come to the light, because it will show all the evil things they do.**

). He tactfully guided the woman at the well to an exposure of her need and misunderstandings and then gave her one of the very few explicit acknowledgements of His Messiahship (John 4:5–26

**5 In Samaria Jesus came to the town called Sychar, which is near the field Jacob gave to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob’s well was there. Jesus was tired from his long trip, so he sat down beside the well. It was about twelve o’clock noon. 7 When a Samaritan woman came to the well to get some water, Jesus said to her, “Please give me a drink.” 8 (This happened while Jesus’ followers were in town buying some food.) 9 The woman said, “I am surprised that you ask me for a drink, since you are a Jewish man and I am a Samaritan woman.” (Jewish people are not friends with Samaritans. n) 10 Jesus said, “If you only knew the free gift of God and who it is that is asking you for water, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” 11 The woman said, “Sir, where will you get this living water? The well is very deep, and you have nothing to get water with. 12 Are you greater than Jacob, our father, who gave us this well and drank from it himself along with his sons and flocks?” 13 Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give will never be thirsty. The water I give will become a spring of water gushing up inside that person, giving eternal life.” 15 The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so I will never be thirsty again and will not have to come back here to get more water.” 16 Jesus told her, “Go get your husband and come back here.” 17 The woman answered, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right to say you have no husband. 18 Really you have had five husbands, and the man you live with now is not your husband. You told the truth.” 19 The woman said, “Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that Jerusalem is the place where people must worship.” 21 Jesus said, “Believe me, woman. The time is coming when neither in Jerusalem nor on this mountain will you actually worship the Father. 22 You Samaritans worship something you don’t understand. We understand what we worship, because salvation comes from the Jews. 23 The time is coming when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, and that time is here already. You see, the Father too is actively seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” 25 The woman said, “I know that the Messiah is coming.” (Messiah is the One called Christ.) “When the Messiah comes, he will explain everything to us.” 26 Then Jesus said, “I am he—I, the one talking to you.”**

). He used countless real-life experiences to both clearly share the gospel with all open hearts and enshroud it in mystery for those who would only abuse His words (e.g., Luke 14, 15).Jesus could speak this way because of who He was. Not in the sense that His words cannot be spoken by His people today, but in the sense that He was one with God, so it was expressed by His words. There’s a difference between sounding kind and expressing kindness from the heart. To have such words come from the heart, the heart itself must be captured and transformed by the Holy Spirit. The new heart is given as a free gift by God to all who are willing (Ezek. 36:26

**26 Also, I will teach you to respect me completely, and I will put a new way of thinking inside you. I will take out the stubborn hearts of stone from your bodies, and I will give you obedient hearts of flesh.**

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**27 I will put my Spirit inside you and help you live by my rules and carefully obey my laws.**

). Those who struggle with their words may try of their own volition to say this and not that, to make promises, and they may even make strides. But it is treating the symptom of an issue that only Jesus has the power to change. Jesus did not come just to secure the possibility for us, but also to show what the result of such a glorious surrender can be. As humanity’s living Example, He invites His disciples in every age to walk with Him and after Him, even in word.

inSight

The Strongest Argument  
There is an eloquence far more powerful than the eloquence of words in the quiet, consistent life of a pure, true Christian. What a man is has more influence than what he says. The officers who were sent to Jesus came back with the report that never man spoke as He spoke. But the reason for this was that never man lived as He lived. Had His life been other than it was, He could not have spoken as He did. His words bore with them a convincing power, because they came from a heart pure and holy, full of love and sympathy, benevolence and truth. It is our own character and experience that determine our influence upon others. In order to convince others of the power of Christ’s grace, we must know its power in our own hearts and lives. The gospel we present for the saving of souls must be the gospel by which our own souls are saved. Only through a living faith in Christ as a personal Saviour is it possible to make our influence felt in a skeptical world. If we would draw sinners out of the swift-running current, our own feet must be firmly set upon the Rock, Christ Jesus. The badge of Christianity is not an outward sign, not the wearing of a cross or a crown, but it is that which reveals the union of man with God. By the power of His grace manifested in the transformation of character the world is to be convinced that God has sent His Son as its Redeemer. No other influence that can surround the human soul has such power as the influence of an unselfish life. The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian. To live such a life, to exert such an influence, costs at every step effort, self-sacrifice, discipline. It is because they do not understand this that many are so easily discouraged in the Christian life. Many who sincerely consecrate their lives to God’s service are surprised and disappointed to find themselves, as never before, confronted by obstacles and beset by trials and perplexities. They pray for Christlikeness of character, for a fitness for the Lord’s work, and they are placed in circumstances that seem to call forth all the evil of their nature. Faults are revealed of which they did not even suspect the existence. Like Israel of old they question, “If God is leading us, why do all these things come upon us?” It is because God is leading them that these things come upon them. Trials and obstacles are the Lord’s chosen methods of discipline and His appointed conditions of success. . . . Often He permits the fires of affliction to assail them that they may be purified. (Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, 469–471.)

inQuire

Share a time that you were meaningfully and positively impacted by someone’s words. Why do you think words affect us so much?How does it affect our relationship with God when we have both “fresh water” and “salty” coming from our mouths?When James says that we should not curse men and bless God at the same time, does this allow for people to grow from immaturity to maturity? Why or why not?How have you seen the way Jesus speaks differently after this week’s study?How can we balance our understanding of the importance of the expressions of our heart and the importance of the condition of our heart itself?How can we have an Ezekiel 36:26

**26 Also, I will teach you to respect me completely, and I will put a new way of thinking inside you. I will take out the stubborn hearts of stone from your bodies, and I will give you obedient hearts of flesh.**

experience?

KNOWING IS NOT ENOUGH

inTro

Wise Knowledge  
Read This Week’s Passage: James 3:13–18

**Who is wise and understanding among you? let him show by his good life his works in meekness of wisdom.But if ye have bitter jealousy and faction in your heart, glory not and lie not against the truth.This wisdom is not that cometh down from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.For where jealousy and faction are, there is confusion and every vile deed.But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy.And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for them that make peace.**

Wise  
Knowledge One way to define gaining knowledge is the acquiring of facts or information. Wisdom, though, is the ability to use that knowledge in the right way: with sound judgment, a wholistic perspective, and in lessons learned through personal experience. There are different kinds of wisdom, James is quick to point out, and, like other attributes he has explored so far, the kind of wisdom that he is talking about can be seen in the life. Though other characteristics of wisdom are explored in subsequent verses, James first focuses on the meekness of wisdom. Knowledge, when not tempered with wisdom, can easily lead to arrogance, a completely disproportionate view of one’s own self-importance. Perhaps it’s due to humanity’s natural bent toward selfishness or the inaccurate metric of accomplishment to determine self-worth; in whatever case, nearly everyone can think of someone who comes across as arrogant because of how they wield “how much they know” about this or that. Wisdom, when it’s the right kind, allows the knowledgeable one to see their knowledge in its context, and see themselves in the proper context too. This “proper context” can also be called reality, and it results in meekness. This week’s lesson will explore how not all wisdom is created equal, but the Christian doesn’t have to be confused about the good and the bad—just like everything else, the evidence is in the fruit.

inGest

What Heavenly Wisdom Looks Like  
Certain sections of the Bible have timid readers scurrying for cover lest they die of boredom. A common culprit is lists: genealogies, sins to avoid, people who were there, and attributes to embrace. But each of these items hold their own blessing and insight, even if they require a little more time to discover. The Biblical authors were not pressured by word counts—so every thought behind the words is worth our consideration. James’s definition of heavenly wisdom is one such list—nice words that are often glazed over. But what can be discovered when taken one at a time? What is heavenly wisdom, really?Pure: It is untainted, unsullied by sinful attitude and motivation; this is the first evidence that it is heaven borne, since all purity is only possible from God Himself.Peaceable: True purity leads to true peace; this wisdom can bring peace among quarreling parties, and even more so, brings peace to the heart in a way nothing else can. Thus this wisdom both shares peace with others and fills the possessor with peace.Gentle: True wisdom does not hammer what it knows into other people; it deals with them gently, whether in agreement or in error.Willing to yield: True wisdom is open to discussion, open to reason, open to conversation, to change, and to being wrong; it does not change out of people-pleasing, neither does it remain obstinate “just because.” Full of mercy: True wisdom tells the possessor that he should extend to others the same mercy he has been the recipient of; after being the receiver, he is now a conduit.[full of] good fruits: True wisdom is expressed in the life because it’s held genuinely and sincerely; the evidence in the life cannot be helped any more than it can be forced.Without partiality: True wisdom does not “respect persons” (Deut. 16:19

**19 Do not judge unfairly or take sides. Do not let people pay you to make wrong decisions, because that kind of payment makes wise people seem blind, and it changes the words of good people.**

) because it knows that this is foolishness (as James has already established in chapter 2).Without hypocrisy: This wisdom does not pretend to be something or someone it is not; there is sincerity and realness. It’s not a façade someone wears, but rather permeates the entire being of the one who has it. These are not attributes to be used to conjure heavenly wisdom; they’re not to be scrounged up and pieced together, so that the possessor can declare, “Aha! I have heavenly wisdom!” Instead, this is a picture of what someone will look like, be like, and live like when they have wisdom from God. They are the effects, not the causes, of heavenly wisdom.

inTerpret

Worldly Wisdom  
After delving into the differences between living faith and dead faith in the previous chapter, James continues this kind of comparison in the context of wisdom: wisdom that descends from above and earthly wisdom. James takes the time to describe demonic wisdom for the sake of his listeners to understand what it is and to steer clear of it.Earthly, sensual, and demonic wisdom is found where the individual has bitter envy and self-seeking in his or her heart. It’s a kind of wisdom that’s self-focused, using what it knows to promote self and seek the place of others, and sees achievement as something in which to beat others. Envy includes seeing others as competition or obstacles to getting what one wants, instead of the fellow brothers and sisters they actually are. Self-seeking shows the possessor is not walking in love, because the focus is on oneself instead of God and others. When envy and self-focus are in the heart, James warns, do not take this as an opportunity to “boast and lie against the truth” (James 3:14

**14 But if you are selfish and have bitter jealousy in your hearts, do not brag. Your bragging is a lie that hides the truth.**

). Earthly wisdom, like earthly knowledge, can be used as an excuse for arrogance and an inflated view of oneself; this is a lie, though, and distorts reality. Envy and self-seeking are not standalone sins: “Confusion and every evil thing are there” when these two are held in the heart (v. 16). Instead of “good fruits” (v. 17), earthly wisdom brings countless sufferings, evils, and distortions in its train. Like most things in the great controversy, these are not two options for wisdom that are “kind of good” and “kind of bad”: there is one that leads to untold misery and evil and another that leads to peace and righteousness. Tragically, worldly wisdom can still look like real wisdom—in part. It can be charming, enticing, successful by the standards of the world that humanity is constantly bombarded with. It can look really good. Again, this shows the importance of the fruit of the life. What fruits are borne from the wise person’s life—both on stage and off? What happens when they are challenged? Do they listen, consider, and are they “willing to yield” (v. 17)? What happens if they are misunderstood? Do they seek clarity and mutual understanding, or does their fire-and-brimstone response give evidence of a different spirit? The condition of the heart shows what kind of wisdom has taken up residence there, and the condition of the heart is displayed in the life.

inSpect

What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?Deuteronomy 34:9

**9 Joshua son of Nun was then filled with wisdom, because Moses had put his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to Joshua, and they did what the Lord had commanded Moses.**

Psalm 111:10

**10  Wisdom begins with respect for the Lord; those who obey his orders have good understanding. He should be praised forever.**

Proverbs 1Proverbs 11:2

**2  Pride leads only to shame; it is wise to be humble.**

1 Corinthians 1:17–24

**17 Christ did not send me to baptize people but to preach the Good News. And he sent me to preach the Good News without using words of human wisdom so that the cross n of Christ would not lose its power. Christ Is God’s Power and Wisdom 18 The teaching about the cross is foolishness to those who are being lost, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 It is written in the Scriptures: “I will cause the wise to lose their wisdom; I will make the wise unable to understand.” Isaiah 29:14 20 Where is the wise person? Where is the educated person? Where is the skilled talker of this world? God has made the wisdom of the world foolish. 21 In the wisdom of God the world did not know God through its own wisdom. So God chose to use the message that sounds foolish to save those who believe. 22 The Jews ask for miracles, and the Greeks want wisdom. 23 But we preach a crucified Christ. This causes the Jews to stumble and is foolishness to non-Jews. 24 But Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God to those people God has called—Jews and Greeks.**

What other verses come to mind in connection with James 3:13–18

**True Wisdom 13 Are there those among you who are truly wise and understanding? Then they should show it by living right and doing good things with a gentleness that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you are selfish and have bitter jealousy in your hearts, do not brag. Your bragging is a lie that hides the truth. 15 That kind of “wisdom” does not come from God but from the world. It is not spiritual; it is from the devil. 16 Where jealousy and selfishness are, there will be confusion and every kind of evil. 17 But the wisdom that comes from God is first of all pure, then peaceful, gentle, and easy to please. This wisdom is always ready to help those who are troubled and to do good for others. It is always fair and honest. 18 People who work for peace in a peaceful way plant a good crop of right-living.**

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inVite

The Greatest Peacemaker  
James ends chapter 3 with a mildly cryptic sentence: “Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:18

**18 People who work for peace in a peaceful way plant a good crop of right-living.**

). It helps to unpack it backwards, since it’s written backwards chronologically: (a) there are people who make peace; (b) these people sow seeds of a certain kind; (c) these seeds bear the fruit of righteousness. Within the context, James is still talking about heavenly wisdom. It is a sign of spiritually mature and wise people to encourage peace between individuals, to sow peace, work peace, encourage peace, and be peaceable. This peace bears the fruit of righteousness; like agricultural seeds, it may take time, but it is sure. Quite literally, that’s exactly why Jesus came: to create peace practically between estranged humanity and God. Paul explained that, “having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . When we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son. . . . We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Rom. 5:1

**Right with God 5 Since we have been made right with God by our faith, we have n peace with God. This happened through our Lord Jesus Christ,**

, 10

**10 While we were God’s enemies, he made us his friends through the death of his Son. Surely, now that we are his friends, he will save us through his Son’s life.**

, 11

**11 And not only that, but now we are also very happy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we are now God’s friends again.**

; emphasis supplied). Jesus is the Greatest Peacemaker there ever was, both fulfilling God’s requirement of righteousness and taking on the consequences of humanity’s failures. His sacrifice makes no sense in the context of worldly wisdom: why would God risk all of heaven for the sake of wayward creatures? Maybe it could be understood to die for someone who was righteous, but why die for one’s enemies? (Rom. 5:6

**6 When we were unable to help ourselves, at the right time, Christ died for us, although we were living against God.**

, 7

**7 Very few people will die to save the life of someone else. Although perhaps for a good person someone might possibly die.**

, 10

**10 While we were God’s enemies, he made us his friends through the death of his Son. Surely, now that we are his friends, he will save us through his Son’s life.**

). Why take a punishment that someone else deserves? Why share a reward with someone who merited none of it? Jesus chose to do these unexplainable things out of love: not for Himself, but for humanity. This Greatest Peacemaker extends His mission of peace to all who love Him; by being compelled by His same love, His disciples become His ambassadors to plead with others to be reconciled to God, to accept the peace that Jesus secured for all who will accept it (2 Cor. 5:14

**14 The love of Christ controls us, because we know that One died for all, so all have died.**

, 20

**20 So we have been sent to speak for Christ. It is as if God is calling to you through us. We speak for Christ when we beg you to be at peace with God.**

). His children represent the God of Peace who fills believers with peace, enables them to live in peace, and, most miraculously, to be at peace with Himself (Rom. 15:13

**13 I pray that the God who gives hope will fill you with much joy and peace while you trust in him. Then your hope will overflow by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

, 33

**33 The God who gives peace be with you all. Amen.**

; 2 Cor. 13:11

**11 Now, brothers and sisters, I say good-bye. Live in harmony. Do what I have asked you to do. Agree with each other, and live in peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.**

; Phil. 4:9

**9 Do what you learned and received from me, what I told you, and what you saw me do. And the God who gives peace will be with you.**

). Peace, then, is not just a mental state, a word to be cross-stitched or sought after—it is a theologically rich and deeply practical experience that was earned by Jesus and freely given to His children, who, in turn, will not be able to keep from giving the good news to those around them.

inSight

Downloading Wisdom  
The Bible is God’s great lesson book, His great educator. The foundation of all true science is contained in the Bible. Every branch of knowledge may be found by searching the word of God. And above all else it contains the science of all sciences, the science of salvation. The Bible is the mine of the unsearchable riches of Christ. The true higher education is gained by studying and obeying the word of God. But when God’s word is laid aside for books that do not lead to God and the kingdom of heaven, the education acquired is a perversion of the name.There are wonderful truths in nature. The earth, the sea, and the sky are full of truth. They are our teachers. Nature utters her voice in lessons of heavenly wisdom and eternal truth. But fallen man will not understand. Sin has obscured his vision, and he cannot of himself interpret nature without placing it above God. Correct lessons cannot impress the minds of those who reject the word of God. The teaching of nature is by them so perverted that it turns the mind away from the Creator. By many, man’s wisdom is thought to be higher than the wisdom of the divine Teacher, and God’s lesson book is looked upon as old-fashioned, stale, and uninteresting. But by those who have been vivified by the Holy Spirit it is not so regarded. They see the priceless treasure, and would sell all to buy the field that contains it. Instead of books containing the suppositions of reputedly great authors, they choose the word of Him who is the greatest author and the greatest teacher the world has ever known, who gave His life for us, that through Him we might have everlasting life. (Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, 107, 108.) Many of our youth suffer shipwreck in the dangerous voyage of life, because they are self-confident and presumptuous. They follow their inclinations, and are allured by amusements, and indulgence of appetite, till habits are formed which become shackles, impossible for them to break, and which drag them down to ruin. . . . If the youth of our day would, like young King Solomon, feel their need of heavenly wisdom, and seek to develop and strengthen their higher faculties, and consecrate them to the service of God, their lives would show great and noble results, and bring pure and holy happiness to themselves and many others. (Ellen G. White, SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 2, 1024.)

inQuire

How is wisdom obtained? How is it different from how knowledge is obtained?Describe a truly wise person that you know. How can you see their wisdom?Why do you think it is specifically “envy” and “self-seeking” that lead to every other evil?How can you unlearn the standards of worldly wisdom?Which of the attributes of heavenly wisdom stand out to you the most? Why?Why is peace so important in this week’s passage? Share a time where someone was “willing to yield.” What impression did that experience make on you?

THE IMPORTANCE OF WHAT YOU WANT

inTro

What Do You Desire?  
Read This Week’s Passage: James 4:1–10

**Whence wars and whence fightings among you? not hence, of your pleasures that war in your members?Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and covet, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war; ye have not, because ye ask not.Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend in your pleasures.Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God.Or think ye that the scripture speaketh in vain? Doth the spirit which he made to dwell in us long unto envying?But he giveth more grace. Wherefore saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.Be subject therefore unto God; but resist the devil, and he will flee from you.Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye doubleminded.Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall exalt you.**

What  
Do You Desire? In a world where it’s easier to blame everyone and everything else, James begins chapter 4 by dismantling that mindset entirely: Where do all of the issues come from? You. Worldly problems being solved in a worldly way will never be fixed. But the issue is never the fruit; it’s the root.James could have described his listeners a few different ways, but he chooses to use the label of someone who is unfaithful to their spouse, often in a very intimate and personal way. It is spiritual adultery to seek the affections of the world while claiming intimacy with God. Friendship with the world cannot be held in tandem with closeness with God; it is not, “should not,” but cannot. Where someone is investing, pouring their desires, and focusing betrays where their loyalties lie, even if their words say something different. One does not even need to be successful in the world to turn one’s back on God. James says, “Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4

**4 So, you are not loyal to God! You should know that loving the world is the same as hating God. Anyone who wants to be a friend of the world becomes God’s enemy.**

; emphasis supplied). It is possible to look like a God follower on the outside and yet desire something else entirely on the inside. The self-diagnosis questions, then, are: What do you really want? Where are your desires leaning? And where are you encouraging them to go?

inGest

Getting What You Want  
James doesn’t hold back even from the onset of chapter 4: battles, wars, and fights arise because of a focus on and a drive for the fulfillment of pleasures. The listeners aren’t told what these “pleasures” are, but they are told how they’re trying to obtain them: by lusting, murdering, coveting, and fighting. Even legitimate and healthy desires can be turned into something terrible when gone after in the wrong way; desiring a deep connection with another human is legitimate and God-given, but seeking it by stalking is neither. Desires for unhealthy or downright sinful experiences take it a step further by being harmful in both the end and the means. All the worldly ways of gaining simply do not work. Lusting and coveting build a sickening desire for something, while murdering and fighting seek to take things by force and violation of someone else. These ways of gaining something appeal to the carnal heart because they lend a semblance of control and accomplishment. But it is all smoke and mirrors. When one is seeking to gain in such ineffective ways, James asks, Where is God? Going about gaining access to pleasures in such reckless ways betrays a deep distrust in God. Why not simply ask Him? The believer should trust Him to provide and to give what is needed. Often, though, God is far from the minds of even those who confess allegiance to Him. Sometimes someone will pray to God, ask for what they want, and they won’t get it. Does that mean God wasn’t listening? There are several reasons for unanswered prayer, and James provides one explicitly here: “You ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:3

**3 Or when you ask, you do not receive because the reason you ask is wrong. You want things so you can use them for your own pleasures.**

). If God were to fuel the hedonistic pleasures of His children or enable them to further invest in broken cisterns, it would violate the law of love. How could He encourage His children to seek out what will never satisfy, will only harm, will only lead to wanting more of the same vapor? Sometimes God says “No” because He knows saying “Yes” would only lead to harm. It’s easy to misunderstand God when prayer is seen as using God as a vending machine or a similar transactional relationship. Prayer is not about strong-arming God and bending Him to our will—it is about surrendering to His will, learning to trust Him more, and allowing Him to change us. The humble surrender of prayer is a far cry from the murdering and lusting that the world recommends to get what one wants. Then again, God always does seem to have a non-worldly way of doing just about everything.

inTerpret

Encouraged by Lamentation  
The first half of James 4:8

**8 Come near to God, and God will come near to you. You sinners, clean sin out of your lives. You who are trying to follow God and the world at the same time, make your thinking pure.**

is likely to be on cross-stitched pillows and wall hangings: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” It is both an invitation and a promise, one that reminds us of God’s desire to be with His people in an intimate way. The second half of the verse, though, is less known and less cross-stitched: “Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded” The following verse further encourages the reader to “lament and mourn and weep!” (v. 9). Why are these parts of verses 8 and 9 less known? When these harsher-sounding sentences are taken out of context, they can be misconstrued to mean some unbiblical things: We must cleanse our own hearts and minds before coming to God; He does not like joy in His presence; laughter is disrespectful; godly Christians should be full of mourning and gloom. Though silly to some, these are real conclusions that others have drawn from verses like these. Instead of lifting them from the page, they’re better understood in context. What is James talking about? Submitting to God, resisting the devil, and drawing near to God. While here—in surrender to God and in nearness to Him—a sense of personal sinfulness is inescapable. Ellen White writes that “the closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature. This is evidence that Satan’s delusions have lost their power; that the vivifying influence of the Spirit of God is arousing you.”[i] How should one respond to this? In humility, in doing one’s part in being cleansed (putting away certain habits and experiences, asking God to change one’s heart), in lamenting and mourning one’s sinful condition (putting away laughter and joy that does not stem from godly pleasures). Lamenting, mourning, and weeping are common experiences throughout the Bible that are connected with a recognition of one’s dismal situation, deep repentance, and a desire to turn back to God (Jer. 49:3

**3  “People in the town of Heshbon, cry sadly because the town of Ai is destroyed! Those who live in Rabbah, cry out! Put on your rough cloth to show your sadness, and cry loudly. Run here and there for safety inside the walls, because Molech will be taken captive and his priests and officers with him.**

; 4:28

**28  So the people in the land will cry loudly, and the sky will grow dark, because I have spoken and will not change my mind. I have made a decision, and I will not change it.”**

; Ezek. 7:27

**27 The king will cry greatly, the prince will give up hope, and the hands of the people who own land will shake with fear. I will punish them for the way they have lived. The way they have judged others is the way I will judge them. Then they will know that I am the Lord.”**

; Isa. 22:4

**4  So I say, “Don’t look at me. Let me cry loudly. Don’t hurry to comfort me about the destruction of Jerusalem.”**

; and the book of Lamentations). Throughout the Old Testament, prophets would encourage the people to lament, mourn, and weep, because this would be the first step in seeing reality and then being reconciled to God. Out of context, these verses can seem discouraging; but this experience is irrefutable evidence that the delusions of sin are fading and giving way to clear sight and a deeper surrender to Christ.

inSpect

How do the following verses relate to the primary passage?Matthew 7:7

**Ask God for What You Need 7 “Ask, and God will give to you. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will open for you.**

1 John 2:17

**17 The world and everything that people want in it are passing away, but the person who does what God wants lives forever.**

1 John 5:14

**14 And this is the boldness we have in God’s presence: that if we ask God for anything that agrees with what he wants, he hears us.**

, 15

**15 If we know he hears us every time we ask him, we know we have what we ask from him.**

Romans 5:15

**15 But God’s free gift is not like Adam’s sin. Many people died because of the sin of that one man. But the grace from God was much greater; many people received God’s gift of life by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ.**

1 Peter 5:8

**8 Control yourselves and be careful! The devil, your enemy, goes around like a roaring lion looking for someone to eat.**

Proverbs 3:34

**34  The Lord laughs at those who laugh at him, but he gives grace to those who are not proud.**

What other verses come to mind in connection with James 4:1–10

**Give Yourselves to God 4 Do you know where your fights and arguments come from? They come from the selfish desires that war within you. 2 You want things, but you do not have them. So you are ready to kill and are jealous of other people, but you still cannot get what you want. So you argue and fight. You do not get what you want, because you do not ask God. 3 Or when you ask, you do not receive because the reason you ask is wrong. You want things so you can use them for your own pleasures. 4 So, you are not loyal to God! You should know that loving the world is the same as hating God. Anyone who wants to be a friend of the world becomes God’s enemy. 5 Do you think the Scripture means nothing that says, “The Spirit that God made to live in us wants us for himself alone”? n 6 But God gives us even more grace, as the Scripture says, “God is against the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.” Proverbs 3:34 7 So give yourselves completely to God. Stand against the devil, and the devil will run from you. 8 Come near to God, and God will come near to you. You sinners, clean sin out of your lives. You who are trying to follow God and the world at the same time, make your thinking pure. 9 Be sad, cry, and weep! Change your laughter into crying and your joy into sadness. 10 Humble yourself in the Lord’s presence, and he will honor you.**

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inVite

The Yearning Savior  
After emphasizing the impossibility of simultaneous friendship with the world and God, James articulates why this is: “Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, ‘The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously’?” (James 4:5

**5 Do you think the Scripture means nothing that says, “The Spirit that God made to live in us wants us for himself alone”? n**

). The Holy Spirit fiercely woos the heart that He is invited into. God does not want to share the throne of anyone’s heart. He yearns jealously. Using the analogy of adultery, God is deeply betrayed and torn by a divided heart in His child. The inner suffering of a faithful spouse when betrayed is mirrored and amplified in the Spirit of God when His children have world-loving hearts. Jesus expressed this deep yearning for His people when He lamented over Israel: “ ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” ’ ” (Matt. 23:37–39

**Jesus Feels Sorry for Jerusalem 37 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone to death those who are sent to you. Many times I wanted to gather your people as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you did not let me.38 Now your house will be left completely empty. 39 I tell you, you will not see me again until that time when you will say, ‘God bless the One who comes in the name of the Lord.’ ” n**

). He acknowledges at the beginning their betrayal: they have even scorned and killed the messengers seeking to reconcile them with their King. Jesus yearns for their hearts, to protect them. But by their own actions and hearts they have chosen a desolate house and to not see His face again until their choices are not changeable. Does the Spirit simply yearn and then leave it to humanity’s weakness to make a change? No, “but He gives more grace” (James 4:6

**6 But God gives us even more grace, as the Scripture says, “God is against the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.” Proverbs 3:34**

). The Spirit of God does not leave humanity stranded with contrary hearts. He gives grace—that wonderful grace secured by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus!—for surrender and a change wrought by His power. With Charles Spurgeon, we should “[n]ote that contrast; note it always. Observe how weak we are, how strong he is; how proud we are, how condescending he is; how erring we are, and how infallible he is; how changing we are, and how immutable he is; how provoking we are, and how forgiving he is. Observe how in us there is only ill, and how in him there is only good. Yet our ill but draws his goodness forth, and still he blesseth. Oh! what a rich contrast!” (“More and More,” in The Complete Works of C. H. Spurgeon, vol. 61.) If His children would only acknowledge the reality of their need, He will send all the grace needed and more. This grace leads His child to submit to God and resist the devil, and the devil will flee, knowing that he is no match (v. 7). Humans cannot resist the devil in their own strength; submission to God is paramount and primary. And God gives the grace for even this.

inSight

Spiritual Resistance  
By the one who had revolted in heaven the kingdoms of this world were offered Christ, to buy His homage to the principles of evil; but He would not be bought; He had come to establish a kingdom of righteousness, and He would not abandon His purpose. With the same temptation Satan approaches men, and here he has better success than with Christ. To men he offers the kingdom of this world on condition that they will acknowledge his supremacy. He requires that they sacrifice integrity, disregard conscience, indulge selfishness. Christ bids them seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; but Satan walks by their side and says: Whatever may be true in regard to life eternal, in order to make a success in this world you must serve me. I hold your welfare in my hands. I can give you riches, pleasures, honor, and happiness. Hearken to my counsel. Do not allow yourselves to be carried away with whimsical notions of honesty or self-sacrifice. I will prepare the way before you. Thus multitudes are deceived. They consent to live for the service of self, and Satan is satisfied. While he allures them with the hope of worldly dominion, he gains dominion over the soul. But he offers that which is not his to bestow, and which is soon to be wrested from him. In return he beguiles them of their title to the inheritance of the sons of God. Satan had questioned whether Jesus was the Son of God. In his summary dismissal he had proof that he could not gainsay. Divinity flashed through suffering humanity. Satan had no power to resist the command. Writhing with humiliation and rage, he was forced to withdraw from the presence of the world’s Redeemer. Christ’s victory was as complete as had been the failure of Adam. So we may resist temptation, and force Satan to depart from us. Jesus gained the victory through submission and faith in God, and by the apostle He says to us, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.” James 4:7

**7 So give yourselves completely to God. Stand against the devil, and the devil will run from you.**

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**8 Come near to God, and God will come near to you. You sinners, clean sin out of your lives. You who are trying to follow God and the world at the same time, make your thinking pure.**

. We cannot save ourselves from the tempter’s power; he has conquered humanity, and when we try to stand in our own strength, we shall become a prey to his devices; but “the name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.” Proverbs 18:10

**10  The Lord is like a strong tower; those who do right can run to him for safety.**

. Satan trembles and flees before the weakest soul who finds refuge in that mighty name. (Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, 130, 131.)

inQuire

How have you experienced “wars and fights” as a result of desires for pleasures?What does it practically mean and look like to desire friendship with the world?How does the world tell you to accomplish and/or gain things? Give some concrete examples. How does God’s Word compare with those instructions? Be specific. How can you pray for things that you want in a biblical, balanced way? Think of a time that mourning was good for you. Describe that experience and what you can learn from it. How does knowing that God “yearns jealously” for you affect your life? How can we want to be friends with God instead of the world and not just look like it?

YOU’RE NOT WHO YOU THINK YOU ARE

inTro

Who Are You?  
Read This Week’s Passage: James 4:11–17

**Speak not one against another, brethren. He that speaketh against a brother, or judgeth his brother, speaketh against the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judgest the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.One is the lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy: but who art thou that judgest thy neighbor?Come now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into this city, and spend a year there, and trade, and get gain:whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. What is your life? For ye are a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall both live, and do this or that.But now ye glory in your vauntings: all such glorying is evil.To him therefore that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.**

Who Are You?Several passages throughout Scripture seek to give the reader a correct view of themselves. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus shared how God took care of the sparrows, and then asked, “ ‘Are you not of more value than they?’ ” pointing out God’s deep care for lesser creatures, and thus how much more is the value of every human life (Matt. 6:26

**26 Look at the birds in the air. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, but your heavenly Father feeds them. And you know that you are worth much more than the birds.**

). God sometimes directly asks about His listener’s identity to draw their attention to who they really are. In Isaiah, He asked His people, “ ‘Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die, and of the son of a man who will be made like grass?’ ” (Isa. 51:12

**12  The Lord says, “I am the one who comforts you. So why should you be afraid of people, who die? Why should you fear people who die like the grass?**

). He appealed to their identity as His people to demonstrate the foolishness of fearing another human. These passages and others like them focus on the need to value oneself as a child of God and see oneself more valuable than one might think, based on what God says. In this week’s passage, James has a parallel goal in mind. Instead of elevating one’s view of self, James encourages his listeners to lower it when it has become too high. “Who are you to judge another?” he asks, pointing out that their identity did not come with judgment credentials (James 4:12

**12 God is the only Lawmaker and Judge. He is the only One who can save and destroy. So it is not right for you to judge your neighbor.**

). “What is your life?” he asks, pointing out that no human is eternal nor omniscient (v. 14). Though the earlier mentioned verses on the value of human life are possibly more encouraging outright, James’ words have the important function of providing a well-rounded view of oneself: every human is eternally valuable, loved, and cared for; at the same time, God is God and His creatures are just creatures after all. Understanding both enables a balanced view of oneself and of God.

inGest

Higher Consequences  
After establishing the great power of the tongue (James 3), James further explores how using one’s tongue inappropriately has consequences. Speaking evil of a brother is closely tied with judging that brother, which is a job that God has not given His children. The Greek word used here for “speak evil” refers to slander, which is “the sin of those who meet in corners and gather in little groups and pass on confidential tidbits of information which destroy the good name of those who are not there to defend themselves.” (William Barclay, The Letters of James and Peter, The New Daily Study Bible, 128.) This is not a good use of the abilities God has entrusted. There’s a higher consequence here, though. Not only is the evil speaker judging their brother, but they are speaking evil of and judging the law. Jesus already made it clear that His followers are not to judge one another (Matt. 7:1–5

**Be Careful About Judging Others 7 “Don’t judge others, or you will be judged. 2 You will be judged in the same way that you judge others, and the amount you give to others will be given to you. 3 “Why do you notice the little piece of dust in your friend’s eye, but you don’t notice the big piece of wood in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your friend, ‘Let me take that little piece of dust out of your eye’? Look at yourself! You still have that big piece of wood in your own eye. 5 You hypocrite! First, take the wood out of your own eye. Then you will see clearly to take the dust out of your friend’s eye.**

). Furthermore, speaking evil is also not loving one’s neighbor as oneself, which is a key part of summing up the entire law (Matt. 22:38–40

**38 This is the first and most important command. 39 And the second command is like the first: ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ n 40 All the law and the writings of the prophets depend on these two commands.”**

). Sometimes someone can think the law doesn’t apply to them because they’re breaking it for a good reason. In this way, they place themselves above the law, judging it as unfair, unreasonable, or not worthy to be wholly followed. This changes one’s relationship with the law from a doer to a judge, which is not humanity’s place. God is the only one who can give the law and judge people, because He’s the only one with the right to do it (as both Creator and Redeemer), and He’s the only one who does it correctly. “Who are you to judge another?” James asks, appealing to His followers’ lack of credentials for such an action. James wraps up this section with an expanded definition of sin: “To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17

**17 Anyone who knows the right thing to do, but does not do it, is sinning.**

). Lack of doing can be just as sinful as doing. It was a sin for the priest and the Levite to not help the man on the road (Luke 10:25–37

**The Good Samaritan 25 Then an expert on the law stood up to test Jesus, saying, “Teacher, what must I do to get life forever?” 26 Jesus said, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” 27 The man answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.” n Also, “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.” n 28 Jesus said to him, “Your answer is right. Do this and you will live.” 29 But the man, wanting to show the importance of his question, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 30 Jesus answered, “As a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, some robbers attacked him. They tore off his clothes, beat him, and left him lying there, almost dead. 31 It happened that a priest was going down that road. When he saw the man, he walked by on the other side. 32 Next, a Levite n came there, and after he went over and looked at the man, he walked by on the other side of the road. 33 Then a Samaritan n traveling down the road came to where the hurt man was. When he saw the man, he felt very sorry for him. 34 The Samaritan went to him, poured olive oil and wine n on his wounds, and bandaged them. Then he put the hurt man on his own donkey and took him to an inn where he cared for him. 35 The next day, the Samaritan brought out two coins, n gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of this man. If you spend more money on him, I will pay it back to you when I come again.’ ” 36 Then Jesus said, “Which one of these three men do you think was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by the robbers?” 37 The expert on the law answered, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Then go and do what he did.”**

). Notice that there is knowledge involved: “ . . . who knows to do good.” This was a theme in Jesus’ parables, too, as in the unfaithful servant who was punished more severely because he knew his master’s will (Luke 12:47

**47 “The servant who knows what his master wants but is not ready, or who does not do what the master wants, will be beaten with many blows!**

). With increased understanding comes increased responsibility and greater consequences; simultaneously, with increased understanding comes increased potential for blessing others and having a closer intimacy with God. As His children allow the Holy Spirit to teach them, God will also guide them in what He has already revealed, leading them into doing more good as they learn more good.

inTerpret

Is Planning Evil?  
Those with a P (“perceiving”) in their Myers-Briggs personality type may try to use James 4:13–15

**Let God Plan Your Life 13 Some of you say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to some city. We will stay there a year, do business, and make money.” 14 But you do not know what will happen tomorrow! Your life is like a mist. You can see it for a short time, but then it goes away. 15 So you should say, “If the Lord wants, we will live and do this or that.”**

to denounce all planning. The idea can even be bolstered by the Sermon on the Mount, right? “Do not worry about tomorrow…” (Matt. 6:34

**34 So don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will have its own worries. Each day has enough trouble of its own.**

) means, “Don’t even think about it,” so planning for the future and reaching toward the unknown is a Christian taboo. Right? Ah, no. Actually, like the latter verses of Matthew 6, planning is not being denounced here in James, but a harmful posture of the heart while planning is.While there is a type of planning for organizational purposes, there is also a type of planning that grasps at control it can never have. James is warning against losing sight of the lack of control humanity has over the future, and even the lack of foreknowledge. He encourages his listeners to remember that their lives are “even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (James 4:14

**14 But you do not know what will happen tomorrow! Your life is like a mist. You can see it for a short time, but then it goes away.**

). Don’t pretend that you are immortal or all-wise, he warns, and a good heart-check for you to do is to see how you go about your planning. How can His children adjust their plans to acknowledge God and their frailty? To set plans with an understanding of their dependence on Him, “instead [they] ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that’ ” (v. 15). Plans are all right; they just have to be made in the context of God’s will and providence, leaning on Him as is always needed in the past, present, or future, being willing to change or even give up on these plans if God’s leading so directs. The converse is continuing in one’s own way, boasting in arrogance, thinking that one knows everything, can control everything, and has no need of consulting or depending on God for future plans. This is not only harmful, but it also departs from reality. As has been shown in earlier lessons this week, this is why a balanced and biblical view of oneself is paramount. Thinking too little or too highly of oneself warps reality, because there are ripple effects based on one’s grasp of one’s own identity. “Lord willing” should not be used as a simple cliché that’s appended to what was being planned anyway. What is needed is a posture of the heart that bows in submission to God’s enduring love and vast knowledge, that trusts He will do what’s best even when He’s painting on a larger canvas than His child can immediately see. “If the Lord wills” means the plans are only desired if the Lord wills, because He is more trustworthy than emotions or short-sighted understanding.

inSpect

How do the following verses relate to the primary passage?Matthew 6:25–34

**Don’t Worry 25 “So I tell you, don’t worry about the food or drink you need to live, or about the clothes you need for your body. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothes. 26 Look at the birds in the air. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, but your heavenly Father feeds them. And you know that you are worth much more than the birds. 27 You cannot add any time to your life by worrying about it. 28 “And why do you worry about clothes? Look at how the lilies in the field grow. They don’t work or make clothes for themselves. 29 But I tell you that even Solomon with his riches was not dressed as beautifully as one of these flowers. 30 God clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today but tomorrow is thrown into the fire. So you can be even more sure that God will clothe you. Don’t have so little faith! 31 Don’t worry and say, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ 32 The people who don’t know God keep trying to get these things, and your Father in heaven knows you need them. 33 Seek first God’s kingdom and what God wants. Then all your other needs will be met as well. 34 So don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will have its own worries. Each day has enough trouble of its own.**

Proverbs 19:21

**21  People can make all kinds of plans, but only the Lord’s plan will happen.**

Colossians 2:9

**9 All of God lives fully in Christ (even when Christ was on earth),**

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**10 and you have a full and true life in Christ, who is ruler over all rulers and powers.**

1 Peter 2:9

**9 But you are a chosen people, royal priests, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession. You were chosen to tell about the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**

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**10 At one time you were not a people, but now you are God’s people. In the past you had never received mercy, but now you have received God’s mercy.**

Jeremiah 31What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with James 4:11–17

**You Are Not the Judge 11 Brothers and sisters, do not tell evil lies about each other. If you speak against your fellow believers or judge them, you are judging and speaking against the law they follow. And when you are judging the law, you are no longer a follower of the law. You have become a judge. 12 God is the only Lawmaker and Judge. He is the only One who can save and destroy. So it is not right for you to judge your neighbor. Let God Plan Your Life 13 Some of you say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to some city. We will stay there a year, do business, and make money.” 14 But you do not know what will happen tomorrow! Your life is like a mist. You can see it for a short time, but then it goes away. 15 So you should say, “If the Lord wants, we will live and do this or that.” 16 But now you are proud and you brag. All of this bragging is wrong. 17 Anyone who knows the right thing to do, but does not do it, is sinning.**

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inVite

The Judgments of Jesus  
Though Jesus was perfect and had every right to judge those around Him, that’s not why He came to earth. In his conversation with Nicodemus under cover of darkness, He explained that He did not come “ ‘into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved’ ” (John 3:17

**17 God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world guilty, but to save the world through him.**

). He didn’t come to judge and revamp the law, either; He came to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17

**The Importance of the Law 17 “Don’t think that I have come to destroy the law of Moses or the teaching of the prophets. I have not come to destroy them but to bring about what they said.**

). From the start, Jesus’ mission and focus was far different from what the Pharisees of back then and today wish it was. Humanity’s natural way of judgment, stemming from selfishness, is to harm, get back at, or criticize out of pride. When Jesus was unwelcome in a Samaritan town on the way to Jerusalem, His disciples recommended calling down fire on the town as a response. But Jesus rebuked them, saying, “ ‘You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them’ ” (Luke 9:55

**55 But Jesus turned and scolded them. [And Jesus said, “You don’t know what kind of spirit you belong to.**

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**56 The Son of Man did not come to destroy the souls of people but to save them.”] n Then they went to another town.**

). God’s way of judgment is different. Instead of coming from a place of selfishness, it pours out from a place of deep, redemptive love. As Jesus cried out the destruction in store for His people, He lamented that they would not come to Him instead so that He could protect them (Matt. 23:37

**Jesus Feels Sorry for Jerusalem 37 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone to death those who are sent to you. Many times I wanted to gather your people as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you did not let me.**

). This is not a judgment that delights in destruction or harm, even when it’s justified! It is a judgment that desires to redeem. All of Jesus’ judgments, too, are not arbitrary but simply trying to bring people back to reality. He beckoned the people away from the religion of the Pharisees because it was truly not going to help them; they would only thirst more after water from these broken cisterns. He pointed out the spiritual poverty of the religious leaders to show them where they were, so that they could change through surrender. If Jesus had been “judgmental” in the way that humanity can be and often use that word, then the tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners would not have flocked to Him as they had. This was one of the religious leaders’ most constant complaints against Jesus: “Why do all these bad people love You so much? And why do You let them come to You?” (see Luke 15:1

**A Lost Sheep, a Lost Coin 15 The tax collectors and sinners all came to listen to Jesus.**

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**2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to complain: “Look, this man welcomes sinners and even eats with them.”**

). It was because all of Jesus’ instruction, censure, and guidance came from an overflow of love. The only people who can be offended by that are those who choose to not see their need.

inSight

Meek and Lowly in Heart  
The less you meditate upon Christ and His matchless love and the less you are assimilated to His image, the better will you appear in your own eyes, and the more self-confidence and self-complacency will you possess. A correct knowledge of Christ, a constant looking unto the Author and Finisher of our faith, will give you such a view of the character of a true Christian that you cannot fail to make a right estimate of your own life and character in contrast with those of the great Exemplar. . . .The fitting up for your work is a life business, a daily, laborious, hand-to-hand struggle with established habits, inclinations, and hereditary tendencies. It requires a constant, earnest, and vigilant effort to watch and control self, to keep Jesus prominent and self out of sight. It is necessary for you to watch for the weak points in your character, to restrain wrong tendencies, and to strengthen and develop noble faculties that have not been properly exercised. The world will never know the work secretly going on between the soul and God, nor the inward bitterness of spirit, the self-loathing, and the constant efforts to control self; but many of the world will be able to appreciate the result of these efforts. They will see Christ revealed in your daily life. You will be a living epistle, known and read of all men, and will possess a symmetrical character, nobly developed. “Learn of me,” said Christ; “for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” He will instruct those who come to Him for knowledge. There are multitudes of false teachers in the world. The apostle declares that in the last days men will “heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears,” because they desire to hear smooth things. Against these Christ has warned us: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits.” The class of religious teachers here described profess to be Christians. They have the form of godliness and appear to be laboring for the good of souls. . . . They are in conflict with Christ and His teachings, and are destitute of His meek and lowly spirit. . . . The Good Shepherd came to seek and to save that which was lost. He has manifested in His works His love for His sheep. All the shepherds who work under the Chief Shepherd will possess His characteristics; they will be meek and lowly of heart. Childlike faith brings rest to the soul and also works by love and is ever interested for others. If the Spirit of Christ dwells in them, they will be Christlike and do the works of Christ. (Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, 375–377.)

inQuire

How much of a balanced view do you have of yourself? Of your value and importance in your place as a human? Explain. How does Jesus help those who naturally have too low of an estimate of themselves, but also those who have too high of an estimate?Are you more of a planner or more spontaneous? How can you express trust in Jesus more in both?How does judging others harm ourselves?What are some of your favorite verses that articulate our relation to God? What do you love about them?How did Jesus balance being completely accepting but also not excusing sin? What are practical ways to regularly meditate on God’s love?

THE EVILS OF RICHES

inTro

What Do You Do with What You Have?  
Read This Week’s Passage: James 5:1–6

**Come now, ye rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you.Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.Your gold and your silver are rusted; and their rust shall be for a testimony against you, and shall eat your flesh as fire. Ye have laid up your treasure in the last days.Behold, the hire of the laborers who mowed your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth out: and the cries of them that reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.Ye have lived delicately on the earth, and taken your pleasure; ye have nourished your hearts in a day of slaughter.Ye have condemned, ye have killed the righteous; he doth not resist you.**

What  
Do You Do with What You Have? After the rich young ruler walked away from Him, Jesus shared with His disciples that “it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:23

**23 Then Jesus said to his followers, “I tell you the truth, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven.**

). Contrary to how it’s sometimes portrayed, the Bible holds no criticism of riches themselves. All of the negativity about wealth focuses on one’s relation to riches; in the case of the rich young ruler, he chose his wealth over following the commands of Jesus. The focus is on the posture of the heart.Like all gifts from God, one’s usage of riches determines more than the riches do themselves. In this week’s passage, James explores how the rich often use their power to defraud, condemn, and even murder. This is the condemnation—how power and influence gained by wealth is wielded as a weapon instead of as an opportunity for love. James spares no words as he rebukes the rich in his audience. Continuing his focus on actions, he details specific ways the rich have failed to live up to the standard of love. Though they may not be conscious of consequences now, James assures them that the day is coming, and what they have so trusted in will be witnesses against them in the end.

inGest

What Is Enough?  
At the end of chapter 4, James has just finished establishing the importance of depending on God even in one’s business plans, a seemingly non-spiritual aspect of one’s life. James emphasizes that God’s people should not forget Him even in this. Another way humanity sometimes deviates from God is depending on security devised by their own hands. A common source is wealth; in many ways, the world makes it look like the best safety net out there! Perhaps it is the best worldly security, but it is still woefully inadequate when compared with true security. James himself points this out: riches become corrupt, gold and silver corrode, and moths can destroy beautiful clothing (5:2, 3). Even the things the world trusts most will always be inadequate and disappoint.It’s easy to gloss over passages like this, particularly if the rich are always “someone else.” The interesting thing about money, though, is that character can be revealed even with a small amount of it. Patterns are established and revealed with the smallest opportunities (Matt. 25:14–30

**A Story About Three Servants 14 “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who was going to another place for a visit. Before he left, he called for his servants and told them to take care of his things while he was gone. 15 He gave one servant five bags of gold, another servant two bags of gold, and a third servant one bag of gold, to each one as much as he could handle. Then he left. 16 The servant who got five bags went quickly to invest the money and earned five more bags. 17 In the same way, the servant who had two bags invested them and earned two more. 18 But the servant who got one bag went out and dug a hole in the ground and hid the master’s money. 19 “After a long time the master came home and asked the servants what they did with his money. 20 The servant who was given five bags of gold brought five more bags to the master and said, ‘Master, you trusted me to care for five bags of gold, so I used your five bags to earn five more.’ 21 The master answered, ‘You did well. You are a good and loyal servant. Because you were loyal with small things, I will let you care for much greater things. Come and share my joy with me.’ 22 “Then the servant who had been given two bags of gold came to the master and said, ‘Master, you gave me two bags of gold to care for, so I used your two bags to earn two more.’ 23 The master answered, ‘You did well. You are a good and loyal servant. Because you were loyal with small things, I will let you care for much greater things. Come and share my joy with me.’ 24 “Then the servant who had been given one bag of gold came to the master and said, ‘Master, I knew that you were a hard man. You harvest things you did not plant. You gather crops where you did not sow any seed. 25 So I was afraid and went and hid your money in the ground. Here is your bag of gold.’ 26 The master answered, ‘You are a wicked and lazy servant! You say you knew that I harvest things I did not plant and that I gather crops where I did not sow any seed. 27 So you should have put my gold in the bank. Then, when I came home, I would have received my gold back with interest.’ 28 “So the master told his other servants, ‘Take the bag of gold from that servant and give it to the servant who has ten bags of gold. 29 Those who have much will get more, and they will have much more than they need. But those who do not have much will have everything taken away from them.’ 30 Then the master said, ‘Throw that useless servant outside, into the darkness where people will cry and grind their teeth with pain.’**

). Alongside the rich, people of all economic statuses should consider two important questions: Where are you gaining your riches? Does it come from honest hard work or defrauding others? Are you gaining through wisdom or through hoarding? What are you doing with the money that you have (great or small)? Do you use it as an opportunity to love, serve, and bless others? Or do you use it to inflate your own self-importance, taking the opportunity to wield your influence in a harmful way? Both questions can be summarized as: What does your money reveal about your character? Beyond how it affects others, hoarded and ill-gotten gain hurt the possessor too. It reveals an unhealthy trust in riches, maybe for security, but also for happiness. When does enough become enough? The rich described in this passage are withholding wages from people who mow their fields—is what they have not enough? They have used their influence (likely using bribes too) to condemn and murder the just—is what they have not enough? They continue to heap up treasure in the last days, when they are surrounded by opportunities to love others—is what they have not enough? The issues here aren’t about the possession of wealth; they’re about how wealth is being used to harm the possessor and those in their sphere of influence. It reveals a pattern of greed, a scarcity mindset, and a distrust in the One who gives all gifts. Money, like other gifts, is simply another opportunity to reveal the character of the one who holds it.

inTerpret

Why So Harsh?  
Even with all of the explanations so far this week, James’s choice words for the rich can still seem harsh. Further unpacking the context can be helpful to gain further insight. James 4:17

**17 Anyone who knows the right thing to do, but does not do it, is sinning.**

is the verse directly before James 5:1

**A Warning to the Rich 5 You rich people, listen! Cry and be very sad because of the troubles that are coming to you.**

. Chapter separations, though incredibly helpful in organization, are not necessarily inspired; one chapter’s thoughts do not end with its organizational end. Said another way, James 4 and James 5 are not as separate as they might look in our modern Bibles. At the end of chapter 4, James explains that sin is not just doing evil, but it is also abstaining from known goodness. This is incredibly relevant for the rich. Jesus shared a parable of two servants who disobeyed their master while he was gone. The servant who did not know his master’s will was not punished as severely as the servant who did know his master’s will, because “everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required” (Luke 12:48

**48 But the servant who does not know what his master wants and does things that should be punished will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded. And from the one trusted with much, much more will be expected.**

). Like talents and gifts, increased money gives both an increased chance of greater blessing and greater evil. It’s up to the individual as to how it will be used. Despairing over the wickedness of His people, God described them through the prophet Jeremiah, saying, “ ‘As a cage is full of birds, so their houses are full of deceit. Therefore they have become great and grown rich. They have grown fat, they are sleek; yes, they surpass the deeds of the wicked; they do not plead the cause, the cause of the fatherless; yet they prosper, and the right of the needy they do not defend’ ” (Jer. 5:27

**27  Like cages full of birds, their houses are full of lies. They have become rich and powerful.**

, 28

**28  They have grown big and fat. There is no end to the evil things they do. They won’t plead the case of the orphan or help the poor be judged fairly.**

). Like the rich that James describes, the wealthy were not using their gifts of influence and power for selflessness, for helping others. It only gave further expression to the wickedness of their hearts. Evil abounded because wealth was used as an opportunity to gain even more wealth. As God warned His people throughout the Old Testament in order to have them return to Himself, James warns the rich not out of hatred but out of love. He seems to be sharing the inevitable destruction of their beloved riches as something that this particular audience doesn’t seem to be aware of. They are accruing riches as if they can be depended on. They are trusting in riches as if they are eternal. Instead, these precious materials will be a witness against them and will eat their flesh like fire; the very thing they trusted in will harm them. James uses these harsh words because he’s doing what he can to alert his listeners to their dire circumstances. The world may say the rich are great because they are rich. They may seem to get away with corruption and fraud, but a day of reckoning is coming when reality will be revealed. It would be best, James urges, for them to acknowledge this reality, right the wrongs, and change their ways before they are forced to.

inSpect

What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?Proverbs 11:28

**28  Those who trust in riches will be ruined, but a good person will be healthy like a green leaf.**

Job 31:24–28

**24  “I have not put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, ‘You are my security.’ 25  I have not celebrated my great wealth or the riches my hands had gained. 26  I have not thought about worshiping the sun in its brightness nor admired the moon moving in glory 27  so that my heart was pulled away from God. My hand has never offered the sun and moon a kiss of worship. 28  If I had, these also would have been sins to be punished, because I would have been unfaithful to God.**

Jeremiah 48:7

**7  You trust in the things you do and in your wealth, so you also will be captured. The god Chemosh will go into captivity and his priests and officers with him.**

Psalm 52:7

**7  “Look what happened to the man who did not depend on God but depended on his money. He grew strong by his evil plans.”**

Psalm 62:10

**10  Do not trust in force. Stealing is of no use. Even if you gain more riches, don’t put your trust in them.**

1 Timothy 6:17

**17 Command those who are rich with things of this world not to be proud. Tell them to hope in God, not in their uncertain riches. God richly gives us everything to enjoy.**

What other verses come to mind in connection with James 5:1–6

**A Warning to the Rich 5 You rich people, listen! Cry and be very sad because of the troubles that are coming to you. 2 Your riches have rotted, and your clothes have been eaten by moths. 3 Your gold and silver have rusted, and that rust will be a proof that you were wrong. It will eat your bodies like fire. You saved your treasure for the last days. 4 The pay you did not give the workers who mowed your fields cries out against you, and the cries of the workers have been heard by the Lord All-Powerful. 5 Your life on earth was full of rich living and pleasing yourselves with everything you wanted. You made yourselves fat, like an animal ready to be killed. 6 You have judged guilty and then murdered innocent people, who were not against you.**

?

inVite

The Greatest Power  
Though the religious leaders of His time were determined to disprove it, Jesus came by His power and influence honestly, because they were founded in His inherent identity. He was and continues to be God. Instead of wielding His identity as a weapon, He “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:7

**7  But he gave up his place with God and made himself nothing. He was born as a man and became like a servant.**

, 8

**8  And when he was living as a man, he humbled himself and was fully obedient to God, even when that caused his death—death on a cross.**

). He didn’t turn stones into bread even after fasting for forty days (Matt. 4:3

**3 The devil came to Jesus to tempt him, saying, “If you are the Son of God, tell these rocks to become bread.”**

, 4

**4 Jesus answered, “It is written in the Scriptures, ‘A person lives not on bread alone, but by everything God says.’ ” n**

). He didn’t release Himself from the torture of the cross, even when He was mocked for not saving Himself (Mark 15:31

**31 The leading priests and the teachers of the law were also making fun of Jesus. They said to each other, “He saved other people, but he can’t save himself.**

). As God, He retained the ownership of “the cattle on a thousand hills,” yet He lived on the kindnesses of others, with “nowhere to lay His head” (Psalm 50:10

**10  because every animal of the forest is already mine. The cattle on a thousand hills are mine.**

; Matt. 8:20

**20 Jesus said to him, “The foxes have holes to live in, and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to rest his head.”**

). Jesus is a marvelous example of overwhelming power that is controlled for the sake of blessing and loving others. Instead of using His power as a way to force others to do His will, He used it as an opportunity to serve and love those who people avoided: prostitutes, tax collectors, lepers, and all manner of sinners (Matt. 8:1–3

**Jesus Heals a Sick Man 8 When Jesus came down from the hill, great crowds followed him. 2 Then a man with a skin disease came to Jesus. The man bowed down before him and said, “Lord, you can heal me if you will.” 3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man and said, “I will. Be healed!” And immediately the man was healed from his disease.**

; 9:10

**10 As Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and “sinners” came and ate with Jesus and his followers.**

, 11

**11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked Jesus’ followers, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”**

). He even took the time to heal someone from the mob that arrested Him after a sword-happy disciple was overzealous in protecting His Lord (Luke 22:51

**51 Jesus said, “Stop! No more of this.” Then he touched the servant’s ear and healed him.**

). He chose to stay on that cross, lay down His life, and take it back up again so that He could be the reconciliation between the world and His Father (John 10:17

**17 The Father loves me because I give my life so that I can take it back again.**

, 18

**18 No one takes it away from me; I give my own life freely. I have the right to give my life, and I have the right to take it back. This is what my Father commanded me to do.”**

). With more power than the human mind can fathom, Jesus exclusively used it in love. The more one has, the harder it may be to keep a level head. This is why Jesus endured tests of a magnitude that no other human will be called to endure. Though not as powerful as Jesus, and maybe not as rich as some people who are often seen on social media, all of God’s children are called to use what they have to bless others. This is not done through gritted teeth and self-promises. It’s accomplished through the power Jesus secured for all who believe: through surrendering to the Holy Spirit and allowing Him to work in the heart a transformation that is both mysterious and all-encompassing.

inSight

The Love of Riches  
No class is free from the temptation to worldly care. To the poor, toil and deprivation and the fear of want bring perplexities and burdens. To the rich come fear of loss and a multitude of anxious cares. Many of Christ’s followers forget the lesson He has bidden us learn from the flowers of the field. They do not trust to His constant care. Christ cannot carry their burden, because they do not cast it upon Him. Therefore the cares of life, which should drive them to the Saviour for help and comfort, separate them from Him. Many who might be fruitful in God’s service become bent on acquiring wealth. Their whole energy is absorbed in business enterprises, and they feel obliged to neglect things of a spiritual nature. Thus they separate themselves from God. We are enjoined in the Scriptures to be “not slothful in business.” Romans 12:11

**11 Do not be lazy but work hard, serving the Lord with all your heart.**

. We are to labor that we may impart to him who needs. Christians must work, they must engage in business, and they can do this without committing sin. But many become so absorbed in business that they have no time for prayer, no time for the study of the Bible, no time to seek and serve God. . . . And many who are working with a very different purpose, fall into a like error. They are working for others’ good; their duties are pressing, their responsibilities are many, and they allow their labor to crowd out devotion. Communion with God through prayer and a study of His word is neglected. They forget that Christ has said, “Without Me ye can do nothing.” John 15:5

**5 “I am the vine, and you are the branches. If any remain in me and I remain in them, they produce much fruit. But without me they can do nothing.**

. They walk apart from Christ, their life is not pervaded by His grace, and the characteristics of self are revealed. Their service is marred by desire for supremacy, and the harsh, unlovely traits of the unsubdued heart. Here is one of the chief secrets of failure in Christian work. This is why its results are often so meager. . . . The love of riches has an infatuating, deceptive power. Too often those who possess worldly treasure forget that it is God who gives them power to get wealth. They say, “My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.” Deuteronomy 8:17

**17 You might say to yourself, “I am rich because of my own power and strength,”**

. Their riches, instead of awakening gratitude to God, lead to the exaltation of self. They lose the sense of their dependence upon God and their obligation to their fellow men. Instead of regarding wealth as a talent to be employed for the glory of God and the uplifting of humanity, they look upon it as a means of serving themselves. Instead of developing in man the attributes of God, riches thus used are developing in him the attributes of Satan. (Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, 51, 52.)

inQuire

Why do you think it’s a common experience to lean too much on material things?Why do you think the Bible talks about money so often?How can you use your finances, or a part of your finances, to be a blessing in your sphere of influence this month?Share about someone you know who blesses others with their finances. What can you learn from them?Reflecting on the inSight quote, how can our relation to money parallel our relation to ministry?How has the media (social or otherwise) impacted your worldview regarding money?Describe a balanced, Christian relationship with money. What does that practically look like?

WAIT FOR IT

inTro

Our Guarantee  
Read This Week’s Passage: James 5:7–12

**Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until it receive the early and latter rain.Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord is at hand.Murmur not, brethren, one against another, that ye be not judged: behold, the judge standeth before the doors.Take, brethren, for an example of suffering and of patience, the prophets who spake in the name of the Lord.Behold, we call them blessed that endured: ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, how that the Lord is full of pity, and merciful.But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by the heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath: but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay; that ye fall not under judgment.**

Our GuaranteeAfter explaining the condition of the rich to the rich, James turns his attention to his “brethren,” who were likely often victims of the rich. While those who live for themselves and at the expense of others should fear the impending future, God’s people should look toward the future with patience and hope. For those against God, the future is worse than they realize; for those who live in surrender to Him, it’s much better than they could ever imagine. Using parables ranging from agriculture to the devastating story of Job, James reminds his listeners that patience and perseverance are not novel concepts in the realm of the life of faith. Hopeful patience is needed for farmers desiring to feed their families, prophets repeatedly giving the same message to idolatrous nations, a man of God wondering why his circumstances are what they are, and a believer straining with eyes of faith toward the future. In all these circumstances, the individual is blind to the future (even the present!), because they cannot see it clearly. Instead, they must trust the One who can. In this time of waiting, words continue to reveal the condition of the heart. James warns his listeners not to give utterance to grumblings or swearing, as both bring condemnation and judgment in their wake. “Establish your hearts,” he encourages, “for the coming of the Lord is at hand” (James 5:8

**8 You, too, must be patient. Do not give up hope, because the Lord is coming soon.**

). No matter how unlikely, how uncontrollable, or how far-off it may seem, the Lord Jesus is coming, and all that He has promised will surely be fulfilled.

inGest

Exceptional Circumstances Require Exceptional Patience  
Patience is an essential quality of a Christian, no matter who they are. Paul encourages the believers to “put on” patience, and he lists it as one of the fundamental fruits of the Spirit (Col. 3:12

**12 God has chosen you and made you his holy people. He loves you. So you should always clothe yourselves with mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.**

; Gal. 5:22

**22 But the Spirit produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,**

). In addition to the ordinary need, there are certain circumstances that require exceptional patience. Patience when circumstances are out of your control. James uses the example of a farmer waiting for “the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain” (James 5:7

**Be Patient 7 Brothers and sisters, be patient until the Lord comes again. A farmer patiently waits for his valuable crop to grow from the earth and for it to receive the autumn and spring rains.**

). Arguably, there are very few things that a farmer can control about growing plants. Aside from tilling the soil and planting, there’s just a whole lot of waiting. The farmer cannot forcibly germinate his seeds any more than he can conjure rain from the clouds overhead. He can hope and pray and watch. But he cannot make it happen. Patience sometimes looks very passive. It requires trust in someone or something else, and a stillness instead of a frantic grasping for control. Often the greatest discomfort in patience is that there isn’t more for the patient one can do other than be patient. Patience when people will not change. The prophets of old are one of the best examples of persistent patience. Isaiah and Jeremiah (and Hosea and Amos and many others) are filled with God’s pleadings with an obstinate nation. Real life analogies, intricate stories and metaphors, and tearful pleadings by prophets often did nothing to move the hearts of His people. And still He sent more; and then, He sent His Son. Patience sometimes looks devastatingly active. It requires doing what God has asked, even when the results are not materializing as hoped. It involves trying again and again in selfless service and persistence, out of love for someone other than self. Patience when your experience is unexplainable. Job is a long-winded book that tells of a God-loving man’s confusing experience. Though readers are given the extra context of the conversations between the devil and God regarding Job, it still does not answer every question. Besides, it’s possible Job never even heard that part of his story, and he at least didn’t know it while he was going through the darkest chapters. Yet, he stayed faithful to God. He didn’t withhold his bitterest of questions and heartaches, but he refused to accept faulty theology from his friends, or the recommendation to curse God from his wife, or even the suggestion to be quiet. Patience sometimes is painful. It’s the experience of waiting and not knowing why that tears at the heartstrings. Sometimes, answers come with relieving clarity later on; but sometimes they can only be hoped for at the time when God will provide all the answers. Believers need patience with God because He paints on a larger canvas than human sight can see.

inTerpret

What Not Grumbling Can Do  
While patience is essential, impatience can bring untold consequences. One of the greatest sins of the people of Israel, especially while traveling throughout the desert for forty years, was their complaining. Many times, their grumbling was rooted in impatience itself (Num. 21:4, ESV

**The Bronze Serpent 4 From Mount Hor athey set out by the way to the Red Sea, bto go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way.**

). They grumbled about a lack of water instead of asking God for some (Exod. 15:22–25

**Bitter Water Becomes Good 22 Moses led the Israelites away from the Red Sea into the Desert of Shur. They traveled for three days in the desert but found no water. 23 Then they came to Marah, where there was water, but they could not drink it because it was too bitter. (That is why the place was named Marah. n) 24 The people grumbled to Moses and asked, “What will we drink?” 25 So Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. When Moses threw the tree into the water, the water became good to drink. There the Lord gave the people a rule and a law to live by, and there he tested their loyalty to him.**

); they idolized their meals from their past lives as slaves and claimed God wanted to kill them with hunger (even though they had plenty of food, just not what they wanted; Exodus 16); and, as soon as Moses was out of sight for longer than they expected, they decided a golden calf was a good idea to have as their focus of worship (Exodus 32). Using the Oxford Dictionary definition of patience, “able to accept or tolerate delays, problems, or suffering without becoming annoyed or anxious,” the nation of Israel was a fantastic example of the opposite of it. Israel’s recorded history helps the modern reader understand why James denounces grumbling so intensely. As he has emphasized several times, words are not just words; they are the expression of the condition of the heart. When words of impatience are expressed, it gives evidence of an impatient and untrusting heart. When grumbling and complaining words are used, the speaker shows their distrust in their loving Father. From an experiential point of view, how does complaining help the situation? That is, not seeking out solutions, not brainstorming ways out, but pure, unadulterated complaining. Logic and the experience of many confirm that complaining serves best to fuel the fire of frustration, not diminish it. Instead of helping, then, it makes the situation worse by magnifying the problem. James adds that grumbling also brings condemnation to the speaker, thereby compounding the reasons to stay away from it. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul urges believers to “do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain” (Phil. 2:14–16

**14 Do everything without complaining or arguing. 15 Then you will be innocent and without any wrong. You will be God’s children without fault. But you are living with crooked and mean people all around you, among whom you shine like stars in the dark world. 16 You offer the teaching that gives life. So when Christ comes again, I can be happy because my work was not wasted. I ran the race and won.**

). When God’s children abstain from complaining and fighting, there is a stark, supernatural difference about them. Their light shines in the world, and they glorify God.

inSpect

How do the following verses relate to the primary passage?Nehemiah 9:30

**30  You were patient with them for many years and warned them by your Spirit through the prophets, but they did not pay attention. So you handed them over to other countries.**

Romans 15:5

**5 May the patience and encouragement that come from God allow you to live in harmony with each other the way Christ Jesus wants.**

, 6

**6 Then you will all be joined together, and you will give glory to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

2 Thessalonians 3:5

**5 May the Lord lead your hearts into God’s love and Christ’s patience.**

Habakkuk 2:3

**3  It is not yet time for the message to come true, but that time is coming soon; the message will come true. It may seem like a long time, but be patient and wait for it, because it will surely come; it will not be delayed.**

Jude 16

**16 These people complain and blame others, doing the evil things they want to do. They brag about themselves, and they flatter others to get what they want.**

2 Peter 3:9

**9 The Lord is not slow in doing what he promised—the way some people understand slowness. But God is being patient with you. He does not want anyone to be lost, but he wants all people to change their hearts and lives.**

Matthew 5:33–36

**Make Promises Carefully 33 “You have heard that it was said to our people long ago, ‘Don’t break your promises, but keep the promises you make to the Lord.’ n 34 But I tell you, never swear an oath. Don’t swear an oath using the name of heaven, because heaven is God’s throne. 35 Don’t swear an oath using the name of the earth, because the earth belongs to God. Don’t swear an oath using the name of Jerusalem, because that is the city of the great King. 36 Don’t even swear by your own head, because you cannot make one hair on your head become white or black.**

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with James 5:7–12

**Be Patient 7 Brothers and sisters, be patient until the Lord comes again. A farmer patiently waits for his valuable crop to grow from the earth and for it to receive the autumn and spring rains. 8 You, too, must be patient. Do not give up hope, because the Lord is coming soon. 9 Brothers and sisters, do not complain against each other or you will be judged guilty. And the Judge is ready to come! 10 Brothers and sisters, follow the example of the prophets who spoke for the Lord. They suffered many hard things, but they were patient. 11 We say they are happy because they did not give up. You have heard about Job’s patience, and you know the Lord’s purpose for him in the end. You know the Lord is full of mercy and is kind. Be Careful What You Say 12 My brothers and sisters, above all, do not use an oath when you make a promise. Don’t use the name of heaven, earth, or anything else to prove what you say. When you mean yes, say only yes, and when you mean no, say only no so you will not be judged guilty.**

?

inVite

The Patient Savior  
James appeals to believers to be patient “until the coming of the Lord” (James 5:7

**Be Patient 7 Brothers and sisters, be patient until the Lord comes again. A farmer patiently waits for his valuable crop to grow from the earth and for it to receive the autumn and spring rains.**

). God Himself knows what it’s like to wait for something precious and longed for. Even before His incarnation, Jesus patiently led His people through the desert. (Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 401). “Long-suffering” was personified in those forty years, and Jesus saw their lives in the Promised Land by faith even when they were unable to see it themselves. Jesus was consistently and enduringly patient with His closest companions—His disciples. They assumed His wishes incorrectly by shooing away children that He wanted close by (Luke 18:15

**Who Will Enter God’s Kingdom? 15 Some people brought even their babies to Jesus so he could touch them. When the followers saw this, they told them to stop.**

, 16

**16 But Jesus called for the children, saying, “Let the little children come to me. Don’t stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to people who are like these children.**

); they rebuked Him for sharing the painful future that awaited Him (Mark 8:31

**31 Then Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and that he would be rejected by the Jewish elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of the law. He told them that the Son of Man must be killed and then rise from the dead after three days.**

, 32

**32 Jesus told them plainly what would happen. Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to tell him not to talk like that.**

); they held vindictive views of people who did not welcome Jesus (Luke 9:54

**54 When James and John, followers of Jesus, saw this, they said, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven and destroy those people?” n**

); and they continued to ask Him when He would restore Israel as a nation even after He was raised from the dead (Acts 1:6

**Jesus Is Taken Up into Heaven 6 When the apostles were all together, they asked Jesus, “Lord, are you now going to give the kingdom back to Israel?”**

). For most of His earthly ministry, they seemed to be a half-step or more off where He was headed and what He was doing. Yet Jesus never “fired” a disciple. He didn’t fiercely rebuke them out of anger, demote them, or give up on them. Instead, He patiently and repeatedly answered their questions, calmed their fears, and saw the fruit of their lives when they couldn’t even see it themselves (Luke 22:32

**32 I have prayed that you will not lose your faith! Help your brothers be stronger when you come back to me.”**

). This Jesus of the Gospels is the same Jesus who lives today. He extends the same lovingkindness and long-suffering to all of His children. He encourages generous forgiveness and forbearance with others, because He models this Himself. He patiently retraces the steps of a confused sheep that doesn’t know where it’s going and rescues it from danger only He can see. He steadfastly watches the road where a child walked away, waiting for a glimpse of their return. As soon as He sees their form on the horizon, He runs toward them, eager to embrace and restore. Jesus sacrificed Himself on the cross while His closest friends abandoned and denied Him, the leaders of His people hated and mocked Him, and His Father’s presence was withdrawn. (Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, 759). He endured all these things without removing Himself from the situation and without complaint because of “the joy that was set before Him” (Heb. 12:2

**2 Let us look only to Jesus, the One who began our faith and who makes it perfect. He suffered death on the cross. But he accepted the shame as if it were nothing because of the joy that God put before him. And now he is sitting at the right side of God’s throne.**

). He was looking toward the result. He was patient with His overwhelming circumstances, and by faith He saw His disciples emboldened, the leaders converted or proved wrong, and Himself seated “at the right hand of the throne of God” (v. 2). And that was enough for Him.

inSight

Precious Fruit  
The word of God often comes in collision with man’s hereditary and cultivated traits of character and his habits of life. But the good-ground hearer, in receiving the word, accepts all its conditions and requirements. His habits, customs, and practices are brought into submission to God’s word. In his view the commands of finite, erring man sink into insignificance beside the word of the infinite God. With the whole heart, with undivided purpose, he is seeking the life eternal, and at the cost of loss, persecution, or death itself, he will obey the truth.And he brings forth fruit “with patience.” None who receive God's word are exempt from difficulty and trial; but when affliction comes, the true Christian does not become restless, distrustful, or despondent. Though we can not see the definite outcome of affairs, or discern the purpose of God’s providences, we are not to cast away our confidence. Remembering the tender mercies of the Lord, we should cast our care upon Him, and with patience wait for His salvation. Through conflict the spiritual life is strengthened. Trials well borne will develop steadfastness of character and precious spiritual graces. The perfect fruit of faith, meekness, and love often matures best amid storm clouds and darkness. “The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.” James 5:7

**Be Patient 7 Brothers and sisters, be patient until the Lord comes again. A farmer patiently waits for his valuable crop to grow from the earth and for it to receive the autumn and spring rains.**

. So the Christian is to wait with patience for the fruition in his life of the word of God. Often when we pray for the graces of the Spirit, God works to answer our prayers by placing us in circumstances to develop these fruits; but we do not understand His purpose, and wonder, and are dismayed. Yet none can develop these graces except through the process of growth and fruit bearing. Our part is to receive God's word and to hold it fast, yielding ourselves fully to its control, and its purpose in us will be accomplished. “If a man love Me,” Christ said, “he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” John 14:23

**23 Jesus answered, “If people love me, they will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.**

. The spell of a stronger, a perfect mind will be over us; for we have a living connection with the source of all-enduring strength. In our divine life we shall be brought into captivity to Jesus Christ. We shall no longer live the common life of selfishness, but Christ will live in us. His character will be reproduced in our nature. Thus shall we bring forth the fruits of the Holy Spirit—"some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.” (Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, 60, 61.)

inQuire

In your own words, what does “patience” mean practically?Why do you think complaining is so acceptable in most circles? What are ways to change that in our lives?Share a situation where you needed patience recently. What did you learn from the experience?Share a Bible story not mentioned in this week’s lesson that involved patience. What can you learn from the story about patience?What is your reaction to this section of this week’s inSight: “Often when we pray for the graces of the Spirit, God works to answer our prayers by placing us in circumstances to develop these fruits; but we do not understand His purpose, and wonder, and are dismayed”?Is the psalmic phrase “wait on the Lord” the same thing as having patience? Why or why not? Use Bible verses to further explain your thoughts. What are different ways you need to express patience in the coming week? How can that be accomplished?

AN ABRUPT ENDING

inTro

Closing with Prayer and Community  
Read This Week’s Passage: James 5:13–20

**Is any among you suffering? let him pray. Is any cheerful? let him sing praise.Is any among you sick? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:and the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him.Confess therefore your sins one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working.Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth for three years and six months.And he prayed again; and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.My brethren, if any among you err from the truth, and one convert him;let him know, that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins.**

Closing  
with Prayer and CommunityJames keeps his focus on practical Christianity up until the last word of his letter. Departing from his longer-winded explanations, he finishes with some bite-sized pieces of practical advice.The majority of this closing section centers on prayer. His overarching point is that there is always a great reason to talk to God. In the throes of despair and in the heights of joy, both give ample opportunity to commune with God in prayer. When courage fails, reach out to others to help pray and leave all burdens and needs at the feet of Jesus. James emphasizes that there’s nothing special about Elijah that made God listen to Him more than He will listen to His children today. His very being—his nature—was no different than ours, and we don’t need another human in order to commune with God. James finishes his book by sharing the far-reaching impact of accountability in godly community. Love is sometimes used as an excuse to avoid confrontation and instruction; but James paints the eternal positive consequences of bringing someone back to the truth after they’ve wandered. With no explicit goodbye, James leaves his readers to live the practical wisdom he has shared, all in the power of and glory to Jesus Christ.

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Always a Reason to Pray  
In quick succession, James shares seven times that believers should pray and how they should pray:When suffering. This Greek word (kakopatheō) is broad in its application and encompasses many kinds of affliction or suffering. Any kind is a good reason to pray. Instead of allowing it to separate the sufferer from the Redeemer, it should serve as an opportunity for them to grow close in faith and trust. The instruction is beautiful in its simplicity: “Let him pray” (James 5:13

**The Power of Prayer 13 Anyone who is having troubles should pray. Anyone who is happy should sing praises.**

). When cheerful. When happy or joyful, it’s an opportunity to express oneself in psalms, songs of praise to God. Often God is only remembered when pain reminds us of our need. However, it both glorifies God and elevates our own spirits when we remember God in the good times too. When sick. When they are in need of extra prayer, or the idea of praying seems overwhelming, James urges the sick one to not neglect prayer. Instead, ask others to pray. Notice the detail that the sick one is to reach out and ask for help in their dark time. Sometimes the only way someone else will know of a need is if they’re told directly—and asking for help is encouraged here. When sinning. Sin hurts the sinner. Confessing these trespasses to safe fellow believers and uniting with them in prayer is a beautiful and healing part of community. Instead of wallowing by oneself or denying that there are any issues, James invites the believer to seek healing in the ways God has provided. With fervency and righteousness. Jesus told His disciples a parable with the explicit purpose of encouraging them to persist in prayer (Luke 18:1

**God Will Answer His People 18 Then Jesus used this story to teach his followers that they should always pray and never lose hope.**

). It is the fervent, repeated prayers of a righteous person that “avails much” (v. 16). Often, the believer does not see the answers to their prayers for lack of persistence, or even for lack of walking according to what God has revealed (that is, they lack righteousness). When you need something that’s impossible. Elijah, though having the human nature of all humanity, asked for something impossible according to the laws of nature: to determine when it would stop raining and when it would resume. It was through prayer that this was done, as a witness to the power of God (1 Kings 17–18). Prayer is not just to bolster up what you can already do in your own strength; through prayer, the impossible can happen. When someone is straying. Though these two verses do not explicitly mention praying, the context and biblical principle of intercessory prayer can be seen (e.g., 1 Tim. 2:1

**Some Rules for Men and Women 2 First, I tell you to pray for all people, asking God for what they need and being thankful to him.**

; Phil. 1:19

**19 Because you are praying for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ is helping me, I know this trouble will bring my freedom.**

). When seeing someone wander from the truth, it’s not a time to look the other way. Instead, the believer should do all that is in their power (especially prayer!) to turn them back to the truth. In one way, this passage could be seen as an expansion on Paul’s shorter version: “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17

**17 Pray continually,**

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Why Isn’t Every Person Healed?  
This question should always be approached with humility and care. Though theological ideas can be shared, it’s important to remember that this is often asked with names and faces in the mind of the asker. The short answer is, humanity cannot fully articulate why not every person prayed over is healed. That said, there are some helpful answers that can be found. Jesus was clearly in support of healing—He spent more time doing that than preaching, and even sent out His disciples to do the same (Matt. 10:1

**Jesus Sends Out His Apostles 10 Jesus called his twelve followers together and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every kind of disease and sickness.**

). So why not everyone?First, not everyone wants to be healed. Whether it’s because the pain has become too familiar to part with, or it provides some other pseudo-comfort, some people simply don’t want the change. Jesus even asked a man if he wanted to be made well before healing him (John 5:6

**6 When Jesus saw the man and knew that he had been sick for such a long time, Jesus asked him, “Do you want to be well?”**

).Second, not every prayer for healing is in faith. Jesus repeatedly praised the faith of those that He healed (Mark 5:34

**34 Jesus said to her, “Dear woman, you are made well because you believed. Go in peace; be healed of your disease.”**

; 10:52

**52 Jesus said, “Go, you are healed because you believed.” At once the man could see, and he followed Jesus on the road.**

; Luke 7:50

**50 Jesus said to the woman, “Because you believed, you are saved from your sins. Go in peace.”**

). When His disciples were unable to cast a demon out of a child, Jesus told them it was due to their lack of faith (Matt. 17:19–21

**19 The followers came to Jesus when he was alone and asked, “Why couldn’t we force the demon out?” 20 Jesus answered, “Because your faith is too small. I tell you the truth, if your faith is as big as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. All things will be possible for you. [21 That kind of spirit comes out only if you use prayer and fasting.]” n**

). Third, humanity occupies a world of sin. This sin has infected our genetic makeup, habits, choices, environments, and lives. It is painful evidence of a great controversy raging in this world between good and evil. Jesus did not come and heal to make a utopia on earth where all were made well. He always pointed to the kingdom to come, even to those He healed. Disease—physical, mental, and spiritual—is a result of sin.Fourth, it’s not always what’s best. Ellen White shared how her own life was plagued by disease, and how God allowed it as a means of keeping her close to Him. (Ellen G. White, Early Writings, 21.) Sometimes the disease comes as a result of harmful habits and choices, and God is choosing not to interfere with natural consequences, lest that person be encouraged in such a harmful direction. (Ellen G. White, Counsels on Health, 373, 374.) Other times, sickness draws the individual closer to God and healing would only harm their connection with Him: “He who is acquainted with the hearts of all men knows whether the person, if raised up, would glorify His name or dishonor Him by backsliding and apostasy. . . . If the Lord sees it will best honor Him, He will answer our prayers.” (Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, 147, 148.) In the light of eternity, is not eternal life more precious than a few years on earth? It is only with deep trust in God and an eternal perspective that this is seen as merciful as it is. There can be other reasons too. God knows. God still desires to heal His people, and He does in countless ways still today. Like Jesus in Gethsemane, we may pray for deliverance, and in the same breath, ask for it according to His will.

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What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?  
Psalm 50:14

**14  Give an offering to show thanks to God. Give God Most High what you have promised.**

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**15  Call to me in times of trouble. I will save you, and you will honor me.”**

Philippians 4:6

**6 Do not worry about anything, but pray and ask God for everything you need, always giving thanks.**

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**7 And God’s peace, which is so great we cannot understand it, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.**

Jeremiah 33:3

**3 ‘Judah, pray to me, and I will answer you. I will tell you important secrets you have never heard before.’**

Ephesians 6:18

**18 Pray in the Spirit at all times with all kinds of prayers, asking for everything you need. To do this you must always be ready and never give up. Always pray for all God’s people.**

Proverbs 28:13

**13  If you hide your sins, you will not succeed. If you confess and reject them, you will receive mercy.**

What other narratives come to mind in connection with James 5:13–20

**The Power of Prayer 13 Anyone who is having troubles should pray. Anyone who is happy should sing praises. 14 Anyone who is sick should call the church’s elders. They should pray for and pour oil on the person n in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer that is said with faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will heal that person. And if the person has sinned, the sins will be forgiven. 16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so God can heal you. When a believing person prays, great things happen. 17 Elijah was a human being just like us. He prayed that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years! 18 Then Elijah prayed again, and the rain came down from the sky, and the land produced crops again. Saving a Soul 19 My brothers and sisters, if one of you wanders away from the truth, and someone helps that person come back, 20 remember this: Anyone who brings a sinner back from the wrong way will save that sinner’s soul from death and will cause many sins to be forgiven.**

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The Power Behind the Practical  
Aside from John 17, most of Jesus’ prayers are recorded in snippets or simply as observations that He was praying. When taken together and observed, both still reveal much about His prayer life. Jesus prayed often (Luke 5:16

**16 but Jesus often slipped away to be alone so he could pray.**

), sometimes continuing in prayer all night (Luke 6:12

**Jesus Chooses His Apostles 12 At that time Jesus went off to a mountain to pray, and he spent the night praying to God.**

). He told His listeners that God’s ears were open to all of their needs, even knowing them already, and that our heavenly Father could be reached by the simplest of prayers (Matt. 6: 5–13

**Jesus Teaches About Prayer 5 “When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites. They love to stand in the synagogues and on the street corners and pray so people will see them. I tell you the truth, they already have their full reward. 6 When you pray, you should go into your room and close the door and pray to your Father who cannot be seen. Your Father can see what is done in secret, and he will reward you. 7 “And when you pray, don’t be like those people who don’t know God. They continue saying things that mean nothing, thinking that God will hear them because of their many words. 8 Don’t be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask him. 9 So when you pray, you should pray like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, may your name always be kept holy. 10  May your kingdom come and what you want be done, here on earth as it is in heaven. 11  Give us the food we need for each day. 12  Forgive us for our sins, just as we have forgiven those who sinned against us. 13  And do not cause us to be tempted, but save us from the Evil One.’ [The kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours forever. Amen.] n**

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**Don’t Worry 25 “So I tell you, don’t worry about the food or drink you need to live, or about the clothes you need for your body. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothes. 26 Look at the birds in the air. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, but your heavenly Father feeds them. And you know that you are worth much more than the birds. 27 You cannot add any time to your life by worrying about it. 28 “And why do you worry about clothes? Look at how the lilies in the field grow. They don’t work or make clothes for themselves. 29 But I tell you that even Solomon with his riches was not dressed as beautifully as one of these flowers. 30 God clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today but tomorrow is thrown into the fire. So you can be even more sure that God will clothe you. Don’t have so little faith! 31 Don’t worry and say, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ 32 The people who don’t know God keep trying to get these things, and your Father in heaven knows you need them.**

). When raising Lazarus from the dead, He thanked His Father for hearing Him, gladly admitting that He knew, “You always hear me,” (John 11:42

**42 I know that you always hear me, but I said these things because of the people here around me. I want them to believe that you sent me.”**

). While in the worst agony ever endured by a human, Jesus prayed to His Father both in the Garden of Gethsemane and while on the cross (Matt. 26:36–44

**Jesus Prays Alone 36 Then Jesus went with his followers to a place called Gethsemane. He said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with him, and he began to be very sad and troubled. 38 He said to them, “My heart is full of sorrow, to the point of death. Stay here and watch with me.” 39 After walking a little farther away from them, Jesus fell to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, do not give me this cup n of suffering. But do what you want, not what I want.” 40 Then Jesus went back to his followers and found them asleep. He said to Peter, “You men could not stay awake with me for one hour? 41 Stay awake and pray for strength against temptation. The spirit wants to do what is right, but the body is weak.” 42 Then Jesus went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this painful thing to be taken from me, and if I must do it, I pray that what you want will be done.” 43 Then he went back to his followers, and again he found them asleep, because their eyes were heavy. 44 So Jesus left them and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing.**

; 27:46

**46 About three o’clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” This means, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”**

; Luke 23:34

**34 Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, because they don’t know what they are doing.” n The soldiers threw lots to decide who would get his clothes.**

). It has been said before: if Jesus saw prayer as such a necessity in His own life, how much more should His children feel their need of prayer? Jesus even saw prayer as a way of ministering to His disciples. After warning Peter that He would deny Him before the next morning, He followed it with, “ ‘But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren,’ ” (Luke 22:32

**32 I have prayed that you will not lose your faith! Help your brothers be stronger when you come back to me.”**

). He spent a large portion of His final prayer time for His disciples, both present and future (John 17:6–26

**6 “I showed what you are like to those you gave me from the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have obeyed your teaching. 7 Now they know that everything you gave me comes from you. 8 I gave them the teachings you gave me, and they accepted them. They knew that I truly came from you, and they believed that you sent me. 9 I am praying for them. I am not praying for people in the world but for those you gave me, because they are yours. 10 All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And my glory is shown through them. 11 I am coming to you; I will not stay in the world any longer. But they are still in the world. Holy Father, keep them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they will be one, just as you and I are one. 12 While I was with them, I kept them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me. I protected them, and only one of them, the one worthy of destruction, was lost so that the Scripture would come true. 13 “I am coming to you now. But I pray these things while I am still in the world so that these followers can have all of my joy in them. 14 I have given them your teaching. And the world has hated them, because they don’t belong to the world, just as I don’t belong to the world. 15 I am not asking you to take them out of the world but to keep them safe from the Evil One. 16 They don’t belong to the world, just as I don’t belong to the world. 17 Make them ready for your service through your truth; your teaching is truth. 18 I have sent them into the world, just as you sent me into the world. 19 For their sake, I am making myself ready to serve so that they can be ready for their service of the truth. 20 “I pray for these followers, but I am also praying for all those who will believe in me because of their teaching. 21 Father, I pray that they can be one. As you are in me and I am in you, I pray that they can also be one in us. Then the world will believe that you sent me. 22 I have given these people the glory that you gave me so that they can be one, just as you and I are one. 23 I will be in them and you will be in me so that they will be completely one. Then the world will know that you sent me and that you loved them just as much as you loved me. 24 “Father, I want these people that you gave me to be with me where I am. I want them to see my glory, which you gave me because you loved me before the world was made. 25 Father, you are the One who is good. The world does not know you, but I know you, and these people know you sent me. 26 I showed them what you are like, and I will show them again. Then they will have the same love that you have for me, and I will live in them.”**

). This redemptive and prayerful spirit of Christ is expressed in the last two verses of James. Jesus turned many people back from wandering from the truth, and He continues to be the reason people can be turned back at all. Jesus saves the souls of all who come to Him from death, and it is His blood that covers all the multitudes of sins. Furthermore, He is the power behind the entirety of James’s practical letter, and He is a perfect example of all of its counsel fulfilled in the life. Jesus extends His ministry of reconciliation to all who claim His name (2 Cor. 5:18

**18 All this is from God. Through Christ, God made peace between us and himself, and God gave us the work of telling everyone about the peace we can have with him.**

). “The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian,” (Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, 470) and James has simply given practical examples of what that looks like, day in and day out. It looks like having faith in Jesus, loving Him more than this world, and this love showing up in one’s words. It looks like treating others the way we would want to be treated. It looks like prioritizing character over worldly possessions. Quite simply, it looks like Jesus.

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Unending Communion  
Through nature and revelation, through His providence, and by the influence of His Spirit, God speaks to us. But these are not enough; we need also to pour out our hearts to Him. In order to have spiritual life and energy, we must have actual relationship with our heavenly Father. Our minds may be drawn out toward Him; we may meditate upon His works, His mercies, His blessings; but this is not, in the fullest sense, communing with Him. In order to commune with God, we must have something to say to Him concerning our actual life. Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him. . . .Jesus Himself, while He dwelt among men, was often in prayer. Our Saviour identified Himself with our needs and weakness, in that He became a suppliant, a petitioner, seeking from His Father fresh supplies of strength, that He might come forth braced for duty and trial. He is our example in all things. He is a brother in our infirmities, “in all points tempted like as we are;” but as the sinless one His nature recoiled from evil; He endured struggles and torture of soul in a world of sin. His humanity made prayer a necessity and a privilege. He found comfort and joy in communion with His Father. And if the Saviour of men, the Son of God, felt the need of prayer, how much more should feeble, sinful mortals feel the necessity of fervent, constant prayer. (Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, 93, 94.) Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him. He who numbers the hairs of your head is not indifferent to the wants of His children. “The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” James 5:11

**11 We say they are happy because they did not give up. You have heard about Job’s patience, and you know the Lord’s purpose for him in the end. You know the Lord is full of mercy and is kind.**

. His heart of love is touched by our sorrows and even by our utterances of them. Take to Him everything that perplexes the mind. Nothing is too great for Him to bear, for He holds up worlds, He rules over all the affairs of the universe. Nothing that in any way concerns our peace is too small for Him to notice. There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read; there is no perplexity too difficult for Him to unravel. No calamity can befall the least of His children, no anxiety harass the soul, no joy cheer, no sincere prayer escape the lips, of which our heavenly Father is unobservant, or in which He takes no immediate interest. “He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.” Psalm 147:3

**3  He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds.**

. The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son. (Steps to Christ, 100.)

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When do you pray to God easily, and when is it harder for you? Why?Share an experience of God answering a prayer of yours in a memorable way. Share an experience of how community has helped you in your spiritual walk. What experience have you had with praying for healing? What did you learn from the experience?How have you seen James 5:19

**Saving a Soul 19 My brothers and sisters, if one of you wanders away from the truth, and someone helps that person come back,**

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**20 remember this: Anyone who brings a sinner back from the wrong way will save that sinner’s soul from death and will cause many sins to be forgiven.**

played out in real life?How would you like to enhance your prayer life? What usually prevents us from pouring out our thoughts to God in prayer?

FAITH THAT WORKS

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Are Works Actually Important?  
Read This Week’s Passage: John 15:1–17

**I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh it away: and every that beareth fruit, he cleanseth it, that it may bear more fruit.Already ye are clean because of the word which I have spoken unto you.Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in me.I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for apart from me ye can do nothing.If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you.Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; and shall ye be my disciples.Even as the Father hath loved me, I also have loved you: abide ye in my love.If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be made full.This is my commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you.Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you.No longer do I call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known unto you.Ye did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that ye should go and bear fruit, and your fruit should abide: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.These things I command you, that ye may love one another.**

Are  
Works Actually Important?A biblical discussion of salvation should not include works except for the sole reason of clarifying that they have no contribution to it. With books like James emphasizing the practicality of Christianity, though, some of those lines can be blurred. Maybe salvation isn’t from works, but shouldn’t there be a stronger emphasis on works? What happened to living for God? At the risk of over-repeating, one concept needs to remain crystal clear: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast,” “knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” “Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord . . . that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (Eph. 2:8

**8 I mean that you have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God.**

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**9 It was not the result of your own efforts, so you cannot brag about it.**

; Gal. 2:16

**16 Yet we know that a person is made right with God not by following the law, but by trusting in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus, that we might be made right with God because we trusted in Christ. It is not because we followed the law, because no one can be made right with God by following the law.**

; Phil. 3:8

**8 Not only those things, but I think that all things are worth nothing compared with the greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him, I have lost all those things, and now I know they are worthless trash. This allows me to have Christ**

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**9 and to belong to him. Now I am right with God, not because I followed the law, but because I believed in Christ. God uses my faith to make me right with him.**

, emphasis supplied). Thus, the role of works is not salvific; no one can achieve, contribute to, or earn salvation through works. So, what’s the point of them? This week’s lesson will explore the main three points: works are a natural expression of genuine faith; works of faith bring the believer into the abundant life; and works of faith show Jesus to the world.

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Properties of Works  
Natural Expression of Genuine FaithBelief leads to action. If someone believes there is a test on Monday and they want an honest high grade, they will study. If someone else believes that gravity is a thing and they don’t want to die, they will not jump off a cliff without a hang glider or parachute. There is no process that these people go through in order to make themselves act on their belief. If a belief is genuinely held, it leads to action naturally. This is James’s point when he explains the role of works. In the same way that finding someone who is naked and hungry and telling them, “Hey! Eat good food and be clothed!” is useless, so is saying that you believe something when there is no evidence in the actual life (James 2:14–17

**Faith and Good Works 14 My brothers and sisters, if people say they have faith, but do nothing, their faith is worth nothing. Can faith like that save them? 15 A brother or sister in Christ might need clothes or food. 16 If you say to that person, “God be with you! I hope you stay warm and get plenty to eat,” but you do not give what that person needs, your words are worth nothing. 17 In the same way, faith by itself—that does nothing—is dead.**

). Because it’s impossible to believe something so radical as the gospel and not have it show up in one’s life. The Abundant LifeJesus said that He came so that His sheep can have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10

**10 A thief comes to steal and kill and destroy, but I came to give life—life in all its fullness.**

). Before Jesus took humanity’s place, there was no choice other than sin; humanity was hopelessly enslaved to it. But Christ’s death gave the freedom of choice: everyone can choose to follow God, to abide in Christ, and to work the works of righteousness (Rom. 6:11

**11 In the same way, you should see yourselves as being dead to the power of sin and alive with God through Christ Jesus.**

).This choice enables people to live the abundant life through the grace and power of Christ. There is none happier on earth than the one who does not steal or commit adultery, does to others as he would have them do to himself, is forgiving and gracious, is generous to those who can’t pay him back, and so on. Trusting obedience means doing what God has asked and then leaving the results and consequences in His trustworthy hands. The Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and similar instructions from God were not given as arbitrary guidelines; they are quite literally the blueprints and practical instructions on how to live the most fulfilling, meaningful, and happy life possible. Witness to the WorldJesus instructed you to “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16

**16 In the same way, you should be a light for other people. Live so that they will see the good things you do and will praise your Father in heaven.**

). Few people will have their first impression of God come from Scripture; more often, they read the lives of those who claim to follow Him (2 Cor. 3:2

**2 You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone.**

). God has shared the ministry of reconciliation. His children are ambassadors for Christ, through whom God is pleading for all to be reconciled to Himself (2 Cor. 5:18–20

**18 All this is from God. Through Christ, God made peace between us and himself, and God gave us the work of telling everyone about the peace we can have with him. 19 God was in Christ, making peace between the world and himself. In Christ, God did not hold the world guilty of its sins. And he gave us this message of peace. 20 So we have been sent to speak for Christ. It is as if God is calling to you through us. We speak for Christ when we beg you to be at peace with God.**

). When ambassadors represent their home country, how do they conduct themselves? It’s simple. They conduct themselves in a way to represent their home country accurately, with respect and dignity. Thus also a Christian’s works should testify of the God they represent, the One whose interests they have in mind. Again, this is not to earn a place as an ambassador or child of God: it is a result of being both.

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Am I Doing Enough?  
Variations of this question are often followed with explanations: “I know I’m not saved by works, but I surely have to do something.”First, what exactly is being asked? “How do I know I’m doing enough?” Enough for what? It’s impossible to meet a vague standard, so what’s being aimed for? Is it an attempt to retroactively earn salvation? “Thanks, Jesus, for getting me started. I appreciate it, but I understand that I have to take it from here.” That’s unbiblical (Col. 2:6

**Continue to Live in Christ 6 As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so continue to live in him.**

). Is people-pleasing the goal? Is it to be seen as a godly person, known for all of the ministries, speaking appointments, and service? This is also not a good idea (Gal. 1:10

**10 Do you think I am trying to make people accept me? No, God is the One I am trying to please. Am I trying to please people? If I still wanted to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.**

).Second, there’s a difference between conviction to serve and anxiety to serve. The first comes from God; the second does not. God does not motivate or communicate through anxieties or fears: He has not given a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and of a sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7

**7 God did not give us a spirit that makes us afraid but a spirit of power and love and self-control.**

). His perfect love casts out all fear (1 John 4:18

**18 Where God’s love is, there is no fear, because God’s perfect love drives out fear. It is punishment that makes a person fear, so love is not made perfect in the person who fears.**

). What is enough, though? There are the orphans to take care of, the widows, the church committee, literature evangelism, and there’s the need for weekly Bible studies. There’s also the need to preach several times a week, do home visitations, and write plenty of Christ-centered literature. We have to lead the people, serve in soup kitchens, donate clothing to a homeless shelter, and take up donations for the food pantry. Would that be enough? Well, there’s also learning rare languages to translate the Bible and visiting foreign lands to bring the life-giving words of Christ to those who do not know Him. We should also become excellent at our jobs and witness tirelessly and lovingly to colleagues. And, of course, we have to set apart a minimum of four hours a day for intercessory prayer, Bible study, and reflection. If enough is defined as “all that there is to do,” then no one has the capacity to do enough. No one can meet every need, minister in every opportunity, or help everyone. Simply put, you and I cannot be God. We can follow Him, but we cannot be Him! Instead of asking, “Am I doing enough?” choose the biblical rewording of, “Am I doing what God has asked me to do?” There are no biblical examples of God asking a single human to meet every need that they see. Instead, the apostles delegated responsibilities so that they could focus on their individual calling (Acts 6:1–7

**Seven Leaders Are Chosen 6 The number of followers was growing. But during this same time, the Greek-speaking followers had an argument with the other followers. The Greek-speaking widows were not getting their share of the food that was given out every day. 2 The twelve apostles called the whole group of followers together and said, “It is not right for us to stop our work of teaching God’s word in order to serve tables. 3 So, brothers and sisters, choose seven of your own men who are good, full of the Spirit and full of wisdom. We will put them in charge of this work. 4 Then we can continue to pray and to teach the word of God.” 5 The whole group liked the idea, so they chose these seven men: Stephen (a man with great faith and full of the Holy Spirit), Philip, n Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas (a man from Antioch who had become a follower of the Jewish religion). 6 Then they put these men before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands n on them. 7 The word of God was continuing to spread. The group of followers in Jerusalem increased, and a great number of the Jewish priests believed and obeyed.**

). In an even broader example, Paul explains that the church is the body of Christ, and “there are many members, yet one body” (1 Cor. 12:20

**20 So then there are many parts, but only one body.**

). Each member is not a body unto itself, but a member of the body. As each part of the body has a specific function and focus, so does each child of God in being part of the body of Christ. God has not called anyone to be the entire church by themselves; He has called each to be a member of the church.

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How do the following verses relate to the primary passage?Isaiah 58Ephesians 2:8–10

**8 I mean that you have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God. 9 It was not the result of your own efforts, so you cannot brag about it. 10 God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God made us to do good works, which God planned in advance for us to live our lives doing.**

Philippians 3:1–12

**The Importance of Christ 3 My brothers and sisters, be full of joy in the Lord. It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it will help you to be more ready. 2 Watch out for those who do evil, who are like dogs, who demand to cut n the body. 3 We are the ones who are truly circumcised. We worship God through his Spirit, and our pride is in Christ Jesus. We do not put trust in ourselves or anything we can do, 4 although I might be able to put trust in myself. If anyone thinks he has a reason to trust in himself, he should know that I have greater reason for trusting in myself. 5 I was circumcised eight days after my birth. I am from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin. I am a Hebrew, and my parents were Hebrews. I had a strict view of the law, which is why I became a Pharisee. 6 I was so enthusiastic I tried to hurt the church. No one could find fault with the way I obeyed the law of Moses. 7 Those things were important to me, but now I think they are worth nothing because of Christ. 8 Not only those things, but I think that all things are worth nothing compared with the greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him, I have lost all those things, and now I know they are worthless trash. This allows me to have Christ 9 and to belong to him. Now I am right with God, not because I followed the law, but because I believed in Christ. God uses my faith to make me right with him. 10 I want to know Christ and the power that raised him from the dead. I want to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death. 11 Then I have hope that I myself will be raised from the dead. Continuing Toward Our Goal 12 I do not mean that I am already as God wants me to be. I have not yet reached that goal, but I continue trying to reach it and to make it mine. Christ wants me to do that, which is the reason he made me his.**

John 6:28

**28 The people asked Jesus, “What are the things God wants us to do?”**

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**29 Jesus answered, “The work God wants you to do is this: Believe the One he sent.”**

Ezekiel 36:26

**26 Also, I will teach you to respect me completely, and I will put a new way of thinking inside you. I will take out the stubborn hearts of stone from your bodies, and I will give you obedient hearts of flesh.**

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**27 I will put my Spirit inside you and help you live by my rules and carefully obey my laws.**

What other parables come to mind in connection with John 15:1–17

**Jesus Is Like a Vine 15 “I am the true vine; my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch of mine that does not produce fruit. And he trims and cleans every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the words I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch cannot produce fruit alone but must remain in the vine. In the same way, you cannot produce fruit alone but must remain in me. 5 “I am the vine, and you are the branches. If any remain in me and I remain in them, they produce much fruit. But without me they can do nothing. 6 If any do not remain in me, they are like a branch that is thrown away and then dies. People pick up dead branches, throw them into the fire, and burn them. 7 If you remain in me and follow my teachings, you can ask anything you want, and it will be given to you. 8 You should produce much fruit and show that you are my followers, which brings glory to my Father. 9 I loved you as the Father loved me. Now remain in my love. 10 I have obeyed my Father’s commands, and I remain in his love. In the same way, if you obey my commands, you will remain in my love. 11 I have told you these things so that you can have the same joy I have and so that your joy will be the fullest possible joy. 12 “This is my command: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 The greatest love a person can show is to die for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know what his master is doing. But I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I heard from my Father. 16 You did not choose me; I chose you. And I gave you this work: to go and produce fruit, fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you anything you ask for in my name. 17 This is my command: Love each other.**

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How to Actually Change  
In this week’s main passage, Jesus gave His disciples a clear picture of His relationship with them. Notice the wording carefully. The last verse does not say, “He who abides in Me and I in him can bear much fruit,” or “can now choose to bear much fruit,” or “might bear much fruit.” It simply says that this person “bears much fruit.” That is, it is a natural expression, a natural result of abiding in Christ and Him abiding in us.Abiding in Christ when believing He is who He says He is leads to behaving a certain way. This is counter to legalism—this is living a life of belief. Sometimes the idea of depending on Christ doesn’t bring a good reaction. It’s a natural (albeit sinful) reaction of the human heart to “shape up” in its own strength, to get credit for all the good actions and expressions of love. This desire can be exacerbated by the observation that people who don’t even know God are doing well enough (David confirms this from his own perspective in Psalm 73). The answer to both hesitations is the same: reality. In reality, no one can change through his own power. It’s as ridiculous as de-spotting a leopard or drastically changing the color of someone’s skin (Jer. 13:23

**23  Can a person from Cush change the color of his skin? Can a leopard change his spots? In the same way, Jerusalem, you cannot change and do good, because you are accustomed to doing evil.**

). In reality, no one can be credited with any of the kind, good, or selfless things they do—they’re all simply evidence of God working in and through them (Eph. 2:10

**10 God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God made us to do good works, which God planned in advance for us to live our lives doing.**

; Phil. 1:6

**6 God began doing a good work in you, and I am sure he will continue it until it is finished when Jesus Christ comes again.**

; 2:13

**13 because God is working in you to help you want to do and be able to do what pleases him.**

). So they would be taking credit for something that they’re not actually responsible for. The way to truly change, in a Christ-centered, lasting way, is to embrace reality. Embrace the reality that all humans are powerless in and of themselves to change (Jer. 13:23

**23  Can a person from Cush change the color of his skin? Can a leopard change his spots? In the same way, Jerusalem, you cannot change and do good, because you are accustomed to doing evil.**

). Embrace the reality that God not only supplies the ability to change, but the desire to change (Phil. 2:13

**13 because God is working in you to help you want to do and be able to do what pleases him.**

). Embrace the reality that God changes hearts in a way that humans are powerless to do, and by doing so, causes willing hearts to walk in the paths of good works, kindness, and love (Ezek. 36:26

**26 Also, I will teach you to respect me completely, and I will put a new way of thinking inside you. I will take out the stubborn hearts of stone from your bodies, and I will give you obedient hearts of flesh.**

, 27

**27 I will put my Spirit inside you and help you live by my rules and carefully obey my laws.**

). By living in this reality, by fully depending on, looking to, and trusting in Christ, people change. As Paul succinctly put it, “As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him” (Col. 2:6, ESV

**Alive in Christ 6 hTherefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,**

). Walk in Him forever. Jesus is not a set of training wheels. He is not a charger for batteries, nor is He a temporary helper to get someone along their way. Jesus is more necessary for physical and spiritual life (and growth and usefulness and ability and everything else) than oxygen itself. All people need Him more often than they do air. Walking with Christ is not the ramp-up to a life of self-sufficient goodness. Instead, it is the journey, the freedom, and the joy of the rest of life. Relation to Christ is one of eternal dependence and love.

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The Beauty of Abiding  
You are just as dependent upon Christ, in order to live a holy life, as is the branch upon the parent stock for growth and fruitfulness. Apart from Him you have no life. You have no power to resist temptation or to grow in grace and holiness. Abiding in Him, you may flourish. Drawing your life from Him, you will not wither nor be fruitless. You will be like a tree planted by the rivers of water. Many have an idea that they must do some part of the work alone. They have trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sin, but now they seek by their own efforts to live aright. But every such effort must fail. Jesus says, “Without Me ye can do nothing.” Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness,—all depend upon our union with Christ. It is by communion with Him, daily, hourly,—by abiding in Him,—that we are to grow in grace. He is not only the Author, but the Finisher of our faith. It is Christ first and last and always. He is to be with us, not only at the beginning and the end of our course, but at every step of the way. David says, “I have set the Lord always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.” Psalm 16:8

**8  I keep the Lord before me always. Because he is close by my side, I will not be hurt.**

. Do you ask, “How am I to abide in Christ?” In the same way as you received Him at first. “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him.” “The just shall live by faith.” Colossians 2:6

**Continue to Live in Christ 6 As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so continue to live in him.**

; Hebrews 10:38

**38  Those who are right with me will live by faith. But if they turn back with fear, I will not be pleased with them.” Habakkuk 2:3–4**

. You gave yourself to God, to be His wholly, to serve and obey Him, and you took Christ as your Saviour. You could not yourself atone for your sins or change your heart; but having given yourself to God, you believe that He for Christ’s sake did all this for you. By faith you became Christ’s, and by faith you are to grow up in Him—by giving and taking. You are to give all,—your heart, your will, your service,—give yourself to Him to obey all His requirements; and you must take all,—Christ, the fullness of all blessing, to abide in your heart, to be your strength, your righteousness, your everlasting helper,—to give you power to obey. . . . A life in Christ is a life of restfulness. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there should be an abiding, peaceful trust. Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ. Your weakness is united to His strength, your ignorance to His wisdom, your frailty to His enduring might. So you are not to look to yourself, not to let the mind dwell upon self, but look to Christ. Let the mind dwell upon His love, upon the beauty, the perfection, of His character. Christ in His self-denial, Christ in His humiliation, Christ in His purity and holiness, Christ in His matchless love—this is the subject for the soul’s contemplation. It is by loving Him, copying Him, depending wholly upon Him, that you are to be transformed into His likeness. (Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, 68–70.)

inQuire

How does this week’s lesson intersect with the rest of the letter of James?How has this week’s lesson impacted your view of the role of works?Share a belief you hold that directly impacts how you do something. Do you struggle with thinking you’ve done “enough”? Why or why not?In your experience, why is it hard to depend on Christ sometimes?How has Jesus shown you that He is trustworthy lately?What have you learned about the practicalities of depending on Jesus?What works do you want God to work through you?What is something you feel convicted to do personally? What do you feel convicted that the community should do? What lessons impacted you the most from this quarter on James?