

The Book of James



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Table of Contents

Chapter 1	Seeking Jesus to deal with problems	3
Chapter 2	Seeking the proper perspective in life	6
Chapter 3	Are you listening?	8
Chapter 4	A call to avoid favoritism	10
Chapter 5	Taming the tongue	15
Chapter 6	God hates pride	18
Chapter 7	Do not judge	21
Chapter 8	Do you have a suppressive heart?	23
Chapter 9	The Power of Prayer	26

Chapter 1

Seeking Jesus to deal with problems

James 1:1-4 This letter is from James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is written to Jewish Christians scattered among the nations.

Greetings!

Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. When your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything.

The writer of this letter, a leader of the church in Jerusalem (see Acts 12:17; Acts 15:13), was James, Jesus' brother, not James the apostle.

The book of James was one of the earliest letters, probably written before A.D. 50.

Stephen was martyred (Acts 7:55-8:3), persecution increased, and Christians in Jerusalem were scattered throughout the Roman world.

There were thriving Jewish-Christian communities in Rome, Alexandria, Cyprus, and cities in Greece and Asia Minor. Because these early believers did not have the support of established Christian churches, wrote to them as a concerned leader, to encourage them in their faith during those difficult times.

James doesn't say *if* you face trials, but *whenever* you face them. He assumes that we will have trials and that it is possible to profit from them.

The point is not to pretend to be happy when we face pain, but to have a positive outlook ("consider it pure joy") because of what trials can produce in our lives. James tells us to turn our hardships into times of learning. Tough times can teach us perseverance.

For other passages dealing with perseverance (also called patience and steadfastness), see Romans 2:7; Romans 5:3-5; Romans 8:24-25; 2 Cor. 6:3-7; 2 Peter 1:2-9.

We can't really know the depth of our character until we see how we react under pressure.

It is easy to be kind to others when everything is going well, but can we still be kind when others are treating us unfairly?

God wants to make us mature and complete, not to keep us from all pain. Instead of complaining about our struggles, we should see them as opportunities for growth.

God for promising to be with you in rough times. Ask him to help you solve your problems or to give you the strength to endure them. Then be patient.

God will not leave you alone with your problems; he will stay close and help you grow.

Seeking wisdom to deal with life.

James 1:5-8 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

By *wisdom*, James is talking not only about knowledge, but about the ability to make wise decisions in difficult circumstances. Whenever we need wisdom, we can pray to God, and he will generously supply what we need. Christians don't have to grope around in the dark, hoping to stumble upon answers. We can ask for God's wisdom to guide our choices.

Wisdom means practical discernment. It begins with respect for God, leads to right living, and results in increased ability to tell right from wrong. God is willing to give us this wisdom, but we will be unable to receive it if our goals are self-centered instead of God-centered. To learn God's will, we need to read his Word and ask him to show us how to obey it. Then we must do what he tells us.

To "believe and not doubt" means not only believing in the existence of God, but also believing in his loving care. It includes relying on God and expecting that he will hear and answer when we pray. We must put away our critical attitude when we come to him. God does not grant every thoughtless or selfish request. We must have confidence that God will align our desires with his purposes.

A mind that wavers is not completely convinced that God's way is best. It treats God's Word like any human advice, and it retains the option to disobey. It

vacillates between allegiance to subjective feelings, the world's ideas, and God's commands. If your faith is new, weak, or struggling, remember that you can trust God. Then be loyal to him. To stabilize your wavering or doubtful mind, commit yourself wholeheartedly to God.

If you have ever seen the constant rolling of huge waves at sea, you know how restless they are—subject to the forces of wind, gravity, and tide. Doubt leaves a person as unsettled as the restless waves. If you want to stop being tossed about, rely on God to show you what is best for you. Ask him for wisdom, and trust that he will give it to you. Then your decisions will be sure and solid.

Chapter 2

Seeking the proper perspective on life

James 1:9-11 Christians who are poor should be glad, for God has honored them. And those who are rich should be glad, for God has humbled them. They will fade away like a flower in the field.

The hot sun rises and dries up the grass; the flower withers, and its beauty fades away. So also, wealthy people will fade away with all of their achievements. Christians who aren't in high positions in this world should be glad, because they are great in the Lord's eyes. This "brother in humble circumstances" is a person without status or wealth. Such people are often overlooked, even in our churches today, but they are not overlooked by God.

The poor should be glad that riches mean nothing to God; otherwise these people would be considered unworthy.

The rich should be glad that money means nothing to God, because money is easily lost. We find true wealth by developing our spiritual life, not by developing our financial assets. God is interested in what is lasting (our souls), not in what is temporary (our money and possessions).

Jesus' words on this subject. Strive to treat each person as Christ would treat him or her.

If wealth, power, and status mean nothing to God, why do we attribute so much importance to them and so much honor to those who possess them? Do your material possessions give you goals and your only reason for living? If they were gone, what would be left? What you have in your heart, not your bank account, matters to God and endures for eternity.

Holding on to the goodness of God

James 1:12-18 God blesses the people who patiently endure testing. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. Remember, no one who wants to do wrong should ever say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else either.

Temptation comes from the lure of our own evil desires. These evil desires lead to evil actions, and evil actions lead to death. So don't be misled, my dear

brothers and sisters.

Whatever is good and perfect comes to us from God above, who created all heaven's lights. Unlike them, he never changes or casts shifting shadows.

In his goodness he chose to make us his own children by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his choice possession.

Chapter 3

Are you listening?

James 1:19-20 My dear brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Your anger can never make things right in God's sight.

When we talk too much and listen too little, we communicate to others that we think our ideas are much more important than theirs. James wisely advises us to reverse this process.

Put a mental stopwatch on your conversations and keep track of how much you talk and how much you listen. When people talk with you, do they feel that their viewpoints and ideas have value?

These verses speak of anger that erupts when our egos are bruised— “*I am hurt;*” “*My opinions are not being heard.*” When injustice and sin occur, we *should* become angry because others are being hurt.

But we should not become angry when we fail to win an argument or when we feel offended or neglected. Selfish anger never helps anybody.

Becoming doers of the word

James 1:21-27 So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the message God has planted in your hearts, for it is strong enough to save your souls.

And remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to. If you don't obey, you are only fooling yourself.

If you just listen and don't obey, it is like looking at your face in a mirror but doing nothing to improve your appearance.

You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you keep looking steadily into God's perfect law—the law that sets you free—and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are just fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.

Pure and lasting religion in the sight of God our Father means that we must care for orphans and widows in their troubles, and refuse to let the world corrupt us.

James advises us to get rid of all that is wrong in our lives and “humbly accept” the salvation message we have received (“the word planted in you”), because it alone can save us.

It is important to listen to what God’s Word says, but it is much more important to obey it, to *do* what it says. We can measure the effectiveness of our Bible study time by the effect it has on our behavior and attitudes. Do you put into action what you have studied?

It seems paradoxical that a law could give us freedom, but God’s law points out sin in us and gives us the opportunity to ask for God’s forgiveness (see Romans 7:7-8).

As Christians, we are saved by God’s grace, and salvation frees us from sin’s control. As believers, we are free to live as God created us to live. Of course, this does not mean that we are free to do as we please (see 1 Peter 2:16). We are now free to obey God.

No matter how spiritual we may think we are, we all could control our speech more effectively.

In the first century, orphans and widows had very little means of economic support. Unless a family member was willing to care for them, they were reduced to begging, selling themselves as slaves, or starving. By caring for these powerless people, the church put God’s Word into practice.

When we give with no hope of receiving in return, we show what it means to serve others.

To keep ourselves from being polluted by the world, we need to commit ourselves to Christ’s ethical and moral system, not the world’s. We are not to adapt to the world’s value system, which is based on money, power, and pleasure. True faith means nothing if we are contaminated with such values.

Chapter 4

The call to avoid favoritism

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

For instance, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in shabby clothes. If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor"—well, doesn't this discrimination show that you are guided by wrong motives?

Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the kingdom God promised to those who love him? And yet, you insult the poor man! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? They the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?

Yes, indeed, it is good when you truly obey our Lord's royal command found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbor as yourself." But if you pay special attention to the rich, you are committing a sin, for you are guilty of breaking that law.

And the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as the person who has broken all of God's laws.

For the same God who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." So if you murder someone, you have broken the entire law, even if you do not commit adultery.

So whenever you speak, or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law of love, the law that set you free. For there will be no mercy for you if you have not been merciful to others. But if you have been merciful, then God's mercy toward you will win out over his judgment against you.

In this chapter James argues against favoritism and for the necessity of good deeds. He presents three principles of faith:

Commitment is an essential part of faith. You cannot be a Christian simply by affirming the right doctrines or agreeing with Biblical facts (James 2:19). You must commit your mind and heart to Christ.

Right actions are the natural by-products of true faith. A genuine Christian will have a changed life (James 2:18)

Faith without good deeds doesn't do anybody any good—it is useless (James 2:14-17). James's teachings are consistent with Paul's teaching that we receive salvation by faith alone. Paul emphasizes the purpose of faith—to bring salvation.

James emphasizes the results of faith—a changed life.

James condemns acts of favoritism. Often we treat a well-dressed, impressive-looking person better than someone who looks shabby.

We do this because we would rather identify with successful people than with apparent failures.

The irony, as James reminds us, is that the supposed winners may have gained their impressive life-style at our expense.

In addition, the rich find it difficult to identify with the Lord Jesus, who came as a humble servant. Are you easily impressed by status, wealth, or fame? Are you being partial to the “haves” while ignoring the “have nots”? This attitude is sinful.

God views all people as equals, and if he favors anyone, it is the poor and the powerless. We should follow his example.

Why is it wrong to judge a person by his or her economic status? Wealth may indicate intelligence, wise decisions, and hard work. On the other hand, it may mean only that a person had the good fortune of being born into a wealthy family. Or it can even be the sign of greed, dishonesty, and selfishness.

By honoring someone just because he or she dresses well, we are making appearance more important than character. Sometimes we do this because

Poverty makes us uncomfortable; we don't want to face our responsibilities to those who have less than we do;

We want to be wealthy too, and we hope to use the rich person as a means to that end;

We want the rich person to join our church and help support it financially.

All these motives are selfish; they view neither the rich nor the poor person as a human being in need of fellowship. If we say that Christ is our Lord, then we must live as he requires, showing no favoritism and loving all people regardless of whether they are rich or poor.

We are often partial to the rich because we mistakenly assume that riches are a sign of God's blessing and approval.

But God does not promise us earthly rewards or riches; in fact, Christ calls us to be ready to suffer for him and give up everything in order to hold on to eternal life (Matthew 6:19-21; Matthew 19:28-30; Luke 12:14-34; Romans 8:15-21; 1 Tim. 6:17-19).

We will have untold riches in eternity if we are faithful in our present life (Luke 6:35; John 12:23-25; Galatians 6:7-10; Titus 3:4-8).

When James speaks about the poor, he is talking about those who have no money and also about those whose simple values are despised by much of our affluent society. Perhaps the “poor” people prefer serving to managing, human relationships to financial security, peace to power.

This does not mean that the poor will automatically go to heaven and the rich to hell.

We must treat all people as we would want to be treated. We should not ignore the rich, because then we would be withholding our love. But we must not favor them for what they can do for us, while ignoring the poor who can offer us seemingly so little in return.

Poor people, however, are usually more aware of their powerlessness. Thus it is often easier for them to acknowledge their need for salvation. One of the greatest barriers to salvation for the rich is pride. For the poor, bitterness can often bar the way to acceptance of salvation.

We dare not say: “Because I can’t keep every demand of God, why even try?” James reminds us that if we’ve broken just one law, we are sinners. We can’t decide to keep part of God’s law and ignore the rest.

We can’t break the law a little bit; if you have broken it at all, you need Christ to pay for your sin. Measure yourself, not someone else, against God’s standards. Ask for forgiveness where you need it, and then renew your effort to put your faith into practice.

As Christians we are saved by God’s free gift (grace) through faith, not by keeping the law. But as Christians, we are also required to obey Christ. The apostle Paul taught “for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:10) to be judged for our conduct.

God’s grace does not cancel our duty to obey him; it gives our obedience a new basis. The law is no longer an external set of rules, but it is a “law that gives freedom”—one we joyfully and willingly carry out, because we love God and because we have the power of his Holy Spirit to carry it out (see James 1:25).

Only God in his mercy can forgive our sins. We can’t earn forgiveness by forgiving others. But when we withhold forgiveness from others after having received it ourselves, we show that we don’t understand or appreciate God’s mercy toward us (see Matthew 6:14-15; Matthew 18:21ff; Ephes. 4:31-32).

Do Faith and works go together?

James 2:14-26 Dear brothers and sisters, what's the use of saying you have faith if you don't prove it by your actions? That kind of faith can't save anyone.

Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, and you say, "Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't

give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

So you see, it isn't enough just to have faith. Faith that doesn't show itself by good deeds is no faith at all—it is dead and useless.

Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." I say, "I can't see your faith if you don't have good deeds, but I will show you my faith through my good deeds."

Do you still think it's enough just to believe that there is one God? Well, even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror! Fool! When will you ever learn that faith that does not result in good deeds is useless?

Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was declared right with God because of what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? See, he was trusting God so much that he was willing to do whatever God told him to do. His faith was made complete by what he did—by his actions.

And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, so God declared him to be righteous." He was even called "the friend of God." So you see, we are made right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

Rahab the prostitute is another example of this. She was made right with God by her actions—when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. Just as the body is dead without a spirit, so also faith is dead without good deeds.

When someone claims to have faith, what he or she may have is intellectual assent—agreement with a set of Christian teachings—and as such it would be incomplete faith. True faith transforms our conduct as well as our thoughts. If our lives remain unchanged, we don't truly believe the truths we claim to believe.

We cannot earn our salvation by serving and obeying God. But such actions show that our commitment to God is real. Deeds of loving service are not a substitute for, but rather a verification of, our faith in Christ.

While it is true that our good deeds can never earn salvation, true faith always results in a changed life and good deeds. Paul speaks against those who try to be saved by deeds instead of true faith; James speaks against those who confuse mere intellectual assent with true faith. After all, even demons know who Jesus is, but they don't obey him (James 2:19). True faith involves a commitment of your whole self to God.

James says that Abraham was "considered righteous" for what he *did*. Paul says he was justified because he *believed* God (Romans 4:1-5). James and Paul are not contradicting but complementing each other. Let's not conclude that the truth is a blending of these two statements. We are not justified by what we do in any way.

True faith always results in deeds, but the deeds do not justify us. Faith brings us salvation; active obedience demonstrates that our faith is genuine.

Rahab lived in Jericho, a city the Israelites conquered as they entered the Promised Land (Joshua 2). When Israel's spies came to the city, she hid them and helped them escape. In this way she demonstrated faith in God's purpose for Israel. As a result, she and her family were saved when the city was destroyed. Hebrews 11:31 lists Rahab among the heroes of faith.

Chapter 5

Taming the tongue

James 3:1-12 Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged by God with greater strictness.

We all make many mistakes, but those who control their tongues can also control themselves in every other way. We can make a large horse turn around and go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. And a tiny rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot wants it to go, even though the winds are strong.

So also, the tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do. A tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is full of wickedness that can ruin your whole life. It can turn the entire course of your life into a blazing flame of destruction, for it is set on fire by hell itself.

People can tame all kinds of animals and birds and reptiles and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is an uncontrollable evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it breaks out into curses against those who have been made in the image of God.

And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water?

Can you pick olives from a fig tree or figs from a grapevine? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty pool.

Teaching was a highly valued and respected profession in Jewish culture, and many Jews who embraced Christianity wanted to become teachers. James warned that although it is good to aspire to teach, the teachers' responsibility is great because their words and example affect others' spiritual lives.

If you are in a teaching or leadership role, how are you affecting those you lead?

What you say and what you *don't* say are both important. Proper speech is

not only saying the right words at the right time, but it is also controlling your desire to say what you shouldn't.

Examples of an untamed tongue include gossiping, putting others down, bragging, manipulating, false teaching, exaggerating, complaining, flattering, and lying. Before you speak, ask, "Is what I want to say true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?"

James compares the damage the tongue can do to a raging fire—the tongue's wickedness has its source in hell itself. The uncontrolled tongue can do terrible damage. Satan uses the tongue to divide people and pit them against one another. Idle and hateful words are damaging because they spread destruction quickly, and no one can stop the results once they are spoken.

We dare not be careless with what we say, thinking we can apologize later, because even if we do, the scars remain. A few words spoken in anger can destroy a relationship that took years to build. Before you speak, remember that words are like fire—you can neither control nor reverse the damage they can do.

If no human being can control the tongue, why bother trying? Even if we may not achieve perfect control of our tongues, we can still learn enough control to reduce the damage our words can do. It is better to fight a fire than to go around setting new ones!

The Holy Spirit will give us increasing power to monitor and control what we say, so that when we are offended, the Spirit will remind us of God's love, and we won't react in a hateful manner. When we are criticized, the Spirit will heal the hurt, and we won't lash out.

Our contradictory speech often puzzles us. At times our words are right and pleasing to God, but at other times they are violent and destructive. Which of these speech patterns reflects our true identity? The tongue gives us a picture of our basic human nature.

We were made in God's image, but we have also fallen into sin. God works to change us from the inside out. When the Holy Spirit purifies a heart, he gives self-control so that the person will speak words that please God.

Wisdom, the worlds of God

James 3:13 -18 If you are wise and understand God's ways, live a life of steady goodness so that only good deeds will pour forth. And if you don't brag about the good you do, then you will be truly wise!

But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your hearts, don't brag about being wise. That is the worst kind of lie. [15] For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and motivated by the Devil.

Wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and every kind of evil.

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no partiality and is always sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness.

Have you ever known anyone who claimed to be wise but who acted foolishly? True wisdom can be measured by the depth of a person's character. Just as you can identify a tree by the type of fruit it produces, you can evaluate your wisdom by the way you act.

Foolishness leads to disorder, but wisdom leads to peace and goodness. Are you tempted to escalate the conflict, pass on the gossip, or fan the fire of discord? Careful, winsome speech and wise, loving words are the seeds of peace. God loves peacemakers (Matthew 5:9).

“Bitter envy and selfish ambition” are inspired by the devil. It is easy for us to be drawn into wrong desires by the pressures of society and sometimes even by well-meaning Christians. By listening to the advice: “Assert yourself,” “Go for it,” “Set high goals,” we can be drawn into greed and destructive competitiveness. Seeking God's wisdom delivers us from the need to compare ourselves to others and to want what they have.

Chapter 6

God hates pride

James 4:1-6 What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Isn't it the whole army of evil desires at war within you? You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous for what others have, and you can't possess it, so you fight and quarrel to take it away from them. And yet the reason you don't have what you want is that you don't ask God for it.

And even when you do ask, you don't get it because your whole motive is wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with this world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again, that if your aim is to enjoy this world, you can't be a friend of God.

What do you think the Scriptures mean when they say that the Holy Spirit, whom God has placed within us, jealously longs for us to be faithful? [6] He gives us more and more strength to stand against such evil desires. As the Scriptures say, "God sets himself against the proud, but he shows favor to the humble."

Conflicts and disputes among believers are always harmful. James explains that these quarrels result from evil desires battling within us—we want more possessions, more money, higher status, more recognition. When we want badly enough to fulfill these desires, we fight in order to do so. Instead of aggressively grabbing what we want, we should submit ourselves to God, ask God to help us get rid of our selfish desires, and trust him to give us what we really need.

James mentions the most common problems in prayer: not asking, asking for the wrong things, asking for the wrong reasons. Do you talk to God at all?

When you do, what do you talk about? Do you ask only to satisfy your desires? Do you seek God's approval for what you already plan to do? Your prayers will become powerful when you allow God to change your desires so that they perfectly correspond to his will for you (1 John 3:21-22).

There is nothing wrong with wanting a pleasurable life. God gives us good gifts that he wants us to enjoy (James 1:17; Ephesians 4:7; 1 Tim. 4:4-5).

But having friendship with the world involves seeking pleasure at others' expense or at the expense of obeying God. Pleasure that keeps us from pleasing

God is sinful; pleasure from God's rich bounty is good.

The cure for evil desires is humility (see Proverbs 16:18-19; 1 Peter 5:5-6). Pride makes us self-centered and leads us to conclude that we deserve all we can see, touch, or imagine. It creates greedy appetites for far more than we need. We can be released from our self-centered desires by humbling ourselves before God, realizing that all we really need is his approval.

When the Holy Spirit fills us, we see that this world's seductive attractions are only cheap substitutes for what God has to offer.

How to repent

James 4:7-10 So humble yourselves before God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, you hypocrites.

Let there be tears for the wrong things you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. When you bow down before the Lord and admit your dependence on him, he will lift you up and give you honor.

Although God and the devil are at war, we don't have to wait until the end to see who will win. God has *already* defeated Satan (Rev. 12:10-12), and when Christ returns, the devil and all he stands for will be eliminated forever (Rev. 20:10-15).

Satan is here now, however, and he is trying to win us over to his evil cause. With the Holy Spirit's power, we can resist the devil, and he will flee from us.

How can you come near to God?

James gives five ways:

Submit to God (James 4:7). Yield to his authority and will, commit your life to him and his control, and be willing to follow him.

Wash your hands. . .

and purify your hearts *Resist the devil* (James 4:7). Don't allow Satan to entice and tempt you.

(that is, lead a pure life) (James 4:8). Be cleansed from sin, replacing your

desire to sin with your desire to experience God's purity.

Grieve and mourn and wail in sincere sorrow for your sins (James 4:9).

Don't be afraid to express deep heartfelt sorrow for what you have done. (5)

Humble yourself before the Lord, and he will lift you up (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6).

Humbling ourselves means recognizing that our worth comes from God alone. To be humble involves working with his power according to his guidance, not with our own independent effort.

Although we do not deserve God's favor, he reaches out to us in love and gives us worth and dignity, despite our human shortcomings.

Chapter 7

Do not judge

James 4:11-12 Don't speak evil against each other, my dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize each other and condemn each other, then you are criticizing and condemning God's law. But you are not a judge who can decide whether the law is right or wrong. Your job is to obey it.

God alone, who made the law, can rightly judge among us. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to condemn your neighbor? Jesus summarized the law as love for God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40), and Paul said that love demonstrated toward a neighbor would fully satisfy the law (Romans 13:6-10).

When we fail to love, we are actually breaking God's law. Examine your attitude and actions toward others. Do you build people up or tear them down? When you're ready to criticize someone, remember God's law of love and say something good instead. Saying something beneficial to others will cure you of finding fault and increase your ability to obey God's law of love.

Do not plan ahead without God.

James 4:13-17 Look here, you people who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit."

How do you know what will happen tomorrow? For your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone.

What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that." Otherwise you will be boasting about your own plans, and all such boasting is evil.

Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.

It is good to have goals, but goals will disappoint us if we leave God out of them. There is no point in making plans as though God does not exist, because the future is in his hands. What would you like to be doing ten years from now? One

year from now? Tomorrow?

How will you react if God steps in and rearranges your plans? Plan ahead, but hold your plans loosely. Put God's desires at the center of your planning; he will never disappoint you.

Life is short no matter how many years we live. Don't be deceived into thinking that you have lots of remaining time to live for Christ, to enjoy your loved ones, or to do what you know you should. Live for God today!

Then, no matter when your life ends, you will have fulfilled God's plan for you.

We tend to think that *doing* wrong is sin. But James tells us that sin is also *not* doing right. (These two kinds of sin are sometimes called sins of commission and sins of omission.)

It is a sin to lie; it can also be a sin to know the truth and not tell it. It is a sin to speak evil of someone; it is also a sin to avoid him or her when you know he or she needs your friendship.

We should be willing to help as the Holy Spirit guides us. If God has directed you to do a kind act, to render a service, or to restore a relationship, do it. You will experience a renewed and refreshed vitality to your Christian faith.

Chapter 8

Do you have a suppressor's heart?

James 5:1-6 Look here, you rich people, weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you.

Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. Your gold and silver have become worthless. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh in hell. This treasure you have accumulated will stand as evidence against you on the Day of Judgment.

For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The wages you held back cry out against you. The cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.

You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every whim. Now your hearts are nice and fat, ready for the slaughter. You have condemned and killed good people who had no power to defend themselves against you.

James proclaims the worthlessness of riches, not the worthlessness of the rich. Today's money will be worthless when Christ returns, so we should spend our time accumulating the kind of treasures that will be worthwhile in God's eternal kingdom.

Money is not the problem; Christian leaders need money to live and to support their families; missionaries need money to help them spread the gospel; churches need money to do their work effectively.

It is the *love* of money that leads to evil (1 Tim. 6:10) and causes some people to oppress others in order to get more.

This is a warning to all Christians who are tempted to adopt worldly standards rather than God's standards (Romans 12:1-2) as well as an encouragement to all those who are oppressed by the rich. Also read Matthew 6:19-21 to see what Jesus says about riches.

Innocent men were defenseless persons, probably poor laborers. Poor people who could not pay their debts were thrown in prison or forced to sell all their possessions. At times, they were even forced to sell their family members into

slavery.

With no opportunity to work off their debts, poor people often died of starvation. God called this murder. Hoarding money, exploiting employees, and living self-indulgently will not escape God's notice.

Patience in suffering

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

Don't grumble about each other, my brothers and sisters, or God will judge you. For look! The great Judge is coming. He is standing at the door!

For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We give great honor to those who endure under suffering.

Job is an example of a man who endured patiently. From his experience we see how the Lord's plan finally ended in good, for he is full of tenderness and mercy.

But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned for it.

The farmer must wait patiently for his crops to grow; he cannot hurry the process. But he does not take the summer off and hope that all goes well in the fields. There is much work to do to ensure a good harvest. In the same way, we must wait patiently for Christ's return.

But while we wait, there is much work that we can do to advance God's kingdom. Both the farmer and the Christian must live by faith, looking toward the future reward for their labors. Don't live as if Christ will never come. Work faithfully to build his kingdom—the King *will* come when the time is right.

When things go wrong, we tend to grumble against and blame others for our miseries (see the second note on +Genesis 3:11-13). Blaming others is easier than owning our share of the responsibility, but it can be both destructive and sinful. Before you judge others for their shortcomings, remember that Christ the Judge will come to evaluate each of us (Matthew 7:1-5; Matthew 25:31- 46). He will not

let us get away with shifting the blame to others.

A person with a reputation for exaggeration or lying often can't get anyone to believe him on his word alone. Christians should never become like that.

Always be honest so that others will believe your simple yes or no. By avoiding lies, half-truths, and omissions of the truth, you will become known as a trustworthy person.

Chapter 9

The Power of Prayer

James 5:13-18 Are any among you suffering? They should keep on praying about it. And those who have reason to be thankful should continually sing praises to the Lord.

If any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.

And their prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make them well. And anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results.

Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for the next three and a half years! [18] Then he prayed for rain, and down it poured. The grass turned green, and the crops began to grow again.

James is referring to someone who is incapacitated physically. In Scripture, oil was both a medicine (see the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37) and a symbol of the Spirit of God (as used in anointing kings, see 1 Samuel 16:1-13). Thus oil can represent both the medical and the spiritual spheres of life. Christians should not separate the physical and the spiritual— Jesus Christ is Lord over both the body and the spirit.

People in the church are not alone. Members of Christ's body should be able to count on others for support and prayer, especially when they are sick or suffering.

The elders should be on call to respond to the illness of any member, and the church should stay alert to pray for the needs of all its members.

“The prayer offered in faith” does not refer to the faith of the sick person, but to the faith of the people praying. God heals, faith doesn't, and all prayers are subject to God's will. But our prayers are part of God's healing process.

That is why God often waits for our prayers of faith before intervening to heal a person.

Christ has made it possible for us to go directly to God for forgiveness. But confessing our sins to each other still has an important place in the life of the church.

If we have sinned against an individual, we must ask him or her to forgive us. If our sin has affected the church, we must confess it publicly.

If we need loving support as we struggle with a sin, we should confess that sin to those who are able to provide that support.

If, after confessing a private sin to God, we still don't feel his forgiveness, we may wish to confess that sin to a fellow believer and hear him or her assure us of God's pardon.

In Christ's kingdom, every believer is a priest to other believers (1 Peter 2:9).

The Christian's most powerful resource is communion with God through prayer. The results are often greater than we thought were possible. Some people see prayer as a last resort to be tried when all else fails.

This approach is backward. Prayer should come first. Because God's power is infinitely greater than ours, it only makes sense to rely on it—especially because God encourages us to do so.

Bring back our wandering brothers

James 5:19-20 My dear brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back again, you can be sure that the one who brings that person back will save that sinner from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.

Clearly this person who has wandered from the truth is a believer who has fallen into sin—one who is no longer living a life consistent with his or her beliefs. Christians disagree over whether or not it is possible for people to lose their salvation, but all agree that those who move away from their faith are in serious trouble and need to repent.

James urges Christians to help backsliders return to God. By taking the initiative, praying for the person, and acting in love, we can meet the person where he or she is and bring him or her back to God and his forgiveness.

The book of James emphasizes faith in action. Right living is the evidence and result of faith. The church must serve with compassion, speak lovingly and truthfully, live in obedience to God's commands, and love one another.

The body of believers ought to be an example of heaven on earth, drawing people to Christ through love for God and each other.

If we truly believe God's Word, we will *live* it day by day. God's Word is not merely something we read or think about, but something we do. Belief, faith, and trust must have hands and feet—ours!

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation Holy Bible: New Living Bible translation.

**Additional comments and charts are taken from:
Life Application Study Bible. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007.**