



# RELATE

## ADULT CONNECT CLASS CURRICULUM

DONALD J. WILLS  
SENIOR PASTOR



AUGUST  
2020

The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

## A Note From Our Pastor

Dear FBC family and friends,

We live in a time when reality TV is at the forefront of interest to the viewing audience. There are many DIY (Do-It-Yourself) shows that demonstrate “how to” remodel a house, flip a house, cook an extravagant 5-star restaurant-quality dinner, or fix up an old jalopy into a street rod that will make you the envy of the road. What about the Christian life? Is there a particular book of the Bible that perhaps more than any other gives the “how to” or practical side of living the Christian life? The answer would be this brief book “The Epistle of James” upon which we will focus this month in our Bible Study Curriculum. Perhaps, the most quoted verse which sums up the book is 2:26: “Faith without works is dead.” So, James gives us clear insight into having a faith that is at work and not “dead.”

As a reminder, the layout of this Curriculum begins with a 7-day approach for both the teacher and the members to get the most from each study. We also acknowledge that teachers may have their own methods for preparing the lessons and we encourage them to prepare in the way that makes them most effective in presenting God’s Word and the weekly lesson. We also encourage each teacher and member to use the suggested 7-day approach for their own personal study and encouragement.

I am excited about the prospect of this study and the impact it can have on our church as a whole. If we all apply what is brought out in this study in our lives, we will be able to impact our community for Christ. Not only that, but we will learn how to deal with difficulty in our lives as well as understand that our time here is brief. All the while, remembering that God is in control and our lives should be in total reliance on Him. Knowing that God is faithful, we can apply these teachings in our lives which He will use to help us grow and mature in Him.

-Blessings  
Pastor Don



## *Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively*

### ***Introduce***

***Day 1:*** Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

### ***Instruct***

***Day 2:*** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

***Day 3:*** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

### ***Inspire***

***Day 4:*** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned in your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

### ***Incorporate***

***Day 5:*** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

***Day 6:*** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

***Day 7:*** Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

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FOR OUR CURRENT SCHEDULE & LINKS, GO ONLINE TO  
[FBCFW.ORG/BIBLE-STUDY/](https://www.fbcfw.org/bible-study/)

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**SUNDAYS • IN-PERSON WORSHIP SERVICES**

**9:15 AM • 65+ & AT-RISK**

**11:00 AM • OPEN TO ALL**

**BOTH SERVICES ARE LIVE-STREAMED**

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**SUNDAYS • BIBLE STUDIES FOR ALL ADULTS**

**WE ENCOURAGE EVERYONE TO PARTICIPATE!**

IF YOU DON'T NORMALLY ATTEND A CLASS, NOW IS A GREAT TIME  
TO TRY THEM OUT TO SEE WHICH ONE BEST SUITS YOUR NEEDS.

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**WEDNESDAYS**

**NOON • JOIN MR. DAVE FOR #KAZKIDSLIVE**  
SEARCH @KAZKIDS ON FACEBOOK TO FIND US WEEKLY!

**6:30PM • GROUNDED STUDENTS**

SEARCH @GROUNDEDSTUDENT ON FACEBOOK TO FIND US! WE WILL  
ALTERNATE BETWEEN ZOOM MEETINGS & IN-PERSON EVENTS

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**THURSDAYS**

**NOON • JOIN US FOR BETWEEN**  
3RD-6TH GRADERS MEET WEEKLY ON ZOOM!

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# MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES

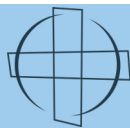
## FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF FORT WORTH

### WHY SHOULD I VOLUNTEER AT FBCFW?

As a believer, God has given you a spiritual gift to be used to serve Him and others. Many volunteers are needed each week to accomplish all God has placed before us as a church. Get involved to discover how you can be part of what God is doing at First Baptist Church of Fort Worth!

#### SOME OF THE IMMEDIATE NEEDS AS WE PREPARE TO REOPEN MINISTRIES ARE:

- **SUNDAYS • PRESCHOOL PRESCHOOL MINISTRY (9:15-10:50AM)**
  - Teachers, Helpers, Secretaries, and Substitutes needed.
- **SUNDAYS • PRESCHOOL MINISTRY EXTENDED CARE SESSION (10:45AM-12:15PM)**
  - Serve only one Sunday a month, or sign-up to be on the substitute list.
- **WEDNESDAYS • AWANA LEADERS FOR ALL AGE GROUPS**
  - Serve 6:15-8:30pm weekly, training will be provided (no teaching required)
- **MEALS FOR MISSION COORDINATOR**
  - The Coordinator / Cook would oversee and prepare the meal (plan, budget, & purchase food) as well as recruit people to help cook, set-up, clean-up, and serve each month.
- **FIRST WORSHIP TUESDAYS KITCHEN TEAM MEMBERS**
  - At least a six-person clean-up crew whose ministry is to stay approximately 30 minutes afterward to assist an already dedicated crew who sets up and prepares weekly meals.
- **FBCFW WORSHIP (CHOOSE TO SERVE YEAR-ROUND OR FOR SPECIAL EVENTS ONLY)**
  - Choir Members
  - Musicians for the Band or Orchestra
  - **FIRSTMedia Team Members (No experience necessary, training provided)**
    - Sound, lights, camera, or computer/slides



TO VIEW ALL MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES GO ONLINE TO  
[OPPORTUNITIES.FBCFW.ORG](https://opportunities.fbcfw.org)

*August 2, 2020*



# *Respond with Patience*

## *James 1:1-11*

Focal Verse:

*"Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience."*

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James 1:3



## Introduce

Most students dread taking tests. Whether we've long since finished with official classroom instruction or it still plays a central role in our lives, we can probably relate to the apprehension and anxiety experienced on the day of the exam. Some students dread taking tests more than others because they fail to prepare sufficiently and study very little; their effort then shows in their grade. Sometimes, however, even those who have studied diligently become overwhelmed and unable to cope because they let circumstances cloud their judgment and dictate how they respond. Consequently, they focus



on the minutiae of the test rather than the final result of demonstrating and applying what they have learned! For instance, some may panic because they don't know exactly what information will be covered on the exam or the format of the questions. Still, other students feel apprehensive because they are slow and methodical, taking so much time to craft their response or to select the right answer that they always become pressed for time.

Tests aren't the product of mere guesswork; they require preparation. While working on my Master of Arts in Theology in seminary, I had a professor who taught Biblical Backgrounds who was infamous for his thorough and tough tests that covered wide swaths of history. On the days that he would lecture, he would call on students to lead the class in prayer. On the days which he gave an exam, he himself would pray because he claimed to have a student who once prayed the whole period to avoid taking the test. When the professor prayed before the exam, he was short and blunt. He would pray, "Lord, please help the students recall what they've studied, but don't let them guess the right answers for anything they haven't."

When properly designed and administered, tests don't merely determine *what* we know; they ensure that we can *apply* our knowledge in a practical way. Therefore, successful tests require preparation by equipping us with the tools to make connections and draw inferences which we can use in our everyday lives. Good tests

## Introduce

will never focus on mere memorization and repetition of information in order to pass only to have the content later forgotten and never used! In reality, such a test serves no purpose! In the many years I taught as an adjunct professor, I never gave my students a study guide—much to their consternation—for this very reason. They needed to prove that they both knew the material and could apply the content when called upon to use it even if in the short-term they struggled with it! In this way, the test looked forward to the end result of helping them use what they had learned.

In life, God uses tests in this same way to determine how we will apply the wisdom He has given us to navigate various kinds of trials that we may encounter. Consequently, God focuses upon the end result which produces endurance and maturation when we surrender to the leading of His Spirit. Last month, we ended our study of Abraham's life seeing how God tested his faith and obedience. Undoubtedly, it showed how Abraham had matured in his faith to trust God fully in contrast to how he had once taken matters into his own hands in Egypt, with Hagar, and again with Abimelech. As we start our study of the letter of James, we will learn how God uses tests and trials in our own lives to gauge whether we have learned to trust in Him and rely upon Him for everything. Trials and tests are not to be feared, but endured with joy—knowing that the Lord will preserve us and help us grow in our faith!

Key  
Question

What do tests or trials in our lives prove about us?

### James 1:1-4

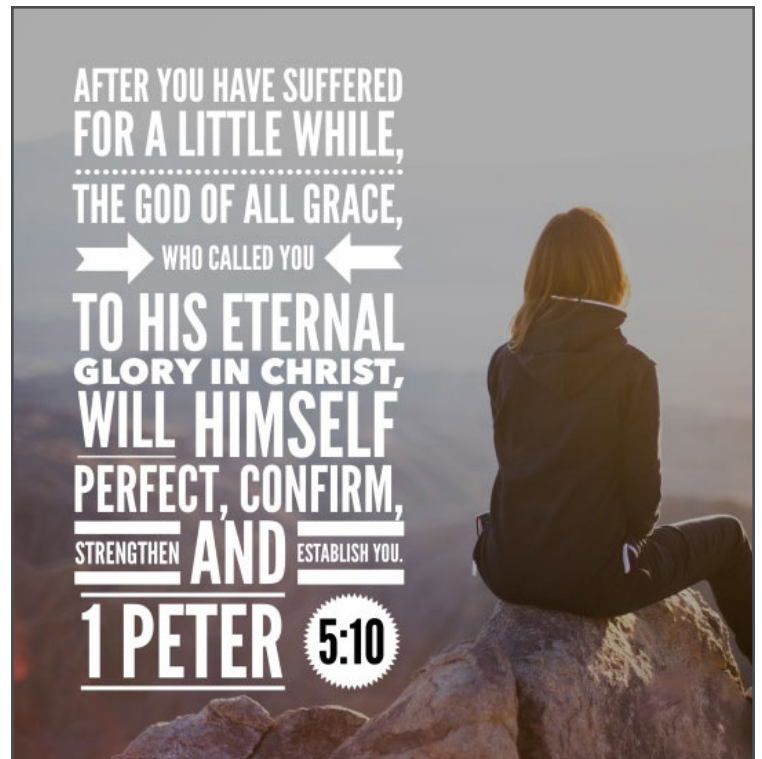
#### ***THE PRODUCT OF TESTING:***

By identifying himself as a servant **of God and the Lord Jesus Christ**, James reveals a radical shift from disbelief to faith. James, the half-brother of Jesus, once rejected His brother's claim to be the Messiah and challenged His authority by prodding Him to prove Himself at a public festival in Jerusalem ([John 7:2-5](#)). Although Jesus didn't cave to His brothers' demands, He does indeed prove Himself as Messiah through His resurrection ([Rom 1:1-4](#)). At that point, He then appeared to James who realized that He is the Messiah and, in fact, God in the flesh ([1 Cor 15:7](#))! The one who once challenged Jesus had now become His servant and an influential leader in the early church in Jerusalem ([Acts 15:13](#); [Gal 1:19](#); [2:9](#)). Church

tradition even suggests that James was martyred for his faith like many in those early days who experienced persecution at the hands of the Jews.

In this letter, he writes to **the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad** (v. 1). This could certainly refer to Jewish Christians, but more likely it refers to all believers in the early church who now share in the promises and inheritance of Jesus the Christ ([Eph 2:11-21](#)). Regardless of one's position about the recipients, these principles apply equally to all believers who should worship in purity with the right motives, seeking to honor the Lord in how we live, what we say, and how we obediently relate to His calling and will for our lives. Written in the style of Proverbs, James addresses several issues throughout the letter in short succession— none perhaps greater than how to deal with the **trials** we encounter in life. The early church was no stranger to the testing of their faith through **various trials** just as we are not immune to difficulties and hardships today.

James opens his letter with a command that sounds shocking to our ears as a modern



## Instruct

audience. He implores us to consider **it all joy** when we face **various** kinds of **trials** (v. 2). He doesn't define the exact nature of these **trials** for his audience or specifically emphasize any in particular that they must currently endure; he leaves his instruction sufficiently broad so as to encompass any hardship or difficulty in life we may face. Because we live in a world corrupted by sin which has altered God's perfect creation bringing destruction and death, we will all find ourselves in difficult situations at times which do not directly stem from our personal choices and over which we have no control. Thus, that oft-asked question of why bad things happen to good people surfaces. James doesn't seek to answer this question directly, however. Instead, he focuses on how we should respond when these situations inevitably arise.

What trials have you faced in life?

Question  
# 1

Therefore, the most appropriate question we should ask is: "How will I respond?"—not "Why are these things happening to me?" When we ask "why," this often leads us down



a path of self-loathing, despair, and depression because our focus shifts from the ultimate outcome to our current circumstances. When we ask "how," it points us to God who ultimately ensures our victory despite the temporary **trials** we may face. Thus, we must resolve to trust God to overcome our circumstances according to His perfect will rather than resigning

ourselves to hopelessness and defeat. To apply James' instruction properly, we must understand three principles which will dictate how we respond to the **trials** we will periodically encounter.

First, we must focus on the things that we can directly control. Often, we can't control our circumstances or the environment in which we live, but we can control how we respond and view them. Those who focus on their circumstances will feel helpless and hopeless; they will likely feel trapped with nowhere to turn because they can't find a solution within themselves or among their fellow man. They also cannot see beyond

their immediate situation and will miss the bigger picture of the victory that comes from the Lord. Consequently, they will frequently make choices which are reactionary and based upon emotion rather than sound logic and biblical guidance. In so doing, they perpetuate the problem instead of finding a solution; this leads to frustration rather than **joy!**

How have you responded to trials in your life in the past? What have you learned from these trials and how did they affect your relationship with the Lord?

Question  
# 2

Even though we can't always control our circumstances, it still doesn't give us the right to make excuses or act irresponsibly. The way we act and the choices we make have a profound impact upon the course of our lives. Therefore, the way in which we respond to trials will often determine the outcome. We can't simply regard them as "fate" in which we can do whatever we want without consequence. When we make poor choices, participate in sin, or reject God's wisdom, it will have an adverse impact! We have control over these things! For this reason, James goes on to address how temptation conceives and gives birth to sin if we allow it ([1:13-15](#)). Implicit within James' command to **count it all joy** is the need to maintain the right perspective in which we turn to the Lord, trust in Him, and seek to apply His wise counsel.

Second, we must turn to the Lord for our source of strength and joy when trials arise. Maintaining joy when we encounter stressful, difficult, or painful times, however,

doesn't come naturally to us. If honest, most of us probably find it easier to complain, lament, or draw attention to our misfortune so others might notice and take pity upon us. Culture even teaches us that by portraying ourselves as victims we can get what we want and desire most. Like children who throw temper tantrums and are "rewarded" by parents who simply



don't want to deal with them and seek to placate them immediately, people learn to exploit their problems for personal gain rather than maturation. By viewing ourselves

## Instruct

as victims of circumstance, we wrongly seek support, compassion, and approval from our fellow man who can offer no permanent solution.

In the end, this “satisfaction” from getting our way is fleeting and temporary because it ignores the grace of God and His everlasting provision. Rather than regarding ourselves as victims of fate, we must see ourselves as victors in Christ. He alone can successfully deliver us through trials and enable us to persevere despite the intensity of the hardship! When viewed properly, trials afford us with valuable experience, insight, and wisdom which we can use in other areas of our lives; they also strengthen our relationship with Christ. In this case, dependence upon Christ doesn’t indicate weakness or ineptness, but it frees us from worry and grants us a dependable source of help which never fails!

In what ways should we focus on the ultimate victory in Christ when facing trials?

Question  
# 3

Third, our **joy** should center on the outcome of the **trials** and what they produce. James isn’t saying that we should take **joy** in misfortune or misery, but rather in **knowing** what these **trials** produce: **patience** or endurance (v. 3). We shouldn’t go around looking for trouble or seeking to bring it upon ourselves as if we attain some spiritual badge of honor. Instead, we should endure it, so that we become **perfect** and **complete, lacking in nothing**, as we mature in our **faith** (v. 4). In Greek, the word translated **patience** in these verses by the NKJV more aptly means endurance or perseverance. We don’t simply “tolerate” **trials**, but we resolve to see them through to the end with the aid of the Lord. In this way, these **trials** do not test whether we have faith; they test our resolve to trust the Lord and rely exclusively upon Him. They test our ability to surrender to Christ and grant Him unconditional access and control of our lives.

We live in a time where many people don’t have the patience or wherewithal to endure and persevere. We’ve become spoiled. We treat life like a DVR or a subscription to an on-demand streaming of programs. We don’t want commercials; we want to fast-forward to the end without interruption. If a program doesn’t suit our tastes, we turn it off and go to the next one that catches our attention. Life doesn’t work that way! We can’t fast-forward or skip. We must learn to endure. Many have learned to throw in the towel and give up when things don’t go their way or meet their expectations.

Certainly, we shouldn't engage in ineffective or detrimental activities simply for the sake of doing so. We must evaluate the effectiveness of our actions and learn from our circumstances. But if God has clearly called us to a specific task, we cannot give up! We must allow Him to equip us and see us through to the end no matter what may happen, the hardships we may face, or what it may cost.



Enduring **trials** in turn **produces** two other outcomes: perfection and completeness (v. 4). When facing trials, we must strive for perfection. Often, we'll see the Greek word translated as **perfect** here referred to as "mature." Undoubtedly, it can mean the end result which leads to maturity or completeness. But maturity as followers of Christ means the pursuit of perfection! We cannot lower the standard to make it more palatable to man. We serve a God and Savior who are perfect, holy, and righteous in every way. Scripture implores us to imitate God ([Lev 19:2](#); [Matt 5:48](#); [Eph 5:1](#)). When we endure trials, our character should reflect His. That's a pretty high standard and an impossible one to attain unless we've completely surrendered to Him!

Why should we always strive for perfection?  
What happens when we begin to focus on the  
impossibility of attaining perfection?

Question  
# 4

**Trials** reveal our true character. We don't suddenly change when faced with difficulty, but who we are and who we follow become evident! Smashing our thumb with a hammer, for instance, doesn't suddenly bring vulgarity to our lips unless we typically (or in the past have) talk that way. Similarly, the words we choose to say when we become frustrated or stressed about a particular situation also reflect what we believe and what we practice. If we lack self-control and don't measure our words, it becomes easier to insult someone for offending us, criticize someone for doing something we don't like, complaining about something that doesn't align with our preferences, or harboring bitterness and a lack of forgiveness for those who have hurt us. Unless we've allowed Christ to transform us and we've given Him complete control to guide us, we

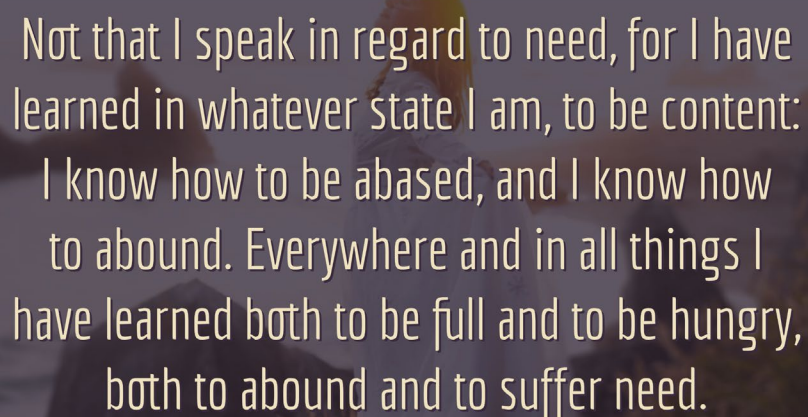
## Instruct

will respond to these challenges in the way that we always have according to our flesh. Yet, in Christ, we can overcome these habits and respond in a way that builds others and helps everyone grow in his or her faith. To do so, we need to model our character after our perfect Savior!

Over the years, how have you seen Christ change your character and how you respond to certain situations?

Question  
# 5

In addition, enduring **trials** also produces completeness whereby we lack **nothing**. Christ makes us complete or whole. In other words, our faith proves genuine because



Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

Philippians 4:11-12

we have correctly placed our confidence in Him! In Christ, we don't need to seek the approval of others whose opinions and views are controlled by their own selfishness and sinfulness. Moreover, we don't have to depend upon society's standards which constantly change upon a whim. We can know God's standard with

certainty which always remains the same! As a result, we find ourselves worrying much less. We won't worry about what others may think or how they'll respond; we'll concern ourselves only with Christ's view and how He has called us to respond!

By having a proper perspective, we will be **complete** and **lacking in nothing** in Christ because we will focus on what He has provided for us and how He has sustained us. Like Paul, we too can learn to become "content" in any circumstance whether we have an abundance or we "suffer need" ([Phil 4:11-12](#)). The secret to contentment comes from the strength that Christ promises us ([Phil 4:13](#)). When we focus on our circumstances, especially in tough times, we will generally decry the things we lack. But when we focus on Christ, we will see what He has done for us and how He has provided! In this sense, we will lack **nothing**! We have everything we need in Christ Jesus to have a



successful and fulfilling life through which we can effectively deal with any trial that may come our way!

In past trials in your life, how have you seen God provide? Why should we not always view God's provision in terms of material things?

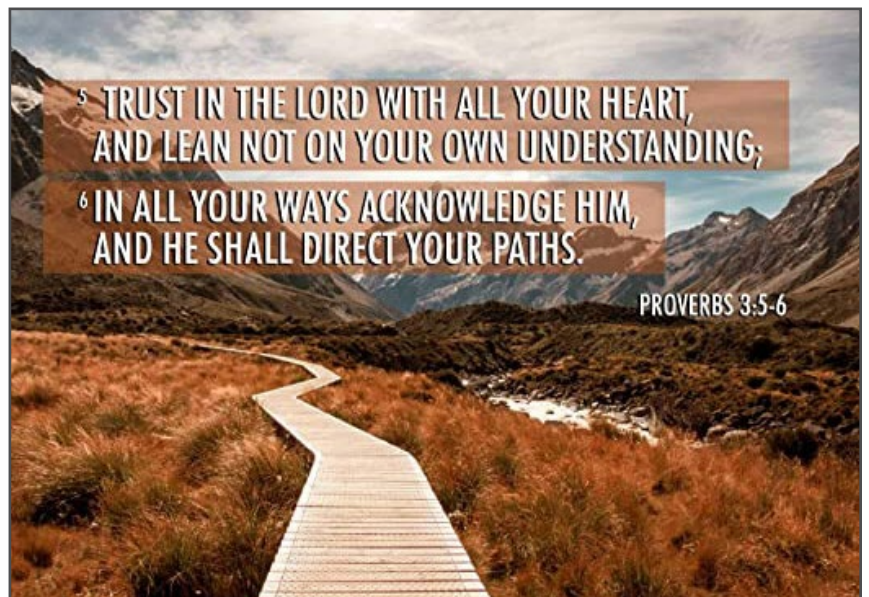
Question  
# 6

## James 1:5-8

### **THE PREPARATION FOR TESTING:**

Although some may view this letter as a patchwork of different, unrelated subjects, it is actually intricately interwoven and interconnected with a purpose! Because we know that we will all face **various** kinds of **trials** throughout our lives, we must start our preparation now! For this reason, James urges us to pray for **wisdom** (v. 5). Having already noted that we will lack **nothing** if we trust God in the midst of difficulty, James now instructs us to pray to Him if we **lack wisdom**. We can only endure **trials**, maintain a proper perspective, and act with moral integrity when we exercise **wisdom** that comes from the Lord ([Prov 2:6](#)).

Just as we must prepare for an exam beforehand, we must also start our preparation before we face a trial. While we can and should pray to God at any time, we must ask Him for **wisdom** to apply the knowledge He has given us in His Word and what He has already taught us when difficult times arise. Waiting to start praying until the trial begins can prove detrimental because we then have the tendency to rely upon our own strength and perceived knowledge which can lead to fleshly decisions devoid of godly **wisdom**. This doesn't mean that we will never need to adapt to our circumstances or change how



we respond as God leads us through the trial. On the contrary, godly **wisdom** helps us evaluate our response and ensures that we're on the right path! At the same time, it prevents us from compromising our faith and acting inconsistently by helping us apply biblical moral values.

## Instruct

When we seek **wisdom** from God, He will give faithfully **without reproach**. The word translated generously or **liberally** is used here only once in the New Testament. Technically, it means that God acts with sincerity or integrity. God undoubtedly gives “generously” in the sense of abundantly, but the idea James wishes to communicate here is God’s faithfulness. When we **ask** of the Lord, He will give **wisdom** to us faithfully. Thus, James contrasts God’s faithfulness in giving with the faithlessness of those who doubt (vv. 6-8). Just as God gives **wisdom** faithfully to us when we **ask** in sincerity without **doubting**, He will also faithfully see us through the trial—He’ll provide us with everything we need to endure and have success!

How have the trials you have faced given you wisdom and insight for living life? How have you applied this wisdom in other areas of your life?

Question  
# 7

James continues by stressing how we should **ask**. We must **ask in faith** without **doubting** (v. 6). He describes the one **who doubts** as **a wave of the sea blown by the wind** which has no direction and arbitrarily reacts to environmental influences. In the same way, a faithless **man is double-minded** and **unstable in all his ways** because he only reacts to his circumstances rather than trust in the only Rock who can provide stability regardless of what may come (v. 8). Consequently, the faithless person who simply calls upon the Lord in times of distress rather than walks with Him daily should **not suppose he will receive anything from Him** (v. 7). What James wants us to understand in these verses is that we must be consistent in our walk and continually seek Christ whether in good times or bad.



Too many people misuse verses like these to turn them into “name-it-and-claim-it” theology which teaches that God will give us whatever we want whenever we **ask** if only we would believe strong enough. Scripture never teaches this! In fact, this interpretation misses the entire point of the passage! James is not saying that

we will never experience doubt or uncertainty in our lives. We will at times. Abraham did. Peter did. Thomas did. James, on the contrary, focuses on the consistency of our walk.

Many people abandon God in the prosperous and good times of life only to seek Him when they experience turmoil and trouble and have tried every other option. These people, as James states, are opportunists, **unstable** in every way. They want to mold God to their purposes and call upon Him only when they need Him because they otherwise see themselves as self-sufficient. We should never act in this way! We must seek God at all times; we must follow His guidance during the prosperous times as well as the difficult times. We must learn to praise Him in both! We must be consistent in our walk.

How would you assess the consistency of your walk with Christ?

Question  
# 8

## James 1:9-11

### ***THE PROOF OF TESTING:***

The proof of our testing becomes evident in our outlook and perspective. To endure repeated **trials** in this life, we must focus on spiritual matters which have eternal consequences rather than mere physical or material matters which are only temporary. To prove his point, James contrasts those of humble (i.e. **lowly**) means with the **rich**. Whether **rich** or living from paycheck to paycheck, our focus should always be on Christ! Just like the **rich** whose money and wealth one day **will pass away**, so also will any heartaches or **trials** experienced by those of humble means. In a sense, James highlights the temporariness of **trials** through this illustration. We can look beyond them because in the end they too **will pass**. But Christ always remains the same! James, therefore, exhorts the believer of humble means to **glory** (or boast) **in his exaltation** (v. 9). In other words, he must look at the spiritual wealth he has in Christ. Most likely, James recalls Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in which He says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:3). Paired with Jesus' assertion that "the first shall be last and the last shall be first" ([Matt 20:16](#)), it highlights the believers' blessing of eternal life through Christ. When we look beyond the temporary troubles of this life, we will have **joy** in the eternal life in our Savior that awaits. In contrast, James cautions those who are **rich** in this life to remember the source of their wealth. They too must exercise humility in recognizing the

## Instruct

impermanence of their wealth and position. They too need to “store up their treasures in heaven” rather than take pleasure here on earth alone where “moth and rust destroy” ([Matt 6:19-20](#)).

For this reason, James reminds them how quickly their wealth and security can disappear. As a **flower of the field** in all its radiant splendor will **pass away** when the seasons change or a dry spell comes, so will all their wealth (v. 10). For Texans, James uses an apt illustration which we can readily understand here in the summer! **The sun** with its scorching **heat** combined with the lack of rainfall causes **the grass** to wither and the **flower** petals to fall. In the same way, the **rich man** will also **fade in all his pursuits** (v. 11)! Everything in this life is temporary! We must focus on that which has eternal value and offers lasting hope. For those enduring **trials**, this offers us hope because we know that our troubles too shall pass in Christ. For those who aren't currently experiencing trials, it serves as a reminder that we still must trust Christ and depend upon Him in every situation regardless of the circumstances. Whether **rich** or of humble means or whether currently facing **trials** or living in triumph, our source of **joy** comes from Christ and our dependence upon Him for everything in life!

Why is it easier to forsake Christ when we have plenty and times are going well? How can we combat this tendency in our lives?

Question  
# 9

Whether to master content in school, to obtain a driver's license, to pass a hunter or boating safety course, or to receive certification or training for our jobs, we've all taken tests at some point in our lives. For most, we know the day and content covered, so we have plenty of time to prepare sufficiently. Sometimes, however, they come unexpectedly like a pop quiz, but even then a teacher generally warns about the possibility so students can prepare by doing their daily assignments. In life, trials come suddenly and unexpectedly with little or no warning. Yet, we've been warned that we will undoubtedly face them! We have no excuse for not being prepared.

We may not know the circumstances of the individual trial or exactly how it will play out. But we know the ultimate outcome. We have victory in Christ regardless of whatever may happen to us in this life. To prepare successfully for any trial that will inevitably come, we must walk with Christ consistently during the good times and the bad. We need to depend upon Christ and cultivate our relationship with Him as much during the good times as we do when we seek help from Him during the difficult times. If we are self-sufficient and self-reliant, forgetting Him when we're prosperous, we won't truly depend upon Him and surrender to Him when we face a trial. Let us mature daily in our walk with Christ so that we have the right perspective and focus when trials come and we can endure them with joy, knowing that we ultimately have victory in Him.

## ***Incorporate***

What advice would you give someone going through a trial? To what Scriptures would you point them?

As a church, what encouragement and support can we give those currently enduring trials? To what biblical examples (whether good or bad) can we point about how we should approach such situations?

How can we effectively prepare to face a trial or help teach others to prepare? What are the essential elements of this preparation?

## ***Journal: Document God's Work***

*August 9, 2020*



# *React with Piety*

## *James 1:12-20*

Focal Verse:

“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

James 1:12

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## Introduce

Every team in sports wants to win. They want to feel the elation of being at the pinnacle of their craft and the joy of being crowned champions. During the season, every team will face adversity whether in the form of critical injuries, an unfavorable travel schedule, or off-the-field problems; how they choose to respond to these trials reveals their character! Although most train hard to improve their skills and practice the fundamentals to build team chemistry, a few become so obsessed with winning that they cave to temptation and take shortcuts in an attempt to attain that glory. In so doing, they trade



their integrity for a momentary crown that tarnishes their legacy and taints their victory in order to satisfy a temporary longing.

The temptation to cheat comes from their own desires. The fans may want them to win and even expect them to win. But the players alone are responsible for their own actions! Fans didn't pressure the players to instruct equipment managers to deflate footballs; they didn't install electronics to steal signs or bang on garbage cans to alert the batter of an upcoming pitch; they didn't force players to take performance enhancing drugs to give them the edge. Players do these things on their own volition. Their desires have misdirected their focus and led them to cheat.

In the long run, how the game is played is more important than the outcome of a single game or even a single season. Although people will remember these teams and the players who win unscrupulously in some cases more than those who win honorably, they will do so for the wrong reasons! The focus no longer resides upon their work ethic, skill, or talent, but upon the method they used to win. Whether or not they have fines and penalties levied against them, an asterisk placed by their name in the record books, revoked championships, or banishment from the sport altogether, no one will look upon their achievements favorably ever again!

As believers, we must take great care in how we endure trials. We must resist the temptation to take shortcuts in which we trust in ourselves and follow our own desires.

## Introduce

When we follow our own desires, it will often lead us to make fleshly decisions that give birth to sin. Our thoughts which ultimately dictate our actions should then produce righteousness because we focus on what God desires for us rather than our own desires which can lead to temptation and give birth to sin if we allow them. Above all, we must maintain integrity in everything we do, following God's guidance and applying His standard. To react with piety, therefore, means that we exercise integrity and live in holiness just as God has commanded us in His Word.

Key  
Question

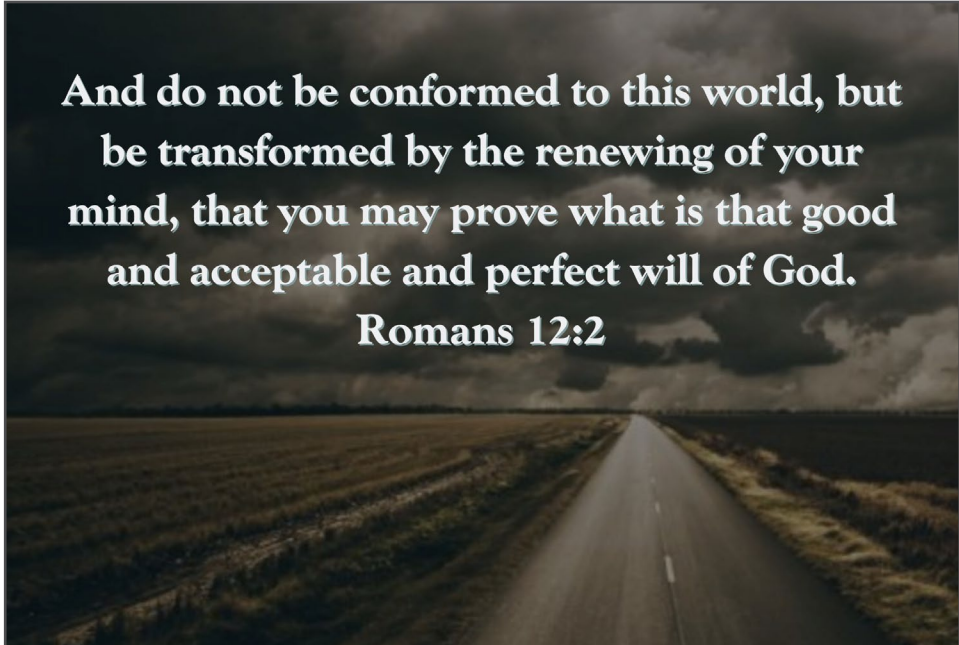
In what areas do you face the most temptation?

### James 1:12-15

#### ***THE NATURE OF TEMPTATION:***

James uses the theme of trials which we extensively studied last week to transition into a discussion about how we should live in righteousness to honor the Lord. In verse 12, the NKJV reads, “**Blessed is the man who endures temptation.**” Unbeknownst to the English reader, however, the word translated “trial” and “temptation” is the exact same word in Greek. Thus, we must depend upon context to supply the correct meaning. In verse 3, James has already explained that “trials” produce “endurance.” Here, in verse 12, he continues that same theme before clearly transitioning to the topic of “temptation.” Accordingly, James is stating that we receive blessing when we endure trials and remain faithful to the Lord.

Although the word trial used here by James doesn’t specifically refer to persecution for one’s faith in Christ, it certainly does include it. Again, James more broadly echoes Jesus’ teaching in [Matthew 5:10-12](#) where He declares, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake for theirs is the kingdom.” In this life, we *will* experience persecution for our faith whether subtly or overtly. Even though most in secular society may deny it, our culture has engaged in a war against salvation in Christ and the righteous way He has called us



**And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**

**Romans 12:2**

to live. Believers face mounting pressure not just to tolerate secular philosophies and preferences, but to accept and practice them! God, however, has called us to distinguish ourselves from these cultural practices and live by His standard as His representatives. Hence, James explains that when we model the character of Christ our faith will prove genuine. We won’t act hypocritically by saying one thing and doing another ([Jas 1:22-25](#)). We will be consistent in our beliefs and with our choices in a way

that honors the Lord.

In what ways does secular society pressure believers to accept or even adopt their beliefs? How has culture infiltrated the church? How should we respond in Christ?

Question  
# 1

When we live consistently in Christ, we will find blessing. In this case, to equate **blessed** with “happy” oversimplifies the concept as a mere emotion which can change depending upon one’s circumstances. On the contrary, **blessed** means that we have assurance and confidence in Christ in every area and in any situation we might encounter in life. Our endurance of trials, therefore, depends upon our relationship with Christ who transforms our perspective and helps us navigate life with integrity. James then identifies the specific blessing we will **receive** when we persevere.

When we endure in Christ, we **will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him**. To avoid misunderstanding, we need to examine this statement in the larger context of the letter as well as Scripture overall. We don’t have **life** *because* of what we do; rather, what we do gives evidence that we have **life**. For this reason, James qualifies this assertion with the phrase **when he has been approved**. In other words, a person’s faith in Christ proves genuine by how he lives. In Revelation 2:10, Jesus makes this same point even more clearly in His command to the church at Smyrna: “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

In this instance, James probably envisions a **crown** made of wreaths used to celebrate the victor of an athletic contest. Regardless of what may happen to us here on earth, we have victory in Christ; for those of us who have a relationship with Christ, we have a **crown of life** which can never be taken away. Christ has already run the race and ensured the victory for us by paying the price. We must look to His example for how we ought to run the race ([Heb 12:1-2](#)). As we saw in the introduction, how we play the game matters! How we live life also has consequences. A life lived apart from Christ ends in defeat no matter how well we think we have run the race; we can see ourselves as a good person, work hard to have a good reputation, and run the race of life in a way



which seems best to us. Yet, none of these things result in eternal blessing; they all lead to death. We can only **receive** the blessing of **life** when we place our confidence solely in the Lord and follow the path He has set for us!

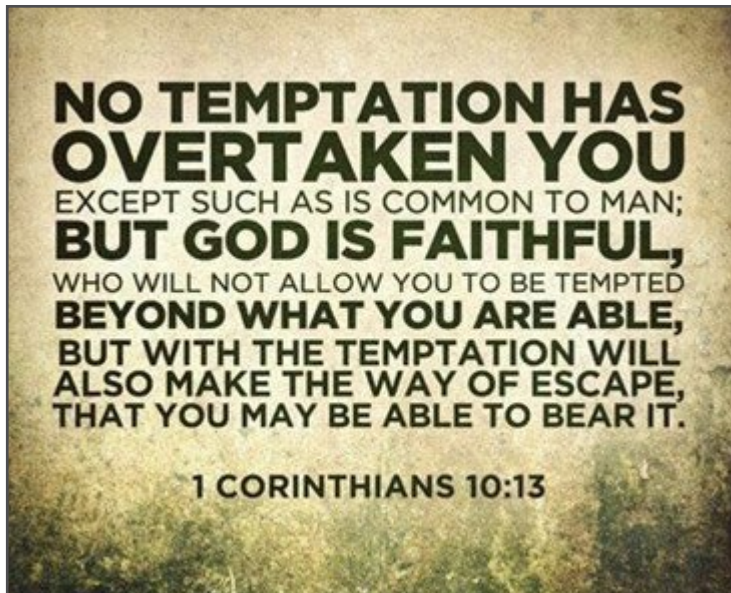
From the Old Testament, we know that God tests the faith of individuals like Abraham ([Gen 22:1](#)) and allows trials to come in the lives of His servants like Job. Even though God already knows the outcome of these tests like He does with Job ([Job 1:10; 2:3](#)), they are designed to help us to mature in our faith and teach us to place our confidence and trust in Him. Besides proving the genuineness of our faith in Christ, tests also highlight our strengths and weaknesses—helping us to concentrate on the areas in which we need to rely upon Him more and in which we need to grow in our faith. Trials aren't designed for God's benefit, but ours! Therefore, how we respond to trials in our lives also plays a crucial role in how we respond to temptation. Just as we place our trust and confidence in the Lord to help us overcome difficult times, we also ought to surrender to Him to help us overcome **temptation**.

Why should we view trials or tests as beneficial to us?

Question  
# 2

While God does indeed test individuals through trials, He does not **tempt** people to sin. He never introduces potential stumbling blocks in our lives that can distract us in our relationship with Him. On one hand, tests point us to God by urging us to depend upon Him for everything and in every situation. **Temptation**, on the other hand, stirs up emotions and **desires** that can distract us from God; still, He provides the only way in which we can overcome our **desires** and resist **temptation** ([1 Cor 10:13](#))! In James 1:13, then, we have a clear transition to a new topic. We cannot blame God for any **temptation** that we face in life. **Temptation**, instead, comes from our own fleshly **desires** and our own lack of self-control! Therefore, **no one** can **say** that **he is tempted by God**. To reinforce this point, James continues to explain that God **cannot be tempted by evil** nor **does He tempt anyone**.

Using an illustration borrowed from fishing and hunting, James describes the source of our **temptation**. **Our** own **desires** lure (i.e. draw away) and ensnare (i.e. entice) us in sin. From this, we can learn two things about our response to **temptation**. First, we alone bear the responsibility for our choices! Notice in this passage that James never once references the devil. This doesn't deny his role in ever tempting us ([Jas 4:7](#)), but rather it reveals that we must take ownership of our decisions. The root of **temptation**,



therefore, does not come from the devil, but from our own **desires**. We choose disobedience because we desire to do so! Sitting prominently upon his desk, President Harry S. Truman had a placard inscribed with the phrase: “The Buck Stops Here.” During the latter days of World War 2, Mr. Truman had to make many weighty decisions which would impact the entire world. Undoubtedly, he spent countless hours consulting with advisors

and experts as well as personally evaluating the evidence and options available for the decisions he would need to make. Although he relied heavily upon the collective advice he received from others, he alone was responsible for issuing the ultimate command and directive regardless of the outcome or sentiment of the people. He couldn’t pass the blame along to his advisors, Congress, the American people, or even the framers of the Constitution for investing him with such responsibility. Mr. Truman was keenly aware that he alone would bear the burden for his decisions.

Likewise, we need such a placard on the mantle of our lives which reminds us that “The Buck Stops Here.” We alone are responsible for the choices we make regarding **our desires** and the **temptation** which inevitably comes from them. We may have external influences in our lives, such as peer pressure, our environment, or even our current circumstances, that impact the way we respond and the choices we make. But ultimately, we alone bear the burden of how we choose to react and respond. We can’t blame our choices on anyone or anything else. No one forces us to choose a certain path. We choose freely. Therefore, excuses like “I just can’t help it,” “It’s just the way I am,” or even “God created me this way” are futile! When we realize the responsibility we have for our choices lies with us, we must turn to the Lord for the solution. He will empower us and equip us with everything that we need to overcome **temptation** and live holy and righteous lives.

Why does effectively dealing with temptation begin with understanding that we’re responsible for our own choices?

Question  
# 3

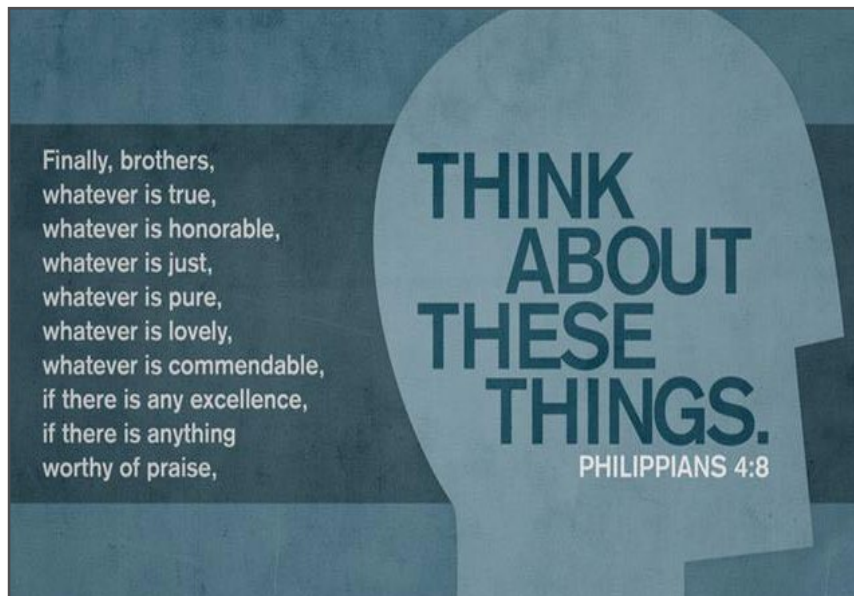
Second, we must identify the areas of **temptation** which seem most attractive to us and take steps to mitigate the enticement which can easily ensnare us. In fishing, different kinds of lures and baits attract different kinds of fish. Ask any avid fisherman. The lure he uses to attract bass will differ from what he would use to attract catfish or trout. **Temptation** functions in much the same way. We each have **desires** that we find most



tempting and hardest to resist. For example, some may struggle with lying while others with stealing or embezzlement; others may find it harder to deal with physical addiction while others with sexual immorality of any kind. Some may struggle with gossip or slander while others with slothfulness and lack of service. The list can go on infinitely. Although we don't face unique temptations so to speak but only those common to man ([1 Cor 10:13](#)), we still have the propensity to engage in sinful activities which we find most desirable based upon our personalities and preferences. So, how can we learn to deal successfully with **temptation** when it comes? We must be honest about the areas in which we struggle and are most susceptible to **temptation**. We must identify and know **our desires**! We must know the source of a problem before we can take steps to rectify and resolve it. To borrow from James' fishing illustration, we must ask: What lure tends to hook me the most? Consequently, we should never intentionally place ourselves in tempting situations and expect good results. When we have identified them as the areas with which we struggle the most, we ought to take steps to minimize or altogether alleviate negative influences on our lives. The more we subject ourselves to negative influences or encounter ungodly influences the more chance we have of turning **our desires** into actions that result in **sin** because we have become desensitized to **sin** and distracted from the righteousness of God. We often wrongly think that **temptation** springs upon us suddenly without warning. But James describes it as a process! He explains that **when desire has conceived it gives birth to sin** and eventually leads **to death** (v. 15). Proverbs frequently describes **temptation** as a scandalous woman who entices us to give in to **our** carnal **desires**, equating physical infidelity with infidelity to God's Word ([Prov 7:21-23](#)). Our

## Instruct

unrestrained thoughts typically lead to unfettered actions which stand in contrast to



God's righteous principles! When we control the things upon which we think, reflect, and dwell in our minds, it will influence the course of action that we take. Therefore, we must take the time to develop a plan based on Scripture about how we will respond. We cannot wait until **temptation** comes because we will tend to resort to what is most comfortable—**our desires**

and old habits.

Why should temptation never catch us off guard as believers?

Question  
# 4

Moreover, we must take action to prevent **temptation** from conceiving and giving **birth to sin**. Most of us probably take measures to ensure our homes remain free from insects and other pests whether we hire a professional company or do it ourselves. We act before the insects invade in what we label as preventative maintenance. In the long run, we've come to understand that it's better to prevent something like a bug infestation from ever happening than to deal with its aftermath! We must approach **temptation** and **sin** in the same way. We must nip it in the bud before it happens! To accomplish this, we must concentrate on the righteousness of God so that we can bear fruit in the Spirit rather than participate in sin that matures into **death**.

What steps can we take to help prevent us from succumbing to temptation and choosing to sin?

Question  
# 5

## James 1:16-18

### **THE NEXUS OF TRUTH:**

In the next three verses, James continues his discussion about how to deal with **temptation** by explicitly identifying God as the sole source of **truth**. He begins with

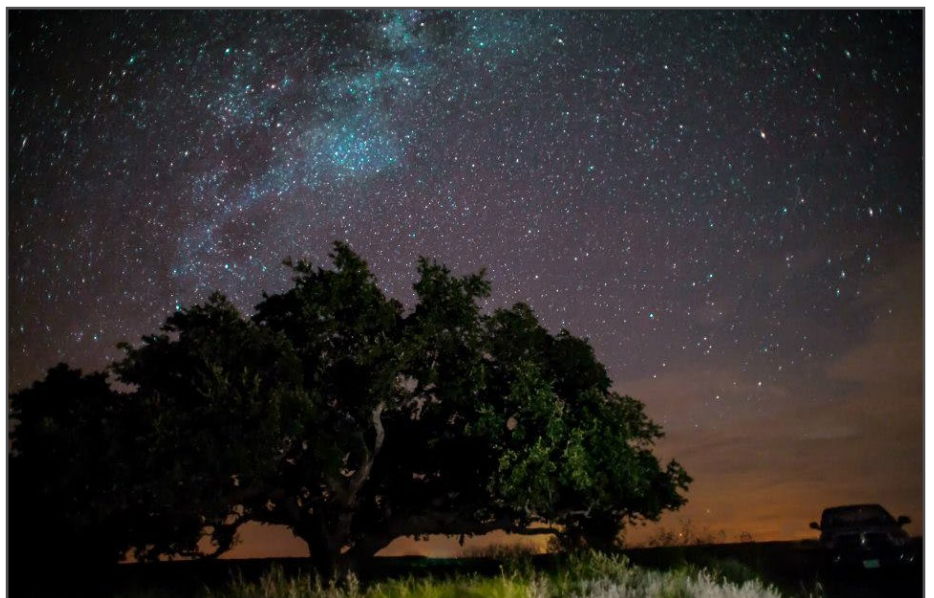


a warning aimed at believers (i.e. **beloved brethren**) **not to be deceived** (v. 16). The word used here more aptly means to be misled or be led astray. In other words, James warns us **not** to allow **our desires** to mislead us and propel us into sin. Unfortunately, the world has elevated one's feelings and **desires** to such a place of prominence that they have distorted the **truth** and obscured reality. For instance, the world tells us to follow our hearts. But the heart of man is often misguided because he omits Christ in his decisions. Left on his own apart from Christ, mankind's inclinations are evil ([Gen 6:5](#); [Jer 17:9-10](#); [Matt 15:18-20](#)). Hence, "to follow the heart" really conveys the world's idea of "doing whatever one desires or whatever feels good." Scripture does not condone such an attitude or practice! Instead, we should follow Christ who transforms the heart and conforms it to His will, so that we live righteously.

How do our hearts tend to lead us astray?

Question  
# 6

To resist **temptation** and avoid **sin**, we need to turn to a source that remains constant and immutable (never changing). Apart from a relationship with God, man cannot provide a source of **truth** on his own. We only need to glance at the condition of the world to find how quickly man's opinions and views change. God, however, never changes; His Word, His actions, and His expectations have remained the same from the dawn of creation. James illustrates God's immutability by referring to Him as **the Father of lights in whom there is no variation or shadow of turning** (v. 17). Borrowing a metaphor from creation, **lights** most likely represents the sun, moon, and stars ([Psalm 136:7](#)). In designing the universe, God ordered and set it into motion. The sun rises and sets; the stars travel across the night sky due to the rotation of the earth. Day gives way to night; seasons change; the weather changes. God, however, remains fixed; He never changes! We can know with absolute certainty the **truth** which He advocates.



In the beginning, God created a perfect world in which He inherently designed **truth**

## Instruct

to be plainly evident. But man ruined it when He subjected it to sin by following his **own desires**, obscuring the **truth**. Therefore, to overcome both trials and temptations in our lives we need to reorient our thinking! James, therefore, notes that **every good and perfect gift** comes **from** God **above** ([Matt 7:11](#)). Certainly, God gives us all kinds of blessings which we can label as **good and perfect** gifts. Here, in this context however, James chooses to focus on only two. The greatest gift which God has given us is salvation through His Son. James reminds us that God literally gave birth (**brought us forth**) **by the word of truth** according to **His own will** (v. 18). Whereas when man succumbs to temptation which conceives and gives birth to sin, God offers restoration through the gospel (**word of truth**) to transform us into who we ought to be in His Son. As a result, the gospel produces transformation through which we become **a kind of firstfruits of His creatures**. Through salvation, we become a gift or offering to God. **Firstfruits** generally refer to the first yield of the harvest set apart and dedicated to the Lord. Thus, God restores us to our original purpose whereby we once again serve as His stewards and representatives to the rest of His creation by pointing everything back to Him. God, therefore, molds us into something He can use—a vessel that brings Him honor and glory ([1 Thess 4:3-7](#))! This responsibility is not burdensome or onerous as some would suggest, but a gift ([1 John 5:3](#)). Although we offer our lives as a gift to God, this is also a gift to us as well. We won't have to wrestle with our consciences. When we obediently follow Christ, we can know assuredly that we have made the right decision. Therefore, we can live confidently regardless of the circumstances because we know we have represented Him well. We don't have to worry or fear what others may think because in the end we'll find approval in the Lord rather than man! In all this, we become free to live as His representatives and do what is right!

How does living in obedience truly free us from much of the stress the world faces in daily life?

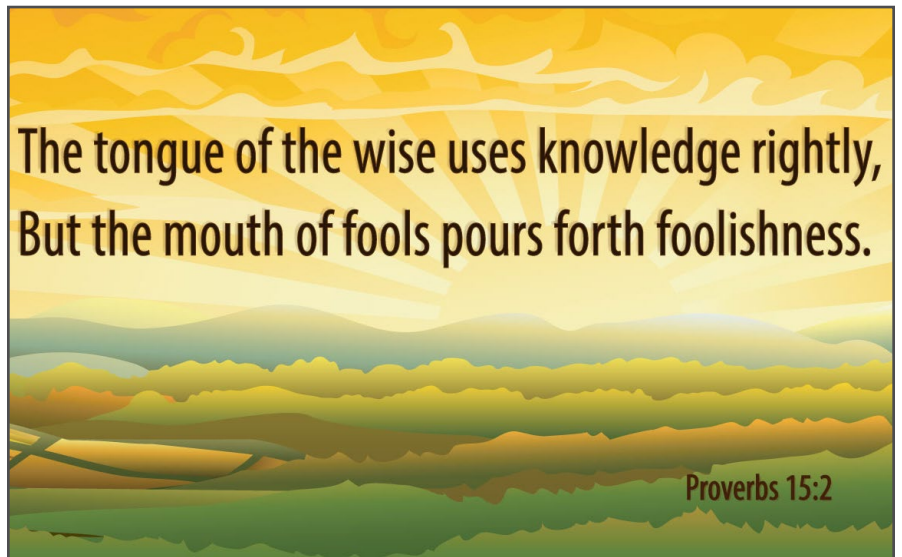
Question  
# 7

## James 1:19-20

### **THE NEED FOR TEMPERANCE:**

In the last two verses of this section, we find a practical application of the wisdom God has given us by which to live. We must exercise temperance or self-control in how we respond to the situations with which we are presented. As His representatives, we must

**be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath** (v. 19). James continues to explain that **the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God** (v. 20). We live in a world that tends to react to situations based upon highly volatile and subjective emotions that depend upon one's personal perspective. Usually, such reactions are an immediate response to stimuli even before all the critical



evidence can be gathered and logically assessed. Thus, perception and opinion guide one's reaction rather than the **truth**. It's not about the "truth" in the way one perceives it, but the actual evidence that exists! Consequently, these judgments and reactions are subjective and often prove wrong when all the information is actually evaluated. We can use this instruction to develop three principles which should guide all our responses. First, we must *reflect*—that is take time to think—before we react! We must take time to investigate and ascertain all the information *before* we **speak** or respond. People often make judgments based upon appearance rather than actual circumstances. As I write, for example, we have been asked to wear masks in public venues throughout Tarrant County. Some, however, cannot safely wear masks because of breathing issues or anxiety. Yet, people judge instantly without knowing the full circumstances. They assume that these people are acting defiantly rather than having a medical condition that prevents them from wearing them safely. Some, however, may be defiant! We simply need to think and obtain all the information to formulate an appropriate response.

How have you personally seen emotions and first impressions lead to wrong decisions and responses?

Question  
# 8

Second, we must *recall* **the word of truth** when we do **speak**. James doesn't say that we can't **speak** at all; we just need to **be slow to speak**. We shouldn't say the first thing that comes into our minds as a knee-jerk reaction; we must craft our responses carefully based upon the wisdom God has given us in His Word and through the Holy Spirit whom He has sent to live within us. We must base everything we say upon

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Scripture! Therefore, we should **speak** the **truth** in love in a way that draws attention to what God desires and expects rather than a way which distracts from the gospel because we haven't taken the time to carefully evaluate the way in which we say it ([Eph 4:15](#))! In contrast, we should never compromise or alter the message of the gospel to make it more acceptable to man! Yet, the way in which we say something is just as important as the message we want to communicate. Choose words that edify and help people mature in Christ rather than tear down and criticize. Let Scripture guide your response!

Finally, we must *reserve* judgment for the Lord rather than become enraged with **wrath**; in the end, God will dispense justice according to His holiness and righteousness. Our **wrath**, whether against perceived injustices or wrongs done to us, never remedies the situation. It usually makes it worse! Scripture instructs us to differentiate between right and wrong, sin and righteousness, and false teaching and the truth ([Matt 7:15-20](#)). On the other hand, the Bible teaches that we should not have a judgmental or critical attitude ([Matt 7:1-6](#)). Nor should we hold grudges and seek revenge ([Rom 12:17-21](#)); instead, we should extend Christ-like forgiveness ([Eph 4:32](#)). By first reflecting upon the circumstances and then recalling Scripture in the words that we choose, we can mitigate much misunderstanding and tense situations. Therefore, let us reserve judgment for the Lord while speaking the truth in love in a way that edifies and encourages so that we can minister to one another in righteousness as the Lord has so called us.

How does reacting in anger only make the situation worse? To what experiences can you relate? How would thoughtfully reflecting and recalling Scripture most likely have changed the outcome?

Question  
# 9

We face trials and temptations almost daily. We don't "fall" into temptation as some would commonly explain it; we don't merely stumble in our walk nor are we simply caught off guard. We deliberately choose to placate our selfish and fleshly desires. As a result, sin is so heinous because it's a conscious choice for which we alone are responsible! We consciously choose to reject the Lord and disobey the truth that He has clearly outlined in His Word. Because we know that temptation lurks around the corner, we have no excuses; we must prepare ourselves to respond in a biblical way. Jesus gave us such a pattern to follow through His experience in the wilderness ([Matt 4:1-11](#)). James also gives us sound principles which we can apply to help us navigate trials and overcome temptations in our lives.

How we choose to respond to trials and temptations says much about where we place our trust and confidence. When we spend time in prayer and Scripture, surrender ourselves to the Spirit, and surround ourselves with godly influences, we will make right decisions and walk blamelessly with our Savior. When we become consumed with our desires, lack self-control, and react to situations without reflecting, temptation will conceive and give birth to sin. Therefore, we must follow Christ rather than our hearts which will lead us astray when we do not conform them to God's will.

## ***Incorporate***

How have trials or tests helped you to mature in your faith? What practical lessons could you share with others?

In what ways does the rejection of absolute truth endanger our society? How does it create chaos and disorder? Without being legalistic, how can the church re-instill the need for and belief in absolute truth?

In what ways do we need to exercise self-control when we speak? How can being careless in what we say hinder the communication of the gospel?

# ***Journal: Document God's Work***

*August 16, 2020*



# *Relate with Purity*

## *James 1:21-27*

Focal Verse:

“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

James 1:27

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## Introduce

As consumers or even purchasers for a business, we must exercise discernment in testing the genuineness of any item that we may wish to buy, so we won't be swindled or defrauded by people with ill-conceived motives. In 1994, I accompanied my high school band to New York City to play in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Prior to the parade, we toured the city on chartered buses. Sitting outside of Radio City Music Hall waiting for everyone to board after watching the Rockettes' Christmas spectacular, a gentleman jumped onto the bus with a number of items he wanted to hawk. On his arm, he displayed a number of



"Rolex" watches which he would sell at the amazingly low price of \$10 each! Although being only a Junior in high school who hailed from a small town, I recognized a problem with such a deal immediately—either the watches were stolen or fake! I wanted no part in this! If fake, I would lose my money; if stolen, I would not only lose my money but also risk other penalties for receiving tainted goods! Without knowing how to test the genuineness of the watch to see if it were indeed a Rolex, clues still pointed to the fact that it was fake. The fact that he was an unlicensed, unsolicited street vendor who hopped onto a bus while being pursued by the police as well as the cheap price for a watch which normally cost thousands offered a telling picture. Nevertheless, some simply couldn't pass up such a good deal. They even rationalized the risk! If fake, they surmised that they would at the very least have a watch that functioned and looked somewhat expensive. If real, then they would have a watch potentially worth thousands on which they could turn a huge profit. But they didn't think about any other risks associated with their purchase! As we continued our tour of the city, one-by-one their watches began to smoke and then completely ceased working—not even twenty-four hours after they plunked down their \$10. It would now cost much more for them to repair the watch and restore it to working condition than it was actually worth. Not only were the watches fake, they proved completely worthless and unusable! They had no value whatsoever!

## Introduce

False religion or works of religion and ritual performed with the wrong motives prove absolutely worthless as well! They cannot redeem or save us; they cannot ensure favor or better standing with the Lord. Neither do they honor Him! Instead, such works actually seek to draw attention to what we have done and bring glory to ourselves. These works have no value at all when they do not honor Christ and point people into a relationship with Him! Therefore, we need to test our motives and evaluate our works to see that they are pure and authentic. Scripture provides the basis for testing them and proving their genuineness. Unlike Rolex watches which sometime require the eye of an expert to authenticate, God has provided us with all the tools we need. We don't have to guess or wonder. Therefore, let us relate with purity and test our motives to determine whether they bring honor to the Lord and glorify His name! Let us not prove inauthentic and ingenuine in what we do, but let us prove worthy and truthful as we bear the name Christian.

Key  
Question

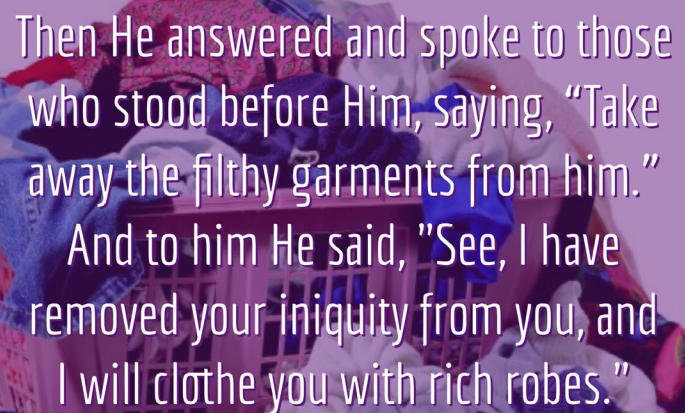
What motivates your service to the Lord?

### James 1:21

#### ***PURGE WICKEDNESS:***

Through the gospel or the “word of truth,” we are re-born to walk in righteousness as God’s transformed representatives or “firstfruits” ([Jas 1:18](#)). This re-birth enables us to overcome any temptation or endure any trial that we may conceivably face in life because it reorients our thinking and conforms our hearts to the will of the Lord! In the verses which follow this declaration, James turns to practical examples of how we ought to model and live out this salvation in Christ. Introduced by the conjunction **therefore** which draws an inference to this new life in Christ, verse 21 stresses the consequence of our salvation whereby we must remove **all filthiness and overflow of wickedness**. When we truly have a relationship with Christ, we will outwardly exhibit our inner transformation in the way we behave!

Every day, we go through the process of removing our clothes soiled by our activities whether when we get home from work, finish a task, or get ready for bed. In the morning, we put on a fresh set of clothes when we rise from our slumber to begin the day. Few people would intentionally wear the same soiled clothes from the previous day no matter how little or how much grime had accumulated on them. And most people would notice if they did! As

A photograph of a laundry basket filled with various items of clothing, including a red patterned top, a blue shirt, and a white garment. The basket is set against a light purple background. Overlaid on the image is white text with a purple shadow effect.

Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, “Take away the filthy garments from him.” And to him He said, “See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes.”

Zechariah 3:4

believers, James urges us to rid ourselves of **all filthiness** and **wickedness** in this same way. The word translated **lay aside** literally refers to the removal of a garment. Sin leaves our garments stained and odious to the Lord ([Zech 3:3-4](#)). Not only do we need to be presentable to the Lord as the holy individuals into which He has transformed us, but we also need to be presentable to those around us so that we can point them to Him!

Therefore, we must be intentional that we consciously rid ourselves of these wicked and sinful influences every day. Before we go to bed, we need to review the day and

## Instruct

ask the Lord to help us evaluate our decisions accurately and critically. We need to ask for forgiveness specifically where we have failed and seek to learn from our mistakes. In the morning, we need to pray that God will help us to avoid sinful choices and live righteously for Him. In fact, this should be an on-going process that occurs throughout the day! We must seek to remove **all** sin from our lives reflected in the choices that we make. Like well-worn clothes that feel so comfortable and may not look *that* bad in our own eyes, sin can deceive us in the same way. The things we've done may not seem *that* bad in comparison to the world around us and we may not even notice how stained we have become unless we seek the Lord intentionally. Then, we will realize that any sin is detestable to Him and we must take steps to get rid of these things by surrendering complete control to Him.

How often do you ask the Lord to help you evaluate all your decisions and choices? What is the danger of getting into a comfortable routine and failing to do this daily?

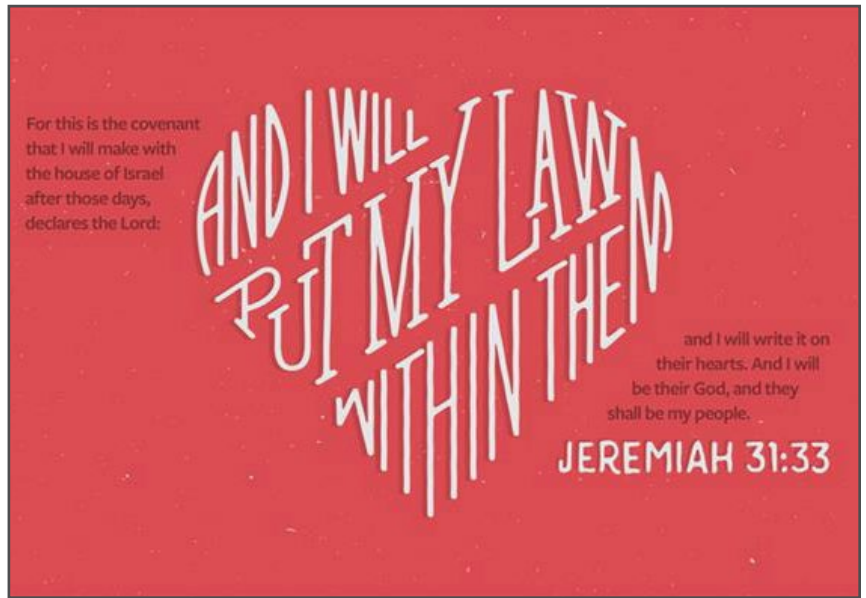
Question  
# 1

Whether eating Italian, Mexican, or barbecue, many of the foods we love here in North Texas have the potential to make a mess. Probably, every one of us has spilled blotches of salsa down our shirt at one time or another. Almost instinctively we sigh and say, "I'll put some stain remover on it when I get home." No matter how careless we are with our food, we have confidence that we can remove the stain and restore our clothes to pristine condition. As a result, we fail to exercise caution the next time we eat and take measures to ensure a different result. The pattern then repeats itself! We cannot afford to take this same *laissez-faire* approach with Christ. Through His blood, we have a stain remover that cleanses all our guilt from sin! Christ will forgive any and everything we ask of Him. But it doesn't give us a license to abuse His grace and forgiveness ([Rom 6:1-4](#)). We need to act responsibly. We should never intentionally or carelessly sin, thinking Christ can just forgive us. We must remove our old lifestyle of sin and live righteously in Him!

In what ways do we as believers sometimes abuse God's grace? What does this say about our attitude toward sin?

Question  
# 2

Having taken off our soiled clothes, we must now **receive the implanted word with meekness**. James has already referred to this as “the word of truth” through which God “gave birth” to us as His children ([John 1:12](#)). Here, he makes the connection more explicit by identifying it as **the word which is able to save your souls**. To save your souls means that a complete transformation has occurred. Our whole being is changed. **The word**



transforms us from the inside out and influences everything that we do. James will explain this further in the next few verses. For now, we must simply note that **the word** is not merely something that we believe, but it’s something that we also do or practice. Therefore, to receive **the word** means that we take it to heart. We live it! We apply it! We practice it!

Whereas we should remove **all** filth and wickedness, we should also allow God to implant His **word** within us. When raising children, for example, we often say that we impress upon them certain values or instill within them certain moral principles. In other words, we want them to both accept (i.e. **receive**) and practice what we have taught them which will serve them well throughout their lives. As children become adults, they usually begin to realize the value of what their parents tried to instill within them even though they may have made many mistakes and often had to learn the hard way. God does the same with us when we **receive** His **word** into our lives. Not only does He save us from our sins, but He also implants His Spirit within us to guide us in every situation. In [Jeremiah 31:33](#), the Lord declares, “This is My covenant . . . I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” God doesn’t give us boundaries by which to live simply because He wants to make our lives more difficult. God has designed them for our benefit and protection! He wants the best for us!

Receiving **the word** and living it out by acting righteously doesn’t come naturally to us. In fact, most of us struggle with it frequently. For this reason, James tells us to respond to **the word with meekness** or humility. We need to have a teachable spirit! Instead of acting obstinately and always thinking we’re right, we must submit to the Lord and

## Instruct

follow His Spirit. By the time we're studying this, hopefully we will no longer be asked to wear masks in public. Regardless of what one may personally believe about the issue, Scripture tells us to submit to the government unless what they ask conflicts with Scripture or is immoral ([Rom 13:1](#)). Certainly, we may express our beliefs and opinions in a constructive way, but ultimately we need to obey Scripture and submit to the government because they believe this is the best way to protect the people from disease, it is not physically harmful, and it is not immoral! Even more disturbing, however, some believers have even contemplated lying to exploit the written ordinance that allows for those with "breathing" issues or "anxiety" to not wear masks when they truly don't have those preconditions! This does not exhibit the humility by which God has called us to live! We need to internalize God's **word** and live by it! We can't pick and choose what we wish to accept, receive, and follow.

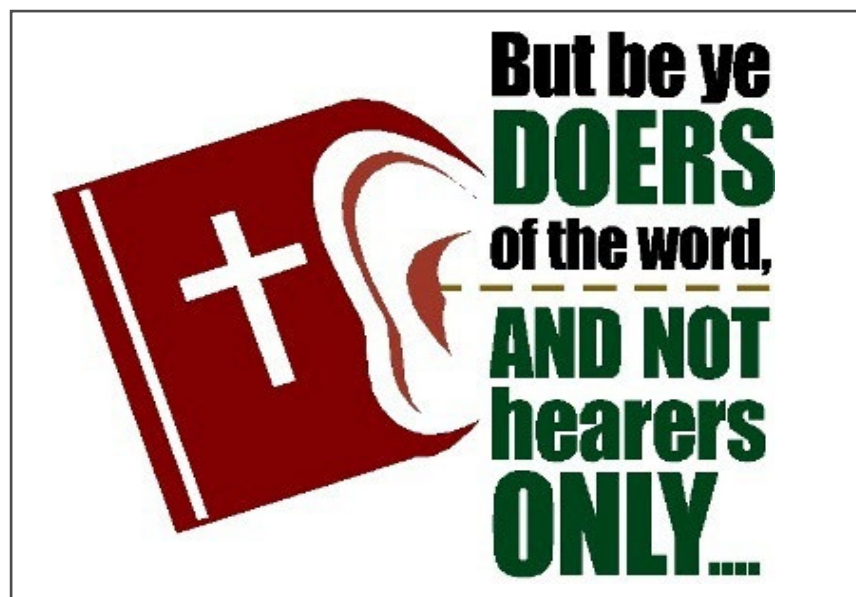
When we fail to exercise humility and have a teachable spirit, how does it hinder our growth in Christ?

Question  
# 3

## James 1:22-25

### ***PRACTICE THE WORD:***

James now implores us to be **doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving** ourselves (v. 22). We can borrow the advertising slogan from Nike—Just Do It! However, we need to refine it slightly to say—Just Practice **the Word!** We can't misunderstand what James is saying and only do the things that we want or find



relevant to our lives. We must follow the full scope of what God has asked of us in Scripture. Although we are not saved through our good works ([Eph 2:8-10](#)), they do demonstrate that we truly have a relationship with Christ when we practice righteousness that does not come naturally to us. Even though at times we may sin and fail, we will not habitually live

in resistance to God’s Word or participate in evil without conviction! The one who says that he has a relationship with Christ—but then never does the things which He has asked—must re-evaluate whether He truly knows Christ.

Many people deceive themselves into thinking that they have a relationship with Christ when they have not actually experienced the transforming power of His salvation. They know *about* Christ cognitively or mentally, but they do not truly *know* Christ because they fail to practice the things which He holds dear and has asked us to do to represent Him in holiness. For this reason, Jesus Himself asserts, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” In other words, we will practice the things which we have **implanted** in our hearts. If Christ is in control of our lives, then we will practice His Word and do works of righteousness; if He is not in control our lives, then we will follow the evil inclinations of our hearts. Let’s not be deceived into thinking that we have a relationship with Christ, but let us know for sure because He has transformed us from the inside out which we bear out through the way that we now live in Him!

In what ways do people deceive themselves when they don’t practice the word?

Question  
# 4

James relates this failure to practice God’s **word** to a person who looks into a **mirror** (v. 23). He equates the one who hears **the word**, but does **not** practice it, to a man who observes **his natural face** only to go **away** and **immediately** forget **what kind of man he was** (v. 24).

Mirrors at that time were made of polished metal and not the clear glass that we have today ([1 Cor 13:12](#)). Although the image would have been somewhat fuzzy, it would have still clearly depicted one’s outward appearance if he spent time looking intently into the object. However, as with any **mirror**, it only reveals the external appearance and not the heart.



## Instruct

At times, the external can mask or obscure the internal if we don't take an honest assessment of ourselves. The phrase **natural face** is difficult to translate into English. **Natural** comes from the Greek word *genesis* which means something akin to **face** of origin or source. In this context, it likely conveys the idea of one's very nature or essence. In other words, such people forget what they actually look like on the inside and who God has called them to be in Christ! As a result, they don't fulfill their purpose to bear His image ([Gen 1:27](#)). For instance, they see themselves as better or more righteous than they truly are which leads to a whole host of problems whereby they regard themselves as self-sufficient without the need for a Savior.

The verb translated **forgets** reveals this very danger. In English, we ascribe forgetfulness to carelessness or accidents and take it rather lightly with little consequence. In Greek, however, it has a much stronger meaning: "to be inattentive, neglect, overlook, or care nothing about."\* In this way, to forget has a more sinister intentional force behind it! Today, the way James uses this term to forget we would say that people just don't want to deal with it. They don't want to know the truth, so they ignore or overlook it! We should never ignore or neglect the truth. We should practice it in a way that transforms us no matter how painful we may regard it. Unfortunately, we can fool ourselves by seeing ourselves in a favorable light in which we want to be perceived. But God sees the heart and knows the truth! Therefore, let's practice the truth in every area of our lives and reflect His image in the way He intended from the beginning of creation.

### In Reference



See Frederick William Danker, ed. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 374.

At some point in our lives, most of us have probably run out of gas in our automobiles. We simply may not have paid attention to the gauge or the warning lights. On the other hand, we may have even intentionally neglected it, fooling ourselves into thinking we have enough gas to get where we're going. We can't afford to do the same in response to the Lord. We must pay attention! We can't neglect our spiritual condition in Christ and think that we'll be alright coasting down the final stretch. In Christ, we must honestly evaluate all our actions, choices, and decisions to make sure that they measure up to His standards and that they accurately reflect the transformed



character by which He has called us to live. Unless we first acknowledge that we have a problem, we can't do anything about it! Let's not fool ourselves, but let us work toward maturity in Christ daily as He leads.

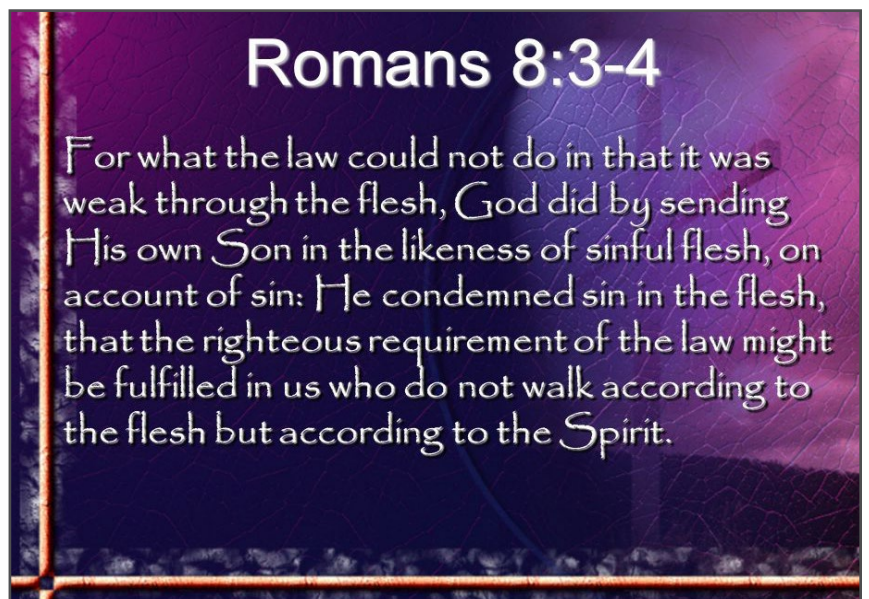
How would you assess your service to Christ and the maturity of your character? On what areas do you need to work?

Question  
# 5

In contrast to the one who **forgets** and neglects **the word**, the one who looks intently into **the perfect law of liberty** will continue in it and do **the work** (v. 25). When one lives according to God's righteous standards, he **will** then **be blessed in what he does**. The word **looks** doesn't indicate a casual glance. It means to gaze intently or, in this context, to examine or study purposefully. In order to have an accurate evaluation, we must first study and know the standard. Failing to know the **law** doesn't absolve us from abiding by it and applying it to our lives! In Scripture, we find this **perfect law of liberty** which we can use to examine our lives. Therefore, we must ask ourselves: How effectively do I apply all the principles found in Scripture in my life?

Although we have freedom in Christ from sin and legalistic constraints, we still have responsibilities and boundaries by which God has ordained that we live. We don't have the burden to do these things because we can attain some kind of favor or honor or even have merit for salvation. We

do them because we love the Lord and earnestly desire to please Him. Salvation in Christ, therefore, isn't a lawless free-for-all where we can do anything we want. We have a higher standard by which we have been called to live and one which the Holy Spirit helps us to accomplish ([Rom 8:1-11](#)). When we truly have a relationship with



Christ, our desires change! We want to live righteously in obedience to His commands! This won't be a struggle, but an honor and a blessing.

Above all, Christ frees us from the grip of sin and restores us to the state in which God originally created us in His image. Succinctly, Christ frees us to be the one whom He originally created us to be—one who obediently serves Him and functions as

## Instruct

His representative to all creation. The world, including some professing believers, embraces the mantra “be yourself” or “be who you are.” In reality, this is an attempt to condone sin and experimentation. Naturally, we are all born sinners. To “be yourself” entails embracing the sin that defines us. Instead, we must be who God created us to be through Christ, experiencing transformation we can only find in Him. Therefore, we must practice and abide by the **law** which God has given to govern us and not live as though we have no **law** or responsibility in Christ.

As believers, why must we still abide by the perfect law of liberty? How does that look in our lives in Christ?

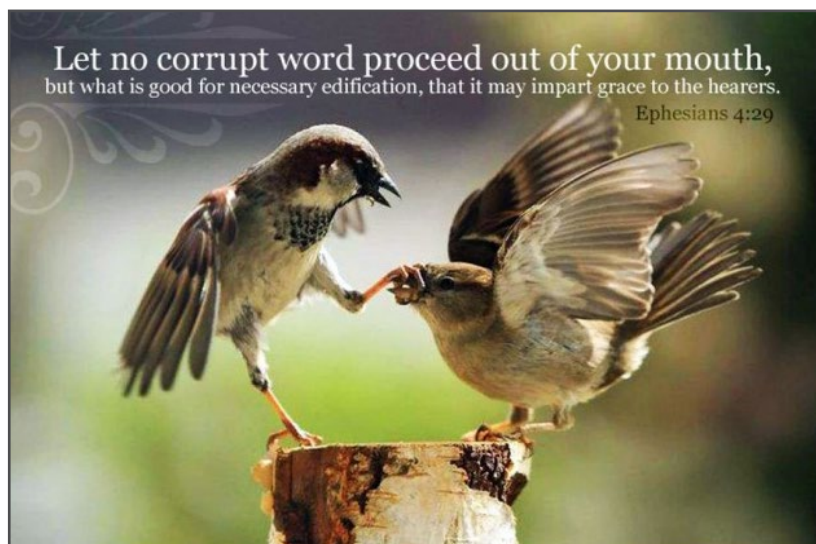
Question  
# 6

## James 1:26-27

### **PROVE THE WORTH:**

We prove the worth or genuineness of our faith and relationship with Christ in the way in which we live. Returning to the theme of self-deception, James cites three areas which we can use to test the genuineness of our faith: 1) the way we speak ([Jas 3:1-12](#)), 2) the way we serve others who need assistance, namely **orphans and widows** ([Jas 2:14-26; 5:13-20](#)), and 3) the way we **keep** ourselves **unspotted from the world** by living righteously ([Jas 2:10-13; 3:13-17; 4:7-10](#)). These two verses serve as a summary of the topics which James will address in-depth throughout the remainder of the letter. For this reason, we will only deal with them briefly here and focus on the main point he wants to make: how to test the purity or genuineness of our faith.

Through these examples, James wishes once again to illustrate the difference between



the one who both hears and does in contrast to the one who only hears and fails to do. He begins by describing one area that would prove our faith ingenuine if we fail to practice the righteousness which God expects. The one who **thinks** of himself as **religious**, but **does not** control (i.e. **bridle**) the tongue, **deceives his own heart** and his

**religion is useless** or worthless. To state it positively, Christ should change the way that we speak! From [James 1:19-20](#), we've already seen how we should speak with "righteousness" in a way that honors the Lord by edifying others which doesn't lead to wrath. To control one's tongue, therefore, means that we avoid gossip and slander, vile talk and dirty jokes, cursing, swearing falsely and misusing the name of the Lord, and having a critical and judgmental spirit. In contrast, we should speak the principles of the gospel in love, encourage, edify and build, and direct our praise to the Lord!

How has Christ changed the way that you speak?

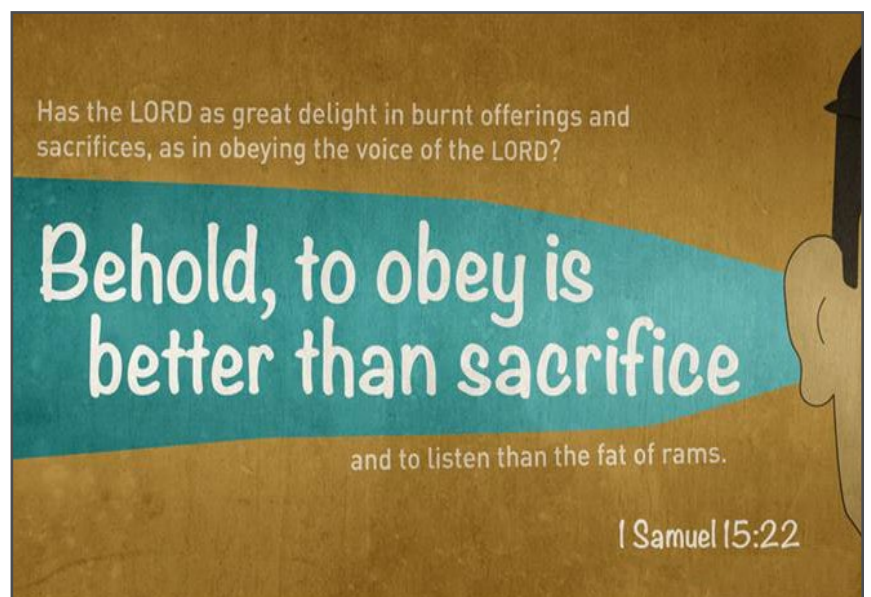
Question  
# 7

Furthermore, a true relationship with Christ compels us to exercise caution in both what we say and what we do to ensure that we bring honor to Him. In verse 27, James shifts back to the theme of what we do. He begins by describing what **pure and undefiled religion** looks like when practiced in a practical way: to have compassion and care for (i.e. **visit**) others in need (**orphans and widows**) and to separate ourselves **from the world** by living holy lives. Just as in James' day, many people today misunderstand **religion** as a meaningless set of rituals to be followed legalistically to win favor with God. As a result, their so-called "**religion**" has no impact on their lives. They live hypocritically and don't practice what they claim to believe. They exhibit no transformation in their lives!

Beliefs and rituals without genuine faith and action don't impress God! In fact, we would call such **religion** hypocritical. And God detests such phoniness! The terms

**pure and undefiled** connote something true and genuine in contrast to something fake or phony. Whether gold, silver, or diamonds, we have tests that can determine their genuineness. If you've ever had to sell something containing silver at a pawn shop or another venue, the buyer would most likely scrape a tiny sliver of the ore and apply a solution

which would turn a certain color. Before finalizing the transaction, he wants to be



## Instruct

absolutely certain what he's buying is genuine or real! We should apply such a test to our relationship with Christ: Do we have a genuine relationship which we live out daily or are we all talk and no action? We can very easily determine the genuineness of our faith in how we live by the way in which Christ has transformed us!

In Isaiah 1:11, God asks this question of people who considered themselves religious: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me? I've had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of the fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls or lambs or goats." At this time, Israel preformed what they saw as religious rituals, but they only went through the motions! Their ritual observances had no meaning behind them and they did nothing to change their hearts. They served other gods and lived sinful lives while at the same time claiming that they served the Lord! We must remember that it's not about a religion that works us to death for no reward, but a relationship that transforms us into a Christ follower who lives righteously, acts responsibly, and represents Him to the world by serving others in love! Therefore, let us relate in purity by living our faith out in a practical way that honors the Lord and glorifies His name!

In what practical ways do you live out your faith?

Question  
# 8

Hopefully, the fellow band members with whom I traveled to New York City in 1994 have since learned a valuable lesson about testing the genuineness of an item and matured in their perspectives. Unfortunately, many people try to rationalize and justify sin in the same way these students did the fake Rolex watch which they bought. These students didn't see the consequences of their purchase as *that bad*. Likewise, many people don't see the consequences of sin as *that bad* either. For example, they may even believe that they've lived a successful life if they've had fun, done what they desired, and followed their passions. In so doing, they have deceived themselves! Dire consequences await for those who do their own thing, follow their own desires, and dismiss the need for a Savior!

To compensate, many people do "religious" works to placate their consciences, appear "good" in the eyes of their fellow man, and hide their inadequacies in other areas. Yet, these things only serve to conceal one's true identity when not practiced consistently with the right motives. To develop James' illustration further, it's like going to the mirror and putting on make-up to cover our blemishes. The blemishes remain; all we have done is conceal them to the world who cannot see the heart. We can't do this with Christ. He sees the heart and knows our motives. He knows when we've just tried to cover over our blemishes or when we've sincerely turned to Him for help! Therefore, let us relate to Christ in purity and genuineness by living out our faith in a practical way with the right motives so that others can see the transformation which He has brought about within us!

## ***Incorporate***

Why is it so difficult to take off our old man and put on Christ ([Eph 4:22-24](#))—that is to remove or purge filthiness and wickedness from our lives? In what practical ways can we follow Jesus' example when we deal with temptation?

What other tests besides the three that James lists in [1:26-27](#) can we use to determine the genuineness of our faith in Christ? What biblical examples can you cite?

Why is it important to exercise consistent and genuine faith in front of the world? How does impure and ingenuine faith affect our testimony as a church?

# ***Journal: Document God's Work***

*August 23, 2020*



# *Reject Partiality*

## *James 2:1-13*

Focal Verse:

“My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.”

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James 2:1



## Introduce

Most of the time when I fly, whether nationally or internationally, I book the economy or coach section of the plane because I can somewhat afford these ticket prices. In 2011, when I traveled to East Africa on a mission trip, a senior adult here at church who retired from a local airline allowed me to use two of her passes to fly to and from Europe through Frankfurt, Germany. From DFW to Frankfurt, I got one of the last seats in economy. Since using her pass equated to flying standby, I had to take whatever seat was available. On the return trip, the airline placed an embargo on Frankfurt for the pass that I had, so I couldn't



fly home from there. After booking a train to Belgium to the nearest airport, several events transpired and I became stranded for two days. I tried everything to get home to no avail! Two days later, the ticket agent came and handed me a ticket and baggage check. With a smile, she said the ticket was for first class! For the first time, I would experience what it was like to fly first class!

As I boarded the plane, numerous airline employees greeted me warmly with a smile. After helping me stow my luggage gently and neatly into the overhead bin, the flight attendant asked if she could hang up my jacket and generously offered to do whatever it would take to make my trip more comfortable. Glancing down at my seat, I found a full-size bottle of water along with a heavy blanket and fluffy pillow. Before she left, the flight attendant showed me how to operate the seat which essentially turned into a bed! Then, she handed me a menu and said she would be back to take my order. The menu was extravagant with so many choices! I had to select a first course from shrimp to salads, then a main course from several different meats and vegetables, and finally a dessert. After the meal, I laid back and put on the nice set of headphones they provided and had several movies, television channels, and games from which I could select. However, I was so tired from the previous two days that once I put on a movie I fell asleep for most of the trip.

My first-class experience stood in stark contrast to my experience in economy.

## Introduce

Although the airline employees did greet us, they simply asked for our tickets and pointed to our seats, telling us which aisle to take. Once at the seat, there was no bottled water—only a small, flimsy blanket and tiny pillow. As people boarded, everyone fought for space in the overhead bin, cramming and stuffing their items with force. Once situated, the flight attendants never came around to check on us. They simply stood at the front of the cabin making the safety announcements required by the FAA. Eventually, they did come to serve dinner, but they did not hand us a menu. Instead, they only asked if we wanted chicken or beef and what we wanted to drink before plopping it down on our tray table. After dinner, I became thirsty, so I pressed the call button to request water. When the flight attendant came, she responded by pointing, “The water is back in the galley. Feel free to get it yourself. We won’t be able to rest if we keep getting people water!” What a stark difference it was between first class and economy!

Through this example, we can clearly observe the preferential treatment displayed for those based on various classes. Even though we technically got what we paid for, we can still learn a valuable lesson about partiality and discrimination. James warns against any such preferential treatment in the church. In Christ, we should love all people—even the ones we may humanly deem unlovable. Christ died for all and He extends forgiveness to anyone who asks regardless of socio-economic class, nationality, or race. God loves us all the same! In the church, we must reflect this same character trait and reject partiality, serving Christ faithfully together as He has redeemed us collectively as His children.

Key  
Question

How does showing partiality or favoritism in the church affect our ability to minister?

#### ***THE VILENESS OF PARTIALITY:***

In [1:26-27](#), James began defining what genuine faith looks like in the life of one who follows Christ. True “religion” not only determines what we believe based upon Scripture, but also what we practice. In other words, we must put our faith into action in specific and practical ways. As we begin the second chapter, James continues to list specific ways we ought to live out our faith in Christ. He shows how Christ should have changed our perspective in the way we view others as well as how we relate to them and treat them. He marks this slight shift in topic by addressing believers (i.e. **my brethren**) directly through the command **not to hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with partiality** (v. 1). The phrase **do not hold** literally means “not having the faith” **of our Lord Jesus Christ**. What James desires to communicate is that those who show **partiality** live inconsistently with **the faith** practiced by Christ. They claim to follow and represent Him, but they don’t live like Him!

The word translated **partiality** is not found in Greek outside of the Bible or subsequent Christian authors.\* It seems biblical writers have coined a new term. In Greek, it combines two words: “to receive the face.” In this context here in James, it clearly refers to favoritism or discrimination based upon one’s external appearance. Any such discrimination based upon one’s physical appearance, whether economic, race, age, or biological gender, constitutes sinfulness and is inconsistent with Scripture. This, however, doesn’t mean that we can’t look across these categories and differentiate between right and wrong. Morality as defined by Scripture, in this case, transcends one’s physical appearance. One isn’t immoral or sinful because they have a certain appearance, but because of what they choose to do. We must understand the difference!

#### ***In Reference***




See Frederick William Danker, ed. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 887.

How is prejudice, discrimination, or partiality inconsistent with the faithfulness of Christ?  
What Scripture can you cite?

Question  
# 1

## Instruct

Having declared the vileness of discrimination based upon external appearance, James points us to the character that we ought to emulate through a rather difficult phrase:



Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52

**our Lord Jesus Christ of glory.** The addition of the word “**of glory**” most likely refers to the exalted character exhibited by Christ—His holiness, goodness, and righteousness. As we await Christ to call us home to join Him for eternity, we should pursue holiness in our lives. We should imitate Him! When Christ does call us home, He will complete that work of glorification which He has already begun in us. Thus, our salvation will be completed and we will become holy and righteous as He is ([1 John 3:2](#)). Paul expresses this same

concept in Romans 8:18: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” While here on earth awaiting the return of Christ, we should already start practicing such holiness in our lives by refusing to discriminate and show favoritism.

Even if such favoritism or **partiality** were not actually occurring in the church, almost anyone could readily identify with it and most had likely experienced it at some point in his or her life. Most of us have probably also experienced something similar in life based upon the first impressions that we make or that others have made about us. However, we must exercise extreme caution to understand James’ illustration in the right context. People often make presumptions based upon first impressions and personal perception rather than actually knowing someone’s abilities and work ethic. Any form of prejudice is sinful whereas rewarding people for hard work according to their abilities is not. Thus, James gives a concrete example to help drive home his point which accurately portrays favoritism based upon one’s external appearance by preferring one socio-economic class over another. In this true-to-life scenario, the **rich** receive preferential treatment over the **poor**!

James commences his analogy by describing the physical appearance of two men who

enter a worship service or **assembly** (v. 2). The first man is dressed to the hilt. He has on expensive **clothes** and **gold rings** adorn every finger. Today, we would say that he wore designer clothes and lots of expensive bling. In contrast, the second man arrives at the **assembly** in **filthy clothes**—tattered, torn, and stained. To help us comprehend the disparity that James wishes to emphasize, imagine the CEO of a large, prosperous company walking into church, or any well-known celebrity, athlete, or wealthy person for that matter, followed by a person who appears to live on the streets. How would we as individuals in the church respond?

Continuing, James explicitly distinguishes between the response to the two men. The people in the crowd fawned over the wealthy CEO and paid him much attention (v. 3). They made sure that he had the best, most prominent **place to sit**. On the other hand, they paid little attention to the **poor man** dressed in **filthy** rags; they only directed him where to go. So as not to distract from or inconvenience the wealthy man, the ushers simply commanded, “**You stand over there**” or “**sit by my footstool**.” The latter directive is akin to saying, “Sit at my feet because you’re not worthy to sit on my same level.”

Based on Scripture, how do we see favoritism or partiality displayed in churches today?

Question  
# 2

Although we may not see such graphic disparity all the time, such attitudes exist even unknowingly in the church. Most likely, we all have our favorite seat. How we respond to guests or other individuals who sit in our usual spot says much about our value of people. Most will probably sit somewhere else without making much fuss. But some will make comments, stand territorially near the seat, or even ask someone to move! It’s not just about where we sit, however! Gathering at church should be about worshiping Christ and proclaiming the gospel not about what we want or our own selfish desires about what we get out of it. We cannot honor Christ and live in selfishness. Neither can we honor Christ and devalue people by showing **partiality** and preference. When we focus on Christ, we’ll have the right perspective and we’ll honor people and want to remove any hindrance for sharing the gospel.

We must ask ourselves two questions: Do we live consistently in Christ and practice what we believe? Do we do everything in our power to proclaim the gospel to all people? Above all, we should honor and prefer one another ([Phil 2:1-4](#)). In all that we do, Paul says, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness



How would you respond to someone like J. D. Rockefeller in comparison to other “common” people?

of mind let each esteem others better than himself” ([Phil 2:3](#)). We must follow the lead of Christ! He always honored and showed respect to others even when they viciously attacked Him; He came to serve rather than be served. He valued every one of us so much that He willingly gave His life upon the cross in exchange for ours! We too must love and honor people that much and rid ourselves of any vile form of favoritism or discrimination in which we may engage so that we can represent the holiness and righteousness of Christ to others.

In what way does Christ help us to overcome favoritism or partiality?

Question  
# 3

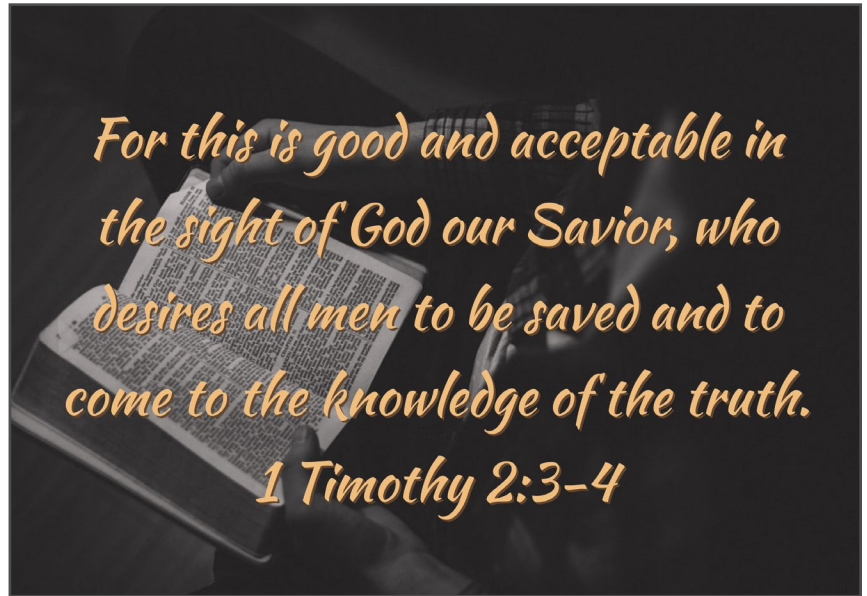
## James 2:5-7

### **THE VALUE OF ALL TO GOD:**

James opens this next section by asking a rhetorical question that will help people put aside prejudice and personal preference for the sake of the gospel and realize the value that all human beings have to God. Borrowing from Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, James posits, “**Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs to the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?**” Most likely, James expounds upon Jesus’ first Beatitude: “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” ([Matt 5:3](#)). Neither James nor Jesus is saying that the rich cannot be saved and have eternal life—even though at times it may be difficult for the self-sufficient wealthy to realize the error of their ways and ask for forgiveness and life in Christ ([Matt 19:23-26](#)).

To be “poor in spirit,” therefore, means that we recognize our own sinfulness and depravity. We need help! We need a Savior; we cannot save ourselves! We can only find life in the merciful forgiveness and gracious sacrifice of Christ. All people regardless of external appearance must make this same confession of their

unrighteousness and acknowledge their dependence upon Christ. One's external appearance should never dictate whether or not we share the gospel. We need to be all things to all people as Paul has stated ([1 Cor 9:19-23](#)). We should maintain a balanced approach in ministry and never favor one group over another. We must minister to the poor as much as the wealthy, the outdoorsman as much as the homebody, the blue-collar worker as much as the white-collar worker, those married with families as much as those who are single,



*For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*  
*1 Timothy 2:3-4*

and senior adults as much as children, youth, or young or median adults. This list can continue indefinitely in citing the categories in which we find ourselves labeled by society. But Christ died for all and the gospel is available to all!

We need to preach the gospel to everyone—even those who differ from us in external appearance, socio-economic background, personality, or values. Regardless of race, nationality, background and life experiences, biological gender, or age, everyone needs Christ just as we do and He will transform them just as He has us! Yet, we tend to hang out with people who share our same passions, values, and have similar backgrounds. Although nothing is inherently wrong with that, we cannot allow this to influence our passion for sharing the gospel to all people. Imagine someone coming into church covered in tattoos, piercings, or body modifications—perhaps even dressed in all black including dyed hair and nails. We must share the gospel and minister to them just as much as to the one dressed in a three-piece, designer suit or fashionable dress. At the same time, however, we cannot slight the ones in suits or dresses. We must remain equal and balanced in our approach. We must minister to all people regardless of external appearance or any notoriety they may have attained.

Why must we look at the value of all human beings collective toward God rather than specific categories, such as race, nationality, etc.?

Question  
# 4

The world tends to react by overcorrecting or overcompensating for such injustice and

disparity that exist in our culture. In doing so, they lose sight of the plan and purpose God has ordained for the church: to reject bias based on external appearance and point all people to a relationship with Christ through the gospel. To state it clearly, discrimination or favoritism in any form is wrong and we must seek to correct it as believers in Christ. To do so, we need a balanced approach based upon Scripture that seeks to minister to all people and help everyone mature in Christ regardless of his or her background! Therefore, to define someone according to their race even in support of what one would label as a just cause still causes divisions and relegates their value according to their race. God doesn't see us according to our races; He sees us as a people whom He has created in the need of a Savior!

After being compelled to proclaim the gospel to a Gentile named Cornelius and his family, Peter learned a valuable lesson. At first, he saw his status as a Jew as incompatible with the Gentile to their detriment and exclusion of the promises of God.

**For there is no partiality with God. For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law**  
**Romans 2:11-12**

But Peter learned that God cares equally for all His creation. Thus, he can say, "In truth, I perceive that God shows no partiality (the same word used here in James) but in every nation whoever fears him and works righteousness is accepted by Him [and] God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all" ([Acts 10:34-36](#)). Therefore, we shouldn't

view the world in terms of external appearances, classes, or races. Instead, we should see the world as those who have a relationship with Christ and are growing in Him and those who need a relationship with Him ([Rom 2:11-16](#)). None of these external appearances or ways in which we categorize them matter in the end!

In fact, God Himself doesn't look at the outside of a person; He examines the heart. The children of Israel had a penchant for looking only at the external and ignoring the spiritual as well as the God-given abilities of a person. This becomes most evident when they wanted to select a king. The people wanted someone who looked like a king in the eyes of the world—someone strong, tall, handsome, and regal. They didn't



care as much about His relationship to the Lord or his leadership abilities. During the search for Saul’s successor, God instructs Samuel, “Do not look at his [Eliab’s] appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam 16:7).

What is the danger of only looking at the external? How can it sometimes be deceiving?

Question  
# 5

To end this brief section, James highlights the church’s inconsistency and demonstrates their true motives and perceptions. In contrast (i.e. **but**) to God’s view whereby He displays love and value for all people, they have displayed **partiality** and have **dishonored the poor man** (v. 6). To show the error and sinfulness in their own thinking, James asks two very blunt and pointed questions: 1) **Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into courts?** and 2) **Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?** With these two questions, James wants them to realize that they’re doing the same thing when they show **partiality!** They act like the world around them. These same people who have likely experienced oppression and persecution for their faith at the hands of the wealthy are doing the same thing to **the poor** when they show **partiality!** Those who complain about their own plight will often quickly point out the fault in others, but they cannot see that same fault in their own lives.

Injustice and discrimination exist because of sin. Because we live in a fallen world, we will all experience actual unfair treatment—not just self-perceived based on one’s personal preferences or stubbornness. When we do, we should respond with love and righteousness because God will ultimately issue judgment ([Rom 12:17-21](#)). Moreover, we shouldn’t complain about the **partiality** of others against us while we make the same mistakes! We must avoid following the world’s pattern that labels people according to external perception rather than their spiritual condition and relationship with Christ. External appearances can be deceiving and misleading. We should resist pre-judging others based primarily upon first impressions! On the other hand, we must seek discernment from the Lord who sees the heart so we can properly assess the fruit that they bear ([Matt 7:15-20](#)).

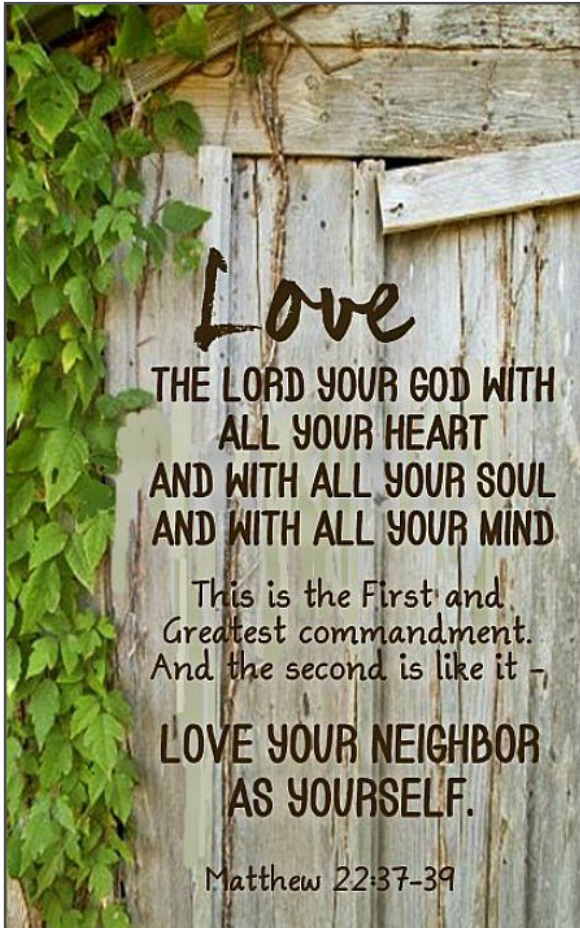
How does God give us discernment to judge character rather than the external appearance?

Question  
# 6

### James 2:8-13

#### ***THE VIOLATION OF THE LAW:***

James concludes this example by revealing how we ought to act as followers of Christ.



We should put the principles of Scripture into practice and we should live out the teaching of Christ which He also modeled for us. He posits that **if** we truly believe what Scripture says, then we will practice it; we will do it! We will live by **the royal law according to Scripture** (v. 8). James identifies it as **the royal law** because it describes life in the “kingdom of God” which Jesus came to establish in full through His death and resurrection. In his teaching, Jesus summarizes the entire law and Old Testament with two principles: love God and love others (**your neighbor**). Therefore, James takes Jesus’ second great command from [Leviticus 19:18](#) and quotes it here: “**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**” As a result, we demonstrate our **love** for God by loving others created in His image.

**Love**, not **partiality**, should rule our hearts. **Love**

doesn’t focus on the external; it regards the value of the individual to God. **Love**, not what we can get or how the person can benefit us, should be our motive in Christ!

When we fail to **love** others and instead **show partiality**, we **commit sin** and stand guilty before the **law as transgressors** (v. 9). Even though we may perfectly **keep** the rest of **the law**, yet **stumble** in just **this one point**, we are guilty of breaking **the whole law** (v. 10)! By making this assertion, James wants us to understand the seriousness of showing **partiality** or discriminating against others based upon external appearance. In this way, showing **partiality** is just as sinful and will incur God’s wrath and judgment just as much as **adultery** or **murder** (v. 11). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses these same two commands to reveal God’s true intent for **the law** and the high moral standard by which He expects us to live in the Spirit. Whether one looks lustfully at another or becomes angry unjustly, Jesus equates these acts with **adultery** and

**murder** respectively ([Matt 5:21-30](#)).

James most likely wants us to recall this same high moral standard that Jesus Himself set. If we are angry or we hate our brother ([1 John 3:15](#)), we become as guilty as one who has physically murdered another person created in God's image. Likewise, we become as guilty when we **show partiality!** For this reason, James points out that those who **commit sin**, whether **partiality, adultery, or murder, will be judged by the law of liberty** (v. 12). Although we have a higher standard to follow in Christ, **the law** is not restrictive, but liberating. It frees us to become who God originally created us to be and has reoriented us to a purposeful relationship with Him! Therefore, it is not merely about legalistically adhering to **the law**; it's about modeling the transformation in Christ who is conforming us to His image. The world will never understand this concept apart from experiencing salvation in Christ!

How is the law and Scripture actually liberating when we follow its requirements?

Question  
# 7

Those who have a transformed relationship with Christ will exhibit **mercy** in their lives. In Matthew 5:7, Jesus declares, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." James, however, tweaks this statement a bit and looks at it from a negative perspective in order to contrast it with the fate of the **transgressors** in verse 9. He states, "**For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy**" (v. 13). One who truly has a relationship with Christ will not repeatedly engage in discrimination or fail to show **mercy**; in contrast, those who have no relationship with Christ only have **judgment** to which they can look forward because they haven't truly experienced transformation! Our lives as believers, however, should stand in stark contrast to the world around us. We shouldn't live as if we are **transgressors** awaiting **judgment!** Yet, the way in which we live gives us tangible evidence to which we can point that we have salvation in Christ. James will deal with this extensively in the next section where he describes how "faith without works is dead." Evidence will always accompany our salvation!

To what evidence or transformation can you point that demonstrates the salvation you have in Christ?

Question  
# 8

## *Instruct*

From this passage we've studied today, we can summarize three evidences of our salvation in Christ: 1) we won't **show partiality** or discriminate against others based upon external appearance, 2) we will **love** God by loving others created in His image, and 3) we will show **mercy** and compassion to others just as God has shown it to us ([Matt 6:14-15](#))! Therefore, let us put aside all our personal preferences and presumptions and see others how Christ sees us! Let us reject **partiality** and discrimination while showing **love** and **mercy** to all people. In doing so, we will follow the higher ethic to which Christ has called us in His kingdom! An ethic which is so thoroughly transformed by His love, devotion, and sacrifice that we will imitate His character and fulfill His high holy purpose and calling for which He created us as His representatives.

Whether or not we've ever had the privilege of flying first class, we can all probably point to ample examples in which we have seen the disparity between socio-economic classes. We've all seen the suites at sporting events versus the nose-bleed seats; we've all seen the difference in eating at a restaurant that serves food for \$100 a plate versus \$10 to \$15. We may have never eaten at such an expensive restaurant or attended a game in such as suite. But we know the difference. People with money and fame are favored and treated much better than those of us who work hard and make comparatively little. In the kingdom of God, it ought not ever be this way! Through Christ, God has made salvation available to all people. He loves us equally and values every person above anything else that He created!

If we have a relationship with Christ, we should treat others with respect, dignity, and value at all times. The world will struggle with this because they have not been transformed. We, however, should never show partiality or discriminate based upon external appearances or presumptions. Christ didn't when He died on the cross for you and me! Everyone needs to hear the gospel. Everyone needs salvation in Christ lest he or she experience judgment and eternal separation at the end of life. As believers, let us shine as examples in our culture and value all life. Let's preach the gospel to all people. Let's point all people to the only One who can save and transform and whose name we bear: Jesus Christ.

## *Incorporate*

How should we as the church combat partiality and discrimination in our world? How can we keep such a mindset from infiltrating the church?

In what ways can we show our culture the value that God has for all people?

How does the world, particularly our culture here in the United States, discriminate against Christians? How are Christians portrayed in the media and through television programs? How should we as the church respond?

## ***Journal: Document God's Work***

*August 30, 2020*



# *Reinvigorate Your Performance*

## *James 2:14-26*

Focal Verse:

*“But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?”*

James 2:20

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## Introduce

Recently, I saw a Kawai Grand Piano posted for sale on the Internet at the amazingly low price of \$1000. The body or case of the piano highlighted prominently in the picture looked flawless. It had a beautiful, sleek black stain which made it shine and glisten when the light hit it. It didn't appear to have any dings or scratches that visibly scarred the wood. All eighty-eight keys seemed in pristine condition. None of them had any chips or nicks on them. When pressed, they



still moved freely and seemed to function in the way that they should.

From the external appearance in the picture, one would never know anything was wrong with the piano until reading the description. It clearly stated, "Fixer-up-er." The inside which produced the beautiful musical melodies when the keys are struck did not work. From changes in temperature and humidity, the sound board and other inside components had ceased to function properly. The sound board, in fact, was severely cracked and beyond repair. All the strings and connecting apparatuses, which once had produced a pleasant sound in symphony when struck, needed to be fully removed and repaired. The strings and all the intricate joints had become warped and mangled by the ever-changing weather. The piano had lost value and ceased to fulfill its intended purpose. Some may have even labeled it as a hopeless piece of junk! Yet, a man who moves and restores pianos for a living saw value in it! He would work to restore the inside to its original condition, so that it would once again fulfill its purpose to emit beautiful music. It would, however, require a complete overhaul on the inside. Just like this piano, Christ does the same through us when we come to Him for restoration! In sin apart from Him, we don't function the way we ought nor do we fulfill God's intended purpose. We need a complete overhaul from the inside out! Outwardly, we may appear in good condition to the world. But inwardly, we're a broken mess—mangled and destroyed. When Christ transforms us, we once again will play beautiful melodies pleasing to the Lord. We will actively serve Him in faith! In 2:14-26, James

## Introduce

demonstrates how faith without works is dead and useless. If we claim to have faith in Christ, then it will show through our attitudes and actions. Good works will then come more naturally to us and they will spring forth from our lives now transformed in Christ. Therefore, let's not be a person who says he has faith, but is dead on the inside. On the contrary, let us allow Christ to reinvigorate our performance and produce within us good works that are consistent with our faith!

Key  
Question

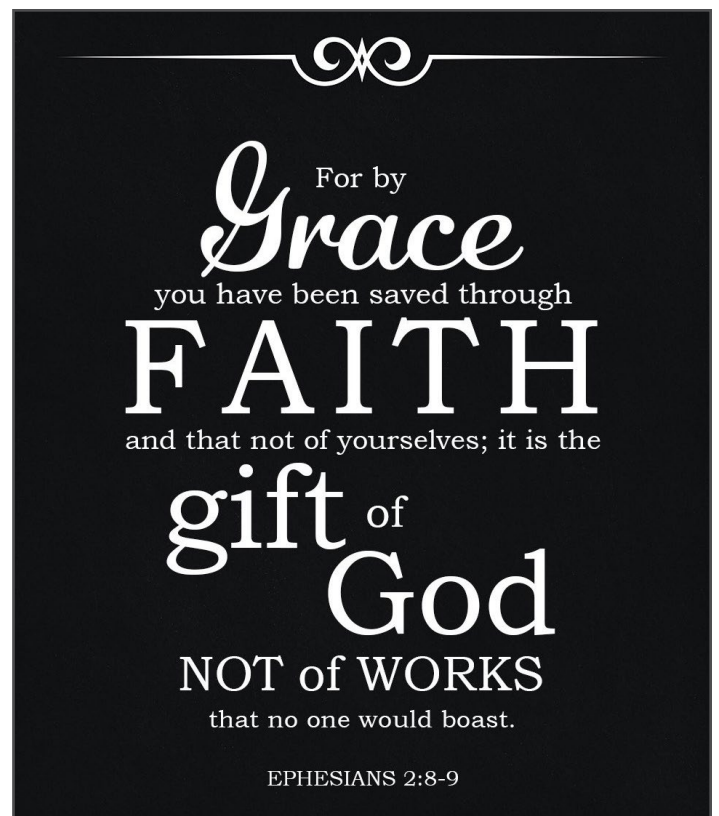
How do the good works we do serve as a sign that we have a relationship with Christ?

### James 2:14-17

#### AN EXERCISE IN FAITH APPLIED:

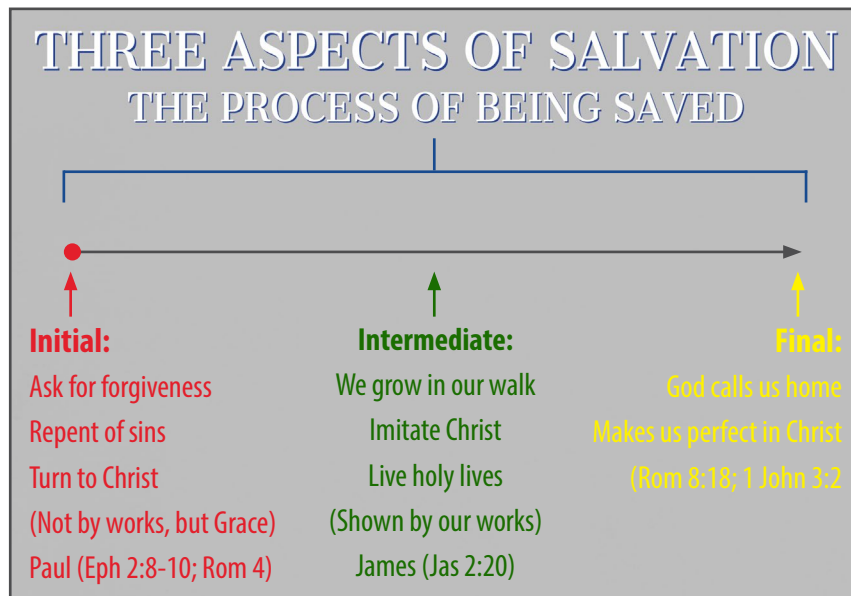
Since [1:26-27](#), James has sought to explain what “pure and undefiled religion” looks like when applied tangibly through the life of a believer. For those who have a relationship with Christ, he explains, the good **works** we now do attest to the genuineness of our **faith**. He then poses a rhetorical question that should serve as a litmus test to determine if we truly have a relationship with Christ that has transformed us: “**What does it profit if someone says he has faith but does not have works**” (v. 14)? As he will demonstrate over the next few verses, we outwardly display the genuineness of our **faith** by what we do and not merely by what we say or claim to believe. Hearing the Word only and having a cognitive understanding of it means nothing if we don’t put it into practice and live by it ([Jas 1:22](#))! **Faith** in Christ is transformative. It changes us; we will not stay the same if we have a relationship with Him! There will be evidence of our **faith**. If no evidence exists in the way we think and act through good **works**, then we must question if we really know Christ and have a relationship with Him.

In the very next phrase, James answers this question directly and succinctly. Most translations regard it as another question: “**Can that faith save him?**” To understand James’ point, we need to look at the Greek carefully. Literally, it says, “*The faith is not able to save him.*” If a question, then the way it is written in Greek requires the answer “no.” Since biblical Greek did not have any punctuation marks at that time, it is better to take it as a statement which answers his first question: a **faith** that does not transform **cannot save**. Even more important, we must pay close attention to the definite article (the) before the word **faith** which unfortunately the NKJV does not translate. James is **not** saying that faith in general **cannot save** and we’re saved by **works**. This would conflict with the rest of



Scripture! On the contrary, the definite article points back to the **faith** without **works** in the previous question. We should, therefore, translate it: *that kind of faith cannot save*. In other words, we demonstrate our **faith** in Christ through good **works**. Over the years, many people have misunderstood what James is saying here. Some have gone as far as to claim that He is in conflict with Paul and this shows inconsistency in Scripture or, even worse, error. However, James does not conflict with Paul. Both, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, believe that salvation only comes through **faith** in Christ by grace which then produces good **works** as evidence of our transformation in Him. In their respective letters, James and Paul are addressing different situations and talking about two different aspects of salvation: justification and sanctification. To help us understand, let's borrow an example from mathematics. Think of life as a ray which begins at a specific point and continues indefinitely through eternity (see the illustration). Events in life are represented by single points or dots on that ray which reflect specific things that have happened at specific times and have come to a conclusion.

According to Scripture, salvation is a process which has three aspects to it. First, there



is a specific time at which we acknowledge our sin, repent, and place our **faith** and trust in Christ. This is a single, one-time event in life represented on the illustration by a dot or point. We call this justification where we are made to be in right standing with God through Christ. When Paul says, "for by grace you have been saved through faith and not of works lest

anyone should boast," he is referring to this single, one-time event. After we begin our relationship with Christ, we must continually seek to grow in our new life to become more like Him and live in holiness. We call this part of salvation sanctification. This is a continuous process or journey rather than a one-time event—represented by a continuous line in the illustration. From the point we are saved, we will do good **works** which honor Christ. When James says, "faith without works is dead," he is referring to

this second aspect of salvation.

Finally, we have the process of salvation completed in full when Christ calls us home or returns to collect us as the church. Thus, Paul can say, “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” ([Phil 1:6](#)). When He calls us home, we will be made fully perfect and conformed to His image to fulfill the original purpose for which He has created us. We call this aspect of salvation glorification. Therefore, John explains, “We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” ([1 John 3:2](#)). Although we will not be “God,” we will be conformed to His image and made like Him in our character. We will no longer face temptation or have the urge to sin, but we will imitate our glorious Lord and Savior in His righteousness. For this reason, we can describe salvation as a process. We can never earn salvation through good **works** nor will we ever lose it once Christ has forgiven us. But we must seek to grow daily in our walk with Him and model His righteousness to the rest of the world.

Why must we regard salvation as a three-part process? What is the danger of focusing on one specific aspect rather than balancing the whole?

Question  
# 1

To help illustrate his point, James turns to a hypothetical example; but one which his audience had most likely encountered in life. Suppose **a brother or sister** comes to us **naked** or hungry, what would we do (v. 15)? In this example, James focuses primarily upon the interaction between believers and how the world at large would see such incongruity between their so-called **faith** and actions. **Naked** derives from the Greek word from which we get our word gymnasium. Male athletes at that time would undress to compete in sporting events or contests. However, in the New Testament, it is often used more figuratively to refer to one dressed in rags or dressed inappropriately for the conditions ([John 21:7](#)). Taken together, **naked** and **destitute for daily** food then indicate a life of extreme poverty. So, this depicts a person who has a true need and not one who abuses the grace and mercy of others or demands help because of his laziness ([2 Thess 3:10](#)). In this scenario, a believer (**one of you**) acts callously and even hypocritically saying to another believer, “**Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,**” but they **do not give them** anything to meet their physical needs (v. 16). In our modern understanding this would be like saying, “Just go on your way. I wish you well. I hope you find something to wear and eat.” To put it in another way that will hit home for all of us, it’s like declaring, “I’ll pray for you,” and then forgetting about it, never doing

## Instruct

anything to meet their need, and never even praying for them! Our love in Christ along with our **faith** displayed through our transformed lives should compel us to act. We



should show love and compassion in a tangible way! Even so, we must utilize discernment when helping others, so we don't create dependence or an even worse situation ([1 Tim 5:3-4](#)). But we still must find ways to help. If we can't physically help them ourselves, we can refer them to resources that will help meet their needs, improve

their lives, and show them we sincerely care. We should point them to Christ, help them, but most importantly teach them what genuine **faith** looks like.

Although we should meet people's needs according to Scripture, why must we exercise discernment in how we help them?

Question  
# 2

James ends verse 16 where he began this section by asking the question: **What does it profit?** Again, he answers his own question by explaining that **faith by itself which does not have works is dead** (v. 17). In nature, signs exist that give an indication whether something is living or **dead**. Plants will have green or color in their leaves or petals, not brown; they will also bear fruit in many cases. We can visibly see this evidence! Apart from Christ, we have no life ([Eph 2:1](#)). A cognitive understanding or head knowledge alone does not result in life. We can know *about* Jesus without truly knowing Him. This kind of knowledge produces no life change. People will continue to make decisions primarily based upon their fleshly and selfish desires. From time to time, we may do good things, but they amount to nothing if we don't have a relationship with Christ. A **faith** that doesn't include transformation in the way that we live, therefore, is as **dead** as a person who doesn't have a relationship with Christ.

What specific evidence can you cite in your life that indicates you have been made alive in Christ?

Question  
# 3

**THE ERROR OF FRUITLESS BELIEF:**

Anticipating some of the questions as well as some of the objections that his audience may have, James summarizes the view of his opponents and contrasts it with the correct view based upon Scripture. By doing so, he hopes to show them the error in their thinking and the fruitlessness of their belief. In general, his opponents (i.e. **someone**) might object and **say**, “**You have faith, and I have works**” (v. 18). As a result, they divorce **faith** from **works** and make them into two separate entities. In this way, they have distorted James’ teaching by claiming that one can have **faith** without **works** or vice versa **works** without **faith**. In the latter, they regard “religion” as legalistic ritual performed meaninglessly and mindlessly to curry favor. They wrongly believe one can earn eternal life by merit rather than properly directed **faith**. To James, this is just as dangerous as one who deceptively believes he can have **faith** without life change. They errantly propose that what one believes is more important than what one does. James rejects both of these views! What one believes is as equally important as what one does; they work in tandem! **Faith** and **works** are not mutually exclusive; together they demonstrate that we have a relationship with Christ. We cannot have one without the other!

What is the danger of separating faith from works?

Question  
# 4

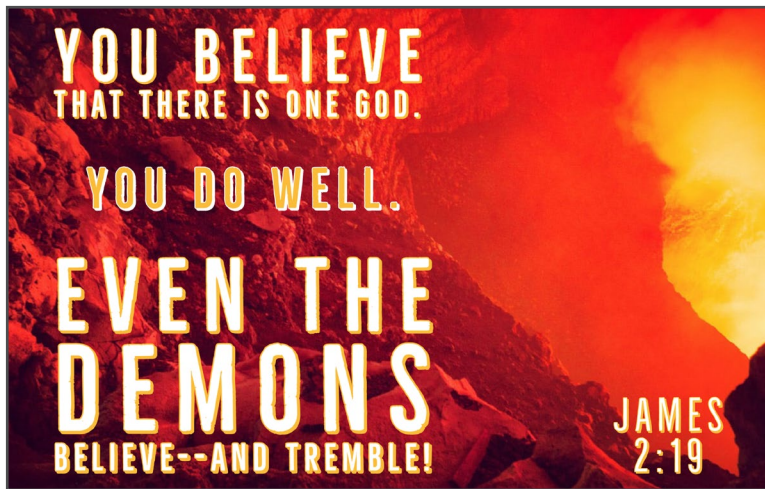
James once again reiterates the absurdity of their view; it’s impossible to separate **works** from **faith**. Thus, he demands his opponents to **show** their **faith without works** while he **will show** his **faith by his works**. To emphasize the fruitlessness of such **faith**, he alludes to Deuteronomy 6:4 which serves as Israel’s statement of **faith**: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” As a nation, they were called to serve the Lord alone. Even though many may have memorized and repeated this verse often, they didn’t really believe it because they failed to practice it. Over the course of history, many, even the majority, in Israel forsook the Lord and served other gods or



## Instruct

worshiped the Lord along with the gods of the other nations around them. In this way, it constitutes meaningless knowledge!

Likewise, we can memorize entire books of the Bible, recite the fundamental tenets of the faith, and even preach the gospel. These are good things to do (i.e. **you do well**)! None of it, however, amounts to anything if we don't have a relationship with Christ and put it into practice! To identify the nature of the problem of a **faith** that does not



produce **works**, James points out that **even the demons believe and tremble** (v. 19). They know with absolute certainty that God exists and they fear Him. Because they tried to usurp God's authority and, as a result, severed the relationship with Him for which they were created, they now realize that they have already been condemned

and await their final sentence of eternal punishment ([Matt 25:41](#); [Rev 20:10](#)). They cognitively **believe** it because they have experienced it personally! They **tremble** and shake with fear because their fate is sealed and they know it!

James speaks rather harshly to those who dismiss the idea that true **faith** produces **works**. Addressing them as **foolish**, he questions whether they truly **want to know** that this kind of **faith** is actually useless (v. 20). We live in a culture that often wants to dismiss reality because they want to justify their views and appease their consciences. They simply don't want to hear the truth because they don't want to deal with the ramifications and grapple with the consequences, so they isolate themselves and gather together those who will tell them what they want to hear ([2 Tim 4:3-4](#)). Some may even go as far as denying that a problem even exists! In a sense, James condemns his opponents for taking a similar stance by asking this question. They don't really want to know that true **faith** produces **works** because it would require them to make changes in their lives!

Why do some people not want to deal with reality? How can we as a church help people to see reality, especially concerning the fate of one's soul?

Question  
# 5



Unlike [verse 17](#) which describes **faith without works** as **dead**, the word used here literally means “not working.” This kind of phony **faith** is broken like the grand piano in the introduction and needs to be reinvigorated and restored. It has no value (**profit**) either to God or the one who claims to exercise it; thus, it becomes completely useless! When teaching children, for example, we must act consistently with the values and principles that we espouse verbally. From experience, we know that what one does makes a greater impact than what one says if they are in conflict with each other. Children learn by both hearing and seeing! But they tend to repeat that which they see more.

Over time, parents strive to teach their children the boundaries by which they expect them to live. Suppose, however, a parent establishes a system of values, but does not abide by those same principles. A child will tend to imitate what they see rather than what they hear. By refusing to follow those same boundaries, parents essentially teach their children they’re not important—in fact, they’re arbitrary rules that don’t apply and are “useless” in real-life situations. Similarly, such **faith** which does not manifest transformation is useless. It’s a meaningless set of beliefs or **works** we do that make no lasting impact upon life without a relationship with Christ.

In what ways does living inconsistently as followers of Christ create problems in life?

Question  
# 6

## ***James 2:21-26***

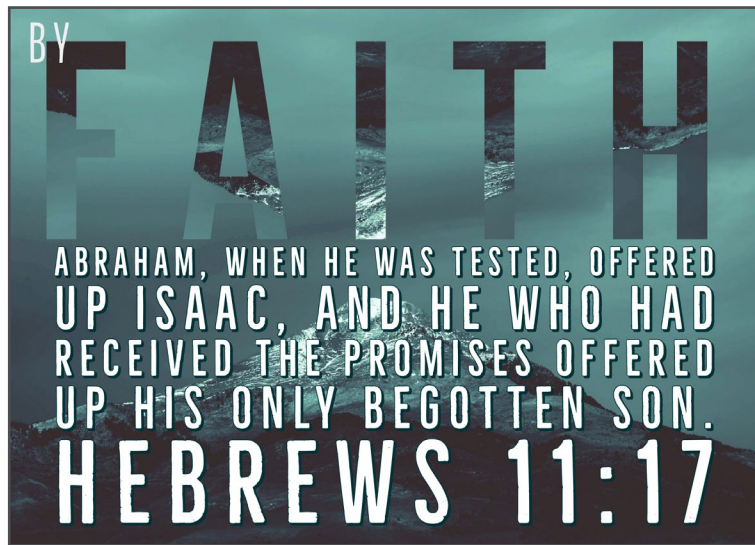
### ***AN EXAMPLE OF FAITH IN ACTION:***

James winds up his lecture by citing two Old Testament examples which show **faith** in action. First, he appeals to Abraham whose **faith** was tested by God and proved genuine **when he offered Isaac his son on the altar** (v. 21). Once again, some encounter difficulty in reconciling James with Paul. In Romans 4:2, Paul argues, “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, not before God.” James, on the other hand, rhetorically asks, “**Was not Abraham our father justified by works?**” When we carefully examine the context and the way they both use the word justify, we will see that they are referring to two totally different aspects. Words depend upon context for meaning. Depending upon context, the same word can have varied meanings; one size doesn’t truly fit all. The noun “record,” for example, can mean two different things: a statistic or a vinyl disc containing audio. It requires context to select the right one that makes sense! Paul and James use the same Greek word—justify—

## Instruct

with two starkly different meanings.

For Paul, the term justify incorporates a more legal meaning in which one is declared “not guilty.” In this way, it means to “be declared righteous” by God on the basis of **faith** in Jesus Christ—the initial step of salvation which cannot be earned. On the other hand, James uses a slightly different nuance. Justify can also signify that something is shown or proven to be right (see [Matt 11:19](#)). In this case, it demonstrates that people have a relationship with Christ on the basis of the transformed **works** they do after Christ saves them; they are not declared righteous because of their **works**. Recall



that James has already beckoned his opponents to **show** or prove their **faith** (v. 18). Without evidence, it is impossible to prove anything! They have no case. They have nothing, but conjecture and a misguided hope, and cannot point to anything tangible to testify that they have a relationship with Christ. **Without works**, therefore, it is impossible to prove the genuineness of **faith**. When

tested in this way in Genesis 22, Abraham passed with flying colors; his **faith** and trust in the Lord proved genuine!

Why is it important to know what we believe and to be able to defend it against errant thinking ([1 Peter 3:15](#))?

Question  
# 7

Under the guise of another question, James clarifies exactly what he wants his readers to **see**: **faith** works **together with works** to be **made complete** (v. 22). We can't have one without the other! Abraham, for instance, placed his **faith** in God well before this great test. In [Genesis 12:1-4](#), he **believed** God, graciously accepted His covenant, and obeyed. Upon his initial proclamation of **faith** and trust in the Lord, Abraham was justified or declared righteous by the grace of God (Paul). Although he wasn't perfect along the way, Abraham always overcame his doubts and believed God. For this reason, James can appeal to [Genesis 15:6](#) as well which asserts, “**Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness**” (v. 23). This early declaration

about Abraham's faith in the Lord was then conformed or proven through a test toward the end of his life. Through this test in which God asked Abraham to sacrifice **his son** of promise, the **Scripture was fulfilled**. It definitively showed Abraham's **faith** in the Lord. It left no doubt! Evidence existed that Abraham trusted God in all things ([Heb 11:17-19](#)).

Before transitioning to his next example, James reinforces the idea that a person is shown to be in right standing with God by the **works** which flow from his or her **faith** (v. 24). We too must ask ourselves:

What evidence exists in our lives that we have **faith** in Christ and a relationship with Him? At some point in our lives, we may have bought a used car. Before we plunk down money to purchase it, we make every effort to ensure it works! It's wise to do so. The outside of the vehicle may look good. But that's not what makes



it function. We open the hood, check the hoses, look for corrosion on the battery, and inspect for any other visible problems. Most likely, we'll also take it for a test drive not just to make sure we like how it feels, but to make sure it works. In some cases, we may even take it to a trusted mechanic who will catch anything we may have noticed. Christ has made a significant investment in each of us. He bought us with His blood! The **works** we now do become a "vehicle" that indicate we have been restored to working condition. Apart from Him, we may look good to others on the outside, but on the inside we're **dead**. Because Christ can search the heart and know our true condition, we cannot hide any of our imperfections from Him. They are all laid bare in His sight. We need a complete overhaul that only Christ can give! Just as we have a checklist to evaluate the condition of a used car, God has given us a checklist to evaluate our lives through Scripture. Therefore, let us evaluate ourselves honestly to ensure that we have a "working" **faith** that honors and glorifies the Lord!

How does your life compare to the standard for living that God has outlined in Scripture?

Question  
# 8

## Instruct

Second, James refers to a Gentile by the name of Rahab who displayed **faith** in the Lord. Living in the ancient city of Jericho during the time of Israel's conquest of the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua, Rahab **the harlot** confessed, "The Lord your God, He is God in heaven above earth and on earth" ([Josh 2:11](#)). In **faith**, knowing that God would deliver her and her family, she hid the **messengers** or spies and helped them to escape the city **another way** (v. 25). Her **faith** compelled her to act—not out of fear but out of sincere belief and reverence for the one true and living God. Hence, James can conclude that just **as the body without the spirit is dead**, so also **is faith without works** (v. 26). Salvation comes to Jew and Gentile in the same way: **faith** in Christ! That **faith** in Christ compels us to good **works**—not because we fear the Lord, but because we respect Him and desire to honor and glorify Him with our lives as a living sacrifice.

Let us allow Christ to reinvigorate our performance. Let's not be like the grand piano in the introduction and have an outward appearance that gives a false impression that we can make beautiful music when our components don't work. We need the restorative touch of the Master conductor to restore us. Let's surrender into His hands and allow Him to produce a pleasing melody in our lives by orchestrating what we do! When we submit to Christ, we will never play a wrong note; when we surrender to Him daily, we will never get out of tune or have components that become dysfunctional. He'll never leave us idle to decay from lack of use, but He'll use us daily as a testament to His glory! This week take time to evaluate your life honestly. Spend time with God and ask Him if any area of your life has become out of tune with Him because you have failed to surrender it into His control. Don't fool yourselves and think we can put our lives on cruise control without daily evidence that we're growing in Christ. God will give us a thorough and honest evaluation when we truly seek Him. Therefore, let us prove our faith genuine and complete by the works we now do in Him.

## ***Incorporate***

Why is it important to know why we believe what we believe and be able to defend it ([1 Peter 3:15](#))?

Although we should never be judgmental or condemning, why is it important to help people understand that true faith requires transformation in life? If we don't experience transformation, what does this indicate?

What other examples can you cite from Scripture and your own life that show how we should be compelled to act in faith through Christ? How has Christ shaped your desires and changed your behavior?

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