



RELATE

**ADULT CONNECT
CLASS CURRICULUM**

**DONALD J. WILLS
SENIOR PASTOR**



**OCTOBER
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,

When following Christ, it is vital that we seek God's will in all that we do. Often, this gets overlooked in our daily planning and the decisions we are called upon to make that impact our lives. In our study, James gives us a sobering reminder of the brevity of life and that all of our planning as well as our decisions ought to be filtered through the lens of the Lord's will. Let me encourage you to make this a practice in your daily life. Seek God's will in every aspect of your life just as Solomon writes in Proverbs that He (the Lord) will make our paths straight.

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.

This month we will be changing our weekly schedule for in-person Bible Study Classes to resume on Sunday mornings at 9:30 am beginning October 11th, if the Lord wills. I trust you will help us get the word out and invite someone to come with you on this date. May you continue to open yourself up to the Lord's will in whatever way He deems best to use you.

-Blessings
Pastor Don



NEW SCHEDULE STARTING SOON!

SUNDAYS, STARTING ON OCTOBER 11

9:30 AM

- In-Person Connect Classes (birth-adult)
 - Median Adults–Room 102
 - Ladies Class–Room 112

11:00 AM

- Blended Worship Service
- Preschool Extended Care (birth-age 3)
- KAZ Children's Church (age 4-grade 2)
- BeTween Worship–Room 200 (grades 3-6)

TUESDAYS, STARTING ON OCTOBER 6

11:00 AM • First Worship Tuesdays • Sanctuary
A Traditional Worship Service for adults of all ages

WEDNESDAYS • STUDENTS ONLY

6:30pm • Grounded Students (grades 7-12)

Watch the bulletin, announcements, and text messages
for details on weekly in-person gatherings.

Text @fbcfwyouth to 81010 to receive updates!

NOT GETTING OUT YET? PARTICIPATE ONLINE!

Watch fbcfw.org/bible-study/ for online classes



MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES

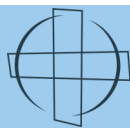
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF FORT WORTH

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)

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.

3



October 4, 2020

Pursue the Lord's Will

[James 4:13-17](#)

17



October 11, 2020

Practice Integrity with Wealth

[James 5:1-6](#)

33



October 18, 2020

Persevere in Suffering
in the World

[James 5:7-13](#)

49



October 25, 2020

Pray with Direction
Wholeheartedly

[James 5:15b-20](#)

October 4, 2020



GOD'S WILL

Pursue the Lord's Will

James 4:13-17

Focal Verse:

"Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'"

James 4:15

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Introduce

Over the past four years, Bro. Dave Rutherford and I have had the privilege of spending time enjoying the beauty of God's creation in some idyllic places whether in the Colorado Rockies, the Smoky Mountains of East Tennessee, or amongst the sandstone formations in the deserts of Utah in Arches National Park. Before we begin our adventure, we always have a plan. We always reserve two campsites well in advance to ensure we'll have two spots when we arrive and we always plan the route so we can know where to book the hotel rooms on the way. Before we even begin packing our tents, beds, and supplies in our cars, we call the local municipalities where we will be staying to confirm our reservations and ask about any regulations or restrictions that they may have. At that time, we also inquire about potable water sources, bathroom and bathing facilities, firewood, and other resources we may need. In doing so, we try to eliminate any possible problem that may occur within our control and stave off any misfortune that could potentially happen because of a lack of planning and preparation.

Despite our best laid plans and meticulous preparations, sometimes circumstances change and events occur over which we have no control. In some form or fashion, most of us probably had to change our plans at least once this year! In May, Bro. Dave and I had made all the necessary preparations to spend a week in the Watchman Campground of Zion National Park. Unfortunately, the pandemic altered our plans as national parks and facilities closed completely and only began to re-open in phases during the mid-summer months. Certainly, we were disappointed and longed to camp under the stars in our tents. But this change in plans didn't truly affect our main purpose in life to serve the Lord and glorify Him.

As things began to re-open, we fortunately had the privilege to schedule another trip. This time we booked two campsites in the White River National Forest near Trapper's Lake Colorado at the end of August. As I write this lesson, four major wildfires have scorched the Colorado landscape, sending thick plumes of smoke into the



Introduce

valleys and engulfing the mountains prompting air quality warnings. Many of these fires are close in proximity to the place we intend to camp! Less than one week prior to leaving, our plans are once again uncertain! We have no clue how these events will unfold and whether we may even be able to go to Colorado. Nonetheless, we still recognize that God is in control. Whether affected by COVID-19 or wildfires, our purpose still remains the same in everything we do: trust the Lord, praise Him in any and every circumstance, and submit to His plan for us.

Nothing is inherently wrong with planning and making preparations unless they become arrogant and self-centered, whereby we completely omit God from them altogether. This type of arrogant attitude is what James condemns in [4:13-17](#) where he reminds us that we must plan according to God's will. James isn't saying that we shouldn't make plans or prepare. Scripture doesn't teach us to live spontaneously or foolishly. Instead, James is helping us to put our plans into perspective. When we do plan, we must pursue the Lord's will and not our own! God has given us wisdom and knowledge so that we can plan and prepare ([Prov 6:6-11](#)). But as we plan, He should always be the center of our preparations! Let's trust the Lord, surrender to Him, and turn to Him to help us plan for the future.

Key
Question

Why should we not regard James' comments about submitting to the Lord's will as an excuse for not making plans or sufficiently preparing?

James 4:13-15

PLAN WITH THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE:

So far in this chapter, we've seen how the lack of godly wisdom has led to self-centeredness and arrogance which then caused arguments and fights over petty personal preferences and differing opinions. Instead of turning to the Lord in prayer, they declared their self-sufficiency where they pursued their own selfish goals and personal gain. Even when they did pray, they asked amiss and prayed according to their own desires ([Jas 4:3](#)). With this attitude, so-called believers became friends with the world living in debauchery, thereby making them enemies with God ([Jas 4:4](#)). As we continue our study, James once again addresses the lack of godly wisdom which has led to a host of arrogant and poor choices because they have omitted any input and guidance from the Lord.

James begins verse 13 by literally asserting **come now**. In more modern English, we would say "pay attention" or even more colloquially "listen up." Picture James as a coach who has gathered his players in a huddle on the practice field.

Before reminding them to practice the fundamentals or pointing out in what areas they need to improve or the mistakes they have made, the coach will exclaim, "Listen up," to get their attention.

In the same way, James is telling the church to "listen up" because they are failing to practice the



fundamentals of the faith. Therefore, he offers this advice as a corrective to their self-confidence and self-assurance which has caused them to eliminate God from their planning.

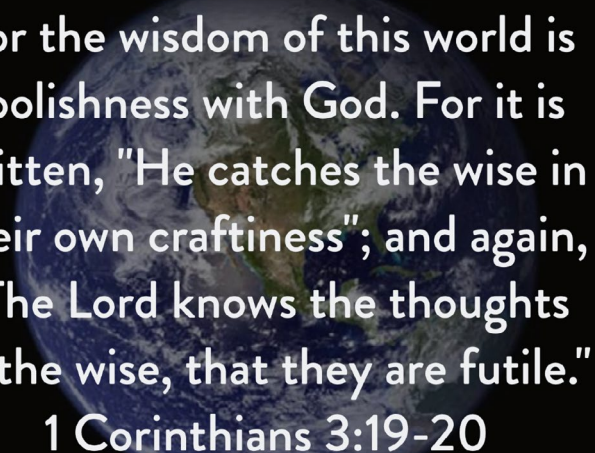
In what areas in life is God telling you to "listen up" so that you can better practice the fundamentals of the faith?

Question
1

Instruct

Having gotten their attention, James now shows them the flaw in their reasoning by characterizing their typical pattern of thinking using a hypothetical situation. They confidently boast in their own plans and their own skills to the exclusion of the Lord. In arrogance, they claim that **today or tomorrow** they **will go** to a particular **city** where they will **spend a year** buying, selling, and making **a profit**. They have everything planned out in their own minds. In their minds, they *know* it will work; they are self-assured and confident in their own abilities! We live in such a society today that very much promotes this same attitude—perhaps to an even greater degree. Consider some of the expressions people use as motivation; they espouse this very same philosophy only with different words! Society tells us to “believe in ourselves” and prods us to “be or become whatever we want.” The world also advocates that “we can do anything we set our minds to.”

In philosophical terms, we call this worldview humanism which elevates mankind, his ability, his wisdom, and his desire as the central tenets that govern the universe. Rather than acknowledging our dependance upon the Lord our Creator and Savior, the world regards itself as essentially good and capable of controlling its own destiny by making



For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their own craftiness”; and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.”
1 Corinthians 3:19-20

its own moral decisions apart from a universal standard of truth. The world believes that man has the authority, ability, resources, and wisdom to solve his own problems. In doing so, man has declared himself self-sufficient and independent from the Lord who alone holds his destiny in His hands! To see where this philosophy has brought us, we need only to look at the current

condition of the world. Left in the hands of man, apart from the wisdom and guidance of the Lord, society has devolved into chaos, confusion, and corruption; it has not gotten better as humanists have led us to believe that it would!

What is the danger of looking to any human leader or institution alone to restore moral order? How should we as a church respond to such “humanism” in our world?

Question
2

For this reason, James reminds the church of our limited ability and insight in contrast to God's infinite authority and wisdom. He demonstrates the foolishness of their self-assured plans by declaring that they **do not know what will happen tomorrow** (v. 14). Proverbs 27:1 warns against such arrogance in omitting God from our plans: "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth." Certainly, we must plan for the future and try to anticipate what might occur rather than constantly react to situations as if we were putting out fires. We are still responsible for the things over which God has given us control! At the same time, however, we must rely upon God rather than solely trust in our own preparation and planning because ultimately only God knows the future and holds it squarely in His hands!

For those of us who have driven in the mountains, we probably have experienced "blind curves" on a narrow, winding roadway where we can't see what's around the corner.

Suppose, however, we see a man whom we know just came around the curve standing on the side of the roadway waving his hands frantically and motioning for us to stop. He had just witnessed a rockslide and wanted to warn us. He had seen and experienced the danger and knew we needed to take a detour. It would be foolish not to trust someone who had such



valuable knowledge which we ourselves could not yet see. God is the same. He can see around every corner in our lives whereas we cannot and He will always offer us the best guidance if only we would take time to stop and listen to Him!

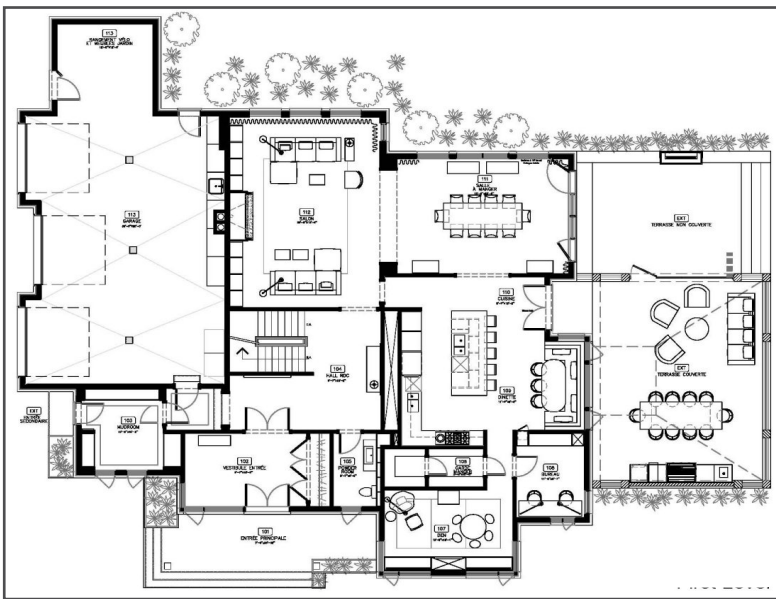
To put the finiteness of both our existence and our plans into perspective, James poses a question: "**For what is life?**" In the scope of eternity, **life** is brief and fleeting. James describes it as a **vapor** which **appears** only **for a little** while and then **vanishes**. Picture a cold Winter morning when we go outside. As we breathe, a mist or **vapor** forms, but it lasts only a few seconds before dissipating and disappearing completely. James wants us to understand that we must focus on the one thing that truly matters because this current **life** is only temporary and quickly passing. We must ask, "Where will we spend eternity?" If we exclude God from our plans and refuse to follow His plan through His Son Jesus, we will have a miserable eternity spent in torture separated

Instruct

from Him. If we surrender to the Lord and accept His plan in Christ, we will have a glorious and bright future spent with Him in paradise! Thus, James wants to reorient our thinking to what is most important in life: following the plan God has designed for us!

For us to apply these verses properly, we must first understand what they do *not* mean. James isn't issuing a universal prohibition against planning and preparation in light of living spontaneously and free with utter disregard for the things over which we *do* have control. Scripture never teaches us to shirk responsibility, live carefree, and resign everything that happens to us merely as fate. On the contrary, Scripture encourages us to weigh the cost of our decisions, act wisely and responsibly, and plan. Proverbs 21:5 states, "The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty." Scripture implores us to work diligently to provide for our basic needs ([Prov 24:7](#); [2 Thess 3:10-11](#)), make provision for our families ([1 Tim 5:4](#)), and to prepare for retirement and other financials needs (expected or unexpected) that may arise from time to time ([Prov 6:8-11](#)).

Moreover, Jesus Himself advocates planning when He tells His disciples to weigh the cost of what it means to follow Him ([Luke 14:25-33](#)). He asks, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it" (Luke 14:28)? Likewise, He encourages His disciples to anticipate, plan, and be ready for His second coming which could happen at any moment. He illustrated the need to prepare through the parable of ten virgins—five of whom were caught off guard and unprepared to receive the bridegroom who appeared suddenly (Matt 25:1-13). We should indeed plan, but our plans must include input from God and be devised by His Spirit whom He sent to indwell us.



In what other ways does the Bible teach us to plan and be prepared?

Question
3

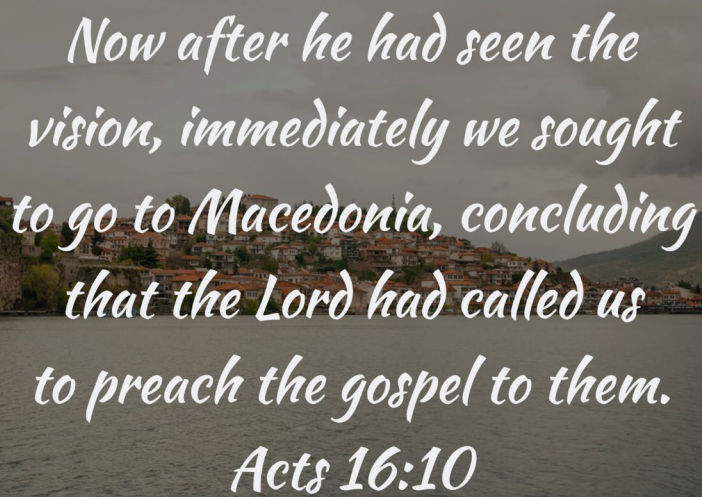
In contrast, the world in which we live wants to seize the moment and receive instant gratification. The world may plan but their plans primarily involve meeting their immediate needs and fulfilling the desires they have right now at this moment. In the hypothetical illustration that James cited in verse 13, the people focused on economic opportunities and enriching themselves to the exclusion of the Lord. Through this illustration, we see how the world rarely thinks about the long-term effects of the choices they make now. They only look at the present and what they can get out of it for themselves. For the world, this happens in every facet of life. Rather than look for a long-lasting solution, for example, people want a quick-fix that usually ends up requiring more time and costing more money in the long run. Moreover, people often do not think of the consequences of their actions upon their bodies whether in physical substances consumed or intimacy.

In addition, many accrue debt and lack financial responsibility and restraint to plan efficiently to live within their means. Many plan their lives around their entertainment rather than around providing for themselves and their families through their jobs. People suddenly quit their jobs with no other prospects simply because they have grown tired of them; others look for jobs based upon the opportunities that they afford for recreational activities. We could list many more things here, but this helps us get a picture of the irrationalness of leaving God out of our decision-making process and relying upon emotional reactions to make life-changing decisions. The things that the world values and seeks are only temporary whereas our relationship with the Lord through Jesus is eternal!

In what ways does the world tend to emphasize their immediate needs and desires over eternity?

Question
4

After comprehending what these verses do not mean, we need to understand what they do mean so that we can apply them in our lives. God calls us to surrender ourselves into His control. Rather than boast arrogantly about our plans, we **ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will do this or that"** (v. 15). Once again, notice how James doesn't chide those who plan; instead, he shows how their plans should be subject to the will of the Lord. We see this in Scripture with the Apostle Paul. Paul had begun making plans and arranging to return to Southern Galatia to strengthen the churches there which he had planted on his first mission trip. There was nothing wrong with these plans in and of themselves; indeed, such a return there could have



Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.
Acts 16:10

been profitable for the believers, helping them to mature in their faith. But God had a different plan which He later revealed to Paul. He sent him to Macedonia (Philippi) to plant churches there ([Acts 15:36-41; 16:6-10](#)). Paul wasn't sinful or misguided in his previous plans. On the contrary, he was sensitive and obedient to God's will as it was specifically revealed to Him and

adapted the plans that he had made accordingly.

Similarly, we should make plans proactively based on what we know God expects of us and desires from us. To do so requires that we pray, read Scripture, and listen to the Lord as He guides us. When we cultivate our relationship with Christ daily, we will always have the right plan and perspective when we listen to Him. Sometimes, however, God chooses not to reveal His entire plan to us all at once and will do so over a period of time—sometimes even years. As God reveals His specific will, we must be sensitive and willing to follow His plan rather than stubbornly continuing on our own—even if we think what we're doing honors Him! To relate this teaching back to James' hypothetical situation, it's alright to plan to go to a particular city, plan for one's business ventures, and plan to operate a financially profitable company as long as we act with integrity, honor the Lord, and listen to (obey) Him if He gives us different directives to follow over time.

At what times in life, have you stubbornly persisted in your own plans? How do those times compare with the times that you listened to the Lord and followed His plans?

Question
5

The key to serving the Lord faithfully is flexibility—not compromise. We must be flexible in the sense of prayerfully and scripturally evaluating opportunities as they arise to discern God's will and how He wants us to respond. Being flexible, however, doesn't mean that we should "react" to circumstances. It does mean that we should "respond" to the Lord. Reacting to circumstances always poses a danger because we


tend to respond based upon emotion without thinking and evaluating the situation. We often treat our circumstances like a hot stove. When experiencing discomfort from the heat or inadvertently touching it, we reflexively pull our hand away without thinking. God did endow us with such reflexes to protect ourselves physically. But the same principle does not apply to adverse circumstances we may face in life. To these situations, we need to respond as the Lord leads and not react.

James 4:16

PRAISE THE LORD NOT YOURSELF:

Now, James makes explicit what he has implied through the illustration in the first three verses by describing how they **boast in their arrogance** (a plural word in the Greek) and **all such boasting is evil** (v. 16). In more modern English, this phrase means to boast in one's accomplishments, achievements, and exploits. Thus, they're saying, "Look at me! Look at what I have done!" Scripture always vilifies such **boasting and arrogance**. In fact, God emphatically declares, "Let not a wise man glory (i.e. boast) in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches" ([Jer 9:23](#)). On the contrary, the only recipient of our **boasting** should be the Lord! The psalmist writes, "In God we boast all day long, and praise Your name forever" ([Psalm 44:8](#); see also [Psalm 34:2](#)).

Likewise, in the New Testament, Paul can exclaim, "Therefore, I have reason to glory (boast) in Christ Jesus the things which pertain to God" (Rom 15:17). What are these things that "pertain to God?" In the context of Romans, they refer to the gospel and salvation which come through Jesus the Christ. He alone saves and He alone is worthy of our praise. Yet, in a broader sense, everything pertains to God because He created it all, sustains it all, and provides for it all. Therefore, He owns everything. We are merely stewards or caretakers of what He has given us here on earth! Essentially, James points out that we cannot be good stewards who represent the Lord well when we exclude Him from our plans. To make matters worse, when we **boast in** our own achievements, we obscure the One



To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it.

- Deuteronomy 10:14 -

Instruct

who rightly deserves the praise for the success He has granted us!

In what other ways can we boast in or praise the Lord according to Scripture?

Question
6

We live in a society which craves attention. People constantly want to make a name for themselves. Because of societal pressure, people feel compelled to **boast** about what they have done or what they think they can do; they often compare themselves to others to accomplish this! At times, this spirit of competition produces a lack of integrity. People lie about their experience and education on resumes in order to have a better chance to get a particular position. Sometimes people **boast** about their abilities and fail miserably. They may have even conned themselves into believing they could do something which they had no business doing in the first place. At other times, it doesn't so much involve a lack of integrity and truthfulness, but rather people just arrogantly **boasting** about themselves; these people always steer the conversation to be about them. I even once heard a eulogy where someone talked about himself more than the deceased—and it wasn't even about his relationship with that person! Rather than try to make a name for ourselves, we should glorify and boast in the name of the Lord. We must resist the temptation to allow the praise that others may offer us to go to our heads. We must acknowledge our dependence upon the Lord and direct other's praise toward Him rather than seek it for ourselves. The moment we seek it for ourselves we con ourselves into thinking we alone are the source of our achievements. Whether we realize it or not, we will slowly drift into thinking we're independent and self-sufficient from the Lord. Such thinking will always lead to problems! Instead, let us always center our praise upon the Lord. Let us, therefore, remind ourselves that He is the source of our salvation, our blessings, our abilities, and our achievements because He is always working in and through us to accomplish His divine plan if we will allow Him.

In what areas do you have the most pride? In what ways do you direct people to praise the Lord because of these areas in your life? If not, how can you start?

Question
7

PARTICIPATE IN GOOD NOT EVIL:

Finally, James shows us what happens when we fail to include God in our plans. He warns when one **who knows to do good and does not do it that is sin** (v. 17). At first blush, some may not regard this verse as having connection and being related to the previous verses. But it does! Simply put, **sin** is omitting God from our lives and plans and selfishly choosing what we want to do! **Sin** asserts that we know what's best for ourselves and that we should have control over our own destiny as we decide! This is the heart of James' entire argument. These believers have arrogantly omitted God from their decisions which thereby constitutes **sin**. It's not that their plans were inherently evil or sinful, but that they left God out! For those who know better, to exclude God from our decisions and refusing to seek wisdom and input from Him constitutes **sin**! Our plans may not be sinful in and of themselves and they may even work from a human perspective, but we've errantly sinned by excluding the Lord.

In addition, **sin** doesn't just spontaneously occur; we don't just happen to stumble or fall into **sin** inadvertently. **Sin** is intentional. We may not ponder it very long or sit down and draw up an elaborate plan to **sin**, but, even for a split-second, we still think about it, evaluate it, weigh the options, and rationalize it before we engage in it, or in this case, fail to do something **good**. Like the arrogant plans proposed in this example cited by James, we deliberately leave God out of the decision-making process and we choose to **sin**! When we involve the Lord and His Spirit in all our decisions, He will never lead us astray; we will never **sin**! We can only conquer temptation and overcome **sin** with His help and guidance. The moment we become enamored with ourselves and trust in our own abilities, then we will fail to include God in our plans which leads to **sin**. Let us not fail to **do good** and engage in sin, but let us seek the Lord, include Him in our plans, and allow the One who knows the future to guide us to have a successful life which honors Him.

What is the danger of seeing sin as something that happens inadvertently? How does following God's plan help us to do good and keep us from sinning?

Question
8

Undoubtedly throughout this year, most of us have encountered uncertainty and instability in many areas of our lives. Penning this conclusion a couple weeks after the introduction, I can tell you that our plans for camping did indeed change. We went East to the Smokies rather than West to the Rockies because of the fires. Even so, uncertainty continued to abound as two tropical systems, Marco and Laura, had the potential to impact our stay. The Wednesday after we arrived a park Ranger stopped to inquire whether we had heard that Hurricane Laura was expected to move through Chattanooga, Tennessee and the Smokies toward the end of the week. Keeping an eye on the weather, we made alternative plans if the storm sped up or shifted course to impact us directly. Yet, God truly blessed us with only encountering one day with heavier rain showers during our stay and then brief showers on the way home. Overall, we experienced fairly good weather during our trip.

Although we didn't have any control over the weather or the natural disasters from fires to hurricanes, we did have control over how we used the wisdom that God had given us to plan where we went and the activities in which we participated. We also recognized that God is ultimately in control and He alone knows the outcome of our situation. We didn't worry or panic. We didn't complain or express frustration. We also didn't arrogantly press forward with our plans saying, "Colorado or bust!" We sought wisdom from the Lord and daily walked with Him so that we could know the right plans He had for us.

Relying upon God to direct our paths during a vacation may seem like a trivial thing compared to the weightier matters we may face in life. But it's not! We must seek the Lord in everything—even the plans which may seem mundane and ordinary to us. Consequently, we must plan with the right perspective. We must include God in all our plans and seek His will rather than our own. When we plan with the proper perspective and include the Lord in all our decisions, we will always participate in doing good things and we will always direct our praise to Him as He so much deserves. Therefore, let us not be arrogant and stubborn in our own plans, but let us pursue the will of the Lord and allow His Spirit to conform our plans to His!

Incorporate

What have you or did you plan for 2020? Honestly evaluate these plans: Did you include God in those plans? Did they honor the Lord? If they did honor the Lord, how so? If they didn't, what went wrong in your process of planning?

Even though your plans may have changed this year, how have you or did you still honor and praise God despite those changes?

In what areas do you know that you should be doing "good," but haven't? How is God leading you to correct these areas and involve Him in the planning process?

October 11, 2020



*Practice Integrity
with Wealth*
James 5:1-6

Focal Verse:

"Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten."

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James 5:2

Introduce

For any of us who have ever aspired to travel the world and delve into the history of ancient cultures and civilizations, Egypt would perhaps be one of the top destinations on our list. Traveling along the banks of the Nile near modern-day Cairo, we would find one of the wonders of the ancient world in Giza—the pyramids. These architectural marvels of the pharaohs served as both monuments to their perceived greatness and their tombs which housed their bodies and possessions for the afterlife. Despite



these pharaohs' great effort to leave a legacy and have people forever revere them, most have probably forgotten their names and wouldn't even recognize any of their accomplishments unless they searched specifically through the pages of a history book. Perhaps, we might be able to name a couple of the more significant pharaohs like Ramses or Tutankhamen whom culture has made somewhat popular. But what do we really know about them?

Despite all their wealth, accumulated possessions, and achieved authority in their day, they suffered the same fate that we all will—death. Death, in many respects, is the great equalizer because it doesn't truly matter how much we have attained here on earth! Within the corridors and chambers of these great pyramidal crypts, the pharaohs amassed a tremendous amount of wealth by earthly standards. Over the years, they collected everything they thought they would need for the afterlife. For centuries, these things sat shrouded in cobwebs, encased in dust, and slowly decayed. Eventually, these things treasured by the pharaohs were stolen and sold for profit, collected and appropriated for display at museums, or decayed beyond repair and devoid of any practical use. In the end, their possessions and accomplishments didn't matter. Like the pharaohs, we can't take anything with us whether our physical possessions or notoriety after we die. Job realized this when he asserted, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return there" ([Job 1:21](#)).

What matters most in life is the decision we make about Christ and how we choose to live for and honor Him in the present. The decision we make about whether or not we

Introduce

will repent of our sins and surrender to Him has eternal ramifications and our eternal destiny hinges squarely upon it. We must be ready for the day when Christ calls us home either through death or by coming to collect His church as His bride. At the final judgment, we will not have a second chance; the decision we made here on earth about serving Christ as our Savior is final.

In the meantime, how we have responded to Christ's call to salvation and repentance will affect what we do and how we choose to live. For those of us who have a relationship with Christ, our treasure lies in heaven. Therefore, our joy won't depend upon our worldly possessions which moth and rust can destroy; neither will we place our hope in them. Instead, we will invest in the eternal. We will live righteously and practice integrity with our wealth and possessions which God has entrusted to us as His stewards. We will use everything He has given us—our finances, our jobs, our families, and our education and knowledge—literally everything we have in life to honor Him!

Key
Question

How do you honor Christ with your wealth?

THE MISERY OF WEALTH:

Just as he did in his condemnation of their arrogant boasting and their exclusion of God from their plans, James instructs the church to “listen up” and “pay attention” (literally **come now**) because he wants to correct their misuse of money and godless pursuit of wealth (v. 1; see [Jas 4:13](#)). In general, the world wrongly believes that wealth brings security, peace of mind, and contentment along with pleasure, happiness, and joy. But James knows that the godless pursuit of wealth actually brings misery in the end because its perceived benefits do not last; it is also powerless to save and guarantee eternal life. And, more important, those who exclude God from their financial decisions, will assuredly face the wrath of His judgment for their self-centered and sinful approach to wealth. Therefore, James tells the **rich to weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon** them. He wants them to recognize the fruitlessness and bareness of a selfish pursuit of wealth that fails to include the Lord, lacks integrity, and exploits others for mere personal profit.

We must exercise caution against misunderstanding what James is saying in these verses especially given the current cultural trend to criticize all wealth—even among many who do so hypocritically that have amassed wealth for themselves. James is *not* arguing that all wealth is sinful or that Christians cannot have any wealth at all. As we learned last week, a failure to include God in our decision-making process and formulating any plan which does not consider His will *is* sinful. Yet, the act of planning itself is *not* inherently sinful; on the contrary, planning is actually promoted by Scripture as wise. Using a similar line of argument, James now characterizes the selfish and godless pursuit of wealth as well as the failure to practice integrity in the use of the wealth as sinful. Yet, acquiring or having wealth is *not* an inherently sinful behavior. It becomes sinful when



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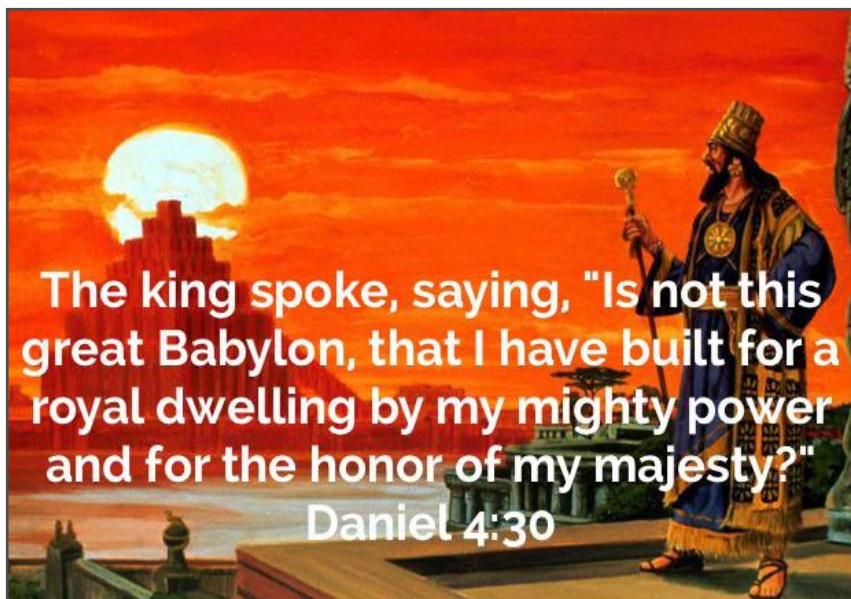
we exclude God and use our wealth and position to exploit others according to our selfish desires and for our own personal gain.

In this context, the command to **weep** and **howl**, better translated as wail, refers to the judgment **coming** upon the **rich** who misuse their wealth. For a time in this life, people may seem to get away with unrighteousness and they may even appear to prosper. Job indeed recognizes this disparity and laments, “The tents of robbers prosper, and those who provoke God are secure—in what God provides by His hand” (Job 12:6). Although the righteous will suffer at times in a world corrupted by sin and the unrighteous may seem to get away with their wickedness, God takes notice, sees the heart, and discerns one’s motives. One day, therefore, He will judge the unrighteous who have mismanaged, manipulated, and misappropriated their wealth! Their sinfulness will not go unpunished!

In what ways do the wicked seem to prosper in this world? Why should we not compare ourselves to them, but compare ourselves to Christ?

Question
1

The **rich** cry because of the severity of their punishment not because they’re expressing sorrow or remorse over their sins. With the judgment that will soon occur, they will come to the stark realization that the hope and security they have placed in their



wealth amount to nothing. In the grand scheme of things, their wealth and possessions have failed them and caused them misery instead of satisfaction and enjoyment. For example, Isaiah tells the once-powerful nation of Babylon whom God used to judge sinful Israel to “*wail* for the day of the Lord is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty”

(Isa 13:6). Babylon boasted in its power, prestige, wealth, and self-sufficiency rather than turn to the Lord through repentance to serve Him ([Isa 14:13](#); [Dan 4:27, 29-33](#)). Even though they were confident in their own abilities and position, one day it all came

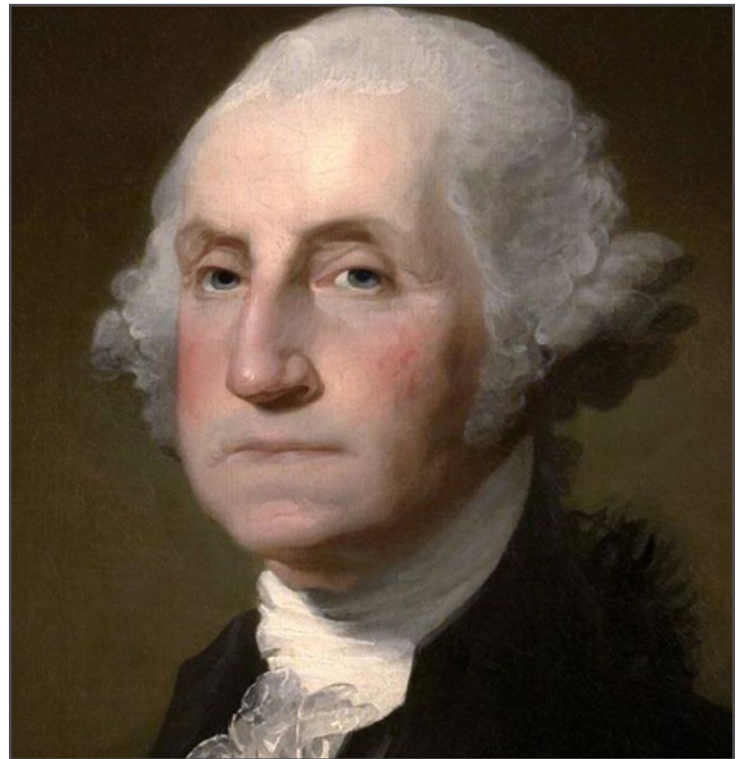
crashing down and their nation laid in ruin. God had sent judgment upon them for their arrogance and repeated refusal to turn to Him.

In the same way, God still judges those who misuse their wealth today. Historically, the United States has been blessed as a nation with tremendous natural resources, much wealth, and a high standard of living. In the past, many recognized that such blessing and the responsibility that comes with it came from the Lord. In a letter to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, George Washington affirms, “While I reiterate the possession of my dependence upon Heaven as the source of all public and private blessings; I will observe the general prevalence of piety, philanthropy, honesty, industry, and economy seems, in the ordinary course of human affairs are particularly necessary for advancing and conforming the happiness of our country.”* Through these words, Washington clearly states that we owe everything we have and everything we have achieved to the Lord!

When we acknowledge the Lord as our sovereign Provider, it will then influence everything we do; our relationship with the Lord through Christ His Son will be shown in our transformed way of life.

Thus, Washington can interject, “For no

man who is profligate in his morals, or a bad member of the civil community, can possibly be a true Christian, or a credit to his own religious society.” In other words, a true follower of Christ will reflect His character and abide by His will which will be demonstrated in the righteous way that he lives. Although Washington’s words are not “Scripture,” they do provide insight into the way that many people in our country once rightly understood our dependence upon the Lord and our need to seek His will and follow His plan for our lives—morally, spiritually, physically, and economically!



In Reference



See George Washington, “[From General George Washington to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, 30 May – 5 June 1789](#),” available from [founders.archives.gov](#).

Ten years earlier, General Washington led the Second Continental Congress to establish a national day of thanksgiving on December 9, 1779. In Washington's general orders as proclaimed by Congress, he notes, "Whereas it becomes us humbly to approach Almighty God with gratitude and praise for His goodness."* Later in this declaration, Washington points out how God "hath prospered our commerce" and "above all that He hath diffused the glorious light of the Gospel." Once again, this declaration shows how God stands at the center of everything whether the physical things we have or the salvation and life that He offered through Christ! Washington continues his prayer by asking God to "bless and prosper the means of education and spread the light of Christianity throughout the world."

Certainly, our founding fathers had imperfections like any human being. But men like Washington understood the importance of including God in all our decisions and acknowledging our blessing and prosperity come only because of Him. Although we have a great military and honorable people who have served valiantly, our success and strength depend on the Lord alone. Although our forefathers had incredible insight in creating a Constitution and government that could function peaceably when rightly used, their wisdom came from the Lord. Although we have had many great inventors, researchers, industrial pioneers, and one of the highest standards of living in the world, all our financial blessings depend only upon the Lord. Washington and many of our forefathers recognized this. But as a whole, our country has now forgotten and even rejected our dependence upon the Lord!

In Reference



See George Washington, "[General Orders 27 November 1779](#)," available from founders.archives.gov.

We need to redeem our dependence upon and active service to the Lord from those who would exclude Him from everything we do as a nation and reject the salvation that comes through Christ alone. We live in an ever-increasingly hostile country toward the things of Christ. Some people have sought to remove Christ from any public event, forum, institution, or agency. People no longer use Scripture to make the right moral decisions about marriage, gender, the right to life which begins at conception, and much other immorality that God finds abominable according to His Word. People value entertainment more than service to the Lord. Many treat the Lord as a "Guest" whom

they will “see” when they have time! In all this, people have excluded God from their lives and have developed a dangerous sense of independence and self-sufficiency, failing to understand that everything we have comes from the Lord. Because many in our country have sought to exclude God altogether, we stand at a crossroad where His judgment will eventually come upon our collective sin as a nation! It did for Israel. It did for Babylon. And it will for us as the United States unless we turn to Christ and surrender all our lives to Him!

What is the danger of being silent as a follower of Christ in such a society in which we currently live?

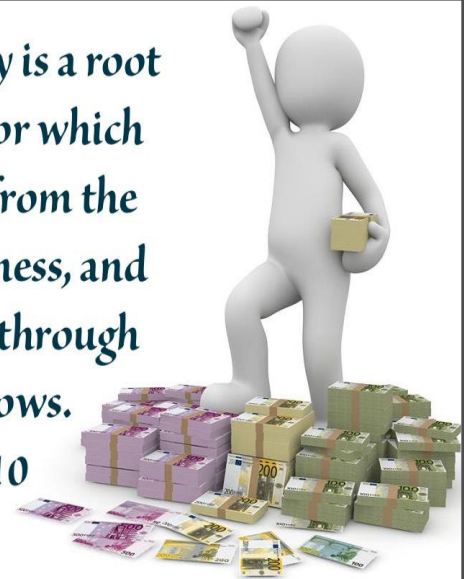
Question
2

However, James doesn't include this reference to judgment as a gloomy, hopeless picture of the fate that assuredly await the **rich**. Nor does he present it as a sarcastic condemnation to make light of how the **rich** and powerful will one day succumb to death and be put in their place. On the contrary, he incorporates this picture of the **misereries** and depression that the godless misuse of wealth will bring so that he can spur people to repentance now before it's too late! Although Jesus notes how difficult it is for the **rich** to repent ([Matt 19:24](#)), it's not impossible ([Matt 19:26](#))! In fact, anything is possible with God! Thus, we see wealthy men like Zacchaeus encounter Jesus and leave completely transformed ([Luke 19:1-10](#))! When Zacchaeus began his relationship with Christ,

he repented of his sin, particularly the extortion of people through taxation, and repaid fourfold anything that he had defrauded. Salvation had come to this **rich** man's house and it impacted the way that he viewed his finances from that point forward.

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

1 Timothy 6:10



How should our relationship with Christ impact our view of finances and possessions?

Question
3

Just as salvation in Christ impacted Zacchaeus' life and transformed his perspective, it should also impact us—in particular according to this context how we view our

Instruct

finances and possessions. When we look at what the world considers valuable, we will realize that these things are transitory and temporary. Nothing in this world is permanent. In Christ, we should invest in the things that have eternal value and make decisions about our finances and possessions that glorify Him! Jesus warns, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal” (Matt 6:19). He then bids us, “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matt 6:20). In other words, Jesus wants us to invest in things that matter—those things which have eternal value and significance.

James likely frames his remarks to the **rich** here with Jesus’ teaching in mind as we can observe many points of similarity. He begins by pointing out that their **riches are corrupted** and their **garments moth-eaten**. He continues by describing their **gold and silver as corroded** because they **have heaped up treasure in the last days** (v. 3). The wealth that these people have procured through fraud, corruption, and



unscrupulous means will serve as **a witness against** them and bring about judgment (literally, **eat their flesh like fire**). Again, we must exercise caution to understand these words rightly in their context. James is *not* saying that all wealth **is corrupted**. Nor is he saying that all the **rich** have gotten their wealth through illegitimate means. Here, as will

become clearer in verse 4, he is addressing specific people in the community who have defrauded others and used corrupt means to enrich themselves. In contrast, many people work hard and earn their wealth legitimately; they also use the wealth which God has given them to glorify and honor Him in all they do.

In a world in which things are only temporary, how can we invest in the eternal? First, we must remember that everything belongs to the Lord in the first place. He has graciously entrusted it to us as His stewards. Therefore, we should give our tithes and offerings as a testament of our trust in Him as well as a way to honor Him by spreading

the gospel around the world. Second, we should value relationships more than money. This is true in both our relationship with Christ and with other people. We certainly should work hard to make a respectable living, provide for our families, and pay the bills for the things that we need to live. Yet, what does it profit someone if he sacrifices his quiet time and service to Christ as well as sacrifices spending quality time with his family or friends to obtain mere things? Therefore, we need Christ to help us evaluate what impact such pursuits may have on our relationships.

What are some other things in life which have an eternal impact? How should / can we invest in those things?

Question
4

People tend to place a premium on things in life that don't truly matter in the grand scheme of things. Many value sports; victories, however, will soon pass and championships will long be forgotten. Many value inanimate objects. Houses will one day sit empty. Automobiles will lay rusting in a heap at a junkyard. Toys will break. Computers and phones will crash, break, or become obsolete. Clothes will hang in the closet because they have gone out of fashion. Then, what do we have left? What truly matters? James wants us to realize the most important thing in life is our relationship with Christ. When we submit to Him, He'll put all these other things into perspective. We must allow Him to lead in every facet of life. We must involve Him in every relationship, every decision, and all our finances. Everything we have, what we do, and what we have become we owe to Him! Therefore, let us always acknowledge Him and look to Him for guidance so that we can live transformed lives worthy of the salvation which He has graciously bestowed upon us.

James 5:4

THE MISUSE OF WEALTH:

Having outlined the general **miseries** that the godless pursuit of wealth will bring in the form of judgment, James now cites a specific example of how some in the community have misused their position to extort wealth from others. As in a court case, James lays out the charges against these people. Their own wicked actions serve as a witness against them and the anguished cries of the exploited have not gone un-noticed by **the Lord of Sabaoth** (v. 4). As employers, these wealthy people hired **laborers** to work in their **fields**, but they never paid them **the wages** they promised. They defrauded these workers of their rightful paycheck!

As believers, we must be above reproach when it comes to our finances whether we think of ourselves as rich or not. For example, charging things on credit which we

‘You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning.’

Leviticus 19:13

know that we can never repay and justifying it by thinking we simply can declare bankruptcy later is fraud—even if we can “legally” do it. Someone still has to pay—whether the bank, credit company, or most likely other consumers in higher prices to cover the losses! Intertwining business and personal finances, such as borrowing for vacations or home improvements,

from self-employed, family-owned, or small businesses can also cause unintended problems even if we think we can maintain integrity! Perhaps, even more common, however, is people who borrow something, whether money or items, and then never return them having always promised to do so. We could continue to list examples. But these will suffice. These few examples show that James’ advice doesn’t just apply to the rich. It applies to us all!

In what other ways can people (not just the rich) take advantage and exploit others in our world today? How should we as believers deal with such situations?

Question
5

At some point in life, we have probably experienced frustration or heartache when someone has cheated, defrauded, taken advantage, or lied to us. We should certainly take precautions against putting ourselves into such situations and learn from experiences that have happened to us in the past, but at the same time we should not always focus on what others have done to us. In doing so, we can fall into the same trap which our society does and adopt their same mindset. Instead, we must examine our own attitudes and actions; we must evaluate our own lives through the eyes of Christ and the pages of Scripture. We must ask ourselves: How do our actions and financial dealings compare to the character of Christ? How do we incorporate Him into the decisions that we make? How do my financial decisions and actions honor and

glorify the Lord? When we seek Christ above everything else and allow Him to guide and guard our financial decisions, then we will never make a mistake and we will never lack integrity!

What is the danger of always pointing out errors and misdeeds in others rather than examining our own lives?

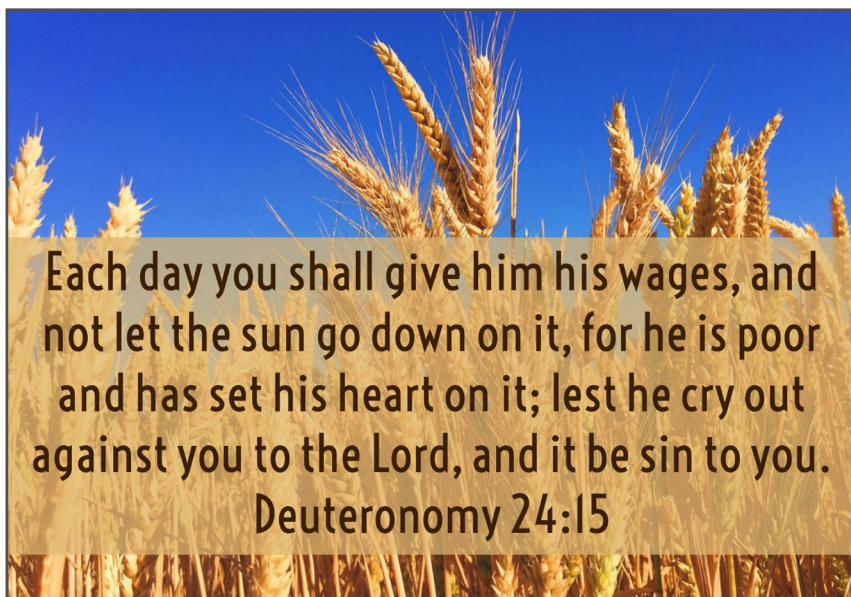
Question
6

James 5:5-6

THE MISDIRECTION OF WEALTH:

The **rich** meanwhile lived in the lap of **luxury** while they exploited the poor **laborers** who barely made ends meet and depended upon their daily wages just to survive.

James, therefore, chides the **rich** for living in **pleasure** and **luxury** while others suffer. He pictures their callousness by showing how they **fattened** their **hearts as in a day of slaughter** (v. 5). This illustration depicts how the **rich** people in the community were continuing their lavish lifestyles at the expense of the workers and didn't care what happened



Each day you shall give him his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he is poor and has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the Lord, and it be sin to you.
Deuteronomy 24:15

to them! James goes on to say that they have **condemned** and **murdered the just** (v. 6). The word **condemned** means to pronounce one guilty; however, in this context, especially when paired with murder, it means to issue a death sentence. By cheating them of their **wages**, the wealthy literally sentenced these **laborers** to death because they had no means of earning a living and obtaining their basic needs in life. And the **rich** didn't care!

James concludes his condemnation of the **rich** who have sentenced the poor to extreme poverty by nothing that **he** (the poor laborer) **does not resist you** (the wealthy). Although James uses a singular pronoun here, it refers collectively to the poor **laborers** who have not received their **wages**. As a collective reference to believers who experience persecution and, in this case, exploitation from the **rich**, it indicates that we must trust the Lord and allow Him to vindicate the wrongs done

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unto us. Job does this when he acknowledges that his Redeemer lives ([Job 19:25](#)). Job didn't exclusively rely upon human means for vindication whether the legal system, the "court" of public opinion, or even his wife and friends who gave bad advice and misperceived the situation entirely. Job relied wholly upon the Lord! This doesn't mean that we should go through life seeing ourselves as helpless victims who are powerless to effect change. On the contrary, we should never knowingly put ourselves into situations which could bring harm or cause us to be exploited! We should use the wisdom and means, whether legal actions or other resources, that God has made available to us to take action.

What it does mean, however, is that whatever may happen in life we must trust the Lord! Whether we receive vindication in this life or not, we must still trust the Lord in everything. If we cannot settle a dispute or correct an injustice in this life, we should never take matters into our own hands. Submit to the Lord and allow Him to resolve the issue according to His plan and His perfect timing. Scripture tells us to "repay no evil for evil" but allow God to enact justice and avenge ([Rom 12:17, 19](#)). In the end, God will judge justly and righteously. As James has reminded us throughout this passage, those who live godless lives will one day face His wrath at the judgment. In the meantime, we must live consistently in our own lives to honor Christ in everything. We must take action in our own lives to rid ourselves of anything that dishonors Him and seek to model our character and choices upon Him. Let's practice integrity in every area of our lives, but particularly with our finances and possessions with which God has entrusted us as His stewards!

Why should we allow the Lord to vindicate and seek vengeance ([Rom 12:19](#))? How does allowing God to vindicate free us to serve Him more effectively?

Question
7

Although we no longer build elaborate monuments like the pyramids and fill them with possessions for the afterlife, the same mentality exists today as it did among the pharaohs and Egyptians thousands of years ago. A few decades ago, popular bumper stickers asininely proclaimed, “He who dies with the most toys wins.” These bumper stickers may have long-since disappeared but the errant philosophy they advocated still dominates our society today. People hoard wealth and seek to acquire things which they believe will give them pleasure. Nothing has changed in millennia! Dysfunctional relationships continue to abound today because many cherish their selfish desires over other people! In some sense, inanimate objects and a multitude of activities have become more important than relationships. Most people seek pleasure rather than value a relationship which they can use as a medium to give, serve, and build others!

Many, but not all, of the rich in James’ day had this same attitude about their wealth. They didn’t truly care about what happened to others as long as they had the means to enrich themselves and live luxuriously as they wanted. Such a godless pursuit of wealth and the dysfunction that it causes in relationships warrant God’s wrath. For such people, God’s wrath will bring judgment and misery because they have rejected Him and chosen to serve themselves. As believers, however, let us not fall into the same trap that has ensnared society from the beginning and continues unabated to this day. Let us practice integrity with our wealth. Let us seek the Lord in every financial decision that we make so that we can invest in the eternal rather than the temporary that is slowly destroyed by decay.

Incorporate

In what ways should we practice integrity with the wealth God has afforded us?

In what ways do you seek guidance from the Lord for the financial decisions that you make? What criteria do you use to evaluate your financial decisions in life? How or in what areas could you improve?

Biblically, what are the steps that we should take if someone has defrauded us—1) as a fellow believer and 2) as an unbeliever? What wisdom does Scripture give us to protect ourselves from exploitation and fraud? If we cannot get the issue resolved, what then should we do?

Journal: Document God's Work

October 18, 2020



Persevere in Suffering in the World

James 5:7-13

Focal Verse:

"My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience."

James 5:10

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During the early years of westward expansion in the United States, the need for timber and refined wood from mills soared. Everything from the construction of buildings in burgeoning towns and ranches from firewood to heat homes as well as later in the building of railroads and the erection of telegraph and electric poles consumed copious amounts of wood. Consequently, the logging industry needed large tracts of forests to meet this ever-growing demand. Before regulations were implemented to encourage



responsible logging, many places in the East were deforested, including what we now know as the Great Smoky Mountains prior to their preservation as a national park in 1926.

Throughout the park, remnants of these logging operations still remain to remind us how much the region has changed and recovered in over 94 years. One can walk along many trails and still see evidence of these logging operations from the shell of an abandoned truck to dilapidated manmade structures partially or even completely fallen and some with only the stone fireplace or foundation remaining. With only a handful of structures preserved to remind modern visitors of life in once-thriving mountain communities spread throughout the national park, slowly the forest and wildlife have re-claimed much of the region. Once again, the forest has become thick with abundant trees and the floor filled with an unimaginable amount of many different kinds of plants. The park now teems with animals like bear and elk which had been driven away from their habitat by this commercialization.

These changes to the landscape didn't occur overnight whether from the logging industry or the reclamation by nature. It has taken years and even decades! Even so, the process of reclamation didn't come without its challenges whether from drought and fire to severe storms and floods. These changes all required persistence, patience, and perseverance—which extends beyond our own lifetimes. We live in a world that wants to see instant results with the minimal exertion of effort. We want instant

Introduce

gratification by bulldozing, re-shaping, and re-building. But God didn't create nature to work in this way. It takes time to produce growth! James even notes this when he bids us to look at "how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth . . . patiently" (Jas 5:7).

Likewise, spiritual growth takes time and doesn't happen overnight. It too requires prudence, patience, persistence, and perseverance. Many want spiritual growth to occur instantly, but they don't want to make time to invest effort in the process. Moreover, we cannot fool ourselves into thinking that we will not face any challenges. Persecution and trials will inevitably come. We learned this in the very first chapter of our study! Although God produces the growth in our lives, it still requires effort on our parts. We must consistently seek Him through prayer and patiently wait as He produces growth in our lives. This requires that we do the things daily which put us in the right frame of mind and draw us closer to Him rather than promote the fulfillment of our own personal desires.

Key
Question

What things do you do to partner with the Lord daily to produce spiritual growth in your life?

James 5:7-11

PRACTICE PATIENCE:

Last week, we learned that the wealthy who misuse their position and power to exploit others will face judgment. We ended our study by noting that the poor, exploited laborers didn't retaliate or seek revenge against the rich. They did "not resist" ([Jas 5:6](#)); instead, they allowed the Lord to seek justice and vindicate them. James continues this thought in the verses we'll study this week when he urges them to **be patient until the coming of the Lord** (v. 7). In one sense, we don't have to worry about the outcome when we have a relationship with Him; Christ settled that score on the cross when He defeated sin and death. As believers, therefore, we also don't have to worry about the persecution or injustice we may face here on earth. In the end, Christ has the final say; He'll right every wrong and those who persist in evil apart from Him will receive their just punishment—a second death and separation from Him—which they themselves have chosen because they have rejected Him.

The coming of the Lord in this context refers to Jesus' return to establish His kingdom in full. **Until** Jesus returns, wickedness, immorality, violence, abuse, exploitation, injustice, and rampant sinfulness will dominate the world because man left to his own devices does not seek good, but evil on account of his selfishness. As believers, this means that we have the propensity to fail at times, even though we should seek to imitate Christ, but it also means that bad things may happen to us because of the



evil in which other people engage. Life, because of man's sinfulness, is not always fair from our perspective. Bad things do happen to "good" people. We look around the world and we see "good" people suffer at the hands of others. In contrast, we see evil prospering and crime going unpunished and, even in some cases, celebrated! Despite this bleak picture of mankind who has rejected Christ and severed his relationship with the Lord, we don't have to live in defeat! Instead, we can live with

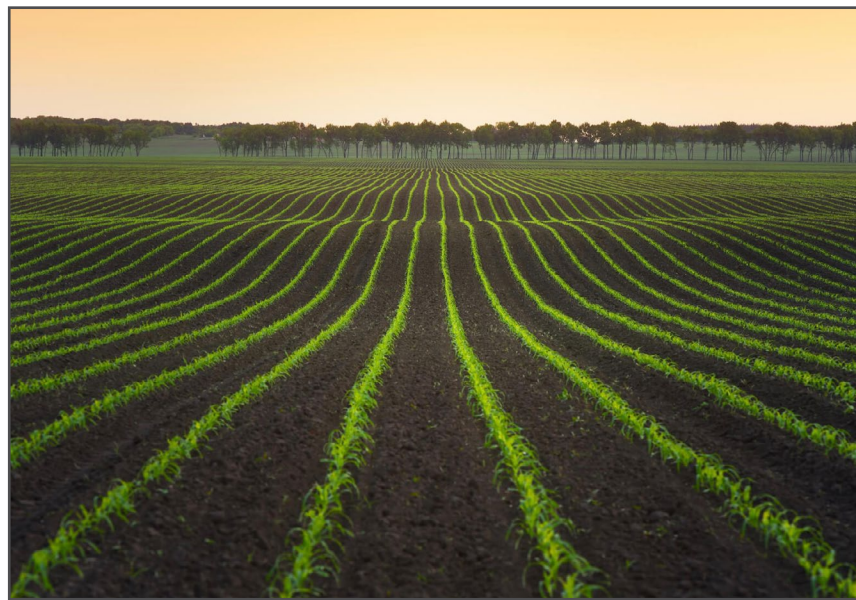
Instruct

patient expectation, looking forward to the eternal life we'll receive in His presence where no more sin, suffering, sickness, or sorrow will exist! Two words accurately describe how we should wait for His return: patiently and eagerly. To wait patiently means that we don't get into a hurry; we don't get ahead or behind God. Moreover, we trust Him explicitly for His provision, in His will, and in His timing; we don't take matters into our own hands, but at the same time we diligently serve Him in the areas over which He has given us control. To wait eagerly means that we wait in anticipation with expectation. Thus, we are ready to receive Him at any time and have made all the necessary preparations. We will address this aspect more fully in verse 8 where James instructs us to **establish** our **hearts**. For now, we will focus on what it means to wait patiently.

How would you evaluate your preparedness to receive Christ if He returns today?

Question
1

To illustrate the importance of waiting patiently, James uses an example with which everyone would have been familiar. He describes how a **farmer** who plants a crop must wait **patiently** for it to produce **the precious fruit of the earth**. Although the farmer does everything within his ability to prepare for a successful harvest—till, plant,



and weed—he still must wait upon things beyond his control: **the early and latter rain**. Ultimately, this shows his dependence upon the Lord. Only God sends the **rain** and only does He facilitate and produce growth. The **farmer** must wait **patiently** upon Him for the results! As believers, we too must actively, but patiently wait for the Lord to fulfill His plan. We must

do everything we can to participate in spiritual growth and maturity in our own lives while at the same time relying upon the Lord to produce results. We do all this while we wait **patiently** for Christ to return and establish the fullness of that transformation in us through His righteousness when He completes the work which He had begun in

us ([Phil 1:6](#); [1 John 3:2-3](#)).

Even though God does the work of saving and transforming us, He has given us responsibility to participate. In other words, we have a hand in our spiritual growth because we must make time to seek the Lord, pray, read Scripture, and be intentional in how our choices reflect His character. At the same time, our society has engrained it within us to be impatient. We get in a hurry; we want immediate results or we become frustrated with ourselves or with others. Although God has given us responsibilities, we must wait upon the Lord to show us the right path and produce the right results. This takes time; it requires a daily walk with Him in which we are persistent and consistent.

In what ways do you experience impatience in your life?

Question
2

Too often, we fail because we take matters into our own hands and do not seek the Lord first. We like to tinker and fiddle with things because we consider ourselves wise, knowledgeable, and capable. Let's borrow from James' agricultural example to help us understand. God has given some of us a green thumb while others not so much.

Recently, we've noticed that our lawn has become overrun with weeds. Without researching, we think we know what we need, so we just go and buy some "weed and feed" at the local store. We have no idea what type of grass we have or even what type of "weeds" the product will kill. Moreover, we don't read the instructions; we simply spread what we think looks



like enough. The yard and all the landscaping begin turning brown, so we decided that it needs more water just by looking at it. We begin watering it more, but then we decide that it just needs more fertilizer. We go back to the store and buy several large bags so we can restore our lawn! Yet, we have no idea what the lawn actually needs. Rather than seek knowledge and the help of an expert, we use trial and error! Most likely this will be an expensive lesson in the long run!

Instruct

Unfortunately, many believers attempt to do this in their spiritual lives. They don't read the instruction manual, Scripture, and they don't seek help from the Expert who created us! They get in a hurry, try to take shortcuts, and do things on their own. This leads to frustration and may even cause some to throw in the towel because they repeatedly fail and do not see success. They try everything before seeking the Lord! Not only do they errantly try to fix things by excluding the Lord, but they become impatient and distraught when they cannot fix the problems over which they have no control. Many people want their problems fixed now; when they aren't resolved immediately, they become frustrated, blame the Lord, and become bitter even though He has promised to judge justly in the end. Because we still live in a world subjected to the curse of sin, our problems often won't have an immediate solution and we may even have to endure heartaches for years. For this reason, James encourages us to wait **patiently**, knowing that Christ will return and restore creation to its perfect relationship with Him!

Being **patient** doesn't mean that we are inactive, however. On the contrary, we must trust the Lord and seek how He wants us to respond. Therefore, in situations beyond our control, we must still ask: "What does the Lord want me to do?" We shouldn't walk around complaining as if finding someone who'll take pity upon us will make us feel better. We shouldn't simply resign ourselves to hopelessness and helplessness as innocent victims who are powerless to do anything. Instead, we must wait upon the Lord to show us what to do. He will enable us to be His ambassadors who point others into a relationship with Him. This leads us to the second part of waiting for His second **coming** as we wait eagerly ([Phil 3:20](#)).

How can we be ambassadors for the Lord when we endure trials, persecution, and suffering in life? Why should we not see ourselves as victims but victors?

Question
3

Scripture repeatedly tells us that Christ could return at any moment even as a thief would come in the night ([1 Thess 5:2](#)). So, we must be prepared and not caught off guard to receive Him in honor when He comes ([Matt 25:1-30](#)). James, therefore, encourages believers to **establish** our **hearts** because **the coming of the Lord is at hand** (v. 8). The word **establish** can also mean strengthen or stand firm; with it, James warns believers not to compromise, succumb to unbelief, or become lax in their

morals and service of the Lord. In other words, we as believers must not compromise our values, our beliefs, our faith, or our morals while we await the return of Christ. We live in a fallen world that assaults us from every direction. It floods us with pressure from television and movies to social media to the education system to the people with whom we choose to associate whether as friends, neighbors, or coworkers. If we don't strengthen and prepare our **hearts**, we can easily become desensitized to the things of the world; we may even find ourselves participating in them if we are not careful! We must wait **patiently**, but we must be **ready** (established) to receive Him when He comes again.



In what ways can we strengthen or establish our hearts in preparation for Christ's return?

Question
4

In verses 9-11, James reiterates the need for believers to have a proper perspective of the wrongs done against us when he cites two examples from the Old Testament. But first, before giving the examples, he includes a warning for us **not to grumble against one another lest we be** judged as well. With this, he reminds us that **the Judge is standing at the door!**

His judgment is imminent!
Whether in the long-term or short-term, complaining constantly cannot fix anything; if anything, it compounds our problems and makes them worse. What good does it do to complain? If we can fix a problem and have some control over it, then fix it! If we cannot fix it or have no control,

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.
1 Thessalonians 5:14-15

complaining won't resolve the issue and it won't make us feel any better! When we complain or **grumble**, it can allow sin to take root in our lives. We can begin to feel

bitter and frustrated; it can cause envy or jealousy of others; we can become vengeful or angry; it can cause us to hate rather than love and forgive as Christ did.

James isn't saying that we can lose our salvation and **be condemned** to death. Christ will certainly judge us for what we do and say after we have a relationship with Him, but this in no way causes us to lose our salvation. Yet, James' main point is simply this: Do the right thing. Don't complain about things, but do what's right even in the face of injustice, wickedness, and unrighteousness. He now lists two examples from the Old Testament of people who did the right thing in the midst of persecution and suffering.

What things have you complained about in the past? What good was accomplished by your complaining? Why should we seek to honor Christ rather than complain?

Question
5

First, James collectively refers to **the prophets as an example of suffering and patience** (v. 10); we **count them as blessed** because they endured (v. 11). They believed God and trusted Him implicitly, but most important they obeyed faithfully no matter what the cost. They **spoke** the truth **in the name of the Lord** to call a wicked generation to turn from their sins to serve the Lord alone. During their ministries, most suffered some form of rejection and vehement ridicule, some were carried into exile, and others were even put to death ([Heb 11:36-38](#)). Nonetheless, they persisted in their obedience and **patiently** waited upon the Lord's directives. In the end, whether here on earth or in heaven above, God vindicated His faithful servants!

Their vindication came in one of two ways. The words which the Lord **spoke** through them came true and they were proved right! Although sometimes it took years and decades for the prophecies which they spoke to come to pass, they did! While waiting for the Lord to move, the prophets waited **patiently** and continued faithfully to do what the Lord asked. Yet, an even greater reward awaited them all, whether their ministry ended in death or they died in old age, they now are spending eternity in heaven in the presence of our Lord and Messiah! No matter what happens to us as believers here on earth, we will share this same honor with **the prophets** when we **patiently endure** and remain faithful to the end in our service of Christ.

Second, James lists Job as a well-known example of suffering and **perseverance** (v. 11). Although he suffered many catastrophes and misfortunes, he remained faithful throughout his life and in the end God showed compassion and mercy. Like **the**

prophets, God vindicated Job!

For example, God vindicated what Job had said in discussion with his foolish friends: “The Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, ‘My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has’” ([Job 42:7](#)). Job had spoken the truth! In the end, God also restored everything that Job once had two-fold because of his faithful **perseverance** ([Job 42:10](#)).



This life doesn't always end with a happy ending from a human perspective like it does in the case of Job. Some lose everything and never get it back. Some of **the prophets** even lost their lives. Yet, **perseverance** and endurance always lead to a happy ending from God's perspective. Our death, when in Christ, is the beginning of life! We have nothing and no one to fear! Whatever you may be facing, know that God is greater than our circumstances. We may have endured hardships from the death of a family member, spouse, or child, the loss of a job, dysfunctional relationships, persecution, and a whole host of other problems in this life. But God rewards those who faithfully endure, patiently wait for His return, and continue to serve Him no matter what it may cost. Our suffering can be great, but our reward in Christ is greater! Let us, therefore, have the right perspective and continue to trust and serve the Lord.

In what ways has God called you to endure in life? How does knowing the ultimate outcome in life help you to endure?

Question
6

James 5:12

PRACTICE PERSISTENCE:

No matter what happens to us in this life, we must practice persistence in our walk with Christ. Let us not compromise our integrity to momentarily alleviate suffering. But let us act and speak consistently according to the character of Christ and the Holy Spirit whom He has sent to indwell us. Unfortunately, many people will do anything to stop suffering; they will stutter in their faith, compromise their integrity, and hurt their

testimony by trying to find a quick and easy solution rather than continue to trust in

JUST SAY NO, OR YES

✦ (Matthew 5:34-37) But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; {35} or by the earth, for it is his footstool; ...{37} Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

the Lord and **patiently endure**. Therefore, James urges us **not** to **swear by heaven or earth or with any oath** (v. 12). Again, James patterns his letter after Jesus' instruction in which He affirms, "But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne" (Matt 5:34). Instead, we should be consistent and truthful in both what we say and what

we do—a hallmark of the teaching in this letter. Therefore, James argues that our **yes** should **be yes** and our **no** should **be no**.

To put this teaching of both Jesus and James into a modern perspective, we can say that our word should be our bond. Although we do have the need for written contracts in a fallen world, a Christian truly should not need one because he is faithful to his word. (Please note: This is an example not a command to avoid contracts. In other words, a believer will absolutely do what he says he will. Years ago, we would call this a gentlemen's agreement which was sealed with a handshake. In the same way, we as believers don't need to take a bunch of oaths; we simply need to do what we say. We need to be truthful and consistent.

How did Job and the prophets show consistency and persistence in their speech?

Question
7

We live in an inconsistent world. Sometimes we're inconsistent by accident because we forget. We make promises and then never remember to fulfill them! For example, sometimes parents threaten to punish children when they get home, but they become busy and never do because they have forgotten. This still sets a bad precedent and the children will learn that they can misbehave outside of the home with less consequence because their parents will forget. Still, we make promises all the time that we don't keep—whether to pray for someone to call or check on someone, to take care of something, or even make plans that we cannot keep or must break.

At other times, however, the inconsistency is intentional. We say things in a misleading way or try to “re-phrase” things that may have gotten us in trouble so that we can avoid controversy. Sometimes people will tell people what they think they want to hear rather than speak the truth to them. They may do this because they want the person to feel better, but they may also have sinister motives in manipulating people to do what they want. Still, others may make promises that they knowingly have no intention of keeping! Regardless of the reason, any such speech is sinful and will garner scrutiny and judgment by Christ. Therefore, let us as believers speak the truth, never mislead either unintentionally or intentionally, and always say what we mean making sure that it matches what Scripture says!

How would you evaluate the consistency in your speech? Does your speech match biblical and ethical standards set forth by Christ?

Question
8

James 5:13

PRACTICE PRAYER:

Finally, the key to overcoming **suffering** and having a consistent life in Christ is to practice **prayer**. James, therefore, asks, “**Is anyone among you suffering?**” To which he implores us to **pray** (v. 13). Again, he asks, “**Is anyone cheerful?**” To which he replies, “**Let him sing psalms.**” Our attitudes and perspectives should never depend upon our circumstances; they should always depend upon our connection to Christ. We are connected to Christ specifically through prayer. We have a direct avenue of communication to our Savior and Sustainer! Therefore, even in the midst of suffering we can rejoice! We can rejoice because prayer keeps us grounded and connected. We can rejoice because we are connected intimately with Christ who guarantees us victory! We will deal with the topic of prayer much more next week as we conclude our study of the book of James when we learn how and what we should pray. Without being overly



Instruct

simplistic in our categorization of prayer, we need to understand what it helps us do. Prayer must be an essential part of our lives. It's not an activity we do just before meals, when we come to church, or occasionally when we need something. We must pray daily; we must be in an attitude and state of prayer throughout the day even! Just like a computer will eventually run down and lose power when unplugged from the wall, so we do as believers when we fail to pray. We lose the ability to discern God's will and begin failing to apply His principles and teaching in our lives. We can find ourselves at the mercy of the world for our beliefs, opinions, and practices. We need Christ. We need Him to overcome the world and its evil influences upon us so that we'll be ready to receive Him at His **coming**. We can only achieve this when we are consistently connected with Him through prayer and completely surrendered to the leadership of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us!

How would you evaluate your prayer life?

Question
9

Many things in this world occur slowly over time and require patience and endurance to see them to the end. In many ways, the world has taught us to become more impatient because we live in an instant society where things may only require the press of a button or take only a few minutes to a few hours to receive. Impatience, however, always leads to trouble! God desires perseverance, patience, and endurance which we can only achieve through His Son! The world is filled with suffering and problems that we as mankind have brought upon ourselves because of our sinful choices. God, in Christ, has offered us a way to overcome that sin and have life. Salvation in Christ is immediate and instantaneous when we confess our sins, repent, and surrender to Him. But the life we now live in Christ calls for patient endurance.

Scripture never promises that salvation will alleviate all our suffering and problems. In fact, it states otherwise. We will never have a problem-free life until Christ comes again. Until then, we must wait patiently. We must mature in Him as He leads and grow in our faith daily. We must look beyond our most immediate circumstances to see the bigger picture in Christ. Suffering and misfortune, like wealth and possessions, are only temporary here on earth. A grander reward awaits; a better life is coming in Christ as we await. Let us remain connected to Christ in prayer while we wait patiently for that day He gloriously calls us home to be with Him forever. While we wait, let us be ready to receive Him when He comes so that we might be found in a position that honors Him with what we are doing and saying when He appears!

Incorporate

In what ways have you prepared your life to receive Christ at His coming? How can we as a church remain prepared and vigilant for His coming?

How consistent are you in: 1) praying, 2) reading Scripture, 3) applying the principles of God's Word in your life, and 4) serving and sharing the gospel? What areas has God shown you in which you're doing well? What areas need improvement?

In what areas are you struggling this week? How have you prayed about those areas? In what areas have you experienced heartache, disappointment, or even perhaps joy and elation? How have you prayed about those areas?

Journal: Document God's Work

October 25, 2020



Pray with Direction Wholeheartedly

James 5:15b-20

Focal Verse:

“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

James 5:16

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Introduce

We conclude our study of James with one of the most difficult and most misunderstood passages in the entire New Testament. Some have seized these words and have hijacked them apart from their context in both this letter as well as the New Testament as a whole. Overall, the message in these verses focuses on a God-centered, Spirit-led prayer life which acknowledges God's sovereignty and seeks to discern His will rather than praying according to our own selfish desires and demand that God bends His ear to our will. Consequently, they do not guarantee physical healing nor do they establish that it is God's will for everyone to be healed.

Some misguided, albeit it sometimes well-intentioned, people can misinterpret these verses and unwittingly destroy a person's faith if God's plan does not include physical healing in the way a person expects. We cannot blame a "lack" of what we consider healing upon a person's lack of faith. To do so is errant because it doesn't take into account God's specific will for a particular situation. To pray in faith as James urges us in 5:15 means that we seek God's will and respond accordingly in the direction He deems best for our lives.

As Senior Adult Pastor, I have experienced some tremendously difficult challenges in offering comfort to people in the hospital along with their family members. What do you say to a person whose spouse has had a terminal stroke, someone who has just learned their child has a terminal disease, someone who has had a family member in an automobile accident, or someone who has just learned that they have cancer?

I've seen people pronounced terminally ill whom the doctors said would never leave the hospital that were miraculously discharged in good condition only to die a few short weeks later. I've also seen people who have gone to the doctor for "routine" procedures or surgeries only to encounter life-threatening problems and face more emergency surgery to save



their lives. These situations only begin to paint the picture of the things that we as a church family have experienced together with offering comfort to people in difficult

Introduce

circumstances.

We cannot and should not ever offer a false sense of hope and erroneously claim that God will heal a person or their loved one if only we have enough faith and we pray hard enough. Such a claim is irresponsible and reckless if we have not sought the will of the Lord for that particular situation and He has not given us clear insight! This often causes more harm than good because if it is not in God's plan to heal people or His desire is to call them home then it can look like He has failed or that a person hasn't done enough to merit healing. Healing, whether physical or spiritual, is always a gift of grace. Sometimes in His divine sovereignty God chooses to heal people and extend their lives here on earth so that He might be glorified. At other times, however, in accordance to His plan, God will call people home to spend eternity with Him. In either case, both responses demonstrate God's grace ([Phil 1:19-23](#))!

As humans, we only have limited knowledge and insight. But God sees the whole picture! Although we may not understand why things happen, we shouldn't question the way God responds. Sometimes the sicknesses we endure have eternal significance when we live a life of faith and trust in the Lord. Through the way that we choose to respond and surrender to the Lord, others may see that great faith in us and be drawn to a relationship with Christ. At the same time, sometimes God calls us home in a benevolent act of mercy rather than allowing us to continue suffering here. Either way God is merciful and glorified when we surrender to Him and live in faith regardless of whatever circumstances we may face in life. Therefore, as we pray, let us pray with direction wholeheartedly so that we pray according to God's will rather than our own and that He might be glorified in whatever happens in our lives.

Key
Question

What does it mean to pray "in faith?" When we do not seek God's will and push our own agenda, why is this not praying "in faith?"

James 5:14-15a

PRAY IN FAITH:

Last week, we briefly touched on how prayer helps us to remain connected to the Lord which allows us to endure **suffering** patiently and overcome any trials that we may experience. Beginning in [verse 13](#), James poses three rhetorical questions to remind us of the situations in which we ought to turn God in prayer: “**Is anyone among you suffering?**”; “**Is anyone cheerful?**”; and “**Is anyone among you sick?**” These three questions indicate that we should pray in every situation no matter the circumstance! We naturally turn to the Lord in prayer when we’re faced with **suffering** or problems as well as when we or someone else we know becomes **sick**. But we sometimes misplace our priorities and forget to pray and praise God when things go well (i.e. we’re **cheerful**). We become consumed with the activity of life and lose focus because we subconsciously regard ourselves as independent and able to meet our own needs. As a result, we treat God like a company with which we do business. When a service, such as electricity, cable, or Internet, goes out or stops working, then we call to report a problem and request it to be fixed. As long as we have a “problem” with our service, we will call until it’s resolved and continually seek information about the status of the repair. Unfortunately, we treat God the same way at times. When we have a need in our lives, we pray fervently. We request God take action and “fix” whatever ails us and we continually seek a status update as to when the problem may be alleviated. When the problem no longer exists, we fail to pray as often and as fervently. We become like nine of the ten lepers who showed no gratitude and simply disappeared when things got back to “normal” in their lives! This ought never be! We should be in a constant state of prayer throughout the day and turn everything in our lives over to Him! Whether we experience good times,

EPHESIANS 6:18

**PRAYING ALWAYS
WITH ALL PRAYER AND
SUPPLICATION
IN THE SPIRIT, BEING WATCHFUL
TO THIS END WITH ALL
PERSEVERANCE
AND SUPPLICATION
FOR ALL THE SAINTS.**

success, and joy or we experience trials, troubles, and tribulations, we must turn to the Lord in prayer!

How much of your prayer time would you say that you devote to praise and thanksgiving in contrast to requests, needs, and intercession?

Question
1

For the remainder of this section, we will focus on the third question: “**Is anyone among you sick**” (v. 14)? The word translated **sick** literally means in the Greek “to be weak” and it can refer to a number of situations: 1) spiritual weakness making us susceptible to sin ([Rom 6:19](#)), 2) wrestling with the conscience and the inability to choose right ([1 Cor 8:7, 9](#)), 3) being powerless and lacking self-control ([Rom 5:6](#)), and 4) one’s physical appearance ([2 Cor 10:10](#)). In the Gospels and elsewhere in the New Testament, the word does often refer to physical infirmities or sickness (see [Luke 7:10](#) for one example). Given the context in James, it seems to refer to physical sickness since **the elders pray over him** and **God will raise him up** (v. 15)—perhaps a reference to an incapacitated person in bed. Yet, given James’ transition to confessing our **trespasses to one another**, it could refer to spiritual “sickness” through which Christ heals us of our sins just as in Isaiah He promised that “by his stripes we are healed” or saved from our sins (Isa 53:5). In that same sense then, God also “raises” us up to walk in the newness of life patterned after His Son ([Rom 6:4](#)).

In either case, God’s healing stems from His grace and mercy because of His abundant love. Spiritual healing, or salvation, comes only through Christ’s gracious and merciful sacrifice on the cross which we receive by faith when we confess our sins, repent, and turn to Him. In the case of physical sickness, ailments, or weakness, God too operates with grace in mind. He either graciously heals us according to His divine plan so that we might glorify Him or He gives us the grace to endure whatever physical problems we may have in this life so that we might testify to His goodness and love while glorifying and praising His name!

Whether God chooses to heal us physically or not—according to His sovereign plan—He still acts with grace and love. Therefore, Paul can report that God has reassured him that “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in **weakness**.” So, Paul can still exclaim, “Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my **infirmities**, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” ([2 Cor 12:9](#)). The word translated both

“weakness” and “infirmities” is the same word James uses here to refer to “sickness.” God’s grace extends to us in any situation that we face! Just because we endure hardship or physical ailments at times doesn’t mean that God loves us any less or that our relationship with Him is somehow dysfunctional. It does, however, mean that He will give us grace in both circumstances!

And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
2 Corinthians 12:9

In what ways does God show us grace whether he heals us physically or allows us to endure physical ailments?

Question
2

James now turns to how **the church** should respond to the **sick**. We are to **pray** and intercede on behalf of one another in **faith** (vv. 14-15a). The **sick** should **call for the elders of the church** who would then **pray over him** and anoint **him with oil in the name of the Lord**. As with much in this passage, so many misunderstand what James is saying because they fail to read it in light of the larger context. First, **the elders** are called because as leaders in the **church** they should exhibit spiritual maturity and **pray** according to God’s will. James isn’t saying that their “prayer” holds any special power or significance because of their status. But, because they seek the Lord, their prayers are **effective!** In [verse 16](#), James does indeed confirm this when he says, “**The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.**” We’ll talk more about this under the third point of this lesson.

Second, James tells **the elders** not only to **pray**, but also to anoint **him with oil** ([Mark 6:13](#)). Some have proposed the **oil** has a medicinal purpose which aids in healing. However, neither the Old or New Testament typically use **anointing** in this way. To anoint someone or something typically means that they are set apart or dedicated to the Lord for a particular function or purpose. We see this in the **anointing** of the high priest for service ([Exod 29:7](#)), the furniture and things of the tabernacle ([Exod 40:9](#)), the king ([1 Sam 16:13](#)), Jesus as the Messiah ([Acts 10:38](#)), and believers with the Holy Spirit who teaches us the truth ([1 John 2:27](#)). Most likely, therefore, the **oil** functions the

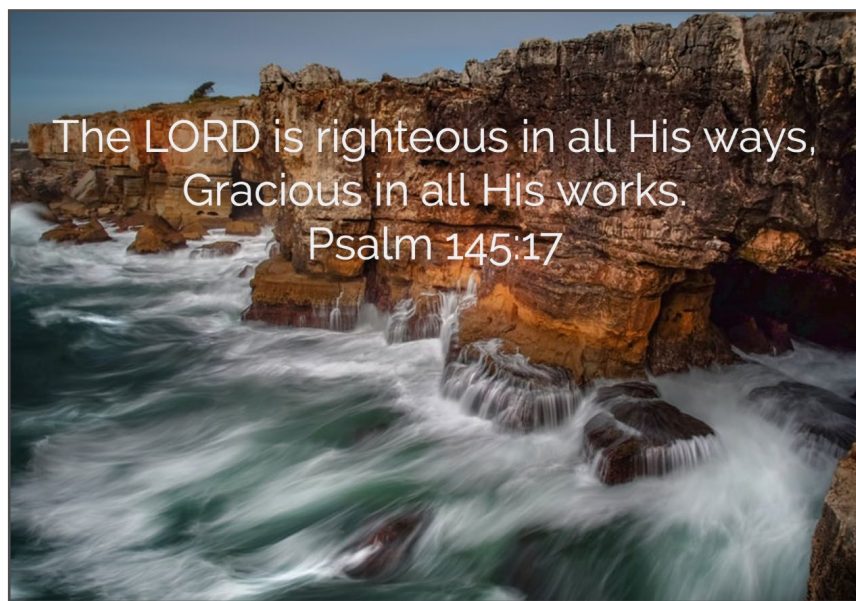
Instruct

same way in this passage—to dedicate the **sick** to the Lord so that His will may be done and the Lord can use the situation according to His divine purpose as He sovereignly deems best!

Why is it important to dedicate ourselves and our circumstances to the Lord in whatever situation that we may face?

Question
3

Next, we see the result of a **prayer** uttered in **faith**. God will heal or **save the sick** and **raise him up** (v. 15a). First, we must define what it means to pray in **faith**. **Faith** means that we trust God in every situation and recognize that as our Creator and Savior He knows best! It does not mean that if we pray hard and long enough and we



believe with all our being what we *desire* and *want* will come true. James has already stated that such prayer is ineffective because we “ask amiss” according to our own “pleasure” ([Jas 4:3](#)). On the contrary, **faith** means that we trust God if He heals us or someone else and we glorify Him; it also means that we trust God if He doesn’t heal us or someone else and we still

praise Him for who He is and what He has done. **Faith** doesn’t only depend upon what God does from our human perspective, although He will always be faithful to His Word. But **faith** depends upon who God is—His holy, righteous, and just character! And we trust Him and place our **faith** in Him no matter the circumstance.

Second, James says **the prayer of faith will save** and **the Lord will raise him up**. The word translated **save** usually refers to salvation from one’s sins and the word **raise** can mean to resurrect or raise from the dead. **Raise**, however, can also mean to awaken from sleep or arouse in the sense of get up. James is not saying that we can pray someone into heaven or be “saved” for them by proxy! The passage clearly states that it is the Lord’s prerogative to **save** and **raise**. Salvation from our sins does not depend upon what we do; it depends upon what Jesus did and how we respond to His

death and resurrection. Salvation is a choice that we make and the Lord **will** always graciously **save** when we ask in sincerity! We can and should pray for individuals to come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, but we cannot pray them into heaven if they choose to reject Him. Nonetheless, whether these words refer to salvation from sin or salvation and restoration from physical ailments (healing), the Lord's prerogative is the same; He saves or heals and He raises or restores according to His prescribed plan and will.

In what ways should we pray for the lost that is those who don't have a relationship with Christ?

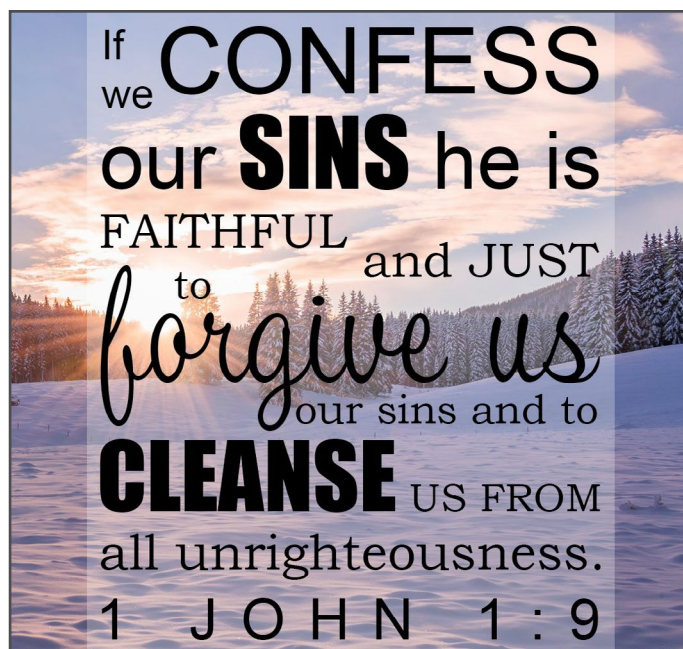
Question
4

James 5:15b-16b

PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS:

James somewhat switches gears by providing an example of both physical and spiritual healing through forgiveness. In [verse 15a](#), James points out that **if the sick person has committed sins, then he will be forgiven.**

Sometimes, but not always, sin can lead to physical illness. The immorally promiscuous can incur sexually transmitted diseases; those who use drugs can have a whole host of physical problems; those who are gluttonous and slothful can have poor health from overeating or inactivity. Yet, some illnesses are simply the result of living in a fallen world. Job got boils all over his body—not because he sinned but because he lived in a fallen world. We have to be careful in



attributing every sickness and misfortune to sin. At the same time, we cannot say that sin never leads to sickness. We must evaluate things on a case-by-case basis.

In addition, God may heal us spiritually and forgive our sinful choices, but often the physical consequences remain. Those who make unwise and ungodly decisions can **be forgiven** and restored at any time when they call upon the name of the Lord in sincerity, but the diseases they contracted or the damage they have done to their bodies will remain forever until Christ calls them home. Therefore, notice that in

Instruct

this part of verse 15 the emphasis lies on spiritual healing and restoration through forgiveness. Let us, therefore, examine our lives and see if we need to purge any sinful activities from our lives, seeking spiritual restoration from the Lord by asking for forgiveness.

Why will God always forgive our sinful choices when we seek forgiveness, but why does He not always remove the consequences of those choices?

Question
5

Part of the healing process involves seeking forgiveness from the Lord, but also finding and confiding in other mature believers who will help us stay accountable. Therefore, James urges us to **confess** our **trespasses to one another** and **pray for one another** so that **we may be healed** (v. 16a, b). We don't confide in each other to promote gossip! Prayer should never be used for this reason; unfortunately, some do and they don't truly pray for the other person. Instead, we should pray **earnestly** for each other and encourage **one another** to remain accountable. Ultimately, God through His Spirit gives us strength to overcome temptation and sin because left in our own flesh we're weak and powerless apart from Him. One source of help He has given us is other believers to encourage us and walk through life's difficulties with us. Sometimes, these believers may have encountered and overcome in Christ the same temptations we have and some have even made similar sinful choices that we have. They, or any other believer for that matter, should always offer us godly wisdom and point us to Scripture. We can call upon them at any time when we're facing temptation and they can pray and walk with us through these times, teaching us to be dependent upon the Lord.

How can accountability within the church help us to overcome our temptation and our sinful choices?

Question
6

James 5:16c-18

PRAY FERVENTLY:

We ought to pray fervently with direction to seek God's will. When we do, James acknowledges that **the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much** (v. 16c). To understand this properly, we must focus on what it means to be **righteous**.

To be **righteous** entails that we are in right standing with the Lord. We can only achieve this right standing through Christ who instills His righteousness within us and gives us His Spirit to guide us. We cannot become **righteous** on our own; we must have a relationship with Christ! When we have a relationship with Him, we must maintain our fellowship by surrendering to Him rather than allowing our personal choices



and sinful desires to hinder our walk! When we are in right standing and have right fellowship with Him, then we will seek His will and His desires rather than our own! Only then can we say that our prayer is **effective**—that is we must first fervently seek His will to have an **effective** prayer-life that works!

James now extols Elijah as an example. In [1 Kings 17 and 18](#), God sent Elijah to Ahab to inform him that there will be **no rain** upon the land for **three years** due to Israel's rebellion against Him. In James 5:17-18, he summarizes this account from 1 Kings. He identifies Elijah as **a man with a nature like ours**. In other words, he had a relationship with the Lord! He sought the Lord who used Him to proclaim His message to Ahab and Israel. He proclaimed that Word faithfully. He did not venture out on his own, but he prayed specifically and **earnestly** as the Lord led Him. After the **three years and six months**, God directed him to **pray** for **rain** and indeed it did **rain** according to His plan and **the earth** once again began to produce **its fruit**.

Elijah's prayer was **effective** because he sought the Lord—not simply because he prayed fervently and **earnestly** for something he personally desired. We ought to pray fervently and **earnestly**, but with direction. We need to seek the Lord and hear Him clearly speak. We shouldn't push our own agenda or promote our own desires. As believers, our desires should become and reflect what the Lord desires! Let us, therefore, be **fervent** in our prayers, knowing that God will answer according to His divine plan which will always be the best for those who follow Him!

How can praying fervently and earnestly without direction be devastating? How can it cause people to question their faith in the Lord?

Question
7

James 5:19-20

PRAY FOR FIDELITY:

Finally, James concludes this letter with a call for us to remain faithful to the Lord in what we believe, what we say, and what we do. The danger in seeking our own desires

BRETHREN, IF A MAN IS OVERTAKEN IN ANY TRESPASS, YOU WHO ARE SPIRITUAL RESTORE SUCH A ONE IN A SPIRIT OF GENTLENESS, CONSIDERING YOURSELF LEST YOU ALSO BE TEMPTED. BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS, AND SO FULFILL THE LAW OF CHRIST. GALATIANS 6:1-2 NKJV

rather than the will of the Lord is that we have a greater potential to wander **from the truth** (v. 19). When we stray or wander **from the truth**, it will inevitably lead to sin. To avoid such consequences, we must ground ourselves in prayer and plant ourselves firmly in God's Word. As a church, therefore, we must also pray for one another to remain faithful and seek to warn and turn **back**

those who have gone astray. When sin infiltrates the church in even one area, it affects the whole ([Gal 5:9](#)). It is incumbent upon the church as a whole to remain faithful and pure and to correct those who are deceived and errant according to the truth of Scripture.

As believers from Western culture, we often elevate the individual above the community. Consequently, we tend to emphasize personal choice and responsibility to the point where we think it's none of our business what others believe or what another person does—especially if sin is involved. God has indeed invested the individual with personal responsibility for his choices. But He has also invested the church with the responsibility of being involved in other's lives to the point of speaking out against sin, biblically correcting wrongs, and pointing people to restoration in Christ. For this reason, James declares that **if someone** (i.e. the church / believer) **turns a sinner back**, then he **will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins** (v. 20). We must learn to relate to one another in this biblical way; we must practice community. We need godly accountability from those led by the Spirit who stand for the truth and point people to the Lord.

How often do you send praying for believers to remain faithful? Why is this so important in today's world especially?

Question
8

This final portion of James' letter touches on many different subjects—some perhaps even challenging to understand—but they boil down to three areas. First, we need to seek God and trust His plan in everything and not pray for our own desires. Second, we need to pray fervently and intercede for one another according to God's will. This means we must pray that we and others remain faithful regardless of the circumstances and always fix our eyes on Christ. Third, we need to function as a community whom God has placed together to grow, mature, and build each other in Him. We need to speak the truth in love from Scripture. We need to be accountable to one another so that we spur each other to good works which glorify Him. We need to challenge each other to remain faithful and not stray from the truth. We need to be the community which God has created us and called us to be!

Prayer plays an essential role in keeping us connected to Christ and preventing us from straying from the truth and sinning. We say that we trust God and rely upon Him for everything. But does this include when He says “no” to our prayers or desires or He doesn’t answer them in the way we expect or think that He should? People and churches that teach it is God’s will for everyone to be healed are errant. He does indeed say that He desires everyone to be saved—but this depends upon one’s personal response to His call ([1 Tim 2:4](#)). To teach that God always heals physically can create great dysfunction and disunity within the church. Such teachings have not taken into account God’s sovereignty and His divine plan and purpose which we don’t always fully understand as humans.

If God always “heals” physically if we simply pray with enough faith apart from His will, people will begin to blame Him when that healing doesn’t occur. This sets a dangerous and selfish precedent because it drives people away from the Lord rather than points them to Him. Moreover, such teaching can also lead people to misunderstand their relationship with the Lord. If no physical healing occurs, they will begin to believe their faith is not strong enough. They may also believe that they have sinned or erred in some way that has caused God to become angry with them. This can lead to depression and constant uncertainty. Sometimes sickness is caused by sin, but at other times it’s simply not in God’s divine plan to heal.

When we overlook God’s plan and fail to trust Him implicitly in all situations, then we will forget to see His grace whether He chooses to heal physically or not. Therefore, let us not misunderstand these verses or any other Scripture. Instead, let us pray wholeheartedly with direction, seeking the Lord and trusting Him regardless of whatever situation in which we may find ourselves.

Incorporate

What biblical examples can you cite in which God's plan for a person that did not include healing or allowed illness to occur? In what ways did God ultimately show them grace? How did they respond or glorify the Lord despite their circumstances?

In what ways can we biblically practice accountability better in the church today? Why is it so important to be accountable to the Lord first and the church second? What has individualism and the lack of accountability introduced into the church?

In what ways have some in the church strayed from the truth and accepted the culture's interpretation of the way things ought to be? How should we as a church respond and how can we point them back to restoration in Christ?

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