



**RELATE**

**ADULT CONNECT  
CLASS CURRICULUM**

**DONALD J. WILLS**  
SENIOR PASTOR



**SEPTEMBER**

**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,

Have you ever said something and thought to yourself, did I just say that out loud? Words do have an effect on the hearers. Paul admonishes not to allow any corrupt communication to proceed out of our mouth but what we say should minister grace to the hearer. This directly ties to the ability to control the tongue and engage spiritual wisdom, as James writes about. I read a statement the other day that says “Winsome speech demands a wise source. Both controlled talk and cultivated thought are necessary.” All of this is to be shrouded in humility. This is what James is driving home in our study this month.

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.

Proverbs 25:11 says, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold In settings of silver.” Let me challenge you this month to pray and ask the Lord to reveal to you where work is needed in your life to speak fitting words (the tongue), Godly wisdom, and humility. Choose to communicate with words that edify and minister grace to the listener whether family, friend, or stranger. Then glorify the Lord in word and deed!

-Blessings  
Pastor Don



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

### *Introduce*

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

### *Instruct*

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

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

### *Inspire*

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

### *Incorporate*

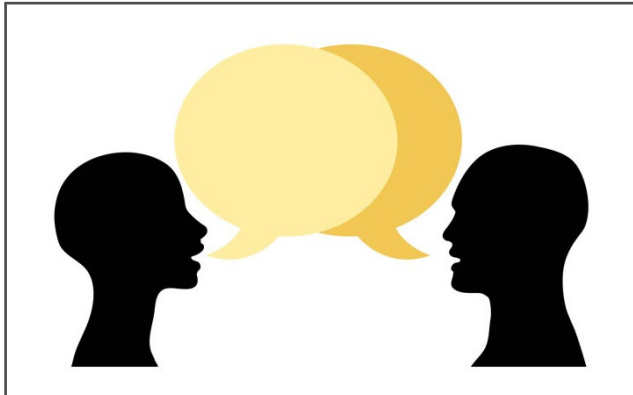
**Day 5:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

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

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

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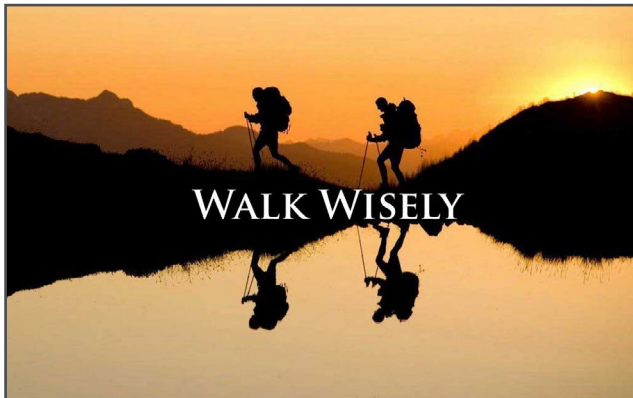
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*September 6, 2020*



# *Control Your Tongue*

## *James 3:1-12*

Focal Verse:

*“But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.”*

James 3:8

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## Introduce

During the early stages of World War 2 as German forces advanced westward through The Netherlands, Belgium, and France, the British people faced an uncertain outcome along with a deeply divided political system which had starkly different ideas about how to handle the growing threat from the Axis Powers. Charged with the unenviable task of uniting a nation and preparing for war, Winston Churchill assumed the role of Prime Minister in May of 1940. From the moment he assumed office, he was confronted with monumental decisions about how to rescue the entire British army from the French shores while at the same time bolstering defenses around the island nation in preparation for the inevitable blitz from the *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force).



Through a series of memorable addresses to Parliament, the nation, and ultimately the world, Churchill charted a course for victory and inspired the people to unite against the advancement of tyranny. Mr. Churchill achieved this at first through the power of the words he meticulously chose and crafted into an effective rallying cry. The film *Darkest Hour* (2017) cinematically portrays some of these speeches and delves into the painstaking decisions behind them. It climatically concludes with Churchill's speech to Parliament on June 4, 1940 in which he passionately encourages the British leaders and people to "never surrender" and "defend [their] island whatever the cost may be." Although the movie may take some artistic liberty to portray the tension of this moment apart from recorded historical fact, it does depict various reactions to this powerful speech, including that of Secretary of State Edward Wood. During the thunderous ovation from most of those in attendance at the House of Commons that day in June, an unidentified man leans over to Secretary Wood and asks, "What just happened?" To which Mr. Wood responds, "He mobilized the English language and sent it into battle." This innocuous, probably mostly overlooked, moment in the movie captures brilliantly the effect words can have on us!

## Introduce

The oft-repeated proverb by children stating, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” is well-meaning, but misguided. Words *do* have a dramatic upon those who hear them. Therefore, we must choose our words carefully and think about the impact of what we say so that it always honor Christ. All speech, whether intended or not, has the potential to elicit either positive or negative results. Words can build and edify as well as tear down and destroy. They can be used to offer comfort and healing or maliciously used to hurt and defame. They can inspire, motivate, and encourage or depress and discourage. Words can offer correction and communicate truth, but they can also mislead.

James understood the power of words! He recognized the great potential that we have as believers to use our speech to praise the Lord, proclaim the truth, and promote righteousness. But he also recognized the dangers of the tongue! Though one of the smallest muscles in the body, it is the most difficult for people to control. As believers, we must carefully weigh what we say and ask the Spirit to help us tame our tongues so that we might use them for God’s glory and not our own gratification. Therefore, as James exhorts us, let us control our tongues and use them to edify and build rather than tear down and destroy.

Key  
Question

How has your relationship with Christ changed the way that you speak?



### James 3:1-4

#### ***THE POWER OF THE TONGUE TO INFLUENCE:***

Throughout this letter, James shifts back and forth in his admonition between the importance of our words and our works to show how equally vital both are to a life transformed by Christ. In [1:26](#), James has already introduced the topic with which we will now deal in-depth by noting the dangers of one who “does not bridle [control] his tongue” because it renders his “religion” useless. Yet, he balances this need for consistent speech which honors the Lord with our need to participate in good works done in Him. For this reason, we shouldn’t be “hearers of the word only” and not “doers” ([Jas 1:22](#)). Such “religion is [also] useless.” What we hear, what we believe, what we say, and what we do are all inextricably connected! Each one affects the other; we can’t compartmentalize or separate them.

However, the one that essentially governs every aspect of our lives is what we believe. What we believe determines what we say and what we do! Therefore, James begins his appeal for us to control our tongues by addressing those called to teach. He warns that

**not many** should seek to **become teachers** because we know that **we will receive stricter judgment** (v. 1). Including himself in this advice (i.e. **we**), James begins with the position in the church most directly involved with speaking.

What **teachers** proclaim verbally, as we shall see in verses 3 and 4, has the ability to influence other people either negatively or



positively because they implant a word that affects the mind. And the mind, in turn, controls what the people who sit under their teaching say and do.

Therefore, **teachers** have the utmost responsibility to communicate doctrine correctly based upon the proper interpretation of Scripture. Although the hearers of the teaching are ultimately responsible for listening carefully, receiving the information correctly, and applying it consistently, **teachers** are responsible for presenting it

## Instruct

accurately and understandably to communicate the message in the way that God intended it! To be sure, this is a great responsibility when we think about how our words can be interpreted and received if we're not careful to communicate them clearly in context or if we have not clearly understood God's Word ourselves before we attempt to teach it ([1 Tim 1:7](#)). Consequently, **teachers** will face **stricter**, literally "greater" in the Greek, **judgment** because we must ensure we handle God's Word rightly and communicate it accurately ([2 Tim 2:15](#)).

If we receive bad information, we will mostly likely make bad decisions in ignorance. Bad theology, for example, will then filter down into the rest of our lives, becoming



manifest in our words and deeds. To illustrate, let's suppose we're remodeling our home. So, we hire an interior designer to give us advice, but we want to do the actual remodeling ourselves. The designer takes all the measurements, proposes a plan, and reports it to us, but the measurements are all wrong! From these bad measurements input

into our thinking, everything else we do in the project will suffer! It will affect the price of the project either through wasted material or the need to purchase more material. In the end, it will affect every area of the actual construction which can result in delays, damage, and dollars!

How can bad theology affect every area of our lives? Despite bad teaching, however, why are we ultimately responsible for the choices we make?

Question  
# 1

As bad as this kind of disaster would be in remodeling, bad teaching is much worse because it has eternal consequences! Bad teaching has the potential to distract from Christ and deceive others about what it means to have life in Him. Although James gears his instruction toward those in church who teach in an official capacity, it still applies to everyone who has a relationship with Christ. We all have the power to

influence others with our words in any of our relationships whether as a parent or grandparent, a husband or wife, a friend, an employer or employee, a neighbor, or a citizen of the community. We all teach in some way and model what we believe in our actions. Regardless of our age or position, someone is always watching and learning from us!

Therefore, we all must exercise self-control in what we say! If we have children or have been around those who do, we know that they will often repeat what they hear. Sometimes parents don't filter what they say around their children, whether intentionally or assuming they aren't paying attention, only to have them repeat that information at the most inopportune and embarrassing time. Certainly, this can include foul language or suggestive talk—but even more apropos to many of our situations it would most likely constitute complaining, gossip, or defamation of someone's character. A good rule of thumb is that if we don't want something repeated because we find it embarrassing or insensitive, we shouldn't say it all! This then becomes a good barometer to gauge our speech. Likewise, if it doesn't honor the Lord or communicate righteousness, then we also ought not utter it! Even though this concept is simple to understand, it's hard to do.

In what ways do you teach or influence others through your words?

Question  
# 2

Moreover, a lack of self-control in our speech can prove devastating and destructive. During World War 2, an advertising campaign here in the United States promoted the idea that "loose lips sink ships." In other words, people at that time must guard what they say so that the information doesn't fall into the hands of the enemy which would then lead to defeat. As believers, we must watch what we say so that the enemy cannot use it against us to distract others from placing their faith in Christ. We can never take our words back! Social media has proven this. Even though we may try to erase a post, the



## Instruct

words remain engrained in people's minds or have found their way memorialized by a screen shot or in other comments. We, therefore, must weigh everything before we say it to ensure that it glorifies the Lord!

As important as our words are, however, we also teach through our actions. Not only are **teachers** required to know the material we present and communicate it effectively, we are also required to live it. As a result, James reminds us that **we all stumble in many things** (v. 2). To **stumble**, in this sense, means to sin. It doesn't mean to fumble over our words or speak carelessly; we sin by speaking and living inconsistently with God's Word and character! First and foremost, we've seen how we must exercise self-control in how we speak. [Proverbs 10:19](#) also highlights this need for self-control: "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise."

As he's done throughout this letter, James also connects our speech back to our actions. Hypothetically, he suggests that **if one does not stumble in word**, he is perfect and **able to control the whole body**. Realistically, this is impossible without help from the Lord. We need to surrender control over to Him so that we can learn to exercise self-control in both what we say and what we do. Once again, what we say goes hand-in-hand with what we do. James will return to this theme of living and speaking consistently in [verses 9-12](#) which we will cover in our last section of text this week. For now, we will focus on the power of speech to influence others.

James now gives us two examples to help solidify his point about how words can influence others. **Teachers** have the ability to influence others in the church and



ultimately determine the course of the congregation with the potential of wresting control away from God! Whether we've ridden a horse or not, most of us know that in order to communicate where we want the animal to go we must put a harness and reins on him. Attached to the end of the harness is a **bit** placed in the horse's mouth that when pulled in

a certain direction will **turn** his head where the rider wants to go. Though the **bit** is

comparatively small and the rider need only pull the reins a little, **the whole body** of horse will **turn!**

Similarly, **ships** have a tiny **rudder** in comparison to their massive hulls that determines the direction they travel. Unlike modern cruise ship behemoths, **ships** in the first century would have been propelled by sails that captured the wind. Without the use of a **rudder**, the vessel would be at the mercy of the **fierce winds** for its direction and only go where it was pushed! But the **pilot** or captain had control over the ship with the **rudder** which he could use to plot the course he wanted to head. **Teachers** in the church have the potential to do the same thing. Through their words, they can control the direction of **the body**—either pointing people to Christ or driving them away. God has equipped and gifted people to serve as **teachers** to remind people of His Word and draw principles for practical real-life application. As **teachers**, we must surrender completely to Him. But this also applies to every believer. We must take care to teach correct doctrine, follow God’s plan and vision that He has communicated to the shepherd or pastor for that particular body, and to apply Scripture rightly in our own lives.

How can the enemy use our words to distract from the gospel?

Question  
# 3

### **James 3:5-8**

#### ***THE POISON OF THE TONGUE USED FOR INIQUITY:***

Not only does the **tongue** have the ability to persuade and influence others, but an **unruly tongue** can also destroy when used for iniquity. For this reason, James calls the **tongue a little member** of the body which **boasts great things** (v. 5). In this case, boasting doesn’t just refer to self-promotion, self-glorification, or bragging, but to the ability of the **tongue** to cause major damage and inflict harm upon both the speaker and the world around him. To illustrate, James notes that it only takes a **little** spark to cause a devastating wildfire to rage out of control. The same principle applies to the **tongue**. Even though it’s one of the smallest parts of the body, it can get us into big trouble!

James now equates the **tongue** with that small **fire** which can destroy because it follows the pattern of unrighteousness that characterizes **the world** (v. 6). As the most difficult member of the body to control, the **tongue** introduces sin into our lives which stains or **defiles the whole body**. Sin and unrighteousness come naturally to us and

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penetrate every area of our lives; thus, uncontrolled speech—including that which we never utter aloud apart from our thoughts—influences and ruins everything! With

The Lord shall cut off all  
flattering lips, and the tongue  
that speaketh proud things:  
Who have said, With our  
tongue will we prevail; our  
lips are our own: who is lord  
over us?

Psalm 12:3-4

our mouths, we make sin attractive by sounding less repugnant and more desirable than it really is; with our lips, we talk ourselves into sinning. We justify our sinful actions by making excuses or downplaying the consequences of our choices. With our tongues, we compare ourselves to the world around us rather than the holiest standard found only in Christ.

Consequently, uncontrolled speech that does not come from the Lord leads us down a path of destruction!

In what ways does sinful speech influence every area of our lives?

Question  
# 4

Moreover, we have either surrendered control of our speech to the Holy Spirit who guides everything we say and think in a way that honors the Lord or we have allowed the natural world characterized by unrighteousness (**iniquity**) to dictate what we say which James describes as being **set on fire by hell**. Because sinful speech comes so naturally to every one of us, we need to consciously evaluate what we say to determine who reigns in our lives. We can ask five simple questions which will clearly reveal the source of our speech and thoughts. And these questions need to be at the forefront of our minds before we ever open our mouths! First, does my speech honor God or does it glorify myself and promote my personal agenda? Second, does my speech communicate righteousness and integrity or does it demonstrate sinfulness, dishonesty, and inconsistency? Third, does my speech edify according to God's Word or does it tear down based upon my personal preferences? Fourth, does my speech engage in praise and joy directed to the Lord or does it seek to coerce, complain, and criticize unfairly? Finally, does my speech point others to the gospel or does it repel them? Simply put, if our speech doesn't glorify the Lord, reflect the values found in Scripture, and point others to the gospel, we must change the way we speak!

With another illustration, James stresses the difficult nature of the task that lies ahead of us. He points out that we can subdue or **tame every kind of** animal—whether **beast** of the field, **reptile**, or fish (v. 7). In fact, this act of subduing reflects God’s original intention at creation with which He tasked mankind ([Gen 1:28](#)). Mankind’s sin, however, corrupted God’s perfect creation. And sin corrupts how we speak as well! Therefore, James laments that **no one can tame the tongue** because **it is an unruly evil full of deadly poison** (v. 8). James isn’t saying that we should just throw in the towel and we can say whatever we want because we can never control our **tongue**. On the contrary, we are still held responsible for what we say! Rather he wants us to understand that only through Christ can we overcome our natural tendency to engage in speech which leads to sin and destruction.

Why is the inability to control our tongues not an excuse to say whatever we want or whatever may come to mind?

Question  
# 5

Left to our own devices and willpower, we can never **tame** our **tongue**. It’s impossible. We can, however, control our **tongue** when we surrender to Christ who reforms, reorients, and restores our speech to its original purpose to glorify the Lord! No matter how much that we think we have domesticated or tamed wild beasts like lions, they always have the potential to revert back to their old habits and pose a danger to their handlers! Just like we can’t take the wildness out of a beast, at times we can also revert back to our old habits and find ourselves saying things that we shouldn’t. Christ can completely change us; He can remove these old tendencies if we allow Him. We just need to make a conscious effort to submit to Him daily and surrender control of every area of our lives to Him. We must never speak without thinking; we must always weigh the cost of every word that we say and the affect that it has so that we can consistently reflect Christ.



What measures can we take to guard against sinning in our speech?

Question  
# 6

## James 3:9-12

### ***THE PREDICAMENT OF THE TONGUE APPLIED INCONSISTENTLY:***

James concludes his examination of our speech by noting our tendency to speak and act inconsistently when we don't grant the Father exclusive access to our lives and intentionally abide in the way that He has renewed us through Christ. He starkly highlights this inconsistency by calling to our attention the incompatibility of using our mouths to praise **God our Father** while at the same time cursing other people who **have been made in** His likeness (v. 9). Most of us would never intentionally think of cursing God and speaking blasphemy against Him. But we never give a second thought to demeaning, defaming, slandering, or speaking any kind of abusive word against other human beings. James explicitly states that **blessings and cursings** should never **proceed out of the same mouth** (v. 10)!

He further solidifies this point by incorporating three everyday examples to which we can easily relate. By way of a rhetorical question which in Greek requires the answer "no," James inquires whether **a spring** can produce both **fresh** and **bitter water from the same** source (v. 11). The word translated **bitter** means unpotable water which we cannot drink. It doesn't refer to "saltwater" in this sentence, but contaminated, impure water that could potentially **poison** (v. 8). Similarly, he compares inconsistent speech



*Rows of Olive Trees*

to the produce of **a tree** or vine (v. 12). A fig tree, for instance, cannot produce **olives** or grapes and vice versa. Just as **a tree** produces the kind of fruit according to its genetic structure and nature, so we also ought to speak in a way consistent with our renewed nature in Christ when we have a relationship with Him. Finally, James returns to the illustration of **a spring**. This time he reminds us

that **fresh water** does not come from a **saltwater** source. As a result, sanctimonious, unholy, and sinful speech should not come from the mouth of the believer which we



also use to utter praise and blessing to our Lord and Savior!

Let's honestly evaluate our speech and assess if it truly reflects the character of Christ. If honest, most of us probably struggle to represent Christ well and become inconsistent in how we speak. At times, for example, we may find ourselves verbally abusing retail or restaurant workers who may have erred on an order or not offered service in the way we expected. We may also become irate with telemarketers who constantly pester us. We may tend to engage in frivolous debates on social media and attack, demoralize, devalue, and destroy the character of others. Social media is not the place to have meaningful discussions on topics that truly matter with the hope of effecting lasting change. Do it face to face in a meaningful dialogue rather than create a situation in which people feel free to "pile on" their opinions!

Discussions on social media can easily spiral out of control and rarely stay on task with valid arguments that change a person's mind. Even less, are these discussions productive. People will typically act more civil in a face-to-face discussion than online. They will tend to be more measured and reserved in what they say and how they say it. Moreover, brief posts and texts with very little context can be ambiguous and not communicate the message that we truly intend, leading to misunderstanding. Furthermore, most people will not read a long post which clearly articulates a sustained argument that has proper evidence, documentation, and context to help others understand it! If you absolutely must respond to an issue on social media, message the person privately and discuss it with them one-on-one; this is a biblical principle that Jesus taught and we must learn to apply in this digital age ([Matt 18:15-20](#))!

Why is it important to have discussions with people face to face or at least privately online if no other means of communication is possible?

Question  
# 7

In addition, we at times may participate in gossip or even in condemning others without knowing all the facts. The Bible tells us never to be judgmental or condemning which underscores this point all the more ([Matt 7:1](#)). We must think about the ramifications of what we say and point people to Scripture if they indeed need correction! At times, we may also find ourselves misrepresenting ourselves or someone else either to get revenge or simply get an advantage. Our words should never deceive either intentionally or unintentionally! As parents, we certainly should correct our children and never build-up false self-esteem. But neither should we verbally abuse and berate them. We may unintentionally communicate the wrong idea that they can

## Instruct

never do anything right or they will never amount to anything. If not careful, we may instill into them a rebellious spirit because we write them off as hopeless, never able to overcome their sin nature, rather than encourage them to seek Christ who can change! We may also find ourselves criticizing the leadership which God has ordained to oversee us because we merely have a different opinion of the way something ought to be done. If it is actually immoral, unethical, or unbiblical, then we must speak against it. But we must do so in the right way with humility while maintaining a civil



and respectful tone. We could continue listing the ways that we are inconsistent in our speech. But let's look at how Christ can completely transform it! If we walk daily with Christ, we will never be inconsistent in our speech. We will always humbly communicate the truth in love, desiring to see people mature in their own walk with Him as we are in ours. Even

though at times we may need to correct according to biblical principles, we will still be an encouragement that offers hope and points them to God's Word. Jesus modeled this for us!

When we walk with Christ, we will look beyond our circumstances which cause us to complain; instead, we will find joy in the Lord and praise Him for what He has done and for what He will do. Let us, therefore, practice self-control in what we speak and how we speak it so that we represent the Lord in everything that we do. Before we ever open our mouths, let's seriously think about what will come out of them so we don't live a life of regret and remorse because we find ourselves constantly saying things which get us in trouble. With our mouths, let us praise and bless the Lord and uplift those who are created in His likeness so that all may come to know and have a relationship with Him!

In what ways should our speech reflect the character of Christ?

Question  
# 8

In the introduction, we saw the positive impact that words can have upon people as demonstrated through the leadership of Winston Churchill during World War 2. He used his words to inspire, encourage, and instill hope within people during a tumultuous time. Although I personally do not know if Churchill had a relationship with Christ, the words he meticulously spoke in a secular environment propelled an entire generation to victory and have had a lasting impact upon our world even today. In Christ, we have an even higher calling to craft our communication carefully in a way that points people to the ultimate Victor. Even though Churchill's words impacted a generation, the words we speak in Christ can have a direct impact upon eternity. With His aid, we must scrutinize the words we speak by filtering them through the Holy Spirit who ensures that they consistently reflect God's character.

This week let us evaluate the way in which we speak in every area of our lives, in every relationship, and on every platform that we use. Do we pass the Spirit's test? Do our words consistently honor Christ and bring glory to His name? On our own, we have no ability to transform our speech because we cannot control our tongue. But that's no excuse! When we have a relationship with Christ, He has the power to transform; He can do the impossible. He can effectively reform our speech. Therefore, let us surrender completely to Him. Let us exercise self-control in our speech, so that we communicate the right belief, we don't participate in unrighteousness and iniquity, and we act, think, and speak consistently as the new creation into which Jesus has made us. Therefore, let us control our tongue, humbly submitting to the Lord and glorifying Him in everything that we say.

## *Incorporate*

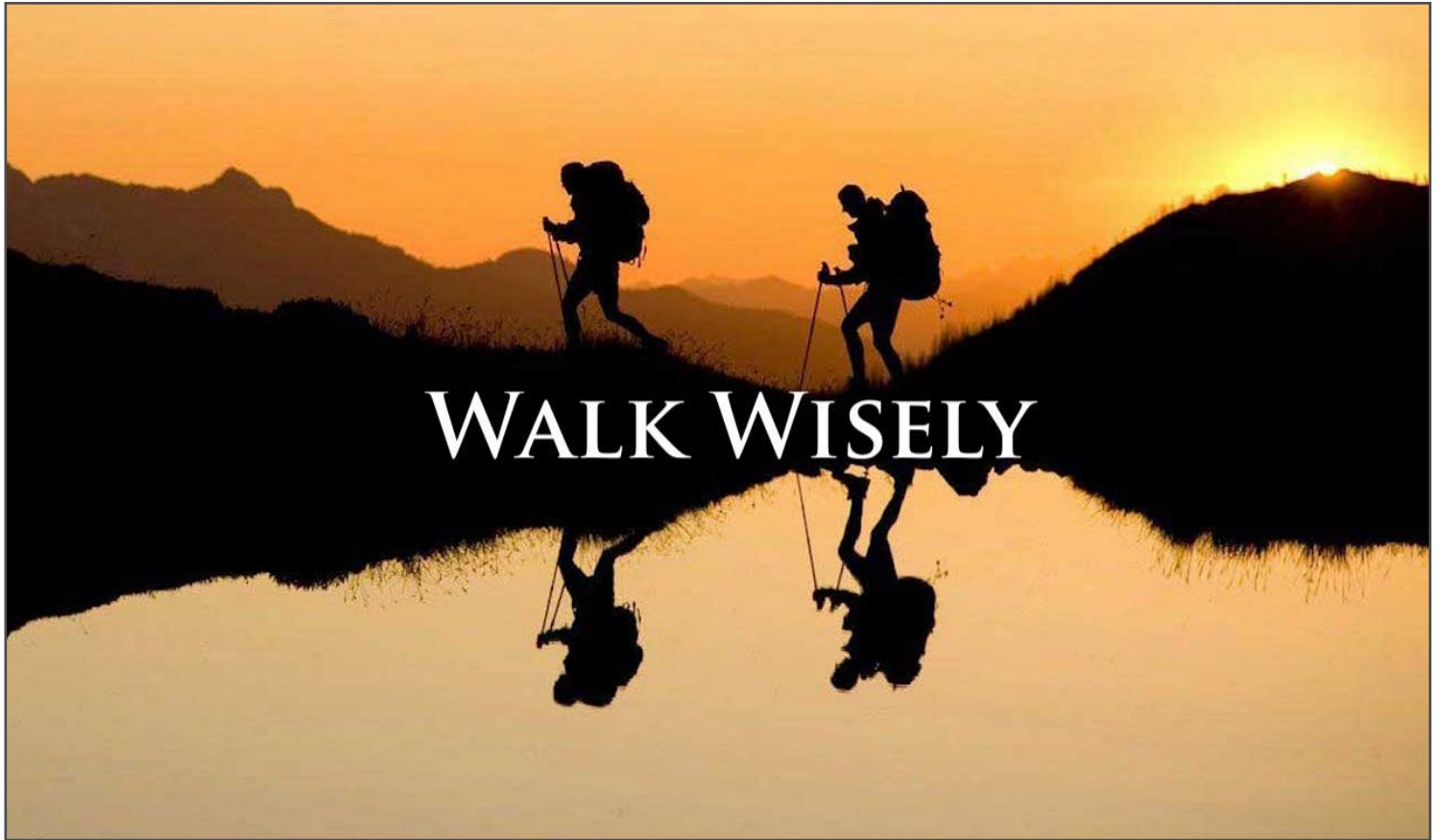
How should we use our speech to make a positive impact?

In what ways should we practice restraint and self-control in our speech? Why must we as a church still continue to speak against sin and point people to Scripture?

In what ways are you inconsistent in your speech? How have you asked the Lord to help guide and transform you?

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

*September 13, 2020*



*Conduct Yourself  
in Wisdom  
James 3:13-18*

Focal Verse:

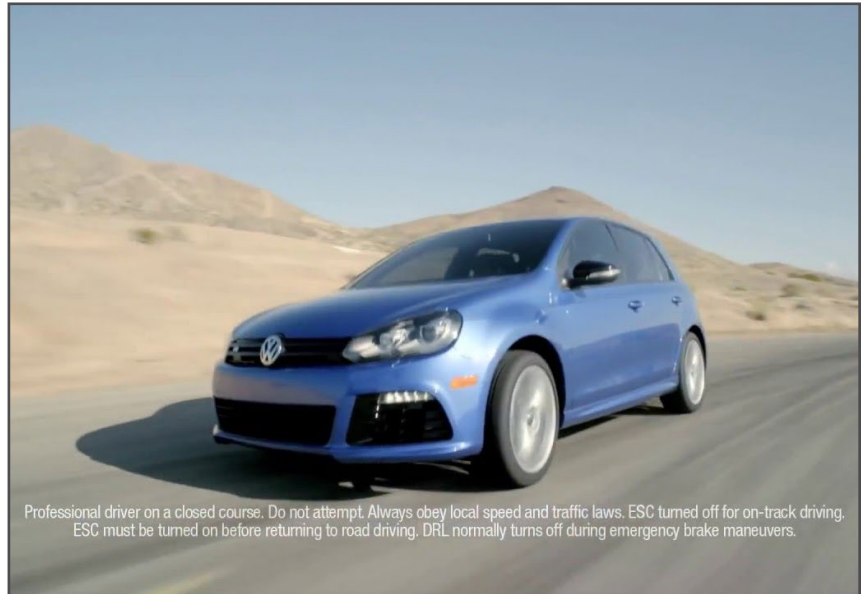
*"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom."*

James 3:13

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## Introduce

From time to time, we may inadvertently watch a commercial or be unable to skip it altogether on various media platforms that we frequent. Sometimes automakers advertise the features and durability of their vehicles by showing them doing extraordinary or even impossible things! On some commercials, these vehicles may traverse rocky, completely inaccessible mountain peaks or travel through the shifting sand of a barren desert with regular tires. Still, others will show the vehicle traveling at high rates of speed on a dangerously curvy road or performing other stunts in heavy traffic. I can even recall one that had a compact car climbing thousands of stairs in an ascent to a mountain-top shrine above low-lying clouds! At the end of the commercial, they excuse such unwise and unrealistic behavior by including the warning: "Professional Driver on a Closed Course. Do Not Attempt."



Besides commercials, sometimes television shows which depict people performing dangerous acts also have warnings urging their audiences not to imitate the behavior they see. Somewhere along the way someone blurred the line between reality and fantasy and imitated what they saw on television, so the producers of these shows have tried to cover all the legal bases against those who acted unwisely. Many in the world live in such fantasy and confusion that they can no longer distinguish the difference. They choose to act unwisely and conduct themselves in foolish ways that endanger not only their lives, but also the lives of those around them.

Wisdom that originates in the world often leads to poor decision-making. In the cases mentioned, people become envious of the fame and attention that others have received from doing these dangerous stunts, so they ignorantly try to replicate them without the training and safety protocol of the actual production. They simply don't think! Moreover, they also become self-absorbed and unaware of their surroundings and their own capabilities, thinking they can successfully do anything to which they set their minds. In the end, however, it results in failure and perhaps even in tragedy!

## Introduce

Earthly “wisdom” that does not come from the Lord is actually foolishness that ought not be replicated. By definition, foolishness is anything that omits God and leads to corruption ([Psalm 14:1](#))! Conversely, God’s wisdom leads to life through His Son who in turn transforms our conduct ([Prov 8:35](#)). Certainly, God warns us in Scripture about the things which we should not attempt or in which we ought not participate. However, He doesn’t just tell us what to do; He gives us a pattern or example to follow who embodies the life found in wisdom! Through Christ, we not only find life, but we can also know what a successful life looks like that pleases the Lord. Having already instructed us to seek wisdom from the Lord who gives it faithfully or generously ([Jas 1:5](#)), James once again reminds us that we ought to live by the wisdom which comes from the Lord. Therefore, let us conduct ourselves wisely by the wisdom which comes from Him.

Key  
Question

What does godly wisdom look like when applied in our lives?

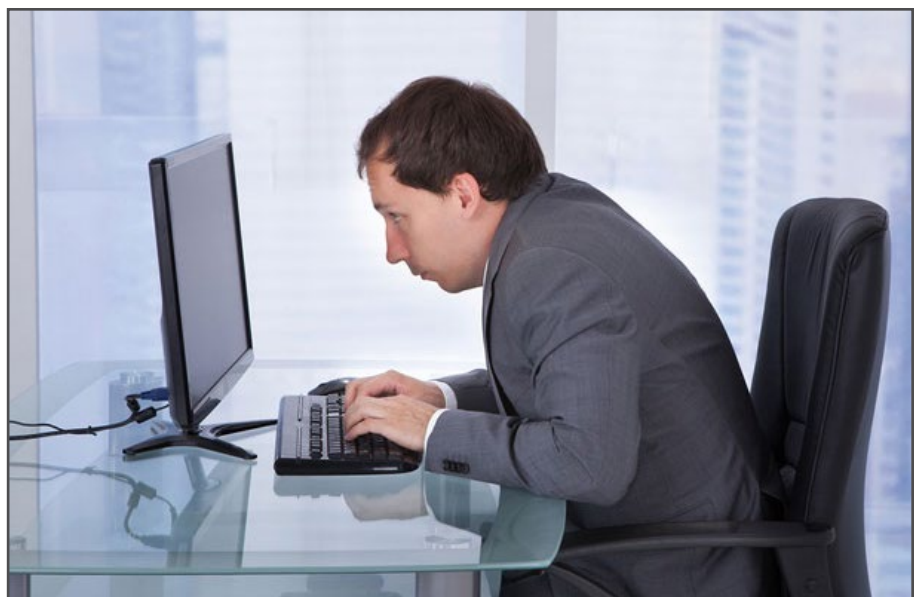


### James 3:13

#### ***WISDOM LEADS TO PROPER CONDUCT:***

Having addressed the need for solid teachers in the church who understand and communicate the principles of Scripture to propagate right belief that in turn will produce righteous speech ([Jas 3:1-12](#)), James asks a rhetorical question that once again links speech with conduct. He inquires, “**Who is wise and understanding among you**” (v. 13)? With this question, James isn’t trying to be facetious or sarcastic. He wants people to think about what truly makes one **wise** since the world inundates us with pseudo-wisdom that leads to wickedness and destruction. He quickly answers this question by pointing out that true wisdom becomes evident in **good conduct**. In other words, someone cannot simply claim that he has wisdom; he must **show** it! Knowledge (**understanding**) and wisdom without practical application are completely useless in the same way that “faith without works is useless” ([Jas 2:20](#)). Such “wisdom” has no value either to the one who claims to have it or to the Lord! At some point in our lives, we have likely encountered someone who claimed to be **wise**. From our own personal experience, we may have humbly offered them advice which we thought could help. But they refused! They insisted that they knew how to do it and could do it on their own. In the end, however, they failed miserably. Such behavior proves them unwise! Hopefully, we’re not that person, but parents, especially of teenagers, can probably identify with this predicament easily!

While attaining post-graduate degrees in seminary, I worked in the computer lab assisting people with basic computer questions and formatting issues. A middle-aged gentleman had some such difficulties and asked my co-worker for help. In the process, he became frustrated and decided he knew better. So, he brushed her hands away from the keyboard and promptly pressed a few buttons



## Instruct

that erased his document and saved a blank file. He became irate. Stepping in, I had to explain what he had done and remind him that his anger was misplaced. He was the one who had acted impatiently and unwisely. He had brought this upon himself; he had no one but himself to blame for his hasty actions. In failing to act wisely, it negatively affected his **conduct**.

How can impatience cause us to make unwise decisions? At what times have you made unwise decisions because you were impatient?

Question  
# 1

Wisdom which comes from God will always be reflected in our **good conduct** which imitates His righteousness. Although it would prove highly instructive to read all [Proverbs 2, verse 20](#) of that chapter summarizes the goal of wisdom which James advocates here: "So you may walk in the way of goodness and keep to the paths of righteousness." Godly wisdom keeps us from making bad and sinful decisions! Take a moment to review your life. We've all made bad decisions and we'll likely err again. Bad decisions all have one common denominator: we did not first seek the Lord. If we say that we trust Him and have surrendered to Him, shouldn't we seek to hear Him and live out what He has said? When we do our own thing apart from Him, we're essentially saying that we don't trust Him! We know better! This is the epitome of sin. A truly **wise** person seeks God first and conducts himself consistently with His Word. When we seek God's guidance, therefore, we'll always make the right choices in life.

Next, James reveals how we should apply wisdom effectively in our **conduct**. Literally,



James states that a person's **works are done in the humility of wisdom**. It's not so much that wisdom produces humility, but that those who have wisdom will exercise it humbly. A truly intelligent person, for example, won't go around telling others how smart they really are. They will let their actions and their outcomes speak for themselves. We live in

a time when many people think because they have a little knowledge in a few areas that it makes them an expert on everything. They then feel entitled to offer advice on everything! The Internet only exacerbates this problem. We have a vast source of information, but very few people know how to evaluate it and determine the validity and truthfulness of the source. Simply finding something that we want to hear or believe isn't **wise**. We must consider the source.

We must first understand what it means to be humble. The Greek word James uses can mean meekness or gentleness, but it more aptly means "the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance."\* We can further clarify the concept of humility as having a proper perspective about ourselves in terms of how God views us in Christ. Just as much as we must avoid arrogance and pride, we must also avoid false humility in which we think too lowly of ourselves. Many, not all, engage in this false sense of humility because they want attention. Our world attempts to overcompensate by building false self-esteem and heaping compliments upon people to lift their morale. Neither of these attitudes demonstrate true humility.

### ***In Reference***



See Frederick William Danker, ed. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 861.

What does Christ-like humility look like in our lives when applying wisdom?

Question  
# 2

True humility, when applied to wisdom, helps us to identify our limitations and know when we must ask for help. In addition, it will also direct us to the right source for that help—Scripture. We will then critique our lives based on God's standard which helps us see what we're doing right as well as determine where we need to improve. Rather than foolishly think we're **wise** in our own estimation, we must learn to listen so that we don't fail! We must learn to seek advice from the One who truly knows and can supply us with the wisdom we need to make the right choices in life. Proverbs 3:7 captures this idea exactly: "Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil." A truly wise person filters everything through the lenses of Scripture rather than venturing on his own.

Second, truly **wise** people don't offer advice from their own limited perspective; they direct people to God's Word. **Wise** people realize that they do not have infinite

knowledge, cannot fully know the context of a particular situation, or the ability to foresee events that may occur. But God does! Therefore, His instruction is always perfect! Before we can help others, we must first be in right standing with Christ ourselves and maturing daily in our own walk with Him ([Matt 7:3-5](#); [Gal 6:1](#)). Only then will we have the right attitude whereby we can humbly point others to Christ. Through Scripture and

the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God gives the **wise** discernment on when, how, and what kind of advice to offer that will spur others to maturity in their faith. When we humbly submit to the Lord, He will continue teaching us all things and helping us to recall His Word which we must actively apply in our own lives while at the same time encouraging others to live by it in theirs ([John 14:26](#)).

Today, people freely give advice—much of it even unsolicited. Generally, it amounts to nothing more than their opinion. They have been taught to discount God and express their opinions based upon their personal experiences and emotions. Such advice is highly subjective and egocentric, frequently ending in frustration, disappointment, and more problems. We must exercise extreme caution in following advice in which someone advocates, “If I were you, I would do this.” Instead, listen to the wisdom of those who have sought the Lord and have knowledge from Scripture. They will say, “God says *this* in His Word which we can apply to our lives.” For this reason, James now turns to the dangers of following advice and worldly “wisdom” which does not come from the Lord.

At what times in your life have you received bad advice? How does this compare to times in which you received godly counsel?

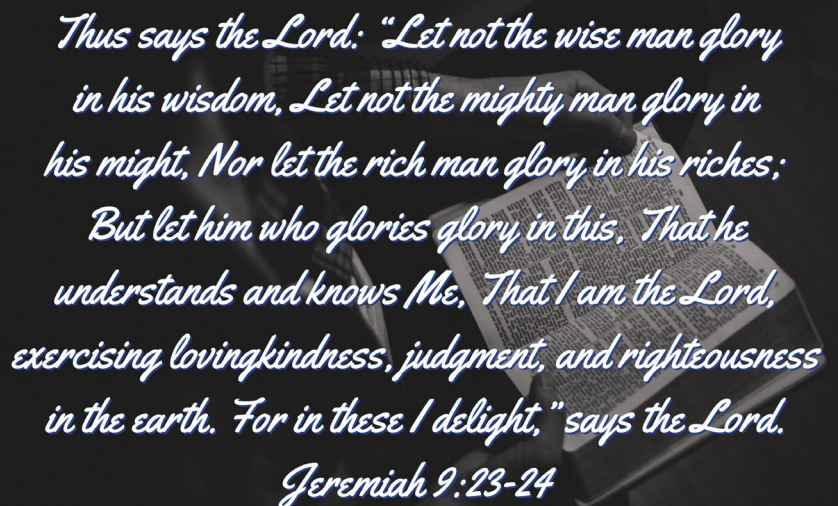
Question  
# 3

**EARTHLY THINKING LEADS TO CONFUSION:**

James now contrasts godly wisdom exercised in humility with the negative effects of worldly “wisdom” exercised in arrogance that leads to chaos and **confusion**. If we harbor **bitter envy** and **self-seeking in our hearts**, we should **not boast** that we have true wisdom (v. 14). Instead, when we practice such things, we actually **lie against the truth**. In other words, our “wisdom” is exposed for what it is: hypocritical and worldly. This “wisdom” does not come from the Lord (literally **descend from above**), but rather it is **earthly, sensual, and demonic** (v. 15). To understand how such pseudo-wisdom leads to **confusion**, we must look inwardly at our attitudes and motives which fundamentally determine the way we act.

The word translated **envy** comes from the Greek word “zeal.” In fact, we get our English equivalent zeal or zealot from this word. Although it can mean **envy** or jealousy, the entire phrase **bitter**, or harsh, zeal points to a person who forcefully wishes to impose his will, beliefs, personal preferences, or opinions on others. The danger in such an attitude becomes the denial of absolute truth and the promotion of a personal agenda. Everything then becomes subjective and dependent upon the individual. Therefore, they will accept no differences in opinion; others must fully adopt and practice their specific belief—not just accept it or agree with it. No room for any differences exists; they want carbon copies of themselves: “It’s my way or the highway.” Even so, they would still find disagreement with others who seemingly agree with them in totality! Sound familiar?

We live in a fractured and chaotic world. The acceptance of pseudo-wisdom has become more prevalent as people have turned from the Lord, rejected absolute truth which produces righteousness, and have turned inwardly to placate their own desires. No longer can many people have a meaningful dialogue that can truly impact and transform our society because they have a personal agenda which they want to force



*Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the Lord.*

*Jeremiah 9:23-24*

## Instruct

upon others. They may couch it as free and transforming, but ultimately it boils down to power and control. They don't make **wise** decisions based upon wisdom which comes from the Lord. They simply want the power to make decisions which benefit themselves—the epitome of **self-seeking!**

If we don't turn to the absolute truth found in Scripture, we have no universal standard which we can use to evaluate our decisions. Every opinion, practice, and belief become valid regardless of their morality and ethicalness which ultimately devolves into complete lawlessness because people will do as they please ([Judg 17:6](#)). Everyone then believes that he has the authority to determine what is right and wrong and the ability to issue judgment and enact retribution against those who "offend" them or even simply hold a differing view. This emboldens people to take drastic measures to get others to agree and support them even if that means violence and coercion in the name of peace and stability. In the end, this creates utter **confusion** in society because mankind's inclinations are naturally bent toward sin and selfishness (v. 16). Therefore, we need one universal standard apart from man's opinion which never changes nor issues arbitrary judgment: the Bible ([Heb 4:12](#)).

How does the rejection of absolute truth lead to chaos and confusion in society?

Question  
# 4

When we look to God for wisdom, we will find actual truth—not the way that we perceive the world through our own corrupted fleshly understanding. We will see things the way they really are! Wisdom which comes from the Lord then helps us to

**HEBREWS 4:12**

**FOR THE WORD OF GOD IS LIVING AND POWERFUL, AND SHARPER THAN ANY TWO-EDGED SWORD, PIERCING EVEN TO THE DIVISION OF SOUL AND SPIRIT, AND OF JOINTS AND MARROW, AND IS A DISCERNER OF THE THOUGHTS AND INTENTS OF THE HEART.**



value His creation and be good stewards of it—especially other people created in His image. We will look not to our own selfish needs, but for a way to impact the world which delights the Lord and upholds His righteous character. We will focus on communicating the truth of the gospel which

alone can save and transform. We won't worry about proving ourselves "right" in the

eyes of the world to justify our fleshly actions; we will concern ourselves with being in right standing with the Lord and doing what is right in His eyes. Therefore, we can stand adamantly on Scripture without compromise because it comes from the Lord and not man; it's not subjective and ever-changing. It is absolute truth which is consistent for all time.

How must we use Scripture to help us overcome such zealousness and self-seeking to engage in a meaningful dialogue that produces permanent change?

Question  
# 5

Our wisdom and understanding either come **from** the Lord **above** or from the **demonic** powers which characterize this world (v. 15). No middle ground exists. Any "wisdom" which does not come from the Lord, no matter how "good" and "pure" it may seem in the eyes of the world, is controlled by the evil inclinations of our hearts. The wisdom which **does not descend from above is earthly**, unspiritual, and **demonic**. The word translated **sensual** by the NKJV comes from the word "soul." A better translation would be unspiritual in this case. The Bible clearly describes the dichotomy between the flesh and the Spirit which is what James wishes to underscore here. In other words, we cannot be Spirit-filled and living according to the flesh at the same time ([Rom 8:5-8](#)). If we surrender control to the Spirit, He will produce within us **good conduct** or works consistent with the nature and character of the Lord! Therefore, we cannot say that we have wisdom and do things which conflict with God's Word.

### **James 3:17-18**

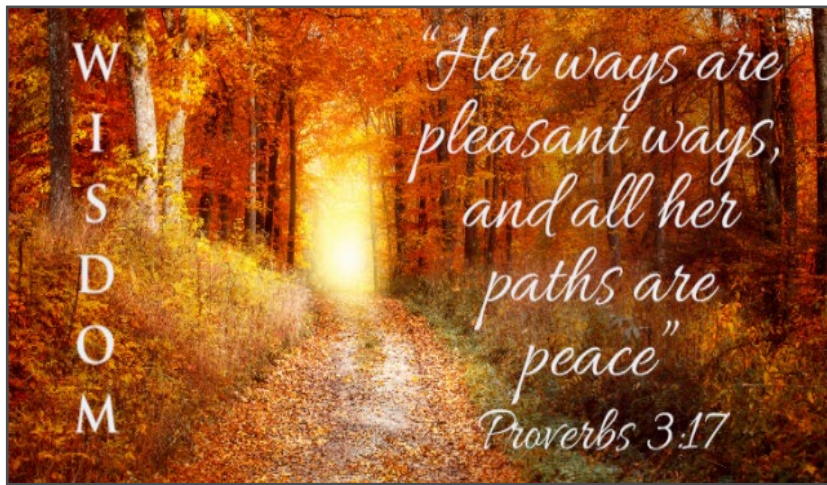
#### **WISDOM FROM GOD LEADS TO PERMANENT CHANGE:**

Having shown that worldly "wisdom" produces corruption and **confusion**, James now endeavors to show the **good conduct** that **wisdom** from the Lord produces. In contrast to the pseudo-wisdom of man, godly **wisdom** produces a whole host of positive benefits and qualities. His **wisdom is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and hypocrisy** (v. 17). Largely, the qualities that godly **wisdom** produces fall into three main categories: what we do, how we respond, and how we view others.

First, James explains how **wisdom from above** transforms what we do. Those who are truly wise will act within the moral and ethical bounds which God has established in Scripture and written on our hearts. The quality of purity then stands in stark

## Instruct

contrast to the **bitter envy** and **self-seeking** of the world. The world tells us to “be



true to yourself.” In reality, this only seeks to excuse bad behavior and poor choices. The world, however, regards it as self-expressive and freeing because such an attitude doesn’t care what others may think; they believe people can choose their own destiny free from remorse and regret and do whatever they may

desire. This attitude is self-seeking and should not be emulated! We should care what others think, especially the Lord. We ought to weigh our decisions based upon what He desires us to do rather than selfishly doing whatever we want which often does not reflect **pure** motives that honor Christ.

With this idea of purity, James also pairs it to our need to live righteously with consistency. In verse 18, he notes how wisdom produces **the fruit of righteousness sown in peace by those who make peace**. In other words, God’s righteous character becomes evident in our lives by what we do. Thus, the Spirit produces within us **good fruits** and **good conduct** which is not optional for a believer but a way of life ([Gal 5:22-23](#)). Therefore, the wise will always exercise integrity in everything they do. By definition, to live with integrity means to act consistently **without hypocrisy**. We live the same way whether we think someone is watching or not—and in our age of technology someone always has the means of seeing and knowing what we do—especially God who can see the heart. So, let’s make sure we are **pure** in heart, allowing Him to mold us continually into His image.

How would you evaluate your consistency in living righteously and purely for the Lord? In what areas might you need more consistency?

Question  
# 6

Second, wisdom from the Lord changes the way that we respond. Whereas the world has a selfish perspective that causes strife when they don’t get their way, the wise in Christ will live peaceably (v. 17). They will not engage in unnecessary and fruitless arguments about things that don’t truly matter—namely their preferences and



opinions. This, however, doesn't mean that we ignore sin and compromise our stance on the truth of God's Word. On the contrary, we will point people to the gospel and the things that matter in life rather than our personal preferences. Jesus did! He didn't compromise the truth and back down from challenging the incorrect beliefs of others by revealing the truth found in Scripture. Yet, He tells us, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" ([Matt 5:9](#)). The wise, therefore focus on what truly matters!

Two other words James uses in this list also communicate how wisdom changes the way we respond. We should be **gentle** or considerate in our response. The word translated **gentle** can mean kind, but, even more appropriate in this context, it means courteous or considerate. Considerate people think about what affect their words and actions have upon others! Even when we attempt to communicate the truth of the Scripture, we must choose our words wisely as led by the Spirit in a way that encourages and promotes the truth rather than drives people away. In addition, James also indicates that we ought to **be willing to yield**. This is somewhat difficult to capture in English. Literally, it means compliant or obedient. In this current context, it means that we should lay aside our preferences for the sake of communicating the gospel. It does not mean that we should compromise doctrine or theology! We should never compromise the truth. But we should never quarrel over things that have no eternal value.

In what ways should we be considerate when we speak the truth found in Scripture?

Question  
# 7

In everything, we ought to respond with **mercy** just as Christ has displayed great **mercy** toward us. Showing **mercy** helps keep us humble because if we realize that it weren't for Christ we would find ourselves in the same hopeless situation. We should never condone or enable sin. But **mercy** compels us to show compassion in a way that can truly help—that is to point others to Christ who can save and make one wise! When we respond with **mercy**, it also changes the way we view others. We will not show partiality. James has already discussed this at length in [chapter 2](#). Here, we must only remind ourselves that true wisdom doesn't see people based upon their physical appearance or situation, but it sees people as God sees them. It values them as His creation whom He has created in His image even though they have gone astray. Therefore, we should respect and value all people by communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations wherever we might have the opportunity to go.

We live in a world that sees itself as wise, educated, and cultured. But the total sum of man's "wisdom" is foolishness when compared to God. In fact, Scripture teaches that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" ([1 Cor 3:19](#)). We don't have to look very far to see how foolish man's "wisdom" truly is. The world around us is confused at every turn which has led to utter chaos because everyone attempts to define what is right according to his own eyes! People selfishly push their own agendas which counter and contradict God's plan in Scripture. Because of such self-centeredness, bickering, intolerance, and violence characterizes our world—and has characterized our world from the moment man first sinned!

To overcome these problems which have long since plagued the world, we need wisdom that can permanently transform. We need wisdom that can penetrate to the root of the problem rather than simply mask the symptoms; wisdom which can fix the heart and cure us of sin and selfishness. Only one source offers wisdom which can accomplish all this. True wisdom leads to life because it points to Christ who can transform our whole lives. His wisdom changes the way we conduct ourselves and eliminates any confusion and conflict that we may have because it restores us to the original creation God designed us to be as we walk with Him. Therefore, let us not regard ourselves as wise if we don't seek the wisdom which comes from above—true wisdom which comes from the Lord alone!

## ***Incorporate***

How has godly wisdom impacted and transformed your life? In what areas might you not have fully applied His wisdom in your life?

In what ways does worldly “wisdom” deceive, confound, and confuse people? How can we as a church promote understanding and order?

How has wisdom changed what you do, how you respond to circumstances in life and other people, and how you view other people? If you cannot list any tangible evidence, from where might your “wisdom” come?

*September 20, 2020*



# *Commit Yourself to the Lord*

## *James 4:1-6*

Focal Verse:

“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

James 4:4

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## Introduce

As a society, we tend to label things in a way that we think accurately characterizes or defines them. We even put labels on our relationships whether in friendships, marriage, or among different family members. Some labels may perfectly summarize the dynamic whereas others may actually be misleading or even deceptive. For instance, we all probably have some concept of what a “high maintenance” relationship entails. Even reading these words, we may have had an individual come to mind whom we’d designate as



“high maintenance!” Although our definition of this type of relationship may differ slightly, it will likely generally follow a similar pattern.

Our description of such a person may go something like this: “High-maintenance” individuals crave attention and attempt to demand it by monopolizing the time of others. They focus on having their needs met in a relationship and rarely spend time thinking about the needs of others or the effect that their persistent neediness may have on those who care for them the most. Even less, do they spend time thinking about how they can contribute to a relationship. They function like a sponge. They soak up everything that another person is willing to direct their way! Such attitudes strain relationships, causing strife, dysfunction, and sometimes even resentment. Moreover, “high-maintenance” people want everything to revolve around them. We might even call them jealous. They want to be the center of every conversation, they want to know everyone else’s business, and they want others to base their decisions on what they enjoy and what they want to do. When they don’t get their way, they become disgruntled. They will complain and campaign until they get what they want. This causes strife not only in a relationship directly between two individuals, but also with others in their sphere of influence. Largely, most people will view such “high-maintenance” relationships negatively and most likely even avoid them altogether. The Bible does indeed address these kinds of “high-maintenance” relationships! It bluntly identifies them for what they truly are: self-centered! In large part, the world

## Introduce

desires relationships that revolve around them and they selfishly view others in terms of what they can get. God, however, desires that we have a meaningful relationship with Him through which He can restore all our human relationships so that they function properly with the right perspective. In [4:1-6](#), James focuses on these two kinds of relationships. He demonstrates how a relationship with the world is incompatible with a relationship with the Lord. He asserts, “Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” ([Jas 4:4](#)). When we have a relationship with God through Christ, our relationships will be characterized by righteousness and grace rather than conflict, pride, pleasure, jealousy, and iniquity. Let us commit ourselves to the Lord rather than find camaraderie with the world!

Key  
Question

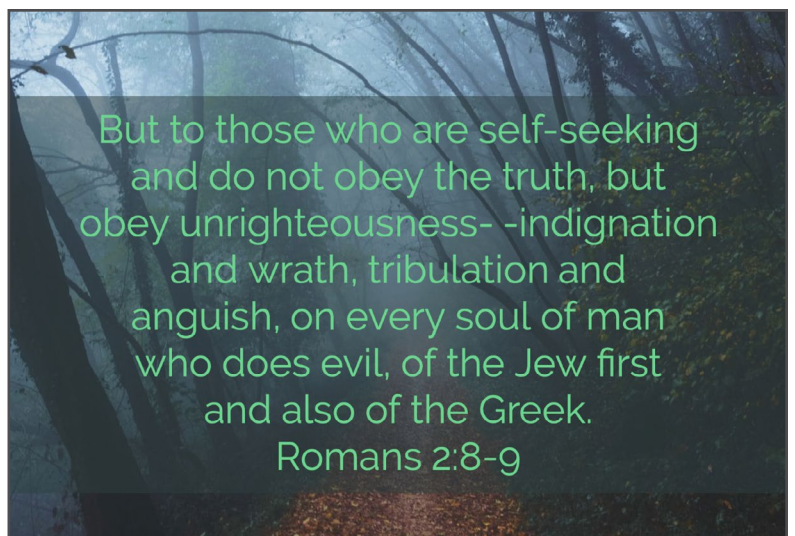
How would you evaluate your relationship with the Lord and then with others?

### RECOGNIZE THE SOURCE OF STRIFE:

Although we begin a new chapter in our modern division of this letter, James continues to address a lack of wisdom by showing its devastating effects upon the church. He ended the previous chapter by reminding us that wisdom from the Lord produces righteousness “sown in peace by those who make peace” (3:18). Now, we find ourselves at war because some in the church to which James wrote did not practice wisdom that came from the Lord. Instead, they took their cue from the foolish and flawed pattern found in this world. This prompts James to pose two questions: “**Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members**” (v. 1)? Through these two questions, the “bitter envy” and “self-seeking” of worldly wisdom become evident (Jas 3:14)! People in the church are arguing vehemently over personal preferences and things that don’t matter!

James doesn’t address the content or nature of their arguments in these questions which most likely indicates that they were not centered upon theology or doctrine, for he would have surely taken time to correct these errors specifically. In contrast, they seem to center on personal preferences and opinion—that is people trying to get their own way in the congregation.

In the first question, James paints a dire picture of the situation. Believers who should be living harmoniously and peacefully in Christ are at war with one another! The first term translated **wars** usually refers to physical battles whereas the latter term **fights** refers



to verbal quarrels, disputes, and strife. We can’t rule out the possibility of physical violence if one doesn’t seek wisdom and restraint from the Lord. However, it seems most likely that they were having a war of words—intense arguments that destroyed unity and hindered fellowship within the body.

How can a lack of godly wisdom cause arguments in the church?

Question  
# 1

## Instruct

The second question in verse 1 identifies the reason for these **wars and fights** among them. They result from their self-centered desire **for pleasure** that rages out of control within them—literally at **war in** their **members** or bodies. We get our modern term hedonist from the Greek word for **pleasure** used here. By definition, a hedonist lacks self-control and indulges freely in unrestrained desire and **pleasure** usually without shame and remorse. Although the term has become primarily associated with sexual immorality, it actually includes participating in anything unrighteous and unholy that relegates the Lord to a secondary role in our lives (idolatry). Most of us wouldn't consider ourselves pleasure-seekers who have no shame and no boundaries. Yet, any pursuit of **pleasure** that overshadows the pursuit of the Lord is hedonistic—including things which in and of themselves are not inherently sinful. Recreation and sports, our families and other relationships, our jobs, our hobbies, and any other activity which has the potential to distract us in our relationship with Christ can fall into this category! Several years ago, I watched a program on television which sought to measure the effects of distracted driving. Through the use of a driving simulator, they first asked participants to concentrate solely upon driving to obtain a base-line measure. Then, they presented them with several types of distractions—changing radio stations,



engaging in conversations with others inside the vehicle, and using multiple functions on cell phones. To us, these things may seem harmless, but they are actually self-indulgent! They are self-indulgent and self-centered because we get so wrapped up in what we're doing that we don't think about the consequences of our actions or the needs of others. When distracted, these people veered off course, ran over curbs, smashed into mailboxes, and even hit other motorists and pedestrians!

Before the test, most drivers expressed confidence in their ability to operate the simulator safely even when doing these other menial activities. But they soon realized that they couldn't do both! Even one distraction led to a whole host of poor decisions! We cannot fool ourselves into thinking that we can pursue other priorities and pleasures in our lives and still express allegiance to the Lord. These distractions



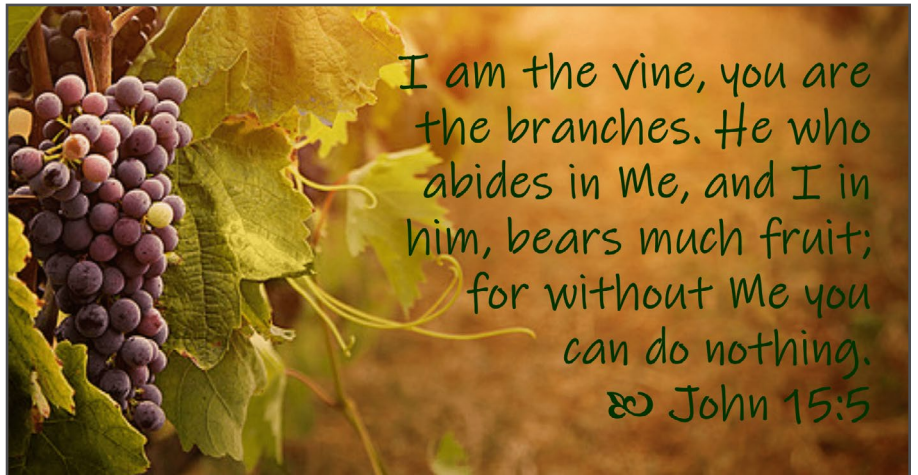
will eventually consume us and affect every area of our lives. We will veer off course—perhaps slowly at first—and become more self-indulgent, self-centered, and unaware of the true course of our lives. Our own desires will take center stage and we will find ourselves in competition with others to get our way. This will lead to dysfunction, disunity, destroyed relationships, strife, and quarrels.

We must be cognizant of the spiritual **war** we face in our bodies caused by our overwhelming fleshly desires and passions. We can't possibly win a **war** that we don't even know we're fighting, however. We must be honest with ourselves and seek an honest evaluation from the Lord which we must then take to heart! Like James, Peter also reminds us about this **war**: "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which *war* against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11). When we take our eyes off Christ and are distracted by the pursuit of worldly **pleasure**, we won't see the attacks that the enemy hurls at us (temptation) and we won't realize the selfishness of our choices because we will only see the imperfections of the world instead of the perfect righteousness of Christ!

What distractions have the most potential to cause you to take your eyes off Christ? What must you do to overcome these distractions?

Question  
# 2

How can we overcome distractions that cause us to lose focus on Christ and become self-centered in our earthly pursuits? Paul gives us the prescription for winning such a **war**. He implores us, "Do not present your *members* as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your *members* as instruments of righteousness to God" ([Rom 6:13](#)). We have no excuse for being caught off



guard in this battle. We've been clearly warned! To avoid distractions and becoming self-centered, we must remain connected and committed to Christ ([John 15:1-8](#)). We must intentionally pursue wisdom from the Lord and not foolishly believe we are wise in our own eyes. When we humbly submit ourselves to His will and follow His plan for our lives, we will be able to relate with one another with the right perspective. We will

## Instruct

no longer pursue our wants and desires, but we will pursue pleasing the Lord in all we do!

### James 4:2-4

#### **RELATE FAITHFULLY TO THE SAVIOR:**

Without wisdom from the Lord that keeps us grounded in righteousness, our lives become a complete mess. Sin dominates and struggles abound. James introduces a litany of charges against the church. Instead of finding joy, contentment, and peace in the righteous will of the Lord, they **lust and do not have**, they **murder and covet and cannot obtain**, they also **fight and war** with each other (v. 2). If we did not know that James was writing to those who profess to follow Christ, we would say that this sounds like anyone in the world who does not have a relationship with Him. We would liken this description to one of the most crime-ridden and lawless places in the world! Such behavior should never occur among those of us who have a relationship with Christ. But, unfortunately, it frequently does because we have the propensity to become self-centered in the flesh! We can permanently overcome such sin and selfishness in Christ. We don't have to resign ourselves to defeat in succumbing to the flesh. But it does require intentional effort on our part to seek Christ and remain focused on Him!

How different does your life look from the world around you? How clearly visible is this difference to others?

Question  
# 3

James begins his list of charges with that of **lust**. Although we often identify **lust** with



sexually impure thoughts, it has a much broader meaning in the New Testament. Certainly, we can **lust** in our hearts and minds over another person. Jesus even uses this same term when He teaches that someone who lusts over another commits adultery ([Matt 5:28](#)). But James doesn't relegate it to only that meaning here. To **lust** in this context means to desire to engage

in unrighteousness and evil according to the pattern of this world. In [1 Corinthians 10:6](#), Paul uses this same word when he writes, “We should not lust after the evil things as they lusted.” We can also translate **lust** as covet which covers a number of things in which we can have misplaced desire ([Rom 7:7; 13:9](#)). We can **lust** for power, position, and prestige. We can **lust** for wealth and physical possessions ([Acts 20:33](#)). We can even lust for knowledge and wisdom to make us look good in the eyes of the world. Anything which draws our attention away from the Lord and misplaces it upon earthly, imperfect, and impermanent objects constitutes lust!

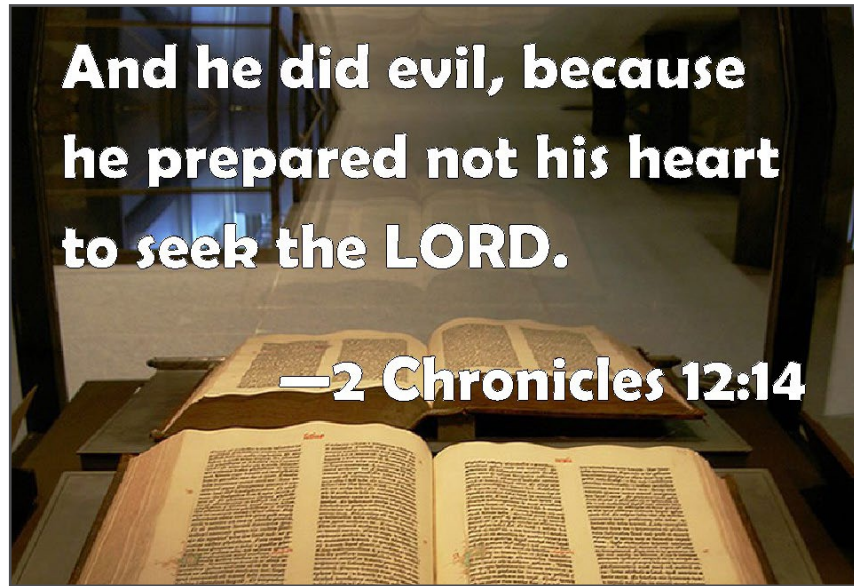
Next, James indicates that they **murder** or kill which is inevitable in a **war** or **fight**. Unrestrained passion when one becomes angered that he didn’t get his way could lead to violence. And it has happened often since Cain killed Abel. However, it is best to see James as repeating Jesus’ teaching in which He figuratively equates being “angry with [one’s] brother without cause” as tantamount to **murder** ([Matt 5:22](#)). John in his first letter even expands upon this very idea when he says that one who hates is also guilty of **murder** ([1 John 3:15](#)). Self-centeredness leads to a whole slew of negative emotions which cause dysfunction in our relationships. Figuratively, it often kills them! Fortunately, Christ offers restoration and healing if only we would humble ourselves to Him and ask for forgiveness and be willing to forgive one another. To achieve such restoration, we need to seek Christ and adopt His worldview which exudes *selflessness* rather than *selfishness*.

How does self-centeredness kill our relationships? What steps can we take to repair a dysfunctional relationship where either we or someone else has exhibited selfishness?

Question  
# 4

James pairs a word translated by the NKJV as **covet** with murder to reinforce how self-centered and destructive their relationships have become. This verb comes from the same word in [James 3:14](#) translated there as “envy.” Recall from our study last week that this is the Greek word from where we get our term “zeal.” They had misplaced “zeal.” They wanted desperately to impose their will upon others. When they couldn’t get their way (i.e. they **do not have** and **cannot obtain**), they threw tantrums which led to **wars** and **fight**s among them. Despite whatever means they chose to use in an attempt to get their way, they never sought the will of the Lord and became further frustrated when they resorted to using sinful tactics to promote their agenda. Unfortunately, this paints an accurate, albeit unflattering, picture of the church even

today. Many people selfishly place their desires and agenda above the Lord. When they don't get their way, they throw a fit. Most will end up frustrated and angry. They



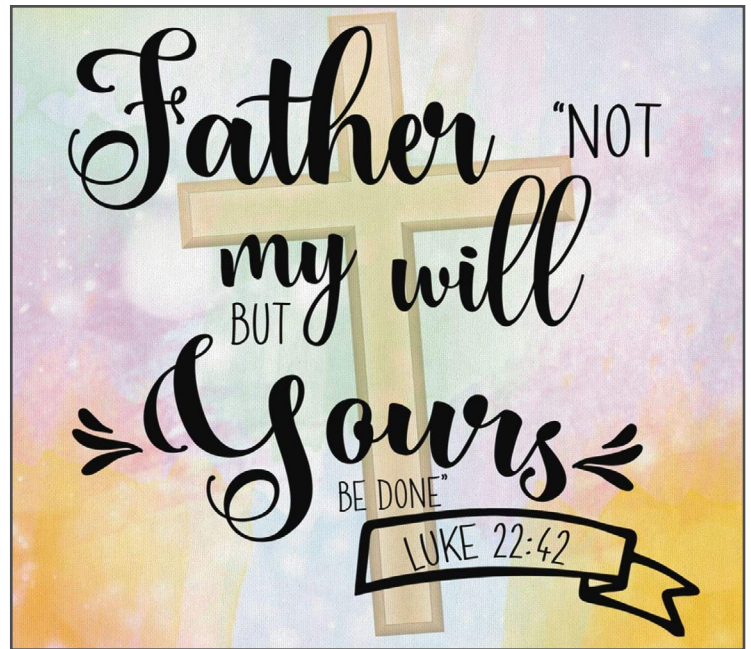
usually leave the church. When they do, they leave a trail of destruction in broken relationships, hurt feelings, and a damaged testimony that is hypocritical in the eyes of the world. We don't need to mention any examples here because it's all too prevalent in the church. We've probably all seen this in some form or fashion. And hopefully we haven't been the

cause. We should never act like the world and throw tantrums. Instead, we should seek the will of the Lord and the common good of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ so that we can grow together and inspire others to come to faith in Him.

Because their selfishness and self-centeredness cause dysfunction and fights within the community, James criticizes their approach to prayer. They **do not have because they do not ask** (v. 2). Jesus also teaches, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be open to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matt 7:7-8). Neither Jesus nor James advocates that we can receive whatever we want if only we pray hard enough and have enough faith! This is a selfish approach to prayer! Jesus instructs us not only to **ask**, but also to seek. Seek what though? We must seek God's will. James makes this clear when he reveals their selfish motives in prayer: they **ask and do not receive because they ask amiss** to have their **pleasure** placated (v. 3). To state it plainly, they prayed for their own selfish desires rather than according to God's will.

Any prayer which does not seek God's will first and elevates our own desires—however noble they may seem in our eyes—is selfish and misdirected. This includes health for ourselves and others, prosperity through either wealth or possessions, success in life as we define success, an end to suffering or persecution rather than patience and endurance, or any number of things that pushes our personal desires above the will of the Lord. God never promised to give us whatever we want even if it doesn't match

His will for our lives; He has promised to give us what we need and what's best for us according to His divine plan. For example, God did not spare Elisha from suffering sickness and eventually death ([2 Kings 13:14](#)), He did not rescue Stephen from being killed at the hands of religious zealots ([Acts 7:57-60](#)), He never removed the thorn in Paul's flesh ([2 Cor 12:7-10](#)), and He did not spare His own Son from suffering tremendous torture and dying upon the cross ([Luke 22:42](#)).



How is failing to pray according to God's will ultimately selfish even if we pray for others or what we consider noble aspirations in our own lives?

Question  
# 5

Too many people paint God into a corner because they have not understood His will and purpose. They then misapply His Word for their own selfish ambitions and purposes even though they may not realize it. When God doesn't answer their prayers in the way they want or even claim He will, it looks like He has failed in the eyes of the world! Moreover, people become distraught and discouraged; they blame this perceived lack of response on a whole host of other factors rather than the one true reason: their own selfishness. They did not "delight in the Lord," but still sought the desires of their own hearts apart from His perfect plan and will ([Psalm 37:4](#))! We must seek God's will in everything! He can be glorified whether in life's troubles or triumphs when we surrender to His will. When we do, others will see God working in and through us despite whatever circumstances we may face. But this requires that we **ask** and seek according to His will rather than **ask** and seek according to our personal **pleasure**.

How would you evaluate your prayer life? How unselfish would you say that it truly is?

Question  
# 6

With such disarray and dysfunction in the church, James castigates them as **adulterers and adulteresses** (v. 4). He borrows from the Old Testament tradition which identifies

## Instruct

idolatry and unfaithfulness to the Lord with unfaithfulness or adultery in marriage. In Jeremiah 3:20, the Lord asserts, “Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel!” A flirtatious word or glance, an illicit thought, or even an outright immoral encounter all constitutes unfaithfulness. Unfaithfulness in even one area means unfaithfulness in all. This is the danger of flirting with the **world** and why James warns that **whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God**. Usually, however, things escalate; they don’t end with just one glance, just one thought, or just one encounter. They begin to affect every area of our lives and all our relationships.

Think of how influential our friends can be. No matter how strong we think we may be, peer pressure greatly influences the way we behave. In many ways, we imitate those with whom we have a close association and with whom we hang out the most. We talk like they do; we dress like they do; we pick up their same mannerisms and habits;



we go to the same places they go; we find ourselves doing the same things that they do. We may think that we’re making these choices as an individual, but we’re merely following the crowd! However, we cannot merely follow the crowd and go with God! Either we are a **friend** of the Lord and His child or we are friends **of the world** and His **enemy**. No middle ground

exists. We cannot be both a **friend of the world** and the Lord at the same time—just like both blessings and cursing should not pour out of the same mouth ([Jas 3:9-10](#)).

In what ways does friendship with the world distract us in our relationship with the Lord?

Question  
# 7

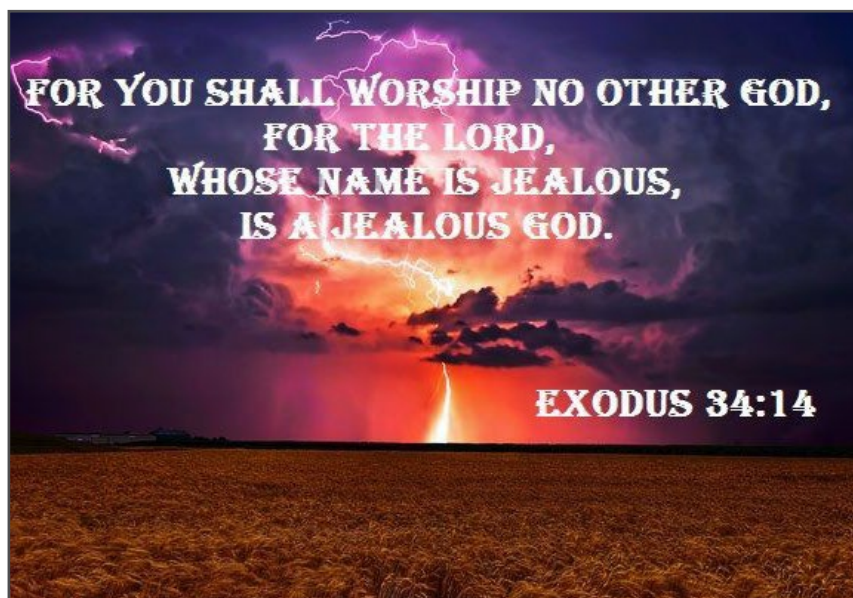
## James 4:5-6

### RESIST THE URGE TO BE SELF-RELIANT:

James closes this section with an appeal that we rely upon the Lord and serve Him

alone. We must resist the urge to be self-reliant which leads us down a path of self-destruction and friendship with the world. James reports that **Scripture** states “**the Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously**” (v. 5). But no **Scripture** records exactly these words. This makes it difficult to know how this verse relates to the previous content. Certainly, **jealousy** amongst humans creates all kinds of strife and fights; self-centeredness and, by extension **jealousy**, is the root of the quarrels in this passage. Thus, the “spirit” yearning **jealously** would have a negative and sinful connotation which we should not emulate. Yet, **Scripture** doesn’t typically refer to the human spirit as that which **dwells in us**. It does, however, refer to the Holy Spirit as the One who indwells us ([Rom 8:11](#); [1 Cor 3:16](#); [2 Tim 1:14](#)).

Numerous times **Scripture** does describe God as jealous—not in human terms as One who is envious of others but One who is unique and unequalled. In [Exodus 20:5](#), God demands that we “not bow down to” other gods “or serve them” because He is “a jealous God.” Through this, God declares His uniqueness; He is not envious of other gods because there are no other gods. He wants His people to serve and worship Him alone—not the false gods of this world, including the god of “self” which elevates our desires and wants above His. [Deuteronomy 32:21](#)



captures this meaning: “They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not god. They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols.”

In those of us who have a relationship with Him, God has sent His Spirit to connect them intimately with Him. His Spirit points us toward Him and steers us away from worldliness when we surrender ourselves completely. In this sense, He helps us resist self-reliance and worldliness and to relate faithfully to the Father. We will no longer be **friends** with **the world** and unfaithful in our relationship with the Lord when we follow His Spirit’s guidance.

Furthermore, God’s **grace** connects us with Him in Christ and helps us to overcome our own selfishness (v. 6). For this reason, James quotes Proverbs 3:34: “**God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.**” The source of our sin and problems boils

## Instruct

down to selfishness. When we understand what God did for us through the gracious sacrifice of His Son, it should humble us and completely change our perspective. Just as Jesus put His own needs aside to die for us upon the cross, we ought to put our own needs aside to seek what the Father desires of us! When we seek what He desires, we will love others unconditionally in Christ. Our preferences and opinions won't matter anymore. Instead, we'll focus on worshiping and serving the Lord alone which will lead us to communicate the truth of the gospel and point others to Him in everything we do.

In what areas do you express self-reliance? How does this affect your relationship with the Lord? Why should we rely upon Him for everything?

Question  
# 8

We must learn to relate to the Lord faithfully in all we do. This doesn't come naturally for us even as believers because the pattern and perspective of the world is engrained in us. Yet, infidelity isn't impossible to overcome when we rely upon the Holy Spirit. We can't place our lives on cruise control, however, and expect to be faithful. We must humbly and intentionally submit to the Spirit daily. When we do, we will not engage in petty disputes, we will promote the truth rather than pedal our personal views, and we will never ask amiss but always seek the Lord in everything we do. Trials and tribulations will still come, but we will endure them with joy and look beyond our circumstances to the hope that we have in Christ!



“High-maintenance” relationships are merely a code word for self-centeredness. Whether people consider themselves high maintenance or not, those intimate with the world are indeed selfish and self-centered. Unfortunately, some believers have never removed such a perspective and attitude from their lives. They allow their desires to consume them which then become the basis for how they respond to others around them. When those in the church become disillusioned by the world, all kinds of strife, fights, and quarrels will exist and the focus will be placed squarely upon individuals rather than the Savior.

Rather than imitate the world which causes strife and enmity with God, we must imitate our Savior. We serve a selfless Savior who thought not about getting His own way or meeting His own desires but about how He could fulfill the Father’s plan. If He had been selfish, we’d all have no hope! On the contrary, Jesus set the pattern which we must follow. He knew the inconsistency of living in the Spirit and practicing the things of the flesh. He never once sinned. He showed us perfectly how to relate faithfully to the Father as well as how to rely upon Him for everything. Let us imitate Jesus and commit ourselves wholly unto the Lord!

## ***Incorporate***

How can we overcome strife and dysfunction in our relationships especially within the church? When strife does occur, what should our first response be?

Why can we not be friends with both the world and Christ? What does friendship with Christ look like?

How does self-reliance lead to pride and arrogance? What is the danger of a self-reliant attitude?

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

*September 27, 2020*



# *Cleanse Your Hearts*

*James 4:7-12*

Focal Verse:

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

James 4:8

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## Introduce

Over the last several months, personal hygiene has become the renewed focus of many public service announcements during this pandemic. From an early age, children receive instruction from their parents, in the classroom through health and civics courses, and from other adults about practicing good hygiene—particularly the washing of their hands with soap and water to prevent the spread of pathogens and communicable diseases. As we all have become well aware, washing our hands with just regular soap and water for at least twenty seconds reduces the chances of contracting an illness greatly. However, even adults must constantly be reminded of this practice which should have become a healthy habit engrained within us that we almost automatically do without even thinking! Still, we have warnings posted everywhere to remind us of the danger of failing to do such a simple task.

In the kitchen, for example, many become careless when preparing certain products. We may wash our hands thoroughly before beginning, but then we become lax. Even though we know the danger of salmonella and other poultry-borne diseases transmitted from handling raw products, some still grab cutlery or utensils, open cabinet doors or the refrigerator, pick up pots and pans, and use spices and seasonings without washing their hands after preparing the uncooked chicken! Some may even wash their hands, but press the top of the soap dispenser or turn on the faucet first which then leads to cross-contamination.

In almost every public restroom facility, we find a sign embossed with the words “All Employees Must Wash Hands Before Returning to Work” displayed somewhere near the soap dispenser and sink.

This should be common sense and common practice! But the need to remind everyone constantly demonstrates that many do not practice such good hygiene and place themselves and others at risk of spreading illness. If everyone were always committed to practicing good hygiene, we’d have much less transmission of



disease in the world. Yet, many people fail to perform such a simple task! It doesn't take

## Introduce

long to do. It isn't inconvenient or expensive. And people don't do it out of ignorance. They fail to do it for selfish reasons! They simply choose not to do it!

The Bible has clearly warned us of the danger of bad spiritual hygiene which produces the sickness of sin that surely leads to death. It even specifically tells us the method that we can use to alleviate this problem completely: restoration through a relationship with Christ. We have no excuse for not knowing! We have no excuse for failing to practice good spiritual hygiene in Christ who completely transforms us! The only reason we cannot overcome temptation and sin is that we choose not to do so in Christ. Just as physically washing our hands boils down to personal choice, so does cleansing our lives of sin and degradation. What have you chosen to do with the information presented in Scripture about living a spiritually healthy life in Christ free from the disease of sin?

After showing how arrogance and the pseudo-wisdom of this world produce self-centeredness leading to strife and dysfunction, James urges us to "cleanse our hands" and "purify our hearts" by submitting to the Lord. Although the soap and water do the work of cleansing us from bacteria physically, we still must place our hands under the soap dispenser and then the water! The same occurs in Christ. He does the work when we submit or surrender to Him, but we must present ourselves to Him so He can work. We must make an intentional effort to remain pure and holy by surrendering to Christ. Therefore, let us cleanse our hands and hearts in Christ from disease-infested sin, so that we can live the life which He has purposed for us from the beginning.

Key  
Question

In what other Scriptures do we find the command to cleanse or purify our hands and hearts?

### James 4:7-8

#### **SUBMIT TO THE LORD:**

Through the lives of careless believers who lost focus on Christ and became friends with the world, sinfulness had infiltrated deep within the community. From early in this letter, we have seen the effects of worldliness and sin: partiality, hypocrisy where one's words and deeds did not match, misuse of the tongue, reliance upon the pseudo-wisdom of the world, and self-centeredness and arrogance which led to strife and disunity. James now calls upon all believers to repent! The inference we can then draw from this pervasive sinfulness is that we need to turn to God and **submit to** Him (v. 7). In our modern understanding, to **submit** carries a negative connotation. Many equate it with the loss of freedom and personal privilege. Some go as far as to link it with dictatorship and abuse. From a scriptural perspective, however, true submission to the Lord entails none of these things and always has a positive outcome when we willingly **submit** to Him.

In Greek, the word **submit** literally means “to order under” and is often used as a reference to military hierarchy where a subordinate is under the command of an officer. Although human officers may fail at times and some may even abuse and exploit their position, a relationship between an officer and his subordinates still generally has a positive outcome for everyone. Aside from these negative human examples influenced by sin, we can still establish four positive benefits of submission—in particular submission to the Lord. First, a good officer trains and equips his platoon or division for success. He provides them with all the skills that they need to survive which we often call “basic training.” It then depends upon the individual as to how effectively he will utilize them when the situation requires. God has given us all the necessary skills in His word that we need to know for navigating life. It depends upon us as to how much we have



## Instruct

listened and how we use them!

Second, the officers through the military and government provide for the basic physical needs of the troops. They provide the necessary food, shelter, clothing and equipment, and healthcare. At times, such as during the Revolutionary War or other wars, human armies may have lacked what they needed. This lack never occurs with God, however! He has promised to give us exactly what we need at the time when we need it the most ([Matt 6:25-32](#)). When our desires become influenced by the selfishness of the world, we may *think* we don't have everything we *need*. But we do! Submitting to the Lord does not restrict our freedom and privilege; it actually frees us! We don't have to worry about anything ([Matt 6:33-34](#)). We don't have to worry about our daily needs nor our destiny as those without hope in Christ do. It still requires that we serve and work faithfully, but we don't have to worry. We know the source of our provision and the outcome of our fate.

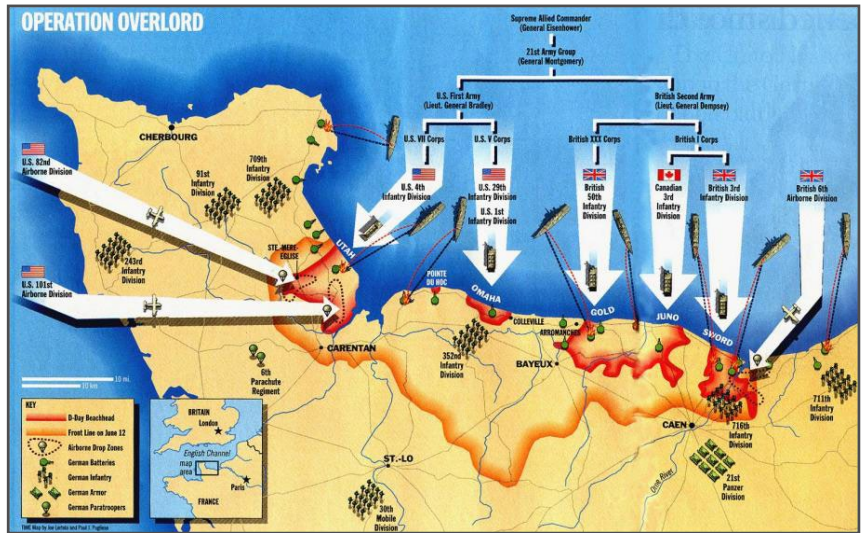
How have you experienced the freedom of the Lord in your life when you've submitted to Him completely?

Question  
# 1

Third, an officer will develop a comprehensive plan and a strategy for winning the war based upon the collective intelligence he has received. As a commanding officer, he will have access to high-level information and intelligence that they do not have. So, he can formulate the best plan of attack. The troops, however, can only see what's immediately occurring around them on the battlefield according to their limited field of vision and perspective. To ensure a victorious outcome, therefore, his troops must trust him implicitly and follow his directives explicitly. He will never knowingly lead them into an ambush or send them into a trap; instead, he will painstakingly analyze every scenario and try to anticipate all their vulnerabilities and potential problems before they ever occur. They simply must trust his judgment and accept his leadership! From the very beginning, God formulated a victorious plan of attack to restore His creation and overcome the curse into which man subjected it. Nothing surprised Him. In His omniscience, He is privy to the best intelligence. He knows all our vulnerabilities and weaknesses. He also knows the plan and the traps set by the enemy well in advance! In fact, with every temptation He has provided a "way of escape" if only we would listen to the intelligence that He has communicated to us ([1 Cor 10:13](#)). He



doesn't bark orders and send us into battle alone; rather, He accompanies us every step of the way—both leading us and providing protection as our rear guard. Moreover, He has sent His Spirit who knows His mind to live within each of us who has a relationship with His Son, so He can communicate the most pertinent wisdom and help us focus on the outcome when all we can see is the single objective right



in front of us ([Rom 8:27](#); [1 Cor 2:11](#)). Do we implicitly trust the plan of the Lord? Have we explicitly followed the plan He has laid out?

Fourth, an officer always has the best interests of his troops at heart. Some may wrongly see the boundaries he sets, the commands he issues, and the orders he gives as oppressive and restrictive. This is the wrong perspective! He doesn't do these things as an authoritarian ogre, but for the benefit and protection of the soldier. He wants them to come out of the battle alive and well. God functions in the same way. Yet, people totally misunderstand why He has given us boundaries and set forth clear expectations. They're for our benefit. He wants us to come out of the battle alive and unscathed rather than following the destructive course of this world. God wants us to succeed in life, but His definition of success often comes into conflict with that of the world. He defines success in terms of holiness and obedience in every situation regardless of the circumstance—whether we experience triumphs in life or go through periods of trial.

In what ways does Scripture indicate that God always has our best interests at heart? How have you experienced this personally?

Question # 2

Next, James commands us to **resist the devil** which will cause him to **flee**. **Resist** typically means to “stand against” and pictures soldiers standing shoulder to shoulder not allowing the enemy to advance. It's the same word and picture that Paul presents in Ephesians 6:13: “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able **to withstand** in the evil day, and having done all, **to stand**.” How can we successfully stand against or **resist the devil**? We cannot do this on our own according to our own

strength. We will fail miserably. In verse 8, James gives the key to success. To **resist**, we



must **draw near to God** who will in turn **draw near to** us.

In this context, to **draw near** means to return to the Lord and repent. We must remember that James is addressing believers in his letter. Although we can never lose our salvation, sin still separates us from the Lord and strains our relationship with Him.

[Hosea 12:6](#) expresses a similar

idea: "So you, by the help of your God, **return**; observe mercy and justice, and wait on your God continually." Because sin separates and God cannot stand the presence of sin, we must be in right standing to approach Him. For this reason, James issues two more commands about how we are to approach God. We must **cleans**e our **hands** and **purify** our **hearts**.

We must first understand that we cannot **resist** something with which we are already in league or fellowship. We cannot **resist** overeating standing in a line at a buffet. We cannot **resist** damage to our hearing when we wear headphones with the volume turned to its peak level. We cannot **resist** a bear attack in the mountains with our tent and belongings smeared with honey. Likewise, we cannot **resist the devil** when we're friends with the world and walking according to its pattern. Yet, how many people continually put themselves into this very position only to wonder why they repeatedly fail? To **resist** requires that we **submit to God** and be in right standing with Him. This means that we must break fellowship with the world and return to and serve Him alone!

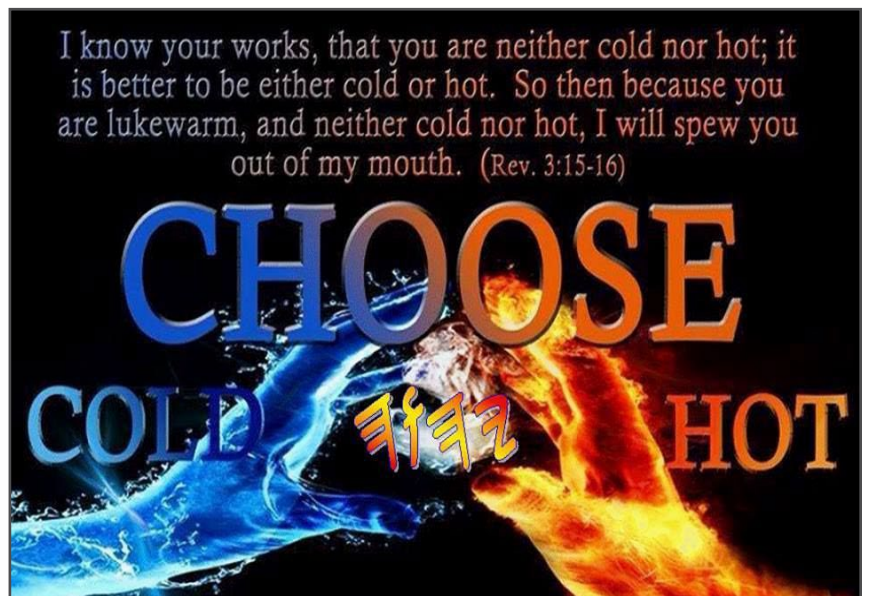
What do you find hard to resist in your life?  
How must you extricate yourself from these things and submit to God?

Question  
# 3

James identifies two actions that we must take in order to **draw near to God**. We must **cleans**e our **hands** and **purify** our **hearts**. Generally, we may quickly read over these

two things without giving them much thought. We may rightly say that they both refer to repentance. And they do! But they refer to two specific areas in which we should repent. For example, we do things and perform activities with our **hands**. Therefore, we need to repent of the sinful activities in which we engage whatever they may be. At the same time, we also need to repent of any sinful attitude that we may hold. In the first century, the heart wasn't so much the primary seat of the emotions as we regard it today, but the vehicle of one's thoughts and attitudes. In a way, the concept of the heart parallels what we would call the mind today. Consequently, we also need to repent of our wrongheaded attitudes, evil thoughts, and misguided motives whatever they may be as God convicts and leads us.

James identifies those who fail to **draw near to God** through repentance as **double-minded**. We've seen this paradox throughout the letter. We cannot ask for wisdom and then doubt that God will give it. We cannot look at our lives in a mirror, go on our merry way, and then forget what we look like to do whatever we want. We cannot say that we have faith, but it not be evident through our works. If we're friends with the world, then we're enemies with God. The difference is clear! We cannot straddle the fence or be lukewarm ([Rev 3:15-](#)



[16](#)). That's offensive and displeasing to the Lord. Yet, many believers try to do just this. They try to live with one foot in this world and one foot in God's "world." This simply does not work. This world will completely suck one into its ways as time marches on if we do not wholly focus on the holy world in which God intends us to live.

We must **resist** the temptation to follow the pattern of this world which exudes selfishness, has no self-control, and does whatever feels good at the moment because they have no hope beyond what they see, hear, feel, and experience right now. We have a hope beyond these experiences that one day will cease and pass away. Let us not live like those who have no hope beyond the moment and look to our eternal inheritance in Christ. Let us not allow our carnal desires to control, consume, and corrupt us. Instead, let us choose Christ. Let's pattern our lives our lives after His holiness according to His righteousness which He has instilled within us. We can't

## Instruct

overcome our selfish desires on our own; we must **submit** to Him in every area of our lives! Let Christ be in control—not sin!

### James 4:9-10

#### SORROW OVER SIN:

Having urged believers to repent of any actions and attitudes which align them with the world, James indicates that we must have true sorrow over sin. Sin should cause us to **lament**, **mourn**, and **weep** because we have willfully chosen to rebel against the One who loves us the most (v. 9). Moreover, our **laughter** should **be turned to mourning** and our **joy to gloom**. In making this statement, James doesn't contradict Paul who tells us to "rejoice always" (1 Thess 5:16). James isn't saying that we should go around depressed, defeated, and distressed about life all the time. Rather, repentance will lead us to be truly sorrowful and broken over sin. Once we seek forgiveness from Christ and receive His restoration, we won't stay sorrowful; we will experience the true joy of our salvation!

Why must we express sorrow over sin, but not allow this sorrow to dominate our lives and rob our joy in the renewed life Christ has given us?

Question  
# 4

We live in a society which does not express grief and brokenness over their sin. In fact, people flaunt their sin openly and feel no shame in their immoral choices (Jer 6:15)! They take pride in their "liberated," albeit it immoral, attitude which shows the depravity of their thinking. In the past, people may have felt momentary sorrow over getting caught in their sin and the consequences they suffer. They may have even clamored for grace, mercy, and clemency as well as asked the forgiveness of the parties involved. In the long run, however, it didn't change anything. They may have stopped for the moment, but inevitably returned to the same lifestyle choices. But now people don't even express remorse over getting caught in their sin. They engage in a spirit of defiance and rebellion which has led to utter chaos in society.

The cure for sin is humbling ourselves **in the sight of the Lord** and **He will lift us up** (v. 10). Although the words for **humble** and **submit** are different in the Greek, they communicate the same idea. When we **humble** ourselves and **submit**, we must confess our sins, seek forgiveness from the Lord, and place our lives fully under His leadership. Therefore, repentance will always lead to change. If there is no change,

there is no repentance by very definition! To repent means to stop, change direction, and go the other way. Consequently, we cannot say that we have repented of our sins and then continue in them. This is why we must express grief and brokenness over our sins, so that we can allow God to transform us. If we claim we have repented and continue in our sins, we have deceived ourselves. When we truly repent, God **will lift us up** or restore us. The word **humble** then points us back to [Proverbs 3:34](#) quoted in verse 6 which specifies that God “gives grace to the humble.” God offers grace and mercy to all who will receive it and He stands ready to restore those who humbly seek Him and surrender their lives completely to Him!

Have you truly humbled every area of your life to the Lord and given Him control so that He can restore you? If not, what areas must you actively seek to humble yourself before Him?

Question  
# 5

### ***James 4:11-12***

#### ***STOP SPEAKING JUDGMENTALLY:***

When we repent of our sins and extricate ourselves from the world, it will change our perspective and conform it to Christ's. Last week, we learned that the worldliness and self-centeredness that crept into the church led to arguments and the abounding of sinful behavior. James returns to that same theme in verses 11-12. Their selfishness and lack of self-control has led to pettiness, vicious arguments, and a judgmental spirit. James, therefore, exhorts believers (i.e. **brethren**) **not to speak evil of one another** (v. 11). To **speak evil** means to slander others maliciously with the attempt to harm others' perception of them. Today, we would say that they “assassinate” their character whether by speaking lies or painting a biased and unflattering picture of them. Rather than focusing on the actual content of a problem or debate, people devolve into personal attacks in hopes of getting their way by demeaning the character of others. Mudslinging isn't something only politicians and celebrities do; many people engage in this tactic daily! We don't have to look very far for examples. We are surrounded by such slander and these debates do nothing to better our lives. They actually do the opposite.

To what examples of being judgmental can you point? How does your life reflect the truth of Christ rather than the judgmental attitude of the world?

Question  
# 6

## Instruct

However, this doesn't mean that we cannot proclaim the truth of Scripture to declare what is right and wrong ([Matt 7:15-20](#)), speak against sin ([Eph 4:15; 5:11; 2 Tim 4:2](#)), or practice church discipline ([Matt 18:15-20](#)). On the contrary, we need to submit to the Spirit who helps practice such things biblically in a manner that restores and produces maturity ([Gal 6:1](#)). James is warning us against harboring a judgmental and arrogant attitude of superiority for personal gain ([Matt 7:1-5](#)). Therefore, he goes on to point out that the one who slanders and **judges his brother** also **speaks evil of the law and judges the law**.

Often, those who speak critically of others with a condemning spirit engage in sin as well. They don't keep **the law**; they point out the sin of others while ignoring their own. Jesus warned, for example, that we must remove the plank from our own eye before trying to help another remove the speck from another's eye ([Matt 7:5](#)). Jesus never said that we couldn't assist them! Conversely, He admonishes us to be in right standing and led by the Holy Spirit before we offer to help—that is so we can “see clearly” to remove the speck!

People frequently take Jesus and James' teaching out of context because they self-righteously wish to condemn sin in others while at the same time justifying it in their own lives. They selfishly want the freedom to act in any way they so desire! Consequently, they propose that this teaching universally prohibits us from exercising discernment and discrimination in evaluating both our own actions and the actions of others. For this reason, James qualifies this prohibition against slander by noting that **if we judge the law, we are not a doer but a judge**. With this statement, James echoes Jesus' teaching! In Christ, we have the responsibility to point others to Him and His Word. But we must do so with the right spirit and the right attitude!

Why should we not regard James' teaching as a universal prohibition against speaking against sin and evil? If we fail to do this in the church, what are the consequences?

Question  
# 7

Finally, James ends by reminding us **there is one Lawgiver who is able to save and destroy** (v. 12). Then, he asks **who are you to judge one another?** If James issued a universal prohibition against differentiating the truth from sin and correcting others who err, he would be in violation of his own statement! He offers correction here against the sin occurring in the church! With these words in verse 12, James cautions us


against putting ourselves in the position that rightly belongs only to the Lord. Through the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we can offer them correction by pointing them to the truth of Scripture.

If they don't listen, however, we need to turn it over to the Lord and allow Him to deal with them once we have shown them what the Bible says! We shouldn't try to exact retribution or revenge; we shouldn't try to issue a verdict or pass a sentence; we shouldn't seek vengeance or exercise wrath. God, not we, has the final say in all this. Ultimately, He alone is the **Lawgiver** and **Judge**. Based on our relationship with His Son, He decrees our

eternal fate! He sentences us to death if we don't have a relationship with Christ or welcomes us to life if we do. Only God can issue such a verdict.

Matthew 18:17

And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.



Why is it important to show people in Scripture where they err rather than simply offering advice?

Question # 8

As we conclude this lesson, let us distinguish ourselves from the world by submitting our lives wholly unto the Lord. When we submit to Him fully, we will no longer live in selfishness because we will allow Him to cleanse our hands and purify our hearts. We will grieve and sorrow over any sin in which we engage, leading us to turn and repent. We will no longer live a lifestyle of habitual sin, but rather one that imitates Christ. In imitation of Christ, we will not allow personal preferences and opinions to cause fights and dissension. We will not slander people and speak judgmentally. Instead, we will allow the Spirit to work through us to communicate the truth and bring about restoration!

During this pandemic, hopefully we have become more cognizant of the benefits of washing our hands and practicing good personal hygiene. Like everything in life, this reflects a choice that we must consciously make. We can reject the sound and logical practice and put ourselves at risk of contracting any disease because we think we're immune or it somehow won't affect us. On the other hand, we can use the wisdom and knowledge that God has collectively given mankind to make the best decision to protect our physical health and extend the longevity and quality of life according to His plan. God has given us this wisdom; we must use it!

Likewise, God has given us a clear prescription for living a healthy spiritual life and not succumbing to our personal desires which lead to death and destruction. We must allow Him to cleanse our hands and purify our hearts so that we're in right standing with Him. To accomplish this, we must intentionally submit to Him! We must give up control ourselves and allow Him to guide us in every area of life.

Therefore, as we ponder this topic, let us ask ourselves a two-part question: Have I chosen to submit to the Lord and draw near to Him through repentance or am I continuing a lifestyle contaminated by sin which leads to death? As believers, we are assured of life in Christ when we have repented of our sins, but from time to time we'll make mistakes. We must acknowledge those mistakes and take immediate steps to amend our lives and return to our Lord. Let us carefully and honestly evaluate our lives to ascertain if we have completely submitted and surrendered everything to Him!



## *Incorporate*

In what areas of your life have you fully submitted to the Lord? How do these areas differ from the ones in which you may have not fully submitted? Why is a failure to submit even in one area of your life so dangerous?

In what ways have people lost a true sense of grief over sin? How does this lack of sorrow affect repentance?

How does a critical and judgmental spirit destroy the church? How can we practice speaking the truth and church discipline without condemning others?

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