

A workshop with various tools hanging on a wooden wall. The tools include a large curved saw, a hammer, a wrench, a screwdriver, a drill bit, a level, and several wooden handles. The background is a dark, textured wooden wall.

# FAITH THAT WORKS

A STUDY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOK OF JAMES



Dear Harvest,

“God’s ways work.” It is such a simple phrase, but it was a phrase that turned around the life of one of my mentors. It makes sense. If God created the universe, then He knows how life should work. He then graciously shows us His ways. When we practice what He shows us, life tends to work.

The same is true for our faith in Jesus. When we surrender our life to Jesus, trust in Him in whatever He tells us and demonstrate that trust by obeying and following Him, then faith tends to work by changing our lives.

The older I get, the more concerned I become with our obsession in the “virtual.” There seems to be a race to recreate normal in a realm that isn’t actually real. Virtual reality will never be reality.

We see this obsession with the term “faith.” “My faith” is a common term. Most people ascribe to some type of “faith.” But for many that faith is virtual only. It does not actually impact their life. So while a society’s “faith” saturation remains relatively constant, society itself goes into decline. Faith is divorced from real life.

This is something that James, the brother of Jesus, simply did not understand. For him, faith had to work, or it was worthless. Jesus had to make a difference, or He wasn’t really God. So, in his letter, James passionately describes how faith makes a real, tangible difference in our life. When we cling to our faith in Jesus, we will never be the same.

I am excited for you to take this journey of faith with James. Let me encourage you to dive right into this devotional. You will be amazed at how 15-20 minutes each day will make a difference in your life as you discover a faith that works.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeremy M. Gwaltney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jeremy M. Gwaltney

Lead Pastor

Harvest Community Church

# BACKGROUND TO THE BOOK OF JAMES

Before we study a book of the Bible, we should know a little bit about it. The book of James is a relatively short letter written by someone named “James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ,” to a group of people known as the “twelve tribes in the Dispersion.” It is natural to ask; who is James, who are the twelve tribes in the Dispersion, when was the letter written, and why did it have to be written? Let’s look at some answers.

## ***Who Was James and Who were the Twelve Tribes?***

Both early church tradition and internal evidence from the book indicate that James was the brother of Jesus who converted to faith shortly after the resurrection. Roughly a decade after Jesus’ death, James has become a leader, along with Peter, of the church in Jerusalem. Therefore, he is uniquely qualified to write a letter about issues of faith.

The “twelve tribes of the Dispersion” is most likely a term to describe Jewish followers of Jesus that had left the greater Jerusalem area due to persecution. Following the martyrdom of Stephen in Acts 6-7, Luke records,

**And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.**

**— Acts 8:1**

Notice that the apostles, like James and Peter, stayed in Jerusalem, while others fled. We know that many moved quite some distance from Jerusalem and that as they fled, they converted more Jews to the Gospel of Jesus. Luke again tells us,

**Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.**

**— Acts 11:19**

As the church dispersed over larger geographic areas and more and more new converts started following the teachings of Jesus' apostles, there arose needs to clarify certain teachings. James is someone who wrote to the churches for this purpose. This letter was probably a circular letter that was passed along to a variety of churches in Judea, Samaria, Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch.

### ***When Was the Letter Written and Why?***

Most scholars believe that James wrote his letter sometime around AD 45, which is roughly 15 years after the resurrection of Jesus. James came to faith shortly after Jesus' resurrection and was present on the Day of Pentecost when the church was formed, which was sometime around AD 30. The persecution that broke out after Stephen's martyrdom is believed to have taken place around AD 40. So, it is easy to assume the letter had to take place after this time period.

Scholars also believe that the letter had to be written before the Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15, which took place around AD 48/49. They believe this because of the "controversy" between Paul's "salvation by faith alone" doctrine versus James "faith without works is dead" teaching. As we will see when we dig into these passages in this study, James and Paul do not actually disagree or contradict each other but are coming at the same issue from two different directions. However, history has been littered with thousands of scholars debating why there seems to be a difference in their theology. The Reformer Martin Luther mused about kicking James out of the Bible because he was so bothered by what was written about faith and works.

However, what we know from the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 is that James whole-heartedly endorsed and supported Paul's doctrine of faith and grace. In fact, it is James' statement in Acts 15:19 that is the final turning point to convince the church to accept what Paul was teaching. So, nothing Paul believed fundamentally contradicted what James believed.

Given all the drama around the Council, it seems less likely that James would have written his letter afterward. He would have known that what he wrote might be used to discredit Paul. Conversely, Paul would have no reason to think what he wrote after the Council would be used to discredit James because he had already been fully endorsed by James.

Given these factors, it seems a date of between AD 44 and AD 47 is most likely.

So why did James write his letter?

The best evidence is found in the letter itself. Simply put, James was worried about the genuine faith of those who claimed to follow Jesus. Followers in these churches had had their lives uprooted for more than five years due to persecution. Many saw family and loved ones killed and imprisoned. They needed to be assured that faith endured trial and persecution.

The circumstances in Palestine were changing in the AD 40s and 50s. Famine, poverty, and other economic stresses were becoming realities. As a result, the rich oppressing the poor, and the weak in society being forgotten was becoming very common. James wanted people to know that genuine faith treated people differently.

Some were claiming to “believe in God” but were not acting like Jesus made a difference in their lives. James wanted them to know that genuine faith produced genuine change in our lives. It was a change that was so powerful it could change the way we speak, challenge us to seek wisdom, cause us to resist the pleasures of the world, empower us to live in the present, invite us to invest in eternity, strengthen us to endure suffering, and change the way we pray.

In short, genuine faith in Jesus causes us to know the Jesus is worth whatever the cost. For an embattled church, these challenging words would have encouraged them to fight on.

## ***James Speaks Today***

We live in a day and age where so much is being questioned: Politics, science, medicine, and ethics. Virtually nothing is shielded from prying, protesting scrutiny. It is almost comical that in an age obsessed with “facts” no one can agree on what they mean.

The person and message of Jesus has not been shielded from this scrutiny. With changing cultural climates, new scientific discoveries and new moralities, the reality of Jesus is constantly being called into question. The younger generation talks openly about “deconstructing” their faith to try to figure out what is true, genuine, and necessary. There just seems to be so much confusion on who Jesus is and what to believe.

This is why the book of James is so needed today.

I can think of very few people in history who would have gone through a more confusing and challenging journey of faith than James. After all, he was the brother of Jesus. He grew up in the same household with the same parents.

We first meet James in the eyewitness account of Matthew, one of Jesus’ disciples. Jesus is preaching in his hometown of Nazareth, and the crowd doesn’t believe his message. Their reasoning:

***Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?***

***— Matthew 13:55 (ESV)***

To put it bluntly, the crowd states that there was nothing special about Jesus’ life in Nazareth — He was an average guy, followed His dad’s work as a carpenter, they knew his family — there should be nothing special about His message of faith now. For the most part the crowd in Nazareth rejected Jesus’ message that day.



The crowd's struggle was James' struggle. Imagine growing up, living with, working with, eating with, sleeping with, sharing life with your brother, then your brother becomes a religious fanatic that is making claims of being the Son of God (let that sink in, James' brother was claiming to be the Son of God). How confusing would that be? How angry would it make you? How embarrassed might you feel?

We know that James felt this way. In another eyewitness account from Jesus' disciple, John, we see that James and his brothers reject Jesus' message. In John chapter 7 they challenge Jesus' plans and teachings. John summarizes the interaction with this statement;

**For not even his brothers believed in him.  
— John 7:5 (ESV)**

After this statement, the very few mentions of Jesus' siblings disappear from the Gospel accounts. We don't know for certain what happened, but it is safe to assume that James and his siblings had similar feelings that many of us have when a family member is doing something we don't understand or, worse, embarrasses us. They tried to lay low, distance themselves, avoid the prying questions, hope that his reputation didn't hurt their business and livelihoods. It is possible they grew angry at their mother, Mary, for joining Jesus' ministry. When Jesus was arrested, tried, and crucified, it is conceivable to think that they went into hiding, afraid their association with a blasphemer and enemy of Cesar would endanger them. Confusion, hurt, and pain are mild descriptions of the range of emotions James might have experienced.

Then, almost as quickly as the news of the crucifixion had come and forced him into hiding, comes an even more unbelievable claim. People are saying that his brother has been raised from the dead and is appearing to His disciples. Not just Jesus' disciples but his very own mother claims to have seen Him alive!

Something must have happened when James heard these accounts. Somehow he pushed past the disbeliefs, cynicism, and fear and came into contact with the disciples and his mother Mary. It is reasonable to assume that Jesus appeared to him as well. Sometime in the days following Jesus' resurrection, James changes his beliefs and puts his faith in Jesus. The next time we see him is in Acts chapter 1 after Jesus' ascension with the disciples in the upper room waiting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

**All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.**

**— Acts 1:14 (ESV)**

As the book of Acts continues, we see that James takes a leadership role in his brother's new movement, the Church. We know this is James the brother of Jesus because in Galatians, the Apostle Paul writes:

**But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.**

**— Galatians 1:19 (ESV)**

This interaction that Paul mentions is recorded in Acts 14 and 15 where James and Peter, the leaders of the Jerusalem church, are mentioned.

Imagine this transformation: from brother, to cynic, to worshiper, to leader of the church. If it had been your brother, how difficult would it have been for you?

# FAITH THAT WORKS

What James found as he pondered a faith in the message of his brother, Jesus, is what should give all of us confidence in our faith. God's ways work. Faith in Jesus works. It is different. It changes our lives and offers proof of its change. Faith in Jesus is not just an idea or a feeling, it is tangible, knowable, doable.

James had to deconstruct a lot of preconceived notions about God and faith in the face of the reality of Jesus. There were the religious structures of the Temple, the ritualistic structures of the Old Testament Law, the traditional structures of his religious history. Unlike almost anyone else in history, James had to deconstruct the ideas of family in his faith. How could his brother be his God? But the proof of Jesus' resurrection impacted him so forcefully that these structures collapsed around him and what he found was the person on which genuine faith is founded; Jesus Christ Himself.

As we explore James' writings, we see that his faith is as genuine and as strong as Jesus Himself. It is a faith that endures and grows stronger with trials. A faith that eliminates social structures and societal privilege in favor of humility and generosity. A faith that is evident in our lifestyle. A faith that tames the tongue. A faith that purely reaches out to the impoverished poor and orphaned. A faith that prays.

A faith in Jesus does what nothing else in this world can; it changes us from the inside out. This is what James found and this is what his book invites us to experience.

# HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

Each day of this devotional is broken down into three distinct parts. The first part is designed to help you study a passage from the book for yourself. We want you to examine the passage and hear what God is teaching you. The second part is a brief devotional thought we have given about the passage of James you have studied. I have asked Pastors Jim and Cory as well as three other Harvest members, Nancy Bontrager, Ruth Hochstetler, and Adam Young to join me in writing these thoughts. This is just to give you some insight into what you have studied. Finally, the last part is daily prayer points. After examining a specific passage, we want to guide you in how to pray about what you have studied.

Now, I know a few of you are thinking, “Pastor Jeremy, I have never studied a book of the Bible like this before? How do I do it?” Let me pass along some guidance I give all the people I have ever trained in studying the Bible.

## *When Reading Scripture, Always Keep Four Things in Mind*

Every time you read your Bible, there are four different persons (or sets of persons) involved.

They are:

- 1 – God:** The original Author of Scripture
- 2 – The Human Author:** The actual person(s) who put pen to paper and wrote the passage you are reading. In this case, James.
- 3 – The Original Audience:** The person(s) that the human author was writing his work to.
- 4 – You:** The person who is now reading the text and trying to apply it to today’s culture and life circumstances. In this case, you!

Every verse in the Bible combines these four persons to give you the message the Holy Spirit wants you to have to help change your heart and life. When you read the Bible with these four people in mind, and the help of the Holy Spirit, you will find the riches of God's will, comfort, and life for you. So how do you do that?

### *A Simple Bible Study Method*

Here is a simple study method that I learned as a teenager sitting in the study of my mentor, Jerry Daley. It can be applied to almost any passage of Scripture that will allow you to navigate the four key elements above and understand the passage better. I have read dozens of Bible studies, sat through four years of seminary instruction, and heard countless Bible teachers — nothing I have read and heard has truly gone beyond these six simple steps. They are the foundation of learning to read the Bible well.

#### Six key steps:

- Step 1:** Read the whole book in a short period of time. This step is not always required. For the book of James, I recommend finding some time to read the entire book in one sitting. For most people, it would only take about 30 minutes or so.
- Step 2:** Break down the book/passage into smaller parts. In this devotional, we have done this for you. Each day, you have a short passage to study.

**Step 3:**

Ask the following question about the paragraph or smaller passage you have chosen: **What does this tell me about the author?** This will help you understand what the *human author* is trying to say.

**Step 4:**

Ask the following question about the paragraph or smaller passage you have chosen: **What does this tell me about the audience?** This will help you understand what the *original audience* was thinking about and dealing with when they heard or read this book or passage.

**Step 5:**

Ask the following question about the paragraph or smaller passage you have chosen: **What is the author telling the audience?** This will help you see the message of the *original author* as well as the message *God* was trying to tell the *original audience*.

**Step 6:**

Ask the following question about the paragraph or smaller passage you have chosen: **What is God telling me?** This will allow *you* to hear what the Holy Spirit is wanting you to hear.

When you begin your devotional, you will see that it begins with these four questions. I recommend that you begin each day with a brief word of prayer, then read the daily passage, answer the questions, listen to God, then complete the rest of the devotional entry. I believe that doing this will not only change your life through the message of James but make you even better at reading the Bible for yourself.

Now, let's begin!





# **WEEK ONE**

Jeremy M. Gwaltney

Lead Pastor

Harvest Community Church

# DAY 1

## *Daily Reading*

James 1:1-4

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

“Count it all joy!” This is what the brother of Jesus tells us about trials, difficulty, and persecution. You can also translate it “count it pure joy.” This is so opposite of our thinking. We look at trial, hardship, and difficulty as things to be avoided at all costs. Yet James calls them joy. Why? So that the “testing of your faith produces steadfastness.”

It is important to know that James’ definition of faith is vastly different than our modern notion of “feel good” mystical experiences. For James, faith is a solid foundation that sustains us our entire lives. It is built upon the Rock of Jesus and therefore should not falter. For James, having steadfast faith is better than having stated faith. For James, the revelation of steadfast faith comes through the testing grounds of trial.

This is why he says to “count it pure joy.” What a trial demonstrates is that our greatest delight is in Jesus Himself. To endure a trial is to demonstrate that the center of our all-surpassing joy is found in Christ alone. A joy so powerful we willfully and faithfully endure trials to experience the reward of His joy!

## ***Prayer Points***

- Bring your trials to the Holy Spirit today. List a few of them below.
- Spend some time thanking the Holy Spirit for the opportunity to find joy in these trials.
- Pray boldly for the Holy Spirit to bring these trials to an end and that you would remain steadfast until that end comes.

# DAY 2

## *Daily Reading*

James 1:5-8

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

When you encounter trial what do you need? You need wisdom.

So many times, when we encounter difficulty our first instinct is to try to figure things out on our own. We work harder, think harder, shut down our emotions harder, ignore life harder. We act like we believe our own instincts are better than the wisdom of God.

James reminds us otherwise. When we lack wisdom, ask God! A God who is generous and not stingy with His wisdom.

Furthermore, ask in faith without doubting. What does James mean here? He means ask God for wisdom as if He is generous with His wisdom. Don't ask God for wisdom as if you are an annoyance. If you see yourself as annoying to God, you are sunk; double-minded because you don't see God as generous and you aren't sure your wisdom is all that bad. You will get what you are expecting; very little.

Go to a generous God and ask Him for all the wisdom you can handle!

## ***Prayer Points***

- Look over the list of trials you shared with God yesterday.
- Where do you need wisdom in these areas?
- Ask the Holy Spirit to give you this wisdom.
- Pray boldly for the Holy Spirit to bring these trials to an end and that you would remain steadfast until that end comes.

# DAY 3

## *Daily Reading*

James 1:9-11

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

When we encounter trial what are we tempted to rely upon? Finances. Status. Influence.

Can I pay for it? Will they respect my position? Would they really do this to me? Can I leverage this accomplishment for some understanding? We look to things we possess and have accomplished to help us get out of trial.

James tells us to be careful of where we place our glory. To the poor person he says, “boast in exultation.” In other words, don’t trust in your status. Boast that the Son of the King has exalted you and brought you into your family. To the rich he says, boast in “humiliation.” In other words, don’t trust your status. Instead, boast that the Son of the King brought you to the place of helplessness so that you may cry out for salvation in Him.

James’ underlying message is that faith boasts and relies on the status given to us by Jesus and Jesus alone.

## ***Prayer Points***

- Look over the list of trials you have been praying about this week. What are you relying upon to find comfort in these trials?
- Spend time repenting of anything you have relied upon in these trials that is not from the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to show you what status you are to rejoice in.
- Pray boldly for the Holy Spirit to bring these trials to an end and that you would remain steadfast until that end comes.

# DAY 4

## *Daily Reading*

James 1:12-15

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?



## ***Devotional Thought***

When we go through trial, what is one of the first questions we ask? “Why did God let this happen?”

Now, this is a perfectly okay question to ask. The Scriptures are full of people amidst trial asking God the hard question “why?” But James wants to take the next logical thought off the table; “God made me do it... God tempted me... God didn’t give me a choice.”

Failure in trial really comes down to one decision, *whose joy do you believe is more powerful?* The joy of “your own desires” or the joy of “the crown of life” which is promised by the God who designed you to experience joy and, in love, offers the crown to you?

Steadfast faith comes by pursuing the crown of life in the middle of difficulty. Once we find it, we experience the pure joy that God promises.

## ***Prayer Points***

- Review the trials we have been praying about this week. Have you been asking God “why?” What has He said?
- Are there any trials where you are accusing God of not being good? Do you need to repent?
- Pray boldly for the Holy Spirit to bring these trials to an end and that you would remain steadfast until that end comes.

# DAY 5

## *Daily Reading*

James 1:16-18

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

I am often amazed at how many contradictions we humans allow in our thinking without being bothered by them. Our culture is obsessed with “new.” The new product, the new fad, the modern gadget, the new morality. “Traditional” and “old-fashioned” are frequently frowned upon, especially when it comes to lifestyle.

Yet, when we look for comfort where do we often turn? We turn to things that inspire steadiness, things we can count on, things that tend to be right where we left them. After all, what is “comfort food” other than food we typically enjoyed as a child under the loving care of our parents?

This is why I find James’ description of God so powerful in this paragraph. “Every good gift” comes from a God that has “no variation... due to change.” God doesn’t change. He is good. He is faithful. We will always find Him right where we left Him. Often, we find Him closer to us because He followed us. This is why it is foolish to try to “modernize” God.

Comfort comes in consistency. Comfort comes in truth. Comfort comes in knowing you can count on someone. Today, let’s put our comfort in the One who doesn’t change.

## ***Prayer Points***

- Spend some time thanking God for being faithful to you. List some ways God has been faithful below.
  
- What is competing with your peace and comfort today? How can you surrender those things to God.
  
- Pray boldly for the Holy Spirit to bring an end to some of your trials and that you would remain steadfast until that end comes.



# **WEEK TWO**

Nancy Bontrager  
Harvest Administrator

# DAY 1

## *Daily Reading*

James 1:19-21

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

Facebook is always asking us “What’s on your mind?” Retailers and restaurants want to hear about your recent experience with them in a “quick” survey. It seems everywhere you go you can be asked to share your opinion or give your feedback. With technology today, it is easier than ever to share whatever is on your mind with whoever you want in an instant.

This kind of instant communication can be dangerous and can easily lead to both misunderstandings and division among the people involved. When we share our opinion without first giving a thought to how it might impact those we are sharing with or asking God to speak through us, we run the risk of spreading hurt and anger instead of the Truth that sets people free.

James is not asking us to be silent or not share with others. Rather we should choose to hear from others and take time to discern the Word of God before we say something we regret or fail to heed the wisdom that others may have for us. For when we are quick to speak and not really listening to the heart of those around us, it can be easy to find ourselves angry. Anger on its own is not necessarily bad, however, it can lead to more words and actions that are not glorifying God.

## ***Prayer Points***

- Where are some places in your life you need to be quicker to listen and slower to speak?
- Is there someone you need to apologize to for a word spoken in haste or anger that was not checked?
- Ask the Holy Spirit to daily guide you to put these instructions into practice.

# DAY 2

## *Daily Reading*

James 1:22-25

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?



## ***Devotional Thought***

How many times do you walk into a room and forget why you had walked in there in the first place? Or maybe you had to read the same passage in a book again because you did not comprehend the content the first time? Sometimes it takes going back over what we were doing or rereading a passage to allow our memory and comprehension to be effective.

It is important when we are digging into God's Word to not just read the words and walk away unchanged, but rather hear the words and then go act on what we have read. As Paul challenges us in Romans 12:2, we do not want to simply be conformed to the world, but rather transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we can better discern God's will. Part of that renewal begins with studying and ingesting the Word of God. When you intently study your face in the mirror, you can tell people more than just the color of your eyes, but also the shape and unique shades and specks that make up your irises. Likewise, when you study the Bible with the help of the Holy Spirit, you can share more than simply the words it contains, but the message it is proclaiming.

When we know the message of the Bible, we can share the Good News with those around us with our words and actions with confidence. The more we inspect and study, the more familiar we become and the more our subsequent actions become like second nature. What a privilege to have the living Word of God and the Holy Spirit to help guide us so that we can persevere and be blessed as we live in God's will.

## ***Prayer Points***

- Are there changes you need to make to be a doer of the Word and not a hearer only?
- How will you address those changes?
- Thank God for His gift of the Bible to guide us.

# DAY 3

## *Daily Reading*

James 1:26-27

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

James has already encouraged us to be quick to listen and slow to speak, yet here is another reminder just how important it is to keep what we say in check. If we say or proclaim to be following Christ, it is important that our actions and words also follow in His ways. If we say that we are Christians, but our actions and words don't reflect anything different from those around us, what good is our testimony? As we read yesterday, we are not to conform to the world around us, but rather be transformed, showing people around us that there is something different in our lives.

Being considered religious can sometimes have a bad connotation because it sounds like someone who is only concerned with his or her outward appearance to others and saying the right thing. Our religion as Christians is more about how we act than just the words that come out of our mouths. When our actions back up what we say we believe, our impact can be much greater to those around us. We are not just spouting off religious speech, but rather living the life we are called to live to be more like Jesus. This can be done in any circumstance. Whether it is including that new student at lunch when no one else will, choosing to help a coworker even when it is inconvenient or laying aside our rights to diffuse a tense situation, we can all show the love of God to those around us by our actions alone.

## ***Prayer Points***

- Is there an area in your life you need to make a change to walk in line with the truth of Scripture?
  
- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you so that you can demonstrate your relationship with Christ in more than just words.

# DAY 4

## *Daily Reading*

James 2:1-7

### *Study Questions*

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

“For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

1 Samuel 16:7b ESV

The context of the verse in 1 Samuel is at the time when Samuel was sent to the house of Jesse to anoint the next king of Israel. Samuel was inclined to pick the eldest son because of his height and appearance alone. This was, after all, one of the qualifications that he saw in the first anointed king of Israel, Saul. God wanted to be clear that His requirements in this area were different from what was initially visible to the human eye.

James, as well, is cautioning the readers not to judge by outward appearance alone. It can be easy to judge another person by their success or position in society, but these are all based on measurements that were set by man and not based on what matters for the Kingdom of God. When we do judge by the outward appearance alone, not relying on the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, our thoughts can lead us astray and we can make decisions that are outside of the will of God. It may not always be apparent who to trust or who we should be associating with, but we can seek God in these matters to lead us towards His purposes.

## ***Prayer Points***

- What are some areas in your life that you have been judging by outward appearances alone?
  
- Are there any relationships in your life that are based only on outward appearance? If so, does something need to change?
  
- Ask the Holy Spirit to give you His eyes to see those around you as He sees them.

# DAY 5

## *Daily Reading*

James 2:8-13

### *Study Questions*

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

“Mercy triumphs over judgment.” James 2:13b

What do you initially think about when you consider what following the law means? Maybe you think about following the speed limit, so you are not pulled over and issued a ticket. Perhaps it involves paying your taxes, so the IRS doesn't send you love letters in the mail. In these cases, do you consider following the law as liberating?

I would venture to guess that for many, the law can feel like more of a constraint or a set of parameters that must be adhered to in order to stay in good standing or be a good citizen. For the Jews that were adhering to the Old Testament law, the law had to be kept in its entirety in order to avoid God's judgment. James makes the point that a person who “fails in one point has become guilty of all of it,” (v 10b) but thanks to Jesus, who took on the judgment that we deserved, we can live as those who are “judged under the law of liberty” (v 12b).

When we live under the law of liberty, we can better show mercy to others as we have been shown mercy. If, however, we are living under the weight of judgment, we will be quicker to judge those around us. If that judgment results in showing partiality, we are in turn “committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (v 9b).

## ***Prayer Points***

- Are you living under the law of liberty that Jesus has made possible for each one of us? Or are you clinging to the law of judgment and not extending mercy to those around you, including yourself?
  
- Thank Jesus for His great sacrifice that allows us to live free from condemnation and full of mercy for those around us.





# **WEEK THREE**

Jeremy M. Gwaltney

Lead Pastor

Harvest Community Church

# DAY 1

## *Daily Reading*

James 2:14-17

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

It is so important to pay attention to what James is saying in the next few paragraphs. Notice what James DOES say, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone **says he has faith** but does not have works? Can **that** faith save him?” Notice James does NOT say, “What good is it if someone has faith but isn’t doing anything. Faith didn’t save him.”

This is James’ way of saying “talk is cheap.” If someone is claiming to have faith in Jesus, but there is absolutely no evidence that Jesus matters in their life, then the faith they are talking about — “that faith” — isn’t saving faith. The power of faith to change them is functionally “dead.” Their claim is little more than empty words.

I have met so many followers of Jesus that become afraid when they read this passage. They are afraid they aren’t “doing enough” to show their “faith.” They are afraid God will condemn them because they aren’t doing enough right things. This isn’t what James is talking about. Just the fact that there is “fear” present when evaluating your actions demonstrates that faith is working in your life. The person James is referring to is probably oblivious to their lack of change. True faith changes you.

So, let me ask, how has Jesus changed you? And is there anything else Jesus wants to change?

## ***Prayer Points***

- Spend some time thanking Jesus for His gift of faith.
- Write down a few ways Jesus has changed you in the past. What are things you used to struggle with that are no longer a struggle?
- Is there something in you that you feel Jesus wants to change now? If so, pray and repent of it and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you and change your heart and actions in this area.

# DAY 2

## *Daily Reading*

James 2:18-19

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

James has no time for a lack of genuineness in someone's faith. Faith transforms us. That is what he is saying. "Just look at me," says James, "Is there any doubt that Jesus has changed my life?"

James is so utterly practical. Faith has to do something in your life. It can't just be theoretical. James says that even demons have good theology, but that theology didn't change them. Life transformation is the evidence of the true work of Jesus in your life.

So here is my question for you today. Are you allowing Jesus to change you? If not, are you really holding onto faith? Jesus doesn't want you to change your life, **He** wants to change it! But to do that, you have to completely surrender to Him and trust that He has the best desires for your life. That is what faith ultimately is. I am wrong. Jesus is right. I will follow what He tells me to do, trusting that it is the best for me. As we follow Him, our lives are transformed.

## ***Prayer Points***

- Today, take a moment for some reflection. Are there any areas in your life you have not surrendered to Jesus? Write them down below.
- Are these areas difficult to surrender? Why? Are you ready to surrender them?
- Surrender to Jesus and ask the Holy Spirit to change your heart and life in these areas.

# DAY 3

## *Daily Reading*

James 2:20-24

## *Study Questions*

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## *Devotional Thought*

You will spend time today and tomorrow reviewing the same paragraph in James. It is an important paragraph. Today I want to get a little technical with the interpretation. Tomorrow, we will apply it.

How was Abraham justified?

James is using an interpretive tactic on us to prove his point. His premise: Abraham was justified by the work of sacrificing Isaac (you

can read the account in Genesis 22). It is easy to read this and think, “Abraham had to do something to earn God’s salvation.” But look closer at the terms James uses.

- “Faith was active along with his works”
- “Faith was completed by his works”
- “Scripture was fulfilled”

Notice in every case, James alludes to the genuine faith that was active prior to the works that Abraham did. What was the Scripture that was fulfilled by Abraham when he sacrificed Isaac? “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). In other words, Abraham had faith and God saved him. However, it is important to note that this verse is in Genesis 15:6, BEFORE Isaac was born. Faith had saved Abraham before Isaac was born.

So, what is going on here? James is asking a simple question: *What is the proof that faith saved Abraham?*

The proof was not that Abraham believed God could give him a son. The proof was not in the fact that Abraham believed God could spare Isaac from sacrifice. The proof was not even that, as Hebrews says, Abraham believed God could raise Isaac from death if he did sacrifice him.<sup>1</sup> The proof was that Abraham obeyed God and PUT Isaac on the altar. Abraham’s works justified; demonstrated the faith that God had given him.

Again, James is not saying we are justified by works apart from faith in Jesus. James is saying that true faith in Jesus produces a lifestyle that follows Jesus, even amidst the greatest of sacrifices.

### ***Prayer Points***

- Today, ask God for more faith.
- Is there something God is asking you to do for Him that you are resisting? Why?
- Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you and then obey what God is asking you to do.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 11:19

# DAY 4

## *Daily Reading*

James 2:20-24

## *Study Questions*

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## *Devotional Thought*

*"You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works..."*

I find this statement by James so comforting. Abraham had been handed an impossible task; sacrifice his son of promise. The



promise was given by God Himself. God told Abraham that his lineage would be a great nation and told Abraham that Isaac was the son to continue that lineage. No amount of “let go and let God” was going to comfort Abraham in this moment.

So, what did Abraham do? He followed one step at a time. He didn’t manufacture a bunch of faith to obey God all at once. He didn’t manufacture a reason “why.” He took one step at a time. For three days, Abraham simply did the next thing God told him to do until the climactic moment; Isaac, bound and helpless, laying on the altar. Then God intervened. Abraham’s actions demonstrated the faith that had changed his life. It was active along the way, and it had fulfilled the command of God.

This is what walking in faith is supposed to look like. We are given a command of God — sometimes it feels impossible. Instead of feeling overwhelmed and trying to generate a HUGE amount of faith, God wants us to take a step. Often, we find just the right amount of faith for the next step. When we look back, we can say, “wow, look at how far Jesus has brought me.” That is the faith that justifies. That is the faith that is alive.

### ***Prayer Points***

- Write something down that you feel is impossible for God to do in your life.
- What would the first step of faith be towards seeing God answer this prayer?
- Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you. Ask Him to show you a step and a solution to this impossible reality, then ask Him for the courage to act.
- Now, take a step.

# DAY 5

## *Daily Reading*

James 2:25-26

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

“Faith apart from works is dead.” This is the heartbeat of James’ message. Jesus has to mean something. Jesus has to change something. Jesus has to make a difference. James’ brother had been raised from the dead! How crazy is that!? This is not an ordinary belief system.

For James, it isn’t enough to say, “I believe in Jesus” or “I go to church” or “I sing those songs.” The faith of Jesus so radically changes us that it defines everything about us. Otherwise, it is just dead words.

So, simple question, is your life defined by an intense passion for Jesus? Does it change you? If not, how alive is your faith? Worried? Don’t be. Just ask for Jesus to revive you.

## ***Prayer Points***

- Spend some time asking the Holy Spirit to revive your faith with new life and passion.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Ask the Holy Spirit what He wants to change in your life.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Ask the Holy Spirit what is one thing that you can do to change someone’s life this week.



# **WEEK FOUR**

Cory Witmer

Staff Pastor

Harvest Community Church

# DAY 1

## *Daily Reading*

James 3:1-2

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

James is going to talk about how the tongue, or words, are particularly powerful, but he starts this section calling out teachers. In the early church and Jewish culture, teachers were held in high esteem, and to be a teacher was an honor. So, many wanted to be teachers, but not everyone understood the truth of the Gospel and thus, they were teaching false doctrine. Teachers are important, but incompetent and unworthy ones do a lot of harm to the Body of Christ. James follows his warning with grace; you don't have to be perfect to teach, no one is. But this does not negate the seriousness of the first warning. James makes it clear that to take up the mantle of teacher is a serious thing, but I hear him saying: give grace to your teachers. They will stumble, as every one of us does.

## ***Prayer Points***

- Let us lift our teachers up. Think of those who teach at Harvest: Pastor Jeremy, Pastor Jim, Pastor Cory, all the teachers in Harvest Kids, Life Group Leaders, etc. Pray for each of them.

# DAY 2

## *Daily Reading*

James 3:3-6

### *Study Questions*

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?



## ***Devotional Thought***

A bit in a horse's mouth. A rudder on a boat. A spark or small flame. All of these are small and seemingly insignificant, but they have great power. James specifically points to the destructive power in a small flame. It doesn't take much to start a fire, and that fire, if left uncontrolled or attended, can become very destructive. The tongue is such a small part of the body, but it can bring quick and complete destruction. It is easy here to point to examples on a large scale where someone's words led to significant harm, but look closer to home, consider how your words burn and destroy others. How many churches or communities have been destroyed by unchecked words, gossip, or slander? It only takes repeating one unchecked story to destroy a person. It only takes uttering one negative thing about another to begin an avalanche that could not only ruin the person but divide a church.

James is specific as to where the fire of the tongue comes from: hell. What better way to destroy the message of the Gospel than to ignite fires from the words used by those who are speaking that Gospel? How many people have turned away from Christ due to the hypocritical words of those who profess to know Him? Let us not be the reason another is turned from the Gospel. Take time today to examine your words, do not look around, look inside. What fires have you started or spread? Are there fires you need to extinguish?

## ***Prayer Points***

- Pray that God would reveal to you the fires your tongue has started.
  
- Ask Him to give you wisdom in how to put these fires out.

# DAY 3

## *Daily Reading*

James 3:7-9

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

After pointing to the power within the tongue and its tendency towards destruction, James then tells us that it cannot be tamed. While man has tamed, and can control almost any animal, the tongue escapes control. James seemingly cannot over-emphasize the power of the tongue. Read James 3:9 again. Read it again. James points out a problem, we bless God, but curse His image. Read one more time the last half of that verse. “We curse people who are made in the likeness of God.” Every individual has been created in the image of God. No matter what they have done to you or someone else, no matter what they have said, no matter their heart, they are made in God’s image and yet we slander, gossip, and tear them down. We throw mud on the image of God. There are things we would not dare to say to/about God, but we don’t think twice about saying them to/about a person made in His image.

As James pointed out earlier, “we all stumble in many ways.” We all have those people who we do not get along with. Picture that person, imagine them standing/sitting beside you. They are made in the image of God. Sit with that for a couple minutes. That person you have said those things about, bears the image of God. Allow God to work in your heart.

## ***Prayer Points***

- Spend some time praying for those who are made in the image of God that you have spoken negative things about.
  
- Pray for those who you struggle to love. Ask God to help you see them as His Image bearers.

# DAY 4

## *Daily Reading*

James 3:9-10

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

James states that blessing and cursing flow from the same mouth and this should not be! He highlights this inconsistency in the comparisons in the following verses that we will look at tomorrow, but for today let us just consider ourselves, our own tongue, our own words. When you open your mouth, do blessings pour out or curses? When you are about to speak, do people wonder what will be said? Do they wince in anticipation of the possible lashing that may come out? Are you known for your gentle and encouraging words or for your aggressive and abrasive words? Consider the words you use, the things you have said. Are you consistent? Is that consistently good or evil?

## ***Prayer Points***

- Spend some time asking God to fill you with gentle, encouraging, life-giving words.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Ask Him to open doors for you to speak life into someone else today.

# DAY 5

## *Daily Reading*

James 3:11-12

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

James points to inconsistencies and impossibilities and says these things ought not be so! We know he is right! We feel it! We know that our irresponsible and inconsistent words are not right. Yet, we go on and on. We continue because of the evil, untamable nature of the tongue. When left to our own, the tongue will rule. Therefore, we must make it submit to the Spirit. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 10:5 to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. This is how we ought to approach our tongue.

Start with the thought, make the thoughts obedient to Christ, and the tongue will follow. Take time today to examine your thoughts and see how they may lead to an untamed, out-of-control tongue.

## ***Prayer Points***

- Ask Christ to help you to bring your thoughts and your tongue under His control. Give Him your mind and your tongue.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Ask Him to fill your mind and lead your words.





# **WEEK FIVE**

Ruth Hochstetler

Harvest Missions Advocate

Jobs For Life Mentor

# DAY 1

## *Daily Reading*

James 3:13-18

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

What a timely and valuable message from James about how to recognize true wisdom! In today's culture there are a multitude of voices, magnified by social media with its easy access and ability to allow faceless engagement. If we've learned anything about wisdom in the last few years, we know that it isn't easy to discern. It can be easily distorted, and we are all vulnerable to being lured into accepting what seems good because it's popular or because it confirms our own thinking.

James is giving us tools for comparing God's wisdom with earthly, even devilish, wisdom. The first test is to consider the source. Anyone holding on to envy and selfishness will only generate "disorder and every evil practice." Likewise, someone who is not living a "life of good deeds done in humility" will not bring forth God's wisdom.

Secondly, examine wisdom through the filters found in verse 17 from the Living Bible paraphrase: "is it peace-loving and courteous, does it allow discussion, is it willing to yield to others, is it merciful, does it inspire good deeds, and is it wholehearted, straightforward and sincere?" James has given us some very practical advice for judging wisdom.

### ***Prayer Points***

- Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart to find any areas of pride in your own wisdom, any envy or selfishness. Write down anything He shows you and ask for His forgiveness.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you discern between God's wisdom and the world's wisdom. Ask Him to make you a person who plants seeds of peace.
- Thank Him for giving us a clear understanding of what His wisdom looks, and acts like through these verses in James.

# DAY 2

## *Daily Reading*

James 4:1-3

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

Before we dismiss these verses as not applying to us because we aren't violent, we certainly don't kill each other, let's consider our motives when we are in conflict with someone. What about our last quarrel? What was so important that we had to have the last word, or had to make sure the other person understood that we were right? Or, like James' audience, we might be in conflict because we are jealous of whoever seems to have it better than us.

I remember wanting my adult son to stay in touch with me more. When I let him know what I wanted and he didn't change his behavior, I was disappointed. That disappointment led me to judge him as being uncaring and rejecting me. Out of the hurt of not getting what I wanted from him, I lashed out in anger and said some words that I wish I could take back. That process describes what Peacemaker Ministries calls a progression of an idol. Desire, even a good desire, can become a demand that left unmet leads us to disappointment and then judging and punishing (lashing out, giving the cold shoulder to, "cancelling") the person who didn't give us the results we felt we needed.

How much better is it to ask God to provide for our needs? God will answer the prayers of a humble heart that trusts wholeheartedly in Him and in His timing.

## ***Prayer Points***

- Is the Holy Spirit showing you any heart desires or attitudes that are hindering any of your relationships? Ask Him for forgiveness.
- Is there anyone you need to forgive? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you humility, courage, and wisdom to make things right.
- Growing in love for those we find difficult to love sometimes starts with praying for them. Ask God to bless whoever you find hard to love.

# DAY 3

## *Daily Reading*

James 4:4-6

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

It would seem James is continuing his thought from the previous verses where he lays out the consequences of pursuing selfish desires and pleasures. In today's verses, he's calling these pursuits adultery and making friends with the world, which makes us God's enemies.

How do we know when we are choosing to make friends with the world? I think the answer lies in assessing our friendship with God. Are we pursuing Him to the degree that the world's pleasures and lures pale in comparison to what we experience as God's chosen, loved, and favored people? Like any good friendship requires, are we talking to and listening to God on a regular basis to keep our relationship fresh and alive? He woos us like a lover who won't tolerate other lovers in our lives.

James says that God gives humble hearts more grace to keep choosing Him as their first love. Our eyes and hearts will be tempted to wander away from Him and to be dazzled by what the world can offer. Let this old song be the posture of our hearts:

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,  
In the light of His glory and grace.”

## ***Prayer Points***

- Ask the Holy Spirit for more grace to respond to God's amazing love for you. Spend some time thanking Him for His love and all that He's given you.
- Ask Him to keep your heart contented in His love.

# DAY 4

## *Daily Reading*

James 4:6-10

### *Study Questions*

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?



## ***Devotional Thought***

Picking up from yesterday's devotional, we learned that God gives more grace to the humble. But how do we become humble? What does humility look like? Today's section in James provides that answer.

James makes a list for us of how we can humble ourselves.

1. Submit to God. (Dictionary definition--to give over or yield to the power or authority of another)
2. Resist the devil-say no to his temptations
3. Come near to God - He's been waiting to draw you in close to Him
4. Confess the things that drew you away from Him - Let them go, and stop being divided in wanting God and wanting to be the world's friend too.
5. Pursuing our own way or selfish desires should grieve us deeply with tears, mourning and gloom. Parents of young kids will remember the half-hearted "I'm sorry" their child mumbled when asked to apologize to a sibling. That's the opposite of what our waywardness from God requires.
6. And lastly, James calls us again to humility before God. We realize how desperately we need His help to stay true to Him and to keep our hearts pure. Good news! He will lift us up! His love and forgiveness never end.

## ***Prayer Points***

- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where you are choosing other things to fulfill you rather than developing a wholehearted desire for more of Him. Tell Him how sorry you are and allow yourself to grieve your wandering away from Him.
- Ask Him for more grace to keep your heart fixed on Him. You may even need to ask Him to help you *want* to have Him be first in your life. Don't be afraid to be honest with Him. He knows everything you feel and think already.
- Sit in silence and enjoy His presence for a while, remembering His unending love and desire for you.

# DAY 5

## *Daily Reading*

James 4:11-12

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

This section of James continues his plea for brothers and sisters in God's family to get along. Slandering someone starts with judging them and finding them falling short of whatever you think they should be or do. Slander is speaking ill of them. God is the only one who can judge whether or not people are living up to His commandments. He sees hearts as well as actions. We have no right to judge others.

Not too long ago, the Holy Spirit nailed me on this. Even if I never speak the words out loud, my thoughts of judgment are just as wrong. I can extend grace and give others the benefit of the doubt when I realize my own failures. Do to others as you would have them do to you is the law I needed to obey.

## ***Prayer Points***

- Holy Spirit, we need You. Prompt us to quickly turn from thinking badly of others to receiving Your heart of love for them.
- Help us to care more about building up the family of God than pointing out their faults.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how to speak words of encouragement and empathy to those you meet today.



# **WEEK SIX**

Adam Young  
Harvest Elder

# DAY 1

## *Daily Reading*

James 4:13-16

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

Having goals is a good thing, however, if God is not at the center of those goals, where does that leave us? Making goals absent of the will of our Father sometimes will leave us feeling empty and at a loss when plans change or when reaching those goals does not bring satisfaction.

James is telling us that we don't know what tomorrow will bring, much less the number of days that we have to live. He says that "our life is a mist that appears for a little while then vanishes." Our goals and plans should have God at the center of them; otherwise, what is the point of them?

Yes, we must plan ahead for tomorrow, next week, next month, etc., but we should hold those plans loosely. If God's desires are at the center of our plans, then we will not be disappointed when plans change or don't come to fruition.

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

## ***Prayer Points***

- Ask God to reveal to you what His desires and goals are for your life. Write them below.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Pray for God to open doors and opportunities for those goals to be met but also for Him to mold your goals into what His will is for your life.

# DAY 2

## *Daily Reading*

James 5:1-6

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?



## ***Devotional Thought***

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

It is important to note that James is not saying that money is the problem but accumulating money for the sake of money and not investing it into eternal rewards will not bring about those treasures in heaven. Missionaries need money to help them spread the Gospel, churches need money to reach people and build lives. Christian organizations need money to help feed the hungry, provide shelter for the homeless and clothes for the poor.

When we realize that everything we have is because of Christ's blessings in our life, then we begin to view our finances differently. Everything that we have is because of God. When we begin to see our finances through that lens and we catch hold of how God can use those finances to further His kingdom and reach people, then we too are invested in those things!

## ***Prayer Points***

- Spend time asking God to reveal in your life where money/ things have become more important than reaching people.
- Pray for God to use the blessings that He has given you to help others.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what is deep inside your heart.

# DAY 3

## *Daily Reading*

James 5:7-8

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

Does the farmer relax and take it easy and show up when the crop is ready to be harvested and expect a great harvest? No, on the contrary, the farmer must labor in the fall to plan and prepare the soil and then again in the spring to work the soil and sow the seed. In the summer, the farmer must watch for weeds and disease and treat the crop as needed so that when the fall comes, they may then reap a harvest. The farmer must also be patient, waiting for God to send the rains at the right time to nourish the crops.

James says we are to be like the farmers, not waiting until the coming of Christ at the great harvest to spread the Gospel news. We must prepare now in anticipation of the right moments to share the good news and be able to enjoy a bountiful harvest! Yes, we have to wait patiently for God to provide the right opportunities, but we should be ready when those come. We are not to live as if Christ is not coming, but instead work now to advance His kingdom; standing firm in our faith and eager to share the good news in preparation for His coming!

## ***Prayer Points***

- Ask God: Am I waiting patiently for the Lord, or am I rushing ahead, trying to make something happen before He is ready?
- Pray that God will reveal to you the people and situations that He is asking you to sow seeds. List those people or situations below.
- What are those areas that the Holy Spirit is telling you to wait patiently in?

# DAY 4

## *Daily Reading*

James 5:9-11

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

It is sometimes easy to get caught up in complaining about others. The world will tell us that we have the right to judge others for their actions. It does not feel good to have others judge and make assumptions about us or our situations, still, we are tempted to do that to them.

James tells us that the Lord is the one who will judge, and He is standing at the door. We do not know when He will come, therefore, we need to forgive and love our brothers and sisters. We need to own what we have done and be willing to admit our shortcomings and faults instead of pointing out what we perceive to be wrong with someone else.

There may be a time that you will want to react out of anger or frustration, but James is encouraging us to persevere when we are wrongly accused or mistreated. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, and we are to imitate Him in our interactions with others.

## ***Prayer Points***

- Ask the Holy Spirit where you are judging someone else and what you need to do in order to love them and extend compassion and mercy.
  
- Pray that the Holy Spirit would speak to you about anyone that you need to ask for forgiveness because you have judged them. Write their name down and ask for forgiveness from God and them.

# DAY 5

## *Daily Reading*

James 5:12

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

A person with a reputation for exaggeration or lying often can't get anyone to believe them on their word alone. Christians should never become like that. Always be honest so that others will believe your simple yes or no. By avoiding lies, half-truths, and omissions of the truth, you will become known as a trustworthy person. If you are known as a trustworthy person, then people will listen and believe when you speak about the Gospel and what Jesus has done in your own life and what He can do in their lives.

## ***Prayer Points***

- If you have been one to exaggerate the truth, pray that the Holy Spirit will not only give you grace but will equip you to be gracious and honest toward others.
  
- Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you any areas that you have not been trustworthy and what you need to do to correct those areas.





# **WEEK SEVEN**

Jim Dreier

Associate Pastor

Harvest Community Church

# DAY 1

## *Daily Reading*

James 5:13

### *Study Questions*

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

Prayer and praise are two vital elements in the Christian life. They are also the two essential components of a believer's spiritual walk that are most frequently lacking.

In every circumstance of life, it is a privilege to come to God in prayer, whether in times of excitement or despair. God has ears that are open to the hearts of His people. He is our ever-present help in times of need no matter what changing moments we face in life. It is essential that we come to God with hearts of thanksgiving through continuous prayer and praise.

The desire to pray and praise can be infiltrated by our own thinking and tainted with entitlement. Having the mindset of God requires consistent prayer and praise. It demonstrates a trust in the God which pleases His heart and glorifies His holy name.

Prayer and praise allow us to approach God's throne of grace, for mercy for help in time of need. It should not be a last hope when all else has failed but should be our first delight and desire.

## ***Prayer Points***

- Bring your prayer requests and praises to the Holy Spirit today! List a few of them below.
  
- Spend some time in prayer and praising God for what He is able to accomplish.
  
- Encounter and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what you need to know today.

# DAY 2

## *Daily Reading*

James 5:14-15

### *Study Questions*

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

How do we know when someone is going to be healed and when someone is not? How do we pray with faith, where we trust God for the outcome, believing in healing? Faith is a belief and trust that God is in control of everything. No matter what happens, God hears every prayer offered up in faith, and He answers them.

God gives gifts of healings to the people He created. He provides these gifts of healings by His grace as He wills. Some people might receive a gift of healing more regularly than other people. God commissions that in some circumstances the elders be the channel of needed prayer for people. The elders are a group of men who earnestly desire to pray a prayer of faith so that the sick will be made well. It is an encounter with the Holy Spirit.

A desired outcome may take time with a prayer offered in faith and there may not be an immediate response. What we know is that we can trust God no matter what is going on in our lives. Persevere in prayer! He is the awesome and amazing God and the one who loves us even more than we can imagine. An encounter with the Holy Spirit changes everything!

## ***Prayer Points***

- Bring your prayers offered in faith to God today! List a few of them below.
- Spend time offering the prayers of faith to God! He is able to accomplish more than we ask or think!
- Encounter and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what you need to know today.

# DAY 3

## *Daily Reading*

James 5:15-16

### *Study Questions*

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## ***Devotional Thought***

Confession is a powerful tool that brings freedom to our lives. We are called to pray for each other willingly and graciously. What would happen if we prayed for the people who have wronged us? As we pray for the people who have wronged us, the fellowship of His love will pour into our hearts and minds. When we have wronged another person, we are called to go to them quickly and admit our sin and seek their forgiveness. This is the will of God for us. The prayer and confession will remove bitterness and the residue of unforgiveness.

The focus of our prayer is not so much about us, but what God can do in our hearts. It is not all about the specifics of how we confess, but about Who we confess it to. We are normal people praying to an amazing God!

We are called to be holy for God is holy. As we confess our sins to one another and to our Father in heaven, fellowship is renewed, and our prayers become effective. It is only as we abide in Him and walk Godly in Christ Jesus that we are enabled to pray in spirit and truth. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

## ***Prayer Points***

- Bring areas of your life where you have been offended or caused an offense to God today. List a few of them below.
- Spend time with God. Am I in right relationship with God and the people around me? Ask God: Who do I need to forgive? Is there someone I need to go to and ask for forgiveness? Confession provides a powerful freedom!
- Encounter and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what you need to know today.

# DAY 4

## *Daily Reading*

James 5:16-18

### **Study Questions**

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?



## ***Devotional Thought***

Elijah had a relationship with God! God chose Elijah not because he was perfect, but because he had a heart attitude that desired to be under God's direction. He was willing to follow and be obedient, regardless of the consequences. Elijah experienced miracles in his lifetime that we cannot fathom. Elijah's faithfulness to God and his trust in God's sovereignty enabled his prayers to be answered.

These verses provide an opportunity through the life of Elijah to illustrate the effectiveness and power of prayer. It reveals to us that the goal is not to achieve perfection, but to live for righteousness. Elijah was not perfect and there is evidence of his failures. He was a man with a sin nature just like us. Elijah faced difficult decisions many days of his life.

When we trust God to provide for us, we can work for the benefit of others in need. If our faith in God is real and we have an absolute trust in God, then our faith will lead to all kinds of practical actions for the benefit of others in need. Believing God leads to impossibilities becoming possible.

## ***Prayer Points***

- Bring possibilities and impossibilities to God today! List a few of them below.
- Spend time offering prayers of faith to God! He is able to accomplish more than we ask or think!
- What practical actions can be taken for the benefit of other people?
- Encounter and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what you need to know today.

# DAY 5

## *Daily Reading*

James 5:19-20

## *Study Questions*

Answer the four questions below about today's passage.

What does this passage tell you about James?

What does this passage tell you about James' audience?

What is James telling the audience?

What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

## *Devotional Thought*

We are called as believers to put our faith into action. In these verses James is referring to someone who has strayed from the truth. This person may not have given their life to Christ, may have wandered away from what they believed or may have been seduced in living a sinful lifestyle. We know that Jesus is the way to eternal life. We could debate about whether those who wander away were saved and now they are not or if that is even possible. Only God knows the heart of each individual.

Our faith in action is all about reaching people and building lives. If a person is wandering, we are commissioned to go to that person and help them return to God. What we need to know is if someone strays away from God, someone needs to go to them and bring them back to God to experience His forgiveness. When we do, we will be saving them from spiritual death. And when the individual has an encounter with the Holy Spirit, it can save them from a life of destruction. Whether the individual did not know Christ or had simply lost their way, both cover a multitude of sins.

It is interesting that James ends his letter with these verses. It implies the importance of these verses. The proper and loving confrontation of others involved in sin can restore wandering believers to the truth. God transforms hearts, but he invites us to partner with Him to influence the people around us. Our faith in God displays itself in love and mercy. Let's provide opportunities for wanderers to encounter the Holy Spirit.

### ***Prayer Points***

- Ask God to reveal to you people in your life that have wandered away from a relationship with God. List a few of them below.
  
- Spend time offering prayers of faith to God for the people who have fallen away or who have never had a relationship with God! He is able to accomplish more than we ask or think!
  
- Ask God if there is a specific action that you need to take to reach the person who has wandered.
  
- Encounter and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what you need to know today.



[hccgoshen.org](http://hccgoshen.org)

