

He Giveth More Grace

A Pastoral Commentary on James

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A pastoral exposition for personal reading
and group Bible study

He Giveth More Grace

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Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

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Introduction

This commentary is the end result of having studied and preached through the Epistle of James during worship services at Redeemer Church of Piketon, Ohio. These chapters grew out of the ordinary life of a congregation gathered around the Word of God. We came to this letter as people who needed the gospel, who knew something of suffering, and who needed to learn how to love one another more faithfully.

My prayer throughout that study was that we would hear James without losing sight of the finished work of Jesus Christ. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Christ has accomplished the redemption of His people, and His righteousness alone avails before God. The Holy Spirit gives life through the Word of truth and brings sinners to rest in the Savior. Everything James commands must be read in the light of that grace.

James addresses the daily life of people who profess faith in the Lord Jesus. He brings us into the home, into the workplace, and into the fellowship of the church. He asks how we speak when we are angry, how we receive someone who has little money, and what we do when a brother needs food. He brings our plans under the sovereignty of God. He calls suffering believers to patience and directs the sick to the prayers of the church. Throughout the letter, the mercy we have received becomes the reason to show mercy.

An important distinction guides the exposition that follows. Our justification before God rests entirely upon Christ and is received through faith apart from the merit of our works. Our conduct gives visible expression to that faith among other people. In this commentary, James's teaching about justification by works is understood as the practical vindication of faith through its expression in love. A neighbor cannot see into our hearts. He can see whether we keep our word, share what we have, and treat him with kindness. James

presses that responsibility upon the church with great seriousness.

That distinction protects the comfort of the gospel while allowing the commands of Scripture to speak with their full force. Grace frees us to serve. A settled hope in Christ gives us reason to confess our failures honestly and seek the good of our brethren. We need no pretence of sinless perfection. We do need the Word of God to correct our pride and awaken us to the opportunities for love that lie before us.

The eight chapters follow the divisions of the original sermons and together cover the entire epistle. The spoken material has been revised into connected commentary, with repeated oral phrases and passing digressions removed. Explanations have been developed where they help readers follow the passage. The biblical text and all extended Scripture quotations are presented in the King James Version, including passages that were originally read or paraphrased in another translation.

Each chapter contains the James passage in full, supporting cross references quoted in full, and five discussion questions. Read the main passage slowly before working through its exposition. Consider how the cross references illuminate the argument. The questions are intended for personal reflection and for honest conversation in a Bible study group. They ask us to understand the text and to consider what obedience might look like in the circumstances God has given us.

I hope these pages will encourage the weary believer and make the riches of Christ more precious to the reader. I also hope they will help our churches become places where people receive patient instruction and practical care. We proclaim the sovereign grace of God. May the graciousness of our life together bear fitting witness to that confession.

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Faith in the Furnace

Joy During Trials

James 1:1–18

James begins among people whose lives have been unsettled. His readers belong to the twelve tribes scattered abroad. They know what it means to live away from familiar places, and the letter assumes that trials will meet them there. The servant of God writes to strengthen their confidence in the Lord and to teach them how to understand the difficulties through which they must pass.

The church still needs this instruction. A congregation may face pressure to soften the gospel in order to gain acceptance. A family may be shaken by bereavement or illness. An individual believer may be worn down by an uncertain future. In such circumstances, our feelings can persuade us that God has forgotten us. James directs our attention to the Father whose gifts are good and whose purpose does not change.

James 1:1–18 | KJV

¹ James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. ² My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; ³ Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

⁴ But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. ⁵ If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

⁷ For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. ⁸ A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. ⁹ Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

¹⁰ But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. ¹¹ For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. ¹² Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

¹³ Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: ¹⁴ But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. ¹⁵ Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

¹⁶ Do not err, my beloved brethren. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. ¹⁸ Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

A servant writing to scattered brethren

James 1:1

James identifies himself through his relationship to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is a servant. That simple confession establishes the posture in which the letter should be received. Its authority comes from the God he serves, and its instruction calls the scattered brethren into willing dependence upon that same Lord.

Their dispersion has not placed them beyond God's care. The Lord knows His people wherever they are. They may be separated by distance, but they belong to one household of faith. This matters when we feel isolated. Our circumstances can change rapidly, while our relationship to the Savior remains secure in His keeping.

As we read, we should also remember that James speaks as a brother to brethren. His searching commands are given within a relationship of pastoral concern. He intends to help the church endure and to correct conduct that harms its

fellowship. We should hear the firmness of his counsel together with the affection that repeatedly appears throughout the epistle.

Joy in the purpose of God

James 1:2–4

The command to count trials as joy can be difficult to hear when the trial is at its fiercest. A person in pain may barely have strength to think beyond the next hour. James nevertheless gives us something solid to consider: the trying of faith works patience. God uses the trial to teach His people steadfast dependence upon Him.

Joy is a settled delight in God and His promises. It can live in a heart that is grieving. We may weep beside a grave and still know that Christ is the resurrection and the life. We may acknowledge the seriousness of an illness while resting in the faithfulness of the Lord. Scripture gives us room to speak truthfully about suffering. Our hope rests in the Savior who holds us through it.

The refiner's fire helps us understand the purpose James describes. Gold remains gold as the fire brings its impurities to the surface. In a similar way, trial exposes the things upon which we have leaned and teaches us to depend more deeply upon Christ. The process can be painful. Yet the Lord's intention toward His people is gracious, and His work has an appointed end.

1 Peter 1:6–7 | KJV

⁶ Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: ⁷ That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

The words “perfect and entire” describe the fullness toward which patience works. They must be read alongside James's later confession that we all offend in many things. Our

complete righteousness before God is found in Christ. In daily experience, the Lord teaches us to live more fully in the light of that provision. We learn His faithfulness through circumstances in which our own resources prove inadequate.

I have often pictured the riches of Christ as an inexhaustible storehouse. By grace, the believer has been brought into its possession. Throughout life, we discover more of what has already been given to us in Him. Yesterday's mercy does not exhaust today's supply. A trial may lead us into a deeper understanding of a promise we have read for years.

Wisdom for the trial

James 1:5–8

James moves naturally from patience to wisdom. We need wisdom to interpret our experience in the light of God's character. We need to know how to speak, how to wait, and how to act when the way ahead is unclear. The invitation is wonderfully direct: ask God. He gives liberally and does not reproach His children for their need.

God's generosity encourages an honest prayer. We can say, "Lord, I do not understand this trial. Help me trust Thee and serve Thee within it." Such a prayer acknowledges His authority. It also confesses that wisdom must come from Him. Christ Himself is the fullness of the provision we need.

1 Corinthians 1:30–31 | KJV

³⁰ But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: ³¹ That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

Asking in faith means coming to the Lord with confidence in His goodness. The double-minded person is divided in allegiance, tossed between dependence upon God and a determination to set his own terms. James's image of a wave describes that instability. We should therefore examine

whether we are seeking God's wisdom or merely asking Him to endorse a decision we have already made.

This warning should lead the troubled believer toward the Lord. A trembling cry for help is still a cry directed to Him. The strength of our assurance can fluctuate, but the One to whom we pray remains faithful. We come because He has invited us, asking that our wavering hearts be steadied by His Word.

The poor and the rich before God

James 1:9–11

The brother of low degree is told to rejoice in his exaltation. His earthly circumstances cannot measure the riches of his position in Christ. He may possess little that the world admires, yet he belongs to the Lord and shares in the promises of the gospel. Poverty does not diminish the worth of a soul whom Christ has redeemed.

The rich believer is directed toward humility. James compares the passing beauty of earthly prosperity to a flower withered by the heat. Wealth may disappear, and the wealthy person himself will certainly pass from this life. Death can interrupt a business plan in the middle of its execution. Possessions offer no lasting refuge from the frailty we all share.

Both readers are called to find their confidence in the Lord. The poor need the comfort of their inheritance in Christ. The rich need the humility that remembers how dependent they remain. Contentment grows as we receive our circumstances under the Father's hand and learn to trust the sufficiency of His care.

Philippians 4:11–13 | KJV

¹¹ Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. ¹² I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ¹³ I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

Endurance and the crown of life

James 1:12

James calls the enduring believer blessed and points him toward the crown of life. This is the promised inheritance of those who love the Lord. The promise draws the sufferer's eyes beyond the immediate pressure to the life God has secured for His people.

Perseverance belongs to the life of faith because the Lord preserves His own. The believer continues to look to Christ through the weakness and conflict of this world. Our endurance brings no independent merit before God. The grace that called us also sustains us, and the Savior's promise gives us confidence when our strength is small.

John 10:27–29 | KJV

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

²⁸ And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

We should therefore encourage one another to hold fast to Christ. Every trial already endured gives us occasion to remember His past mercies. Even when a trial ends in death, His keeping has not failed. He brings His people into His presence, and the life He promises remains theirs.

Temptation and personal responsibility

James 1:13–16

James carefully distinguishes the testing through which God works from temptation to evil. God is holy. He neither experiences an inward attraction to wickedness nor entices His creatures into it. The sinful desire belongs to us. We must confess that responsibility without hiding behind the doctrine of providence.

The movement from desire to death is described with terrible clarity. Lust draws a person away and entices him. When it conceives, sin is brought forth, and sin produces death. What first appears desirable carries consequences far beyond its initial promise. James calls us to recognize that course before we are carried further along it.

Believers remain engaged in a daily struggle against sin. The presence of commands, warnings, and calls to confession throughout the epistles makes that plain. We should ask the Lord for deliverance from temptation and refuse the excuses by which we protect a favorite sin. Our help is found in the grace of Christ, whose blood cleanses His people.

1 John 1:8–9 | KJV

⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Honest confession belongs with active resistance. We may thank God for victories He has granted while acknowledging how much remains to be corrected. Growth in the knowledge of Christ makes us more aware of our need. It also makes His mercy more precious. We can face the truth about ourselves because our hope rests in Him.

The Father who gives life

James 1:17–18

The Father of lights is the source of every good and perfect gift. The created lights change in their appearance, but their Maker remains constant. There is no shifting shadow in His goodness. This assurance answers the suspicion that suffering can awaken in us. The God who governs our days has not become unreliable.

James places the new birth among the gifts of that unchanging Father. “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.” The initiative belongs to God. Through the gospel, He brings His people to life and makes them a kind of firstfruits of His

creatures. The Christian's existence is already a testimony to sovereign grace.

2 Corinthians 4:6 | KJV

⁶ For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The God who gave life will supply wisdom for the life He has given. We therefore come to Him in the trial, confess our sin when tempted, and thank Him for every mercy. Beloved, the Father's purpose is larger than the moment we can see. Christ is sufficient for the journey, and His people may rest in the hand that brought them forth.

Questions for Discussion

1. What does James 1:2–4 teach about the purpose of trials, and how can that truth sustain someone who is grieving?
2. How does asking for wisdom in faith differ from asking God to approve a course we have already chosen?
3. Compare James 1:9–11 with Philippians 4:11–13. What should contentment look like in poverty and in prosperity?
4. Trace the progression described in James 1:14–15. Where might you need to confess a desire or resist an excuse before it leads to further sin?
5. How does the statement “Of his own will begat he us” strengthen your confidence in God's care during a present trial?

Faith in Action

The Word at Work

James 1:19–27

The Father has brought His people forth by the Word of truth. James now considers how those people should receive that Word and live under its instruction. The movement is important. New life comes by the sovereign will of God, and the life He gives is to be expressed in our conduct. We hear as those who have been loved, and we act as those who have been called into the fellowship of Christ.

The subjects are familiar enough to meet us before the day is over. Someone will say something that irritates us. We will be tempted to speak before we understand. A neighbor may need help, or an opportunity for kindness may interrupt our plans. James brings the Word into those moments and asks us to take its instruction seriously.

James 1:19–27 | KJV

¹⁹ Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: ²⁰ For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. ²¹ Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

²² But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. ²³ For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: ²⁴ For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

²⁵ But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. ²⁶ If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but

deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. ²⁷ Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

A teachable heart

James 1:19

James addresses his readers as beloved brethren. His affection gives the command a pastoral setting: be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath. These are directions for the practical life of the household of faith. They should shape the way we listen to Scripture and the way we attend to one another.

A readiness to hear begins with humility. We acknowledge that we need instruction. In conversation, we allow another person to finish. When a disagreement arises, we resist the impulse to decide the matter after hearing only one account. A hasty judgment can wound someone simply because we have not taken time to understand.

Years spent teaching in the public school classroom reinforced the value of this counsel for me. A child's first account of a dispute could sound complete until another child explained what had happened beforehand. Listening did not remove the need to correct wrongdoing. It enabled correction to proceed with a better understanding of the situation. The same patience serves us in our homes and churches.

Proverbs 19:20 | KJV

²⁰ Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.

This teachable posture is especially necessary before the Word of God. We need the Lord to correct the assumptions we bring to the text. Familiarity can make us careless listeners. We may recognize a verse and stop considering what it says. A humble heart continues to receive instruction, asking the Spirit to make the truth clear and useful in daily life.

Romans 10:17 | KJV

¹⁷ So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

The limits of human anger

James 1:20

The wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God. That sentence exposes a temptation common to religious people. We can imagine that our intensity gives our words spiritual power. We may defend a true doctrine with a spirit that injures everyone who hears us. James requires us to examine the anger itself.

The power of salvation rests with God. Our temper cannot regenerate a heart. We should proclaim the gospel clearly and answer error faithfully, while remembering that the Holy Spirit must give understanding. This frees us from the anxious belief that we must overpower a listener in order to bring him to Christ.

The same instruction belongs in public conversation. A hurried comment on social media can become a lasting record of impatience. Before we respond, we should ask whether we have understood the matter and whether our words will serve a useful purpose. Sometimes a measured answer is needed. Sometimes silence allows us to pray and think before speaking.

Ephesians 4:31–32 | KJV

³¹ Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: ³² And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Paul's direction to the Ephesians agrees with James. Bitterness and malice must be put away, and forgiveness is to be exercised in the light of God's forgiveness in Christ. The gospel gives the reason for this conduct. People who have received such mercy have ample cause to show patience toward others.

Receiving the engrafted Word

James 1:21

James calls his readers to lay aside filthiness and the overflowing wickedness that clings to fallen life. The language is direct because sin is serious. A Christian may not excuse dishonesty, cruelty, or an entrenched grudge by appealing to the security of salvation. Those sins harm other people and spoil our testimony. The Lord's Word calls us to confess and forsake them.

The positive direction is to receive the engrafted Word with meekness. God's truth is to be welcomed into the heart. The life described in verse 18 continues under the nourishment and correction of the same Word. We come to Scripture ready to be taught, trusting the God who has already shown His power to save.

Meekness bows before the Lord's authority. It allows Him to name our sin without our rushing to defend it. We may have practiced a habit for many years. We may have good explanations for why we are angry. Yet when the Word exposes what is wrong, the believing response is to ask for mercy and help.

Psalm 25:9 | KJV

⁹ The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.

David's prayer after his sin gives voice to the believer's need for restored joy. Sin can rob our days of the delight we once knew in fellowship with God. We should bring that condition honestly before Him, remembering that the cleansing we need is found in His mercy.

Psalm 51:10–12 | KJV

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. ¹¹ Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. ¹² Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

The mirror and the forgetful hearer

James 1:22–24

James's illustration of the mirror is easy to understand. A man looks at his natural face and then goes away without attending to what he has seen. The act of looking has accomplished little because it has produced no continuing response. The hearer who receives instruction and immediately dismisses it has deceived himself.

Religious knowledge can become detached from ordinary conduct. We may discuss the depths of sovereign grace while neglecting a responsibility at work. We may defend the truth of election and speak harshly to a member of our household. James asks us to let the Word address the actual person who listens to it.

The deception lies in treating hearing as though it has fulfilled the whole duty. The sermon has been heard, the passage has been read, and the mind has been occupied. Yet the neighbor remains unfed and the apology remains unspoken. James calls the believer to carry the instruction into the circumstances for which it was given.

Luke 6:46 | KJV

⁴⁶ And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

This command gives us a useful way to conclude our reading. We can ask, "What has this passage shown me about the Lord, and what responsibility has it placed before me?" The answer may be quite ordinary. Perhaps we should listen patiently to our spouse or carry out a promise already made. Love has room to work in small things.

Continuing in the law of liberty

James 1:25

The attentive believer looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues there. He returns to the truth and remains under its instruction. James describes a persevering attention that becomes action. The blessing is experienced in doing what the Word teaches.

The law of liberty is understood here as God's moral will received in the freedom of the gospel. Christ has delivered His people from condemnation and brought them into willing service. We are free to love the brethren. We can give ourselves to useful work without imagining that the work purchases a place in the Father's household.

This liberty is precious. The believer can undertake a task with gratitude, confess its imperfections, and trust God to use it. A simple visit to someone who is lonely may be one of the good works laid before us. Its value is found in the love it expresses and the benefit it brings, while our righteousness before God remains entirely in Christ.

Galatians 5:13–14 | KJV

¹³ For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

¹⁴ For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

The gospel therefore provides both rest and direction. We rest in the finished work of the Savior and receive His instruction for the life that remains before us. The Spirit who gave us faith also enables us to serve. Dependence upon His strength belongs in the smallest act of obedience.

Philippians 2:13 | KJV

¹³ For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

A bridled tongue and a merciful life

James 1:26–27

James returns to speech as a test of practical religion. A person may think highly of his religious standing while allowing his tongue to wound others without restraint. The contradiction makes his profession empty in its practical expression. He deceives his own heart while damaging his witness before the people around him.

Pure religion is described in concrete terms: visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction and keeping oneself unspotted from the world. These vulnerable people need more than an expression of concern. Visiting includes the attentive care that enters their trouble and seeks their good. The church should be a place where such needs are noticed.

1 John 3:17–18 | KJV

¹⁷ But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? ¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

The call to remain unspotted concerns the character of our life among others. We should resist the greed and self-serving habits that make people disposable. Caring for someone in distress and refusing the world's corrupt values belong together. We cannot serve our neighbor well while treating him as a means to our own advancement.

None of us fulfils these commands perfectly. That fact should keep us humble and prayerful. It should also make us grateful that Christ is our righteousness. We have been loved at great cost, and the opportunity to express that love in the world is a privilege. Let us hear the Word with meekness and carry its instruction into the lives of those God has placed near us.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does the connection between James 1:18 and 1:19–21 help us understand the relationship between new birth and Christian conduct?
2. Describe a situation in which being swift to hear and slow to speak could prevent an unjust or hurtful response.
3. What is the self-deception illustrated by the mirror in James 1:22–24? Where might that warning apply to your habits of Bible study?
4. Read Galatians 5:13–14 alongside James 1:25. How does freedom in Christ provide a motive for serving others?
5. What practical step could your household or study group take to care for someone who is bereaved, isolated, or without family support?

Faith Displayed

Works That Witness

James 2:1–26

James brings us into an assembly where two visitors receive very different welcomes. One wears fine clothing and a gold ring. The other is poor and poorly dressed. The way the congregation treats them exposes a serious disorder in its life. People who confess the Lord of glory have allowed worldly status to govern their fellowship.

From that scene, James moves to a needy brother or sister, then to Abraham and Rahab. The examples press one practical question: how does the faith we profess become visible and useful among others? We must keep that question in view as we read the language of works and justification. The finished work of Christ remains the ground of our acceptance with God, and James calls the church to demonstrate its faith in daily conduct.

James 2:1–26 | KJV

¹ My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. ² For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; ³ And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:

⁴ Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? ⁵ Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? ⁶ But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

⁷ Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? ⁸ If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: ⁹ But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

¹⁰ For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. ¹¹ For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

¹³ For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment. ¹⁴ What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

¹⁶ And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? ¹⁷ Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. ¹⁸ Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

¹⁹ Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. ²⁰ But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

²² Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. ²⁴ Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

²⁵ Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? ²⁶ For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Receiving people in the name of the Lord of glory

James 2:1–4

The title “Lord of glory” places every earthly distinction in its proper place. The congregation belongs to Christ. A visitor’s financial position cannot increase his worth before the Savior or entitle him to a more gracious welcome. James condemns the practice of honoring the prosperous while humiliating the poor.

The partiality in his illustration appears in an ordinary act of hospitality. One person receives an inviting seat; the other is told to stand or sit beneath someone’s footstool. The congregation has made its judgment before either visitor has spoken. Clothing has become a measure of importance.

We should examine the customs of our own assemblies. A person who can contribute money or influence may receive attention almost without our noticing the difference. Someone whose life is visibly troubled may be treated as an inconvenience. The gospel teaches us to welcome people as those who need the same mercy we have received.

Our standing at the feet of Christ removes every cause for spiritual boasting. We bring no personal distinction that obligates the Lord to receive us. His grace is free. A church that confesses this truth should make room for the poor to hear it with dignity and affection.

Galatians 3:28 | KJV

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

The riches God gives

James 2:5–7

James reminds his readers that God has chosen people who are poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of His kingdom. Material poverty supplies no merit before God. His choice is gracious. The point is that a person whom the world overlooks may possess riches that worldly honor cannot provide.

The congregation's behavior has therefore contradicted the very grace it professes. It has despised the poor while courting people who, in the circumstances James describes, oppress believers and blaspheme the name by which they are called. The desire for social advantage has clouded spiritual judgment.

We should thank God for whatever resources He entrusts to us and use them in service. A wealthy believer is still wholly dependent upon mercy. A poor believer is a full member of the household of faith. The church's welcome should declare that Christ is sufficient for both.

The royal law and the seriousness of partiality

James 2:8–13

The royal law commands love for our neighbor as ourselves. Partiality violates that command because it refuses the dignity and consideration we readily desire for our own lives. James calls such behavior sin. It must be confessed as a transgression of God's will.

His statement about offending in one point strips away the shelter of selective obedience. The authority behind the command against adultery is the same authority behind the command against murder. We cannot claim to honor the Lawgiver while granting ourselves permission to disregard a command that inconveniences us. Our obedience in one matter does not cancel our guilt in another.

This exposes the impossibility of establishing righteousness through our own record. When the holy law speaks, it leaves

no room for boasting. We need the righteousness of Christ. At the same time, the law's searching character prevents us from treating favoritism as a small and harmless fault.

Romans 3:19–20 | KJV

¹⁹ Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

James then directs both speech and action toward the law of liberty. People who have received mercy should deal mercifully with others. His warning concerning judgment is solemn. Cruelty cannot be made acceptable by a religious profession, and the church must never turn the grace of God into an excuse for it.

“Mercy rejoiceth against judgment” directs our hearts toward the mercy in which believers live. The forgiven person has reason to abandon the posture of superiority. We should be quick to remember the patience shown to us when we encounter weakness in someone else. Such mercy honors the Lord whose name we bear.

A profession that leaves a neighbor hungry

James 2:14–17

James's next example makes the question of profit impossible to evade. A brother or sister lacks clothing and daily food. Someone offers peaceful words and wishes for warmth and fullness, yet supplies nothing. The need remains exactly where it was. The profession has brought the sufferer no practical benefit.

In the interpretation followed throughout these sermons, James's language about dead faith concerns this absence of practical usefulness. Faith kept inactive does not serve the neighbor who needs help. James is urging the brethren to put

their profession into action. He is not supplying an additional payment toward the redemption accomplished by Christ.

The question “can faith save him?” is therefore read here in the setting of the passage’s concern with profit and practical deliverance. Words alone do not relieve the distress James describes. This reading keeps the passage’s immediate illustration in view and distinguishes the work of service from the work by which Christ secures eternal salvation.

Consider money kept in a wallet while a hungry companion sits beside us. Its existence does not feed him. Or consider a field left uncultivated for years. The land is there, but no harvest reaches a table. These illustrations express the practical force of James’s rebuke as understood in this commentary. A faith that remains unexpressed brings no living testimony to the person in need.

1 John 3:16–18 | KJV

¹⁶ Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? ¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

We should feel the force of the command. If we can help, love calls us to act. A meal, a warm garment, or a practical arrangement for assistance gives visible expression to concern. Such service neither earns salvation nor becomes optional merely because salvation is free. It is the responsibility and privilege of people whom Christ has loved.

Showing faith through its expression

James 2:18–20

“I will shew thee my faith by my works” states the demonstrative concern plainly. Faith is inward; conduct can be observed. Our neighbor encounters our profession through the way we speak and behave. A merciful act provides a visible witness to the truth we confess.

We must also be careful about the object of faith. Even devils acknowledge truths about God and tremble. Mere awareness that God exists does not constitute resting in Christ as the Savior of sinners. The gospel directs us to His person and His finished work. Faith receives Him; its strength is never a substitute for His sufficiency.

A bridge provides a simple illustration. A traveller’s confidence can vary greatly while crossing it. What carries him is the bridge. In the spiritual matter before us, Christ alone bears the weight of our salvation. Our assurance may be strong one day and trembling the next. His accomplished redemption remains the same.

This keeps us from praising the quality of our believing as though it were our righteousness. It also gives us freedom to serve without constantly turning service into an examination of our worth. We can love our neighbor because the Savior has loved us, and we can point him toward the One in whom our confidence rests.

Matthew 5:16 | KJV

¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Abraham and faith vindicated

James 2:21–24

James turns to Abraham offering Isaac. The act demonstrated the faith of a man who had already believed God. The order matters. Genesis records the reckoning of righteousness in chapter 15, well before the offering described in chapter 22. James's appeal to both events allows us to see the relationship between the promise received and the obedience that followed.

Genesis 15:6 | KJV

⁶ And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

Hebrews 11:17–19 | KJV

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, ¹⁸ Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: ¹⁹ Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

Abraham trusted the God who had made the promise. His willingness to offer Isaac brought that trust into costly expression. The work did not create the truthfulness of God's promise or purchase the righteousness already reckoned to him. It displayed his confidence in the Lord who could fulfil His Word even through death.

In this sense, faith was made perfect through works: it reached an intended expression in obedience. The inward trust became visible in the event Scripture records. Abraham's life also contained serious failures. Those failures remind us that his acceptance rested in grace, while this act of obedience gives the church a striking example of faith at work.

Paul states the matter of Abraham's standing before God with equal clarity.

Romans 4:2–5 | KJV

² For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. ³ For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. ⁴ Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

⁵ But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Read together, the passages distinguish the ground of acceptance from the demonstration of faith. God justifies the ungodly through Christ. The believer's actions give testimony to the faith by which he rests in God's promise. James presses the latter concern upon people who need to put their profession into practice.

Rahab and the usefulness of faith

James 2:25–26

Rahab stands beside Abraham as a very different person who trusted the same God. Her confession in Joshua identifies the Lord as God in heaven above and in earth beneath. Her reception of the messengers and provision for their escape expressed that conviction in a dangerous situation.

Joshua 2:11 | KJV

¹¹ And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.

Hebrews 11:31 | KJV

³¹ By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.

The body without the spirit gives James his concluding image. Its inactivity makes his point vivid. In the reading followed here, faith left without expression remains lifeless in its testimony to others. The church is called to awaken to useful service, encouraging one another to act in love.

We should help the brother whose life has become withdrawn and bitter. We should remind him of Christ and invite him again into the fellowship and work of the church. Our task is to bear one another's burdens and to cultivate the good works for which God has fitted His people.

Ephesians 2:8–10 | KJV

⁸ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

The order of grace is beautiful. Salvation is God's gift, and those who receive it are His workmanship. We enter each day with opportunities to serve that we did not create and strength that He must supply. Let us welcome people without partiality and let our neighbors encounter, in practical kindness, the love we profess in Christ's name.

Questions for Discussion

1. What judgments are being made in James 2:1–4, and how might similar partiality appear in a church today?
2. How does James 2:10–11 expose selective obedience and our need for the righteousness of Christ?
3. Explain this commentary's reading of dead faith in James 2:14–17. How does the example of the hungry brother or sister shape that interpretation?
4. Compare Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:2–5, and James 2:21–24. How does the order of Abraham's belief and obedience clarify the argument presented here?
5. Identify a need that your faith could address through practical service. What would it mean to respond without seeking recognition or spiritual credit?

Faith and Wisdom

Taming the Tongue

James 3:1–18

The tongue occupies little space in the body, yet its influence reaches into nearly every relationship we have. Words can comfort a frightened child or crush his confidence. They can steady a weary believer or make his burden heavier. In the fellowship of the church, speech helps determine whether people find encouragement or become afraid to reveal their weakness.

James has already warned against an unbridled tongue. He now develops that warning through a series of vivid illustrations and then directs us toward wisdom from above. The passage requires honesty about our continuing struggle. It also gives us a fitting prayer: that the Lord would govern our words and make our fellowship peaceful.

James 3:1–18 | KJV

¹ My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. ² For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. ³ Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

⁴ Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. ⁵ Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

⁷ For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: ⁸ But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

¹⁰ Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. ¹¹ Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? ¹² Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

¹³ Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. ¹⁵ This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

¹⁶ For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. ¹⁷ But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

The responsibility of teaching

James 3:1–2

The word “masters” in this passage refers to teachers. James warns against seeking that position carelessly because those who teach bear a weighty responsibility. Their words shape the understanding of others. An error repeatedly taught can influence a family or congregation for years, and a harsh manner can make good instruction difficult to receive.

The office should therefore be approached with reverence. A title brings no independent spiritual greatness. The teacher remains a servant under the authority of Scripture. He must study carefully, speak faithfully, and remain willing to correct himself when the Word exposes a mistake.

In ministry, there are occasions when further study requires a preacher to withdraw an earlier statement. Humility allows

him to do so plainly. The honor of Christ matters more than preserving the appearance that we have always understood everything correctly. A congregation is well served by teachers who continue to be teachable.

2 Timothy 2:24–25 | KJV

²⁴ And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, ²⁵ In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

James includes himself in the confession that “in many things we offend all.” This acknowledgement sets the tone for the chapter. The command to govern speech is given to people who know they fall short. The tongue is so closely connected to the rest of life that mastery of it would indicate remarkable maturity throughout the person.

Parents and other members of the church should hear the warning too. Even without a teaching office, our words influence those who listen to us. Children learn something about our profession from what we say at home. A friend may remember an unguarded comment long after we have forgotten it. Speech is a stewardship entrusted to us by God.

Small instruments with great influence

James 3:3–5

The bit in a horse’s mouth directs a powerful animal. The rudder guides a large ship through strong winds. In each illustration, a small instrument exerts an influence far greater than its size suggests. James applies the same observation to the tongue.

One sentence can alter the direction of a conversation. An accusation may turn a disagreement into a quarrel. An honest admission may make reconciliation possible. We should therefore resist the assumption that words are harmless because they are easy to produce. Their effects can continue after the speaker has moved on.

In family life, gracious speech should be cultivated deliberately. We can share the gospel with our children and speak to them with the patience appropriate to their age. We can refuse to make every disagreement a contest for the last word. We can acknowledge wrongdoing without adding a defence that takes the apology away.

Proverbs 15:1 | KJV

¹ A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

Within the congregation, words help establish the character of our common life. When we gather, there is opportunity to ask after someone's welfare, recall a promise of Scripture, and offer prayer. These ordinary exchanges matter. A church becomes a place of refuge partly through the way its members speak to people who are tired and troubled.

The fire of destructive speech

James 3:5–8

James's image changes from direction to destruction. A small fire can spread far beyond the place where it began. So can a rumour. Once repeated, it moves through relationships the original speaker may never see. A careless accusation can damage a reputation that took years to establish.

The description "a world of iniquity" recognizes how widely speech serves sin. Pride boasts through it. Envy finds a voice in it. Malice uses it to injure someone without appearing openly violent. The tongue can gather the corruption of the heart into a few devastating words.

James's reference to hell makes the warning especially severe. Speech used to accuse and destroy serves purposes wholly opposed to the mercy of God. We should be troubled when the suffering of someone we dislike becomes a source of amusement. The pain of his family remains real, and our disagreement with him gives us no cause to delight in it.

Ephesians 4:29 | KJV

²⁹ Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

This instruction has immediate application to what we publish and share. A rumour can travel through a church by conversation, but it can reach thousands through an online post. Before repeating an allegation, we should consider whether it is true, whether it is ours to repeat, and whether passing it along will serve a legitimate good. Love is willing to leave some things unsaid.

James observes that human beings have tamed many kinds of creatures, yet no man can tame the tongue. Our problem is rooted in fallen nature. We cannot achieve a permanent victory over sin by adopting a technique. The struggle continues throughout this life, and our dependence upon grace must continue with it.

The difficulty does not make resistance pointless. We still restrain a dangerous fire when it appears. In the same way, we should stop a quarrel, refuse a malicious remark, and confess a lie. The Lord gives real help in particular moments, even as we await the day when the presence of sin is finally removed.

Blessing God and cursing His image

James 3:9–12

With the same tongue we bless God and curse people made in His likeness. James makes us face the contradiction. Worship does not give us permission to despise our neighbor. The person we are tempted to demean remains a creature of God and must be treated with the consideration that fact requires.

“These things ought not so to be.” The sentence should settle upon our consciences. We may recognize the inconsistency as common to fallen life, but we must also hear the command to oppose it. A Christian should be grieved by cruelty in his own

speech and willing to seek forgiveness from the person he has hurt.

The fountain and the fruit trees illustrate the relationship between source and expression. Water takes its character from the spring, and a tree bears according to its nature. Our words reveal what occupies the heart. We therefore need more than a temporary silence imposed from outside. We need the Word of God to expose and correct the desires from which our speech comes.

Luke 6:45 | KJV

⁴⁵ A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.

A bitter season calls for pastoral care. When a brother becomes habitually harsh, we should ask what burden lies beneath his words. We may need to speak directly about the harm he is doing. We should do so with a desire for his restoration and with awareness of our own susceptibility to the same sin.

Wisdom made visible in conduct

James 3:13–16

James now asks who is wise and endued with knowledge. His answer directs us to a good conversation, meaning a good manner of life, and to works done in the meekness of wisdom. The claim to understand truth must be considered alongside the spirit in which a person lives.

Bitter envy and strife expose a very different source. A person may be intellectually able and still use his knowledge to promote himself. He may make every discussion a contest, resent another person's usefulness, or gather supporters around a grievance. James names the resulting disorder and warns against boasting while such motives remain in the heart.

The church must take this warning seriously wherever influence is exercised. A persuasive argument can carry selfish ambition with it. We should examine whether we are seeking the good of the brethren or merely seeking to prevail. Wisdom is seen in the willingness to serve the truth with meekness.

The same examination belongs in personal disagreements. We can ask why being contradicted has angered us so deeply. Perhaps an important truth is at stake. Perhaps our pride has been wounded. Prayerful attention to that difference can prevent much harm and lead us toward an honest response.

The wisdom that comes from above

James 3:17–18

Heavenly wisdom is first pure. Its peace proceeds from a faithful relationship to the truth. James also describes it as gentle and easy to be intreated. It listens and remains approachable. A wise believer need not become combative in order to remain convinced of the gospel.

This wisdom is full of mercy and good fruits. Its character becomes visible in the good it does. It acts without partiality and hypocrisy, bringing consistency to the way we treat people. The person who has little to offer us should meet the same honesty and kindness as the person whose approval we desire.

Colossians 4:6 | KJV

⁶ Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. James returns us to cultivation. The fellowship we desire will be shaped by what we repeatedly sow into it. Patient explanations, truthful speech, and acts of mercy help create a setting in which others can grow. Continual suspicion and accusation produce a very different harvest.

Our hope in this work is Christ, whose speech was without sin and whose offering has secured our acceptance. We can ask the Spirit for help each day, knowing that the Lord delights to give wisdom. When we fail, we confess it and return to Him. When He enables a gracious answer, we give Him thanks.

Psalm 19:14 | KJV

¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

May that prayer become the desire of our hearts. The tongue is powerful, and our weakness is real. Yet the mercy of God is sufficient for this daily struggle. Let our words bring comfort to His people and bear faithful witness to the Savior whom we love.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why does James begin his teaching about the tongue with a warning to teachers? How should that affect both teaching and receiving instruction?
2. What do the bit, rudder, and fire each contribute to James's explanation of speech?
3. How can believers take the command to govern the tongue seriously while acknowledging that no person can tame it completely?
4. Compare the two kinds of wisdom in James 3:13–18. What motives and results help reveal the difference?
5. Is there a conversation, message, or public comment you need to correct? How could Psalm 19:14 guide your response?

Faith and Humility

Grace for the Lowly

James 4:1–12

James carries the discussion of wisdom into the conflicts that disturb the church. Quarrels have an inward history before they become public. Desires struggle within us, and those desires begin to govern our treatment of others. The passage makes us look beneath the immediate dispute to the heart from which it arose.

Its searching words are accompanied by a precious promise: “But he giveth more grace.” The Lord’s people need both the exposure and the assurance. We need to know the truth about our sin, and we need to know where help is found. James leads us toward humility before the God whose mercy is sufficient for His children.

James 4:1–12 | KJV

¹ From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? ² Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. ³ Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

⁴ Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. ⁵ Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? ⁶ But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double

minded. ⁹ Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. ¹¹ Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. ¹² There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

The war within

James 4:1–2

The question about wars and fightings is addressed to people within the community of faith. James does not allow them to explain every conflict by pointing elsewhere. He directs their attention to the lusts that war in their members. There are desires within us that seek satisfaction at another person's expense.

The language of killing, envy, and fighting shows the destructive course of those desires. A coveted object or position can become so important that another person is treated as an obstacle. Words become weapons. Resentment grows because someone else possesses the recognition or comfort we believe should belong to us.

We should take this diagnosis personally. It is easy to explain a quarrel by describing what the other person did. The harder question concerns what we wanted and why we were willing to injure someone to obtain it. James brings us to that question so that we may confess the sin at its source.

The continuing conflict of the Christian life should keep us dependent upon Christ. We have received new life, yet we remain in a fallen body and a fallen world. Our righteousness before God is complete in the Savior. Our daily experience includes a struggle in which the flesh must repeatedly be opposed.

Galatians 5:17 | KJV

¹⁷ For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

This conflict leaves no place for self-congratulation. We may recognize a change for which we are thankful, only to discover another area of weakness. The Lord teaches us through that experience to put less confidence in ourselves and to value His mercy more deeply. We need His help today as surely as we needed it when we first believed.

Asking amiss

James 4:2–3

James says that his readers do not have because they do not ask. Then he exposes the corruption that can enter even their asking. They seek what they intend to consume upon their lusts. Prayer has been drawn into the service of the same desires that produced the quarrels.

To ask amiss is to seek God's gifts for a selfish purpose. The problem is one of motive. A request may sound admirable while concealing an intention that is far from love. We might ask for someone's continued prosperity chiefly because we benefit from it. We might ask for influence because we want to be admired.

Such possibilities should make us honest in prayer. We can ask the Lord to search the motives we find difficult to distinguish. He already knows them. Our prayer is an expression of dependence upon His wisdom and a confession that even our desires need correction.

Psalms 139:23–24 | KJV

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: ²⁴ And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Prayer belongs under the will of God. We bring real requests and trust Him with the outcome. We need not imagine that

greater intensity gives us authority over His purpose. The Lord Jesus taught His people to ask for the Father's will to be done, and that remains a confession of faith.

Matthew 6:10 | KJV

¹⁰ Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

When the answer differs from our desire, we still have reason to trust the Father. He sees what we cannot see and knows what will serve His glory and our good. The invitation to ask for wisdom in the first chapter continues to apply here. We can ask for wisdom about the very things we are requesting.

Friendship with the world

James 4:4-5

The accusation of adultery describes divided allegiance. James speaks to people who bear the name of God while embracing a way of life opposed to Him. The world in this passage is the order of desire and pride that sets itself against His rule. Friendship with it means accepting its values as our own.

This warning reaches beyond outward respectability. A person can maintain an impressive religious appearance while seeking status, nursing envy, and using others. Worldliness is present wherever our ambitions teach us to disregard the Lord's authority. It must be examined in the heart as well as in conduct.

The KJV wording of verse 5, "The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy," returns our attention to the inward problem James has been exposing. Read with the accusation of spiritual adultery, it presses the seriousness of divided affection. We cannot treat the desires that produce rivalry as harmless companions to the worship of God.

The Lord's claim upon His people is complete. He has bought us with a price. When we wander, His correction expresses His fatherly care. The security of His love should encourage our

return and make us attentive to the warnings by which He keeps us.

Hebrews 12:5–6 | KJV

⁵ And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: ⁶ For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

We should therefore receive correction with humility. A painful exposure of pride may be a mercy for which we later give thanks. The Lord is faithful to confront the things that damage our fellowship and testimony. His discipline belongs to His love for the children He has received.

More grace for the humble

James 4:6

“But he giveth more grace.” After the searching account of our desires, those words give the weary believer room to breathe. The need is great, and the Lord’s supply is greater. His mercy has not been exhausted by the failures James has described.

Pride resists that mercy by insisting upon its own sufficiency. It may take the form of self-righteousness, claiming a standing before God on the basis of conduct. It may appear as stubbornness, refusing a correction plainly taught in Scripture. Both forms need to be brought low before the Lord.

The humble receive grace as those who have nothing with which to purchase it. The Spirit opens our eyes to Christ and teaches us that His righteousness alone avails. We come with empty hands, confessing the sin that makes His mercy necessary. This humility is itself a work of grace in the heart.

Proverbs 3:34 | KJV

³⁴ Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly.

Our failures can become occasions for renewed dependence when they drive us to the Savior. We should never cherish the sin itself. We can, however, thank God that He uses even our painful awareness of weakness to make the sufficiency of Christ more precious. Paul's account of the Lord's answer to his weakness supplies a fitting encouragement.

2 Corinthians 12:9 | KJV

⁹ And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Submitting and drawing near

James 4:7–8

The word “therefore” connects the commands to the promise of grace. Because God gives grace to the humble, we are to submit ourselves to Him. Submission acknowledges His rightful authority over our beliefs and conduct. We receive His verdict on sin and His testimony concerning the Savior.

Resisting the devil belongs within that submission. We stand against the lies that entice us toward pride or despair. One lie suggests that we can live well enough to establish our own righteousness. Another tells the fallen believer that mercy has finally been exhausted. The gospel answers both through the sufficiency of Christ.

1 Peter 5:8–9 | KJV

⁸ Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: ⁹ Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

The promise of God's nearness encourages us to approach Him. Drawing near is the movement of faith toward the Lord who has revealed Himself in the gospel. We come through Christ,

depending upon the cleansing He alone provides. Our confidence is grounded in His invitation and finished work.

The commands to cleanse our hands and purify our hearts address conduct and inward allegiance together. They cannot be satisfied by an outward performance that leaves the heart unchanged. In this exposition, they direct us first to the cleansing blood of Christ and then to the honest confession and forsaking of sin that His Word requires. We ask Him to bring our daily life into agreement with the truth we profess.

Hebrews 10:19–22 | KJV

¹⁹ Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; ²¹ And having an high priest over the house of God;

²² Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Sorrow that brings us to the Lord

James 4:9–10

James calls for mourning because the conduct he describes has been treated too lightly. There is a laughter that dismisses sin and a pleasure that refuses to consider the harm it causes. Such carelessness needs to give way to grief before God.

Repentance includes the abandonment of our imagined righteousness. The Spirit teaches us to see our sin truthfully and to turn to Christ for mercy. We mourn the evil we have done and the good we have neglected. We also confess the pride that once persuaded us we could make ourselves acceptable before God.

2 Corinthians 7:10 | KJV

¹⁰ For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

The promise remains: the Lord will lift up the humble. He receives those who come to Him through Christ. Their tears do

not purchase His favor. His grace brings them to honest confession and gives them hope in the Savior. We may grieve deeply over sin while resting confidently in the blood that cleanses us.

Such humility should soften our dealings with one another. Every believer beside us knows something of the same conflict. Remembering our own need will help us speak with tenderness when someone else has fallen. A church that understands grace should make it easier for a person to confess and seek help.

One Lawgiver and Judge

James 4:11–12

James closes this section by returning to evil speech. Speaking against a brother places us in a posture the law has forbidden. The command to love our neighbor becomes something we presume to set aside, as though our displeasure supplied a higher authority.

There is one Lawgiver who is able to save and destroy. We must remain under His Word. It gives us authority to identify error and call for repentance, but it does not authorize malicious judgment or the pleasure of humiliating another person. Correction must serve the good of the person being corrected.

Romans 14:4 | KJV

⁴ Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

We should approach a struggling brother as people who know their own weakness. His need calls for patient help. The Lord may use our words to restore him, and we may soon need the same kindness from him. Mutual care belongs to the household in which every member lives by mercy.

James has uncovered motives we would often prefer to leave hidden. He has also pointed us toward the God who gives more

grace. Let us submit to His truth, confess our sin, and draw near through Christ. Then let the mercy we have received govern the way we speak to those who share the journey.

Questions for Discussion

1. Think of a recurring conflict. What desire within you might James 4:1–2 call you to examine?
2. What does asking amiss mean in this passage? How could a request that sounds loving conceal a selfish motive?
3. How does the promise of more grace encourage confession while leaving the seriousness of sin intact?
4. Read Hebrews 10:19–22 alongside James 4:7–10. On what basis can a sinner draw near to God?
5. How can you correct a brother or sister faithfully while avoiding the evil speech and self-appointed judgment condemned in James 4:11–12?

Faith in the Will of God

Numbering Our Days

James 4:13–17

James turns from quarrels to plans. The connection is pride. A person may speak as though he rules over his neighbor, and he may plan as though he rules over tomorrow. In both cases, he forgets his place before the Lord. These few verses bring our ordinary intentions under the sovereignty of God.

The passage is especially searching because the activities described are familiar and legitimate. Travelling, trading, and making a profit belong to everyday life. The danger lies in the confidence with which we claim a future we have not been given. James teaches us to plan with humility and to use the present day faithfully.

James 4:13–17 | KJV

¹³ Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: ¹⁴ Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. ¹⁵ For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

¹⁶ But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. ¹⁷ Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

Plans made as though life were ours

James 4:13

The merchants speak with considerable precision. They have chosen a time, a city, and the length of their stay. They expect to trade and gain. Their words leave little room for uncertainty, even though every part of the plan depends upon circumstances beyond their control.

We can recognize ourselves in that confidence. A calendar fills with appointments, and we begin to treat the coming months as a possession. A business opportunity looks promising, and its success enters our calculations before it has occurred. We may speak this way without consciously intending to deny God, yet our words reveal how easily we forget our dependence.

James's correction belongs in the ordinary places where Christians work and make decisions. The sovereignty of God governs the marketplace as fully as the meetinghouse. We should carry our confession of His rule into the planning of a journey and the management of a household.

The Lord has given us minds with which to consider the future. Thoughtful preparation is a useful gift. We can employ it with gratitude while acknowledging that the outcome remains in His hand. This acknowledgement changes the spirit in which we hold a plan, even when the practical arrangements remain the same.

A life as brief as vapour

James 4:14

“What is your life?” James answers with an image we have all seen. Vapour appears for a little time and then vanishes. Its presence is real, but its duration is brief. The image reminds us how little authority we have over the length of our earthly days.

The strongest person shares this frailty with the weakest. Wealth cannot guarantee another morning. Recognition

cannot preserve a life beyond its appointed end. We may be remembered for a time, but the work and possessions around which we have organized our plans will pass into other hands.

Psalm 39:5 | KJV

⁵ Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah.

This truth is meant to humble us and teach wisdom. We should take seriously the days God gives without imagining that He has promised an indefinite supply. Love delayed can become love never expressed. An opportunity to encourage someone may pass while we wait for a more convenient season.

Psalm 90:12 | KJV

¹² So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Numbering our days means receiving them as gifts to be stewarded. We can ask how to use today for the good of our family, how to strengthen the fellowship of the church, and where a neighbor needs help. The answer is often near at hand. Faithfulness does not require an extraordinary stage upon which to act.

The shortness of life also makes the promises of Christ precious. Our earthly course is brief, but our inheritance in Him is secure. The Savior who has conquered death gives meaning to the time He leaves us here. We can labor with hope because the future belongs to Him.

The confession that the Lord wills

James 4:15

James supplies the words that should govern our planning: “If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.” Notice that life itself is included. Before we can carry out an intention, the Lord must sustain our existence. Every activity rests upon that prior gift.

“Lord willing” should be a sincere confession. We acknowledge that God directs our steps and possesses the authority to alter our course. Saying the words can help us remember the truth, provided our hearts receive what our mouths declare. The phrase belongs to a posture of trust.

Proverbs 16:9 | KJV

⁹ A man’s heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.

This trust can bring peace when circumstances change. A cancelled journey or a delayed opportunity may disappoint us deeply. We can still bring the disappointment before the Lord, knowing that our revised circumstances remain within His providence. The plan was ours to propose; the outcome was always His to govern.

Proverbs 19:21 | KJV

²¹ There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.

The sovereignty confessed here is the same sovereignty revealed in salvation. The God who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ holds our days. His rule is therefore a source of comfort to His children. We are placing our future in the hand of the Father who has already shown us immeasurable mercy.

Prudence under providence

James 4:13–15

The passage leaves a full place for responsible preparation. We should provide for foreseeable needs and use the resources entrusted to us wisely. If food is available today and tomorrow’s supply is uncertain, setting some aside may be an act of simple prudence. Careful planning can enable us to serve others when a need arises.

The sermon’s distinction is worth keeping clear. Presumption claims control over the future. Prudence considers likely needs while depending upon God. A Christian can prepare for a

journey, save for later responsibilities, and arrange help for a neighbor with a heart that freely confesses the Lord's authority over every outcome.

Proverbs 6:6-8 | KJV

⁶ Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: ⁷
Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, ⁸ Provideth her meat in
the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.

We should also be willing to reconsider a plan when circumstances reveal that it was unwise. Trusting providence does not require us to defend every decision we have made. The Lord may teach us through correction, counsel, and unexpected limits. Humility receives such instruction and adjusts accordingly.

This helps us avoid wasting the gifts God has supplied. Time and material resources have useful purposes. We honor the Giver by treating them carefully and considering how they may benefit the people entrusted to our care. Dependence upon Him and responsible action belong together.

Boasting and the illusion of security

James 4:16

James calls arrogant rejoicing evil. The boast assumes a power that belongs to God and places confidence in what cannot sustain it. It may be expressed loudly, but it can also remain a quiet certainty in the heart: we have arranged things well enough to be secure.

The Lord's parable of the rich fool exposes that confidence. The man calculates his abundance and plans for ease, while remaining unprepared for the end of his life. His possessions cannot answer the claim of God upon his soul.

Luke 12:16–21 | KJV

¹⁶ And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: ¹⁷ And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? ¹⁸ And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. ²⁰ But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

²¹ So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

The warning concerns the heart's trust. Resources received with thanksgiving may be used generously and wisely. Resources treated as an independent refuge lead us toward the fool's error. We should ask whether prosperity has made us more grateful to God or less conscious of our need for Him.

The gospel brings us back to the One who is sufficient. Our righteousness, life, and lasting hope are found in Christ. The Lord may change our circumstances in ways we would never have chosen, but He remains faithful to the people He has called.

Romans 8:28 | KJV

²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

That promise enables us to relinquish the demand that everything proceed according to our design. We may work diligently and pray earnestly while leaving the outcome with Him. Rest comes as we remember whose purpose governs our lives.

The good we know to do

James 4:17

James concludes with a command that reaches beyond planning: to know the good and fail to do it is sin. The passage has given knowledge, and that knowledge carries responsibility. Once we know our dependence upon God, we should plan accordingly. Once we recognize an opportunity for mercy, good intentions alone do not discharge our duty.

These are often called sins of omission. We may avoid an openly harmful act and still neglect a clear responsibility. A hungry person receives no food from our intention to help. A promise unfulfilled can leave someone in real difficulty, however kindly we spoke when making it.

This verse also searches the grudges we protect. We know that the Lord calls us to forgive, yet we may continue rehearsing an injury until bitterness dominates our thoughts. The struggle can be painful, especially when the wrong was severe. We should bring that difficulty to Christ and ask for grace to obey what He has taught us.

Ephesians 4:32 | KJV

³² And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Love is expressed through action in the time God gives. We can speak the needed word, keep the promised appointment, or undertake the neglected act of care. Our efforts remain imperfect, and we depend upon the Lord to make them useful. His grace gives both a reason to serve and strength to begin.

John 13:34–35 | KJV

³⁴ A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. ³⁵ By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Life is brief, and the Lord rules over it. Let us receive this day with gratitude, make our plans in humble dependence, and

attend to the good already before us. The future is held by the same Savior whose love has made us His own.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is presumptuous about the merchants' speech in James 4:13, even though their planned activities are ordinary?
2. How should the image of life as vapour influence your use of time without leading you to neglect long-term responsibilities?
3. What makes "Lord willing" a meaningful confession? How could that confession change your response when a plan is interrupted?
4. Compare Proverbs 6:6–8 with Luke 12:16–21. How do prudent preparation and misplaced confidence differ?
5. What good do you already know you should do? Identify one concrete step toward carrying it out this week, Lord willing.

Faith Under Pressure

Waiting for the Lord

James 5:1–12

The opening words of James 5 sound like a judgment announced against the powerful. Riches are corrupted, garments are moth-eaten, and withheld wages cry out. James addresses people who have used prosperity to indulge themselves and oppress those whose labor supports them. Their apparent security is about to be exposed.

The warning also brings comfort to the suffering church. God hears what the powerful have ignored. He sees the wrong that has been done and possesses the authority to judge it. James therefore calls the brethren to patience, directing their hearts toward the coming of the Lord.

James 5:1–12 | KJV

¹ Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. ² Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. ³ Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

⁴ Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. ⁵ Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. ⁶ Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.

⁷ Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. ⁸ Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the

coming of the Lord draweth nigh. ⁹ Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.

¹⁰ Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.

¹¹ Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. ¹² But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

Wealth that bears witness against its owners

James 5:1–3

The rich addressed here have made earthly abundance their refuge. James calls them to weep and howl because the security they enjoy cannot withstand the judgment of God. The things they have accumulated will testify to the way they have lived.

The imagery of rotting riches and moth-eaten garments makes wealth's fragility visible. Even what appears durable is described as corrupted. James wants the reader to see the dreadful reversal: the possessions gathered for comfort become evidence against those who trusted and misused them.

The charge concerns wickedness expressed through wealth. Material resources can serve the needs of others and support the work of the gospel. Here, however, they have been hoarded in a life of oppression. The heart's use of its possessions reveals what it worships.

This warning should make every believer examine the way he holds what God has given. We may have little compared with one person and much compared with another. The question remains whether our resources are received as a stewardship or guarded as though they were our ultimate security.

Matthew 6:19–21 | KJV

¹⁹ Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

²⁰ But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: ²¹ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The cries that reach the Lord

James 5:4–6

The laborers have done the work, and their wages have been withheld by fraud. James names the injustice directly. The employer's gain has come through depriving others of what they are owed. His comfort rests upon their distress.

The title “Lord of sabaoth” identifies the Lord of hosts. The workers' cries have reached the One whose power is greater than that of their oppressors. Those cries may have been dismissed in an earthly hearing, but they have not been lost before God. He knows the whole matter.

The accusation of living in pleasure while condemning the just exposes the moral blindness of unchecked power. People can become so accustomed to their advantages that they treat another person's hardship as the ordinary cost of their own comfort. James brings that conduct before the judgment of God.

For the believer who has been wronged, this is a ground of hope. We can seek what is right without giving our hearts over to vengeance. Final judgment belongs to the Lord, whose knowledge is complete and whose verdict is righteous. Our task is to remain faithful while trusting Him with the wrong we cannot finally resolve.

Romans 12:19–21 | KJV

¹⁹ Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. ²¹ Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

That instruction can be difficult to receive when an injury is fresh. The Lord knows the strength of the temptation. His promise gives us a reason to resist it. The wrongdoer will answer to God, and the believer is free to pursue good without becoming consumed by a plan of personal retaliation.

The patience of the farmer

James 5:7–8

James turns to the brethren with the word “therefore.” Because the Lord sees and will judge, they are to be patient until His coming. The future action of God gives meaning to their present endurance. They are waiting for a faithful Judge.

The farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth. He works in hope, knowing that growth and rain are beyond his direct command. He cannot force a harvest to appear simply because he is tired of waiting. His labor proceeds within a season whose completion requires patience.

The illustration helps the church resist the demand for immediate vindication. Suffering may continue longer than we expect. Relief may come by a path we could not have foreseen. We are called to establish our hearts in the promise of Christ, returning to it when the delay tests our confidence.

Patience includes continued faithfulness. The farmer has work to do while waiting, and so does the church. We can care for one another and continue proclaiming the gospel. The certainty of the Lord’s purpose gives us a reason to remain at our appointed task.

The promised coming of Christ

James 5:7–9

The hope proclaimed in these sermons is the future bodily return of the Lord Jesus Christ. His coming will bring the full vindication of His people and the renewal promised in Scripture. The church looks toward the resurrection and the removal of the sorrow that marks this fallen world.

The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 is a significant event in biblical history, but this commentary does not identify it with the exhaustive fulfilment of the Christian hope. James writes to scattered believers and directs them toward the Lord's coming. His words are read here alongside the wider testimony of Scripture concerning the return of the risen Savior.

Acts 1:11 | KJV

¹¹ Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

The Lord who rose bodily from the grave will return, and His people await the fulfilment of His promise. That hope includes those who have already died in faith. Christ's keeping extends to the resurrection at the last day.

John 6:39–40 | KJV

³⁹ And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. ⁴⁰ And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

The statement that His coming draws near calls the church to readiness and confidence. It does not give us permission to set dates. We live before the Lord whose purpose is moving toward its appointed fulfilment. His patience must be understood in the light of His faithfulness to His promise.

2 Peter 3:9–13 | KJV

⁹ The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. ¹¹ Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,

¹² Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? ¹³ Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

The new heavens and new earth give the believer a hope wide enough to answer the grief of the fallen creation. We await a world in which righteousness dwells. The Lord's purpose will reach its completion, and the church will see the fullness of the mercy in which it now believes.

Revelation 21:3–5 | KJV

³ And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. ⁴ And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. ⁵ And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

This hope steadies us under pressure. Present injustice has a limit set by God. The suffering body has a future secured by Christ's resurrection. We can comfort one another with these promises while confessing that the timing remains in the Father's hand.

Guarding fellowship while we wait

James 5:9

Pressure can turn suffering people against one another. We become irritable, find fault quickly, and begin to look for someone nearby to blame. James warns the brethren against grudging, or grumbling, against one another. The fellowship should not become another place in which the weary are wounded.

The Judge stands before the door. This image makes our present conduct serious. The Lord who will set all things right also sees the way we treat His people today. His promised coming should deepen our reverence and make us careful with one another's burdens.

We can apply the warning by refusing to turn every frustration into an accusation. A tired brother may need assistance. A discouraged sister may need someone to listen. We should ask what love requires before deciding that another person's weakness is an offence against us.

The church is given to us as a fellowship in which the gospel is heard and its consolation shared. We need that companionship most when the journey becomes difficult. Let us protect it through patience, bearing with one another as people who live under the same mercy.

The prophets and the patience of Job

James 5:10–11

James directs the church to the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Their faithfulness did not spare them suffering. They endured opposition because they bore the Word of God. Their example helps us understand that difficulty can accompany obedience.

The same lesson appears in Job. His losses were profound, and the book records the anguish through which he passed. James nevertheless speaks of his patience and directs us toward “the

end of the Lord,” the outcome in which God’s compassion and tender mercy are displayed.

Job 1:20–22 | KJV

²⁰ Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, ²¹ And said, Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. ²² In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

Job’s endurance should encourage honest reliance upon God. His story contains lament and questions as well as submission. We need not imagine that patience requires a person never to express pain. The believer brings that pain before the Lord and continues to depend upon Him through it.

The example also needs to be received without turning it into a promise of a particular earthly outcome for every sufferer. James draws attention to the Lord’s character. God is full of pity and tender mercy. That remains true for the believer who receives temporal relief and for the believer whom the Lord brings home through suffering.

Plain speech in a pressured world

James 5:12

James’s final instruction in this section concerns oaths. Let your yes be yes and your no be no. The practical force is a call to trustworthy speech that does not rely upon dramatic assurances to make itself believable. We should speak with the integrity appropriate to those who stand before God.

The Lord Jesus gave the same instruction in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:34–37 | KJV

³⁴ But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: ³⁵ Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

³⁷ But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

This passage directs us toward truthfulness in ordinary dealings. We should keep promises carefully, admit the limits of what we know, and avoid exaggeration designed to gain an advantage. Under pressure, there may be a strong temptation to say whatever secures immediate relief. James calls us to remain honest.

The Lord sees the injustice done to His people and hears their cries. He also gives them a way to live while they wait. We can be patient, guard the fellowship, and speak truthfully because our hope is fixed upon Christ. His coming is certain, and His compassion will be fully revealed.

Questions for Discussion

1. Which actions make the wealthy people in James 5:1–6 objects of rebuke? What does the passage teach about the use of material resources?
2. How does the title “Lord of sabaoth” comfort someone whose cries have been ignored by people in authority?
3. What does the farmer’s patience teach about the relationship between waiting and continued faithfulness?
4. Read Acts 1:11, John 6:39–40, and Revelation 21:3–5. How do these passages inform the future hope presented in this chapter?
5. Under pressure, are you more tempted to grumble or to exaggerate? What would patient, truthful conduct look like in a current difficulty?

Faith Expressed in the Church

Prayer and Restoration

James 5:13–20

James concludes with the ordinary needs of the household of faith. Someone is afflicted. Someone is cheerful. Another is sick, and another has wandered from the truth. Each circumstance calls the church to dependence upon the Lord and loving attention to one another.

These final verses gather the practical concerns of the letter into the life of a praying congregation. Faith is expressed in requests for help, in praise, and in the patient work of restoration. The Lord remains the source of every mercy, and His people are privileged to care for one another in His name.

James 5:13–20 | KJV

¹³ Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. ¹⁴ Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

¹⁶ Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. ¹⁷ Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. ¹⁸ And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

¹⁹ Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; ²⁰ Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

Prayer in affliction and praise in gladness

James 5:13

Life brings changing seasons. A period of gladness may be followed by sudden grief, while a long difficulty may give way to unexpected relief. James directs the believer toward God throughout these changes. The afflicted should pray, and the cheerful should sing psalms.

Affliction calls us to confess our dependence. We bring the trouble before the Lord because He is able to help and has invited us to come. Prayer does not supply information He lacks. It expresses the trust of a child who knows the Father hears.

Psalms 34:17–18 | KJV

¹⁷ The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. ¹⁸ The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

In gladness, we acknowledge the Giver. It is easy to enjoy a gift and forget the hand from which it came. Singing praise gives thanks to the Lord and turns the heart toward His goodness. Joy finds a fitting expression in worship.

Psalms 147:1 | KJV

¹ Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.

Both directions reveal the same dependence. The Lord sustains us in grief and gives us reason for thanksgiving in happiness. We can even praise Him through tears, trusting His wisdom when we cannot understand His purpose. Job's confession reminds us that the worthiness of God endures through the loss of His gifts.

Job 1:21 | KJV

²¹ And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

For sinners to approach the holy God in prayer and song is itself a gift of redemption. Christ has opened the way. Our worship is received through Him, and His righteousness gives us confidence to come. A small congregation singing together is exercising a privilege purchased by the Savior's blood.

Calling for the elders

James 5:14

The sick person is told to call for the elders of the church. The instruction assumes a relationship of trust and care. The sufferer belongs to a fellowship whose leaders can come, pray, and help direct his heart toward the Lord.

Calling for help requires humility. Some people are reluctant to reveal a serious need because they do not want to trouble anyone. Others fear that weakness will be judged harshly. The church should cultivate a spirit that makes the call easier. Our brethren ought to know that they will be met with concern.

The immediate setting is sickness, but the pastoral care it requires naturally reaches the discouragement and fear that often accompany illness. Elders should listen carefully and bring the promises of Christ to bear upon the whole burden. Their presence reminds the sufferer that the church has not forgotten him.

The sermons from which this book grew affirm the continuing value of this instruction. When serious sickness comes, believers should be encouraged to tell the church and request prayer. We should mean what we say when we call one another brother and sister. Family care must extend beyond the time of the weekly service.

Galatians 6:2 | KJV

² Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

Some believers are prevented by illness or distance from gathering regularly with a faithful congregation. Their difficulty should move us to compassionate attention.

Recorded preaching can bring real encouragement, and personal contact can help preserve fellowship. Wherever possible, the church should make its care tangible through visits and ongoing prayer.

Anointing in the name of the Lord

James 5:14

James directs the elders to pray over the sick person, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. The interpretation followed here understands the oil as a symbolic act of consecration and dependence, pointing to the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. The sufferer is being commended to the Lord's care.

Faithful Christians differ over the precise purpose of the oil and the continuing form of this practice. In my pastoral judgment, the instruction remains appropriate for the church. I see no reason to withhold this simple act when it is understood in the light of the passage and accompanied by prayerful trust in God.

The power belongs entirely to the Lord. The oil possesses no independent ability to heal, and the elder has no personal authority to command an outcome. The act is undertaken in the Lord's name, confessing the dependence of everyone present upon His mercy.

This distinction matters. We may earnestly ask God to heal a sick person while admitting that His will concerning the outcome has not been revealed to us. The church prays with confidence in His power and goodness. It leaves the result in His hands.

1 John 5:14–15 | KJV

¹⁴And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: ¹⁵And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

The sovereignty of God gives prayer its confidence. The One to whom we speak is able to act. We need no claim to an apostolic gift in order to ask Him for mercy. The elders come as servants who share the sufferer's dependence upon the same faithful Lord.

The prayer of faith and the raising of the sick

James 5:15

The promise is strong: the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up. We should allow those words to encourage earnest prayer. They direct us to the Lord as the One who acts. Every recovery for which we give thanks belongs to His mercy.

This commentary understands the promise within the epistle's instruction to submit our lives to the will of God. Prayer is offered in faith when it rests in Him and receives His wisdom. It must not be turned into a guarantee that every illness will end in recovery whenever the participants achieve a sufficient level of confidence.

God can restore physical health, and the church should ask Him to do so. He can also sustain faith and renew courage through a sickness that continues. The believer's final hope reaches to the resurrection, when Christ will raise His people bodily. That hope supports the sickbed prayer even when the immediate course remains uncertain.

Paul's account of his repeated request for relief shows how divine mercy can be expressed through sustaining grace.

2 Corinthians 12:8-10 | KJV

⁸ For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. ⁹ And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

We should therefore pray boldly and tenderly. A person whose illness persists should continue to receive the church's love. We have no warrant to make his suffering an accusation that he has failed to believe adequately. The Lord knows the purposes of His providence, and His people remain secure in His care.

Confession and forgiveness

James 5:15–16

James adds that if the sick person has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. The conditional wording matters. It does not identify every sickness as the result of a particular personal sin. It does, however, recognize that the ministry of prayer may also be a setting for confession and spiritual restoration.

Forgiveness belongs to God. An elder can proclaim the gospel and direct a penitent believer to the promise of Christ, but he does not possess an independent power to remove guilt. The cleansing comes through the Savior's blood. Pastoral care should make that truth clear.

1 John 1:9 | KJV

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The call to confess faults to one another places humility within the fellowship. When we have wronged someone, we should acknowledge it. When we need prayer over a burden of sin, we should be able to seek help from trustworthy brethren. Confession should lead toward prayer and restoration.

Such a practice requires a merciful church. If personal weakness becomes material for gossip, people will learn to hide it. Love receives a confession with appropriate seriousness and care. It seeks the person's good and handles what has been entrusted with discretion.

The promise of grace must remain central. We have no superior righteousness to display over a fallen brother. We come alongside him as sinners whose own hope is Christ. That shared dependence makes honest speech possible and keeps correction from becoming an exercise in humiliation.

The righteous person who prays

James 5:16

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. The righteous person is understood here as one accepted before God in Christ, whose life of prayer proceeds from faith in Him. We should never imagine that prayer becomes effective because someone has achieved moral perfection.

The Lord receives His people through the righteousness of His Son. Our confidence in prayer is grounded there. We may be painfully aware of weakness and still approach the throne of grace. Christ is sufficient, and the Father has invited us to come through Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21 | KJV

²¹ For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

The sinlessness of Christ is essential to that promise. He knew no sin. In bearing the sins of His people, He did not become personally corrupt or commit their transgressions. Their sin was reckoned to Him as their Substitute, and He bore its judgment in His spotless sacrifice. His righteousness is reckoned to those He redeems.

This truth protects the foundation of our hope. We need a Savior whose offering is perfect and whose righteousness avails before God. The One who died for us remains the holy Son. Through Him, sinners may pray with confidence in a mercy that has already been secured.

Elijah and dependent prayer

James 5:17–18

James chooses Elijah as an example and immediately reminds us that he was a man subject to like passions as we are. His humanity matters to the argument. The effectiveness of prayer did not arise from his belonging to a different order of being. He depended upon God.

Elijah prayed concerning rain, and the Lord acted. The account in Kings places the return of the rain within God's declared purpose. Elijah's prayer participated in what the Lord had promised to do.

1 Kings 18:1 | KJV

¹ And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.

1 Kings 18:42–45 | KJV

⁴² So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, ⁴³ And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times. ⁴⁴ And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.

⁴⁵ And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel.

God's sovereignty and earnest prayer therefore belong together. The Lord ordains the means through which He carries out His purpose. We pray because He commands us to pray and because His power makes the request meaningful. Elijah's persistence encourages the church to continue asking in dependence upon Him.

The example also keeps us from waiting until we feel unusually strong before we pray. We come as people with ordinary frailties. Our Lord is extraordinary in mercy and power. The smallest congregation can ask great things of Him without claiming greatness for itself.

Restoring the one who wanders

James 5:19–20

The letter ends with a brother who errs from the truth and another who turns him back. James places responsibility upon the fellowship. We should care when someone becomes entangled in error or sin. Love seeks the wanderer and speaks the truth with patience.

Some people need careful instruction concerning the gospel. They may have been taught for years that acceptance with God depends upon their performance. A single conversation may leave many questions unresolved. We should be willing to open the Scriptures repeatedly, trusting the Spirit to give understanding through the Word.

Others need help after a serious moral failure. We should name the sin truthfully and seek their restoration to faithful fellowship. The gospel gives us reason to believe that a broken life can again be useful in the service of Christ. Patient care attends to the real consequences while keeping the sufficiency of His mercy before the person who has fallen.

Galatians 6:1 | KJV

¹ Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

To restore in meekness requires remembering that we also can be tempted. The brother in difficulty is not an opportunity to display our superiority. He is a person to be loved. We should speak as those who may soon need the same patient help.

James's words about saving a soul from death and hiding a multitude of sins describe the weight of this work. The church's

ministry can be an instrument through which God rescues a person from destructive error and brings him to the truth. Only Christ atones for sin, and only the Spirit gives life. We are privileged to carry the Word through which the Lord works.

The term “hide” must be understood in that restorative setting. It concerns the mercy that deals with sin through forgiveness and repentance. It gives no permission to preserve deception. Truthful correction and faithful gospel ministry seek the sinner’s deliverance from the very sin that threatens him.

A church that proclaims sovereign grace should be a house of restoration. Its members know the seriousness of sin and the sufficiency of the Savior. They can pray with the afflicted, sing with the joyful, and remain beside the person who needs patient instruction. The Lord has loved us freely. May that love continue among us as we await His appearing.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does James 5:13 direct believers toward God in both affliction and gladness? Which response do you most often neglect?
2. What does calling for the elders express about the sick person’s relationship to God and to the church? What could make such a request easier in your congregation?
3. Explain the understanding of anointing and the prayer of faith presented in this chapter. How should the church respond when physical healing does not come?
4. Why does James emphasize Elijah’s ordinary humanity? How does the account in 1 Kings 18 connect God’s purpose with persistent prayer?
5. How can a congregation pursue the restoration described in James 5:19–20 with truthfulness, patience, and appropriate care for those affected by sin?

About the Author

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Pastor Jason K. Boothe serves as senior pastor of Redeemer Church of Piketon, Ohio, where he has ministered since 2001. His pastoral work centers on proclaiming the gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in Jesus Christ and helping people understand the Scriptures through the ministry of the local church.

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Pastor Jason's preaching and writing emphasize the finished work of Christ, the sufficiency of His righteousness, and the preserving grace of God. He encourages believers to live in the light of the gospel through patient fellowship and love for their neighbors. This commentary grew from his preaching ministry during worship services at Redeemer.

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