

Test of a Living Faith

THE BOOK OF JAMES

Submission to God

A Controlled Tongue

Wisdom from Above

Patience and Perseverance

Prayer and Confession



ROSE
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A Letter for Our Daily Walk...

Remember that strict middle school teacher who made your life difficult but now you may remember with great fondness? At the time, it seemed like unnecessary harshness; today, in hindsight, you might remember that teacher as one who cared about you; a teacher who wanted you and your classmates to succeed in life. At that moment, we might have resented strictness; looking back, however, we realize that it was for our benefit and learn to appreciate it. That's the case with the book of James. It's a wonderful book, with great lessons for our life. But it's a stern letter; it expects much, but it promises much as well. As you plunge into the letter, keep in mind that strict teacher who's made such a difference in your life.

The Letter of James deals with a question that many Christians still ask: *how do I know that I'm growing as a Christian?* In the following pages, we'll see that James addresses this important question in a clear and practical way.

It gives us good news: God has given us his wisdom and every good and perfect gift so that we can grow and become mature Christians!

OUTLINE OF THE LETTER

- Greetings (1:1)
- Test of a living faith (1:2-18)
- Faith tested by its response to the Word of God (1:19-27)
- Faith tested by its reaction to favoritism (2:1-13)
- Faith tested by its doing of good works (2:14-26)
- Faith tested by its production of self-control in speech and humility (3:1-18)
- Faith tested by its reaction to quarreling, judgmentalism, arrogance, selfishness, and suffering (4:1-5:12)
- Faith tested by its resort to prayer (5:13-18)
- Conclusion (5:19-20)

WHO WAS JAMES?

- He was one of Jesus' half-brothers (Matt. 13:55).
- He was an unbeliever during Jesus' ministry (John 7:5).
- After Jesus' ascension, he was among the believers in the Jerusalem prayer meeting (Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 15:7).
- After Peter left Jerusalem, James became the leader of the church there (Acts 12:17).
- James was one of the pillars of the church (Gal. 2:9; Acts 15:13-29).
- His final appearance in the New Testament is in Acts 21:18 when he meets with Paul.
- According to tradition, James was martyred in Jerusalem in AD 62.
- Eusebius, the third century church historian, called him "James the Just." Eusebius also referred to James as "camel knees" because he constantly prayed on his knees.

TOPIC	DANGER TO BELIEVERS	RESPONSE THAT LEADS TO MATURITY	BENEFIT
TRIALS/ TROUBLES	Falling into the temptation to blame God or others when troubles happen	Rejoice!	Maturing and strengthening of our faith
WISDOM	Failing to ask God for wisdom— wisdom comes from above!	Ask for wisdom. God will give exactly what we need for life.	Having wisdom from God allows us to overcome temptation and grow from trials.
WEALTH	Taking pride in wealth tempts us to forget that all we have comes from and belongs to God.	Remember that wealth is temporal and that we should only take pride in knowing the Lord (Jer. 9:23-24; 2 Cor. 10:17).	When we humble ourselves, God lifts us up. For God "crowns the humble with victory" (Ps. 149:4).
PERFECTION, MATURITY	Failing to surrender to God's will. Double-mindedness is the opposite of perfection. It is a half-hearted surrender. It refers to people unwilling to fully commit their whole beings to God—similar to those in Laodicea, who are described as being "lukewarm—neither hot nor cold" (Rev. 3:16).	Wise and single-minded people realize that trials are opportunities to grow in our dependence on and love for God.	As we become more mature believers, we grow "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).
EVIL DESIRES	Because of our own struggles with sin, our own weaknesses and desires transform a test from an opportunity to become more mature to an opportunity to fall into sin.	Sin leads to death (1:15). But grasping hold of God's grace, through the word of truth, leads us to a new life (1:18).	The word of truth here is the gospel. Just as God created the universe through his Word (Gen. 1), so now God creates us anew through the gospel.

*Share about a difficult time and how trusting in the Lord made you stronger.
How might your experience in growing maturity help another person this week?*

*This is what the LORD says:
"Let not the wise boast of their wisdom
or the strong boast of their strength
or the rich boast of their riches,
but let the one who boasts boast about this:
that they have the understanding to know me,
that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness,
justice and righteousness on earth,
for in these I delight."
declares the LORD.
Jeremiah 9:23-24*

*Blessed is the one who perseveres
under trial because, having stood the
test, that person will receive the crown
of life that the Lord has promised to
those who love him — James 1:12*

MATURITY

The idea of maturity is crucial for James (the Greek word *teleios*, translated as the idea of perfect completeness or maturity, occurs five times in the letter). What does James have in mind? Can we really become mature—or perfect, holy?

- The call to holiness occurs all over the Bible: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48; see Lev. 19:2).
- To be completely mature as a Christian means to live an upright, righteous, truthful, trustworthy, honest, and pure life in faithfulness and loyalty to God and his will, seeking him with sincerity of heart and singleness of mind.
- God shows all of these characteristics in the way he relates to humans. We are called to be imitators of God (Eph. 5:1). Our life must show those characteristics as well.
- Empowered by the Spirit, the call to Christian maturity is not an unattainable dream. Rather, it is a call to be exactly what God intended us to be from the beginning: people who reflect God’s glory because we are made in God’s image.
- Our spiritual maturation is a process. Reaching maturity requires hard work from us. But here’s the good news: God is doing the most difficult parts of that work in us. Be comforted knowing that “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6). We will be fully matured only when Jesus returns.
- In the meantime, growing maturity and holiness are exercised by the ways we:
 - respond to God’s Word,
 - relate to other people, especially the poor and weak,
 - show self-control and restraint,
 - react to trials and temptations.



THEMES OF THE LETTER

- **Temptation and maturity** (1:2-8; 12-18): Christians are faced with many temptations in this world. However, for James, temptations are tests that strengthen our faith and make us mature.
- **Wealth and poverty** (1:9-11; 2:1-13; 4:8-10, 13-16; 5:1-6): James does not condemn wealth. Rather, just as in other biblical texts about riches, James condemns the abusive use of wealth. That is, James condemns two attitudes toward money: (1) an attitude that abuses or ignores the poor, (2) allowing riches to substitute for God and become an idol.
- **Sins of speech** (1:26-27; 3:1-12; 4:11-12; 5:12): Self-control is an important feature of true faith. Our speech can be a source of great goodness or great evil.
- **Patience and prayer** (5:7-11, 13-20): Prayer becomes a test of faith when it requires patience. The patience James writes about is born from a great dependence on God, which is born from wisdom.
- **Faith and actions** (1:19-25; 2:14-26; 3:13-18; 4:1-7, 17): James writes about faith in action. He does not address faith leading to salvation; the Apostle Paul wrote about this faith in his letters. Rather, James writes about the lived-out faith of those who have already been saved. It is a *visible* faith, a faith shown in deeds rather than words.

Choose one theme to pray about for a week.

WISDOM

It is often defined as "the ability to make godly choices." In the Bible, wisdom is tightly connected to creation. The way God created the universe has a direct effect on the way nature and society behave. In an important sense, wisdom is the ability to see life and the world the way God sees them. Wisdom is practical knowledge that allows people to live fully.

TOPIC	DANGER TO BELIEVERS	RESPONSE THAT LEADS TO MATURITY	BENEFIT
LISTENING AND DOING	Defensiveness and anger when confronted with the truth	Patient listening and application of truth that leads to obedience	God has planted the word of the Gospel in our hearts. This word is powerful and transformative. The word transforms us when we not only listen but also "do what it says" (1:22).
TRUE RELIGION	A religious appearance can make us feel safe and righteous. But it's a dangerous deceit. The appearance of being religious without obedience is useless. James considers this religiosity "worthless" (1:26).	Take care of those in need and keep God as our focus (1:27).	Shallow religiosity might feel good for awhile, but it's a destructive lie. Only when we submit to God by obeying his Word can our faith mature and become complete.

How has the word of God changed your life? Think and, if you feel comfortable, share how God is "re-programming" your mind.

THE POWER OF THE WORD

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

—James 1:21

Sin is pervasive and insidious; before we know it, we are slaves to our sin. Sin becomes *second nature*. However, the word of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, transforms us and frees us from the slavery of sin. Like any "spring-cleaning project," the transformation is a process that can be challenging. But the word of God can re-program our minds so we can "be made new" in the attitude of our minds, and "put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:23-24).

TOPIC	DANGER TO BELIEVERS	RESPONSE THAT LEADS TO MATURITY	BENEFIT
FAVORITISM	Considering those with external wealth as more important	Keep the royal law: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (2:8) without bias.	By remaining obedient to God's will, we will receive mercy from God's judgment.

Many societies measure people's worth based on their material wealth. However, the Scriptures make it clear that *caring for the poor and powerless is a crucial characteristic of God's covenant* (Ex. 22:22; Deut. 24:17-21; Ps. 146:9; Isa. 1:17; Jer. 5:28). James also makes it clear that caring for the poor and the powerless is not optional for Christians. Rather, it represents the fulfillment of the *royal law*.

Think of a time when mercy triumphed over justice in your life. What were some of the results?

GENERAL EPISTLES

The book of James is one of the **General Epistles** (letters) in the New Testament. Unlike Paul's letters, which are addressed to specific churches (such as Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians) or individuals (Timothy, Titus, and Philemon), the **General Epistles** (James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, and Jude) do not have a clear addressee. Rather, most scholars think that they were circular letters, meant to be shared with many churches.

THE ROYAL LAW

When James wrote about the law (the perfect law, the royal law, the law of liberty—James 2:8), he surely had in mind the **law of love**: Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments (Matt. 22:37-40).

As citizens of God's kingdom (Phil. 3:20), we are subject to the law of the King. James reminds us that breaking even one part of the law, such as showing favoritism to those with wealth, makes us lawbreakers (see Matt. 5:19).

Obedience to the royal law, with the power of the Spirit, gives us freedom.

The Letter of James and the Sermon on the Mount

Although James does not directly quote Jesus, there are many important parallels with one of Jesus' most important speech in the Gospels: The Sermon on the Mount from the Gospel of Matthew.

JAMES	TEACHING	MATTHEW
1:2	Joy in the midst of trials	5:10-12
1:4	Exhortation to be perfect	5:48
1:5	Asking God for good things	7:7-11
1:17	God the giver of all good things	7:11
1:20	Warnings against anger	5:22
1:22	Becoming hearers and doers of the word	7:24-27
2:5	The poor inherit the kingdom	5:3, 5
2:10	Keeping the whole law	5:19
2:13	Being merciful to receive mercy	5:7
3:12	To be known by our fruits	7:16
3:18	The blessings of peacemakers	5:9
4:2-3	Ask and you will receive	7:7-8
4:4	Serving God vs. friendship with the world	6:24
4:9-10	Comfort for mourners	5:4
4:11-12	Warnings against judging others	7:1-5
4:13-14	Living for today	6:34
5:2-5	Moth and rust spoiling earthly treasures	6:19
5:10	Prophets as examples	5:12
5:12	Warnings against making oaths	5:33-37

TOPIC	DANGER TO BELIEVERS	RESPONSE THAT LEADS TO MATURITY	BENEFIT
FAITH WITH DEEDS	Having a faith with all the right beliefs but that lacks good works	A living faith is demonstrated with good deeds. Knowledge and feelings are not enough; right actions are a crucial test of our faith.	In our desire to imitate God, compassion and action in favor of those in disadvantaged positions is the clearest indication of our journey toward perfection.

James makes his point of the importance of a living faith that produces good works in three ways:

An example of a believer's hypocrisy (2:15-17).

A faith that fails to act on known need is a failed faith. Words and good intentions are not enough. True faith shines forth as good works.

Knowledge by itself is not enough (2:19).

Often, we can fall in the trap of thinking that believing the right doctrines is enough for our Christian life. Right belief is crucial, but so are right actions. Belief alone affects demons' feelings (they "shudder") but makes no difference in their conduct. Right belief must produce good fruit.

The illustration of Abraham's and Rahab's works (2:20-26).

James uses the example of Abraham to show that faith is perfected ("made complete") by works. The goal of the whole letter is precisely to show the need, possibility, and way for all Christians to perfect their faith, to become mature believers. One cannot become a mature Christian without good works. Instead of quoting Rahab's surprising confession of faith (Josh. 2:9-11), James focuses on Rahab's hospitality. Her faith, while expressed in words, is validated by her deed of hospitality toward the spies. Again, James concludes that valid faith is expressed through right actions. This is the faith that pleases God. Note, however, that James is not saying that salvation depends on works. Rather, that "faith without deeds is dead" (2:26).

"As the body without spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." — James 2:26

FAITH AND WORKS

The Apostle Paul dealt with one of the problems new Christians face, the need to add something to "help" God's grace for salvation. His conclusion is clear: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

James deals with the other side of that problem: a misunderstanding about grace that results in an inactive faith: "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:17).

JAMES 3:1-18

Faith Tested Through Self-Control in Speech and in Humility

TOPIC	DANGER TO BELIEVERS	RESPONSE THAT LEADS TO MATURITY	BENEFIT
CONTROLLED TONGUE	Failure to control one's speech is likened to a spark that starts a forest fire. Just one unwise or unkind comment can have damaging effects we regret.	A living faith is not controlled by the tongue. Rather, a mature person is controlled by "wisdom that comes from above" (3:17).	A controlled tongue creates unity among believers. A controlled tongue is a sure path toward Christian maturity and perfection (3:2).
TRUE RELIGION	A natural tendency to envy and selfish ambition causes "disorder and every evil practice" (3:16).	Submitting to God's wisdom promotes peace and unity among believers and roots out selfishness.	A life characterized by wisdom produces people who are: Pure Peace-loving Considerate Submissive Merciful Impartial Sincere

James illustrates these two principles with an important example: a teacher. Teachers have a great deal of responsibility in their work. Their influence can build up or destroy people. Teachers depend on their words to do their jobs.

An uncontrolled tongue can cause much damage to an individual or to a whole group, such as the church. James describes the damage as a raging fire: it spreads quickly and destroys all in its path. This illustration is true of each of us, but it's highlighted in the work of a teacher.

Examine the words of the Proverbs about human speech. How can they help you with controlling your tongue? Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you discern what needs changing and empower you to do it.



PROVERBS ABOUT SPEECH

THE DESTRUCTIVE POWER OF HUMAN SPEECH

- The words of evil men (1:11-19; 10:6; 11:9, 11; 12:5-6)
- The words of the adulteress (5:2-5; 6:24-35; 7:5; 9:13-18; 22:14)
- The words of the liar (6:12-15, 17, 19; 10:18; 12:17-19, 22; 14:5, 25; 17:4; 19:5, 9, 28; 21:28; 24:28; 25:18; 26:23-28)
- The words of the fool (10:10, 14; 14:3; 15:14; 18:6-8)
- The words of false witnesses (6:19; 12:17; 19:5, 9, 28; 21:8; 24:28; 25:18)
- The words of a gossip (6:14, 19; 11:13; 16:27-28; 20:19; 25:23; 26:20)
- The words too quickly spoken (6:1-5; 12:18; 20:25; 29:20)
- The words of flattery (29:5)
- Too many words (10:14, 19, 23; 11:13; 13:3, 16; 14:23; 15:2; 17:27-28; 18:2; 21:23; 29:20)
- Perverted words (17:20; 19:1)

THE POSITIVE, HEALING AND EDIFYING POWER OF HUMAN SPEECH

- The words of the righteous (10:11, 20-21, 31-32; 12:14; 13:2; 15:23; 16:13; 18:20)
- The words of the discerning (10:13; 11:12)
- The words of knowledge (15:1, 7, 8; 20:15)
- The words of healing (15:4)
- The words of a gentle answer (15:1, 4, 18, 23; 16:1; 25:15)
- The words of a pleasant answer (12:25; 15:26, 30; 16:24)
- The words of the law (22:17-21)

JAMES 4:1-5:12

Faith tested by its reaction to quarreling, judgmentalism, arrogance, greed and suffering

TOPIC	DANGER TO BELIEVERS	RESPONSE THAT LEADS TO MATURITY	BENEFIT
QUARRELS	Envy and covetousness lead to quarrels. These two traits come from a life controlled by sinful passions. This life makes us enemies of God.	James calls us to submit ourselves to God (4:7). Faith, at its most basic, is dependence on God. True dependence begins with submission of our whole lives to God. Just as we need reconciliation with God, we need to be in peace with our fellow believers.	Submission to God means that we become God's friends (4:4). God gives us more grace (4:6). Peace with believers promotes unity.
SLANDER	Speaking evil of other believers causes disputes and fights. Judging others places us in a position of judge that does not belong to us.	Humility allows us to understand our proper place: We are subject to the law, not its judges. It is again a call to control our tongue when dealing with our neighbors.	A mature faith allows us to have good relationships with God and our neighbors. Finding our proper place in our submission to God helps us promote unity and love.
ARROGANCE	Planning for the future while ignoring God's will is arrogant and foolish. Allowing our activities and plans to dominate our lives instead of God is sinful.	God is in charge of the universe, so we must allow him to be in charge of our plans and dreams. A mature faith rests on the knowledge that God allows and blesses our plans and our activities.	Realizing we don't have control over the future is a stamp of a mature faith. Resting in God's grace when making plans shows our dependence on his provision.
GREED	Greed is born from an uncontrolled desire for something. Greed leads us to unjust treatment of others—for instance, to building wealth on the backs of those oppressed.	Just as with gaining control of the tongue, centering one's desires on God leads to a mature faith.	Centering our desires on God and his will brings our treatment of others in line with the law of love (Matt. 22:37-40).
SUFFERING	Impatience with suffering and injustice that leads to sin or despair	Believers who suffer injustice can find comfort in the promise of Christ's return. At that time, Jesus will render judgment against those who made believers suffer.	The promise of Jesus' return fills us with hope despite suffering and injustice and helps us endure patiently.
OATHS	Relying on oaths to guarantee the truthfulness of our words. Making oaths can become a misuse of God's name or his world. (It does not refer to oaths made, for example, in court.)	Our speech must always be truthful so that oath making is not necessary. A mature faith controls the tongue. This control includes the truthfulness of our words.	Refraining from making oaths preserves believers from condemnation.

Faith Tested by its Resort to Prayer

TOPIC	DANGER TO BELIEVERS	RESPONSE THAT LEADS TO MATURITY	BENEFIT
PRAYER	<p>When illness, happiness, or suffering occur, we should not forget God.</p> <p>We should not ignore the role of the Christian community during our times of trials or joys.</p> <p>We should not ignore the effects of sin in our lives.</p>	<p>Just as we remember God in times of suffering, God must be present in our minds in times of joy.</p> <p>In addition to one's personal activity, prayer and confession need to remain active in our churches.</p> <p>Confession is a powerful tool for the mature believer.</p>	<p>Prayer is the ultimate test of one's faith. In prayer, one's faith is built up and refined.</p> <p>Prayer for healing and prayers of praise are two tools for the believer.</p> <p>An active life with the body of believers is another tool for perfecting one's faith.</p> <p>The example of Elijah's prayer encourages us in our faith. Just like God answered Elijah's prayer, God answers our prayers when they are in agreement with God's will.</p>

James has dealt with the maturing and perfection of the Christian faith. If the Christian faith is demonstrated with good fruit, it reaches its conclusion with prayer. Prayer needs submission. To pray in times of need or joy requires complete surrender to God's will. In James, prayers for healing and prayers of praise are two sides of the same coin: They show that a mature faith relies on God in all areas of life. This trust is most clearly demonstrated in our prayers. Believing that "the prayer of the righteous person is powerful and effective" requires a mature faith.

When you're overwhelmed with problems, or guilt, have you ever turned to another believer to share that problem or sin that needs confession? Have you prayed together about it? What were the results of that experience?



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