

SOUTHLAND CHURCH

THE BOOK OF
JAMES

14 Day Devotional



foundations
daily devotional

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Versions of scripture quotations are noted.

DAY 1**INTRODUCTION**

James was Jesus' younger brother whose ministry and martyrdom is a great testimony to the truthfulness of Jesus Christ as our Saviour. When the enemy plants doubts about the reliability of the Bible and the deity of Christ, we can think of James and be encouraged! While Jesus was ministering here on earth, James and the rest of the family thought Jesus was out of his mind – imagine, your own brother claiming to be one with God! What in the world could make someone believe his own brother were the Saviour of the world? Only an encounter with the risen Lord! After Jesus rose from the dead, James saw, believed and eventually became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. As we read the book of James we see a man of deep faith, of perseverance and one with a great urgency for righteousness. When we hear how he was martyred, we see that he was a man of integrity who lived out the words he spoke.

When the scribes and Pharisees urged James to renounce Jesus from atop the pinnacle of the temple, James proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah instead. In anger, they pushed him off the roof. The fall broke his legs but did not kill him and so as James prayed, the crowd took up stones and clubs, crushing his skull with their final blows. Perseverance had indeed finished its work and James died a mature believer (James 1:4), receiving the blessing that he himself had penned: “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who trust in Him.” (James 1:12)

James wrote this letter to the “the twelve tribes scattered among the nations” (1:1) which would naturally apply to Jewish Christians. These believers would have been scattered by persecution which would account for James’ references to trials. James is writing as a pastor to instruct and encourage these people in the midst of the difficulties that they are facing.

The book of James is one that is much harder to apply than to understand. It is extremely practical for daily living as James focuses on how genuine faith must be accompanied by a consistent lifestyle. As a writer, James tackles all sorts of topics. A theme for practical daily living emerges, examples which include how to deal with problems, words, money and time. Since James is so practical, expect this book to be challenging!

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Thank the Lord for the practical things in the book of James. Write a prayer, committing to going through each of these devotionals and working at applying them to your everyday life.
2. Ask the Lord to speak to you about the importance of obeying the Word of God. Ask Him to show you an area of your life where you can grow in more fully obeying Him.
3. Ask the Lord to grow you in wisdom, prayer and understanding of how to apply the Word as you go through the book of James.

DAY 2**READ:** James 1:1-12

James begins this book with a radical approach to trials (v. 1-4). He is writing to Jewish Christians who have been dispersed because of persecution and he says that they should

“count it all joy” (v. 2), knowing that God is using these trials to make them “perfect and complete” (v. 4)! I wonder how we would feel if someone said that to us in the midst of our suffering? These first few verses set the tone for the entire book as it starts with a BANG! From beginning to end, this book challenges the reader to think about things from a Biblical perspective. Hard times should not surprise those who are following the Lord. James writes assuming that it is common for followers of Christ to face trials.

Too many Christians falsely believe that if they obey God and follow Him then life will be good. But God did not spare His own Son therefore how can we think that suffering is not part of walking with the Lord? At times, suffering can be a consequence of disobedience but often God also uses trials to test our faith. This does not mean that we have to fake happiness and pretend that all is well but it does teach us that we have hope in the Lord. Our response to suffering should be different from those who are unbelievers because of this. We have joy in trials because of the hope we have in God and His promises. Trials give us a chance to mature, to deepen our faith and to see if our faith is genuine. It is easy to love God in the good times but it is how we love Him in the tough time that really tells the state of our relationship with Him. In most cases, growth through trials requires submitting to Him in the midst of the trials so that we can be refined in character. His goal is to make us “mature and complete, not lacking anything” (v. 4).

The next few verses (v. 5-8) we find the topic changing from trials to wisdom. Everyone can use more wisdom, especially when going through trials. The problem is that most people have gotten pretty used to doing things on their own using human wisdom. James is writing about the wisdom needed to endure trials joyfully (v. 1-4). Biblical wisdom focuses on practical living so James is talking about wisdom that enables us to live obediently in the midst of trials not about knowledge. The first step in growing in wisdom is to humbly acknowledge our need for wisdom. Our society breeds prideful, self-made people who independently do things on their own.

Coming to the Lord requires humility as we admit that we can’t do it on our own! We need Him in order to live joyfully in the face of trials. Lucky for us, God gives wisdom generously to those who ask in faith without doubting (v. 5-6) because those who doubt are double-minded (v. 7). Sometimes when we pray our hearts are divided because we aren’t fully committed to following what He shows us as we have our own ideas of how God should answer our prayers. James says that we can’t expect God to answer these types of prayers (v. 7). Do we really want to know God’s will or do we want God to bless our will?

James shows us in verses 9-12 that to persevere through trials with joy, we must have God’s perspective on poverty and riches. Those who lack this eternal perspective will struggle with handling suffering and trials. If we get caught up in the world’s pursuit of riches and the “American dream” we will miss out on much in this life and lose rewards in eternity. James encourages the poor man to glory in his eternal riches in Christ (v. 9) and tells the rich believer to glory in his humiliation in Christ (v.10).

When a poor person becomes a Christian, this person automatically becomes rich as he/she is a child of the King! James sees that material riches are fleeting and that spiritual riches are eternal. On the other hand, the rich believer should not get their identity from their wealth, status or power but rather realize that all of his/her money will fade away (v. 11) so he/she is better to focus on what’s eternal. Every person shares a common fate – death. Therefore we shouldn’t get caught up in being tempted by the pursuit of wealth. Instead, we should focus on how rich we are in Christ. James tells us that both poverty and riches test our faith because both rich and poor people can struggle with greed, materialism, coveting, pride, etc. All of these can cause people to wander away from the Lord. True blessing is not being exempt from trials but rather learning to persevere through them (v. 12). It is those who persevere, because they love Jesus, who will receive the crown of life! What an amazing eternal reward to look forward to!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask the Lord to remind you of a big trial that you have faced recently or maybe are currently facing. What has been your response to this trial? How has God been refining you through this trial? Praise Him for what He has shown you!
2. Sometimes when we pray our hearts are divided because we aren't fully committed to following what He shows us as we have our own ideas of how God should answer our prayers. Ask the Lord to grow you in pursuing His will for your life, trusting in His Sovereignty.
3. The rich and the poor can both struggle with greed, materialism, coveting, pride, etc. These things keep our eyes focused on this life when we are supposed to have our eyes fixed on eternity. Pray for the Church to grow in seeking Heavenly rewards. Ask the Lord to grow us deeper into the things of God and to help us let go of the things of this world.

DAY 3



READ: James 1:13-18

Learning to overcome temptation is critical for believers, so, James gives us a strategy to overcome temptation. First, we must agree that temptation never comes from God therefore we cannot blame Him for tempting us (v. 13). James tells us that temptation comes from our own evil desires (v. 14). We can't blame God, we can't blame the devil, we can't blame our circumstances, and we can't blame our friends. We can only blame ourselves and take full responsibility when we sin. You will never conqueror sin until you fully acknowledge that you are to blame for your sin. Although it is true that the devil does tempt us (just as he tempted Jesus) we must remember that we have sinful hearts that are prone to sinful thoughts and attitudes and that all these wrong desires come from our sin nature. This sin nature is not permanently removed when we become Christians. Our fleshly nature still has the power to lead us into sin after we are saved. To overcome sin James tells us to recognize that the initial thought comes from the evil desires of our flesh. It is only when we pursue these desires that we fall into sin.

Then, we are to recognize that the flesh (evil desires) drags us away and entices us (v. 14), bringing destruction. The word "entice" means to attract or lure by offering pleasure or advantage. There is a deceptive element working here. Temptation makes us feel like sinning but we must obey God, no matter what we feel. To overcome temptation we must recognize that its source is our own sinful nature, that it entices us deceptively so that we have the desire to sin and then once we sin, it leads to death (v. 14-15). The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). At first it doesn't seem that a little sin can lead us to death. Temptation promises us excitement and fulfillment but it never reminds us that sin will ultimately destroy us. Of course, there is forgiveness in Christ when we truly repent and get back on God's path of righteous living.

In verses 16-18 we learn how vulnerable we are to deception when facing trials. A common lie that many Christians believe when facing suffering is that God is not good or loving or that He is not powerful enough to do something about it. James reminds us here that God is good and He is Sovereign. God gives good gifts to His children (v. 17) and sends trials to accomplish His own loving purposes. God's good gifts may include extremely difficult trials. James does not want us to be deceived into doubting God's goodness. This is one reason why it is so important to spend much time reading God's Word and meditating on God's character. We must know God as He is, as revealed to us in the Bible,

and not how we wish Him to be. Then, when trials hit, we can interpret our circumstances in light of who He is.

When we face suffering the enemy tries to deceive us into believing that either God isn't good or He isn't sovereign. To stand firm we must cling to His goodness and trust in His Sovereignty. Verse 18 says that He chose to give us birth or provide a way of salvation for us, and that we are a kind of firstfruits of all He created. Since He bought us with Christ's blood He is free to use us as He pleases in order to bear much fruit for Him through loving and serving Him wholeheartedly. Even in trials, our goal should be to bear fruit and bring Him glory!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Learning to overcome temptation is a key part of walking with the Lord. Ask the Lord to show you where you are vulnerable to sin. Ask Him for a strategy to handle these situations.
2. Evaluate your heart for the Word. Do you delight in it? Do you long to pour over it? What is your attitude when the Word is preached?
3. Ask the Lord to show you one practical way that you can apply today's scripture passage to your everyday life.

DAY 4



READ: James 1:19-27

In verses 19-21 James teaches believers about godly character. First of all, those with godly character are quick to listen (v. 19). How many relational conflicts would be avoided if people would just listen to each other instead of making assumptions, jumping to conclusions or judging one another?

Secondly, James exhorts believers to be slow to speak (v. 19). Believers should be slow to spout off how much they know about something – maybe someone in the room actually knows more than you. Or, maybe people are just tired of hearing the know-it-all ramble on about this and that. We can also apply this to our prayer lives as we learn to listen to Him and wait on Him in prayer. Our prayer life isn't supposed to be just us talking the whole time but rather Him speaking to us, which requires us to listen.

Third, we are encouraged to be slow to anger (v. 19). A teachable heart doesn't fight angrily with others. Don't be fooled into thinking that you don't have an anger issue just because you don't yell and scream. Internal anger can be just as dangerous as a big blow-up. Anger does not produce righteousness (v. 20).

Fourth, those who are growing in godly character will put aside moral filth and evil (v. 21). When we become saved we bring a lot of filth into our walk with God. Christians must work tirelessly at asking the Lord to show us areas where our thoughts, words and actions do not please Him. This is an ongoing process that we should be engaging in throughout our entire lives as no one is without sin. Confession and repentance is for all believers at all maturity levels and should be a regular part of your devotional life.

Fifthly, we are told to humbly accept the Word planted in us, which can save us (v. 21). The Word is like a seed planted in us but it still needs to be nurtured in order to bear fruit. This requires pulling weeds and providing protection and proper nutrients. Here we see that salvation isn't a one-time experience but rather an ongoing process which culminates in our ultimate deliverance from sin upon death or Christ's second coming. Halleluiah!

This chapter ends with a command to be doers of the Word (v. 22-27). The unfortunate thing in many religious communities is that people know in their heads a lot of information about the Bible but they often struggle with obeying what the Bible commands. What's even worse is that in most Christian circles the moral and social beliefs and behaviours don't differ much from the non-Christian population. When we hear the Word and don't put it into practice we actually end up deceiving ourselves (v. 22). As we read the Word we must constantly ask ourselves how we can apply it to our lives. The Bible is full of practical commands for everyday life and even the chapters that are hard to understand are there for a purpose and can teach us about God and ourselves. Verse 25 tells us there is blessing in doing the Word. The passage ends with a reminder about the tongue (v. 26). This topic will be expanded upon in future devotionals as James has quite a lot to say about our speech in chapter three.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Look at the five areas of Christian character listed in verse 19-21. Ask the Lord to show you one area that you need to work on. Confess if necessary and then ask Him to show you some practical steps you can take to mature in this area.
2. Thank the Lord that His Word produces fruit in our lives and that He can help us grow into maturity! Praise Him for what He has been showing you about your character. Tell Him that you trust that He will help you grow, realizing that you cannot do it on your own.
3. Pray for the church to grow in godly speech and learn deeper truths about healthy relationships.

DAY 5



READ: James 2:1-13

The main emphasis in today's passage of scripture is favouritism. To show favouritism is prejudice whether it's based on economic status, race or anything else. When God's people come together to worship Him corporately at church the world should be baffled at how people of different races, economic and social levels and age groups can have such love and harmony. Showing partiality puts man as judge in the place of God. But James goes further than that in saying that showing favouritism aligns you with God's enemies (v. 6-7). He mentions how the rich exploit the poor (v. 6), this should not be! Exploitation of the poor has been going on for centuries and is one way the rich have gotten wealthy - James refers to this as blasphemy (v. 7).

In verse 9 James plainly states that favouritism is sin. Partiality is sinful because it violates God's law of love (v. 8). Part of loving your neighbour as yourself includes treating each person fairly and objectively. This means caring about their needs, their feelings, their desires and treating people the way you would want to be treated. When people favour the rich they are treating the poor with contempt, which is sinful. This topic matters so much to James that he includes a discussion on how violating the law in one area makes a person guilty of breaking the whole law (v. 11). James is really trying to hammer home the importance of realizing that favouritism is sin. This shows the importance of not dismissing any Biblical command as no big deal. James concludes this section by reminding believers to remember that judgment is coming (v. 12). Those who refuse to show mercy to others will face God's merciless judgment but those who show mercy will receive mercy (v. 13). If we profess to know Christ then there will be evidence of that in our lives through the way that we show mercy to others.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask the Lord to reveal to you any judgmental words, prejudice, thoughts or other forms of favouritism that you have engaged in this past week. Confess as necessary.
2. Ask the Lord to work in your heart and mind to help you see beneath the surface as you relate to people. Ask Him to grow you in your love for people and to see them as He sees them.
3. Thank the Lord for His unfailing love and care for all people! Ask Him to grow the church in showing Christ-like attitudes towards all people.

DAY 6



READ: James 2:14-26

Today's passage is famous for theological controversy because on the surface it looks like James is contradicting Paul who talks about how we are saved by grace. Before we go any further we must note that the Bible does NOT contradict itself. All Scripture is inspired by God, therefore, Paul and James are not in contradiction with each other. We must remember that each had a specific purpose in mind when writing their letters. We also need to remember not to take only one passage and make doctrine out of it. Scripture interprets Scripture so we must look at the totality of the Word of God. This devotional is not the place for this debate so instead we will focus on what James has to say.

James is writing to believers who profess to believe in Christ but do not have any fruit to show for it in their lives. He is not disputing that we are saved by faith alone; he is just arguing that genuine faith results in good works. We won't get into heaven through good deeds alone. We also won't get into heaven by believing in Jesus intellectually without it changing the way we live.

James uses the example of a person without clothes being told to "go in peace, keep warm and well fed" (v. 16, NIV) without doing anything about his physical needs. He calls that faith dead (v. 17, 26) and useless (v. 20). The key thing to remember here is that you cannot separate true faith from good deeds. If someone claims to have faith but has no good deeds his claim proves nothing. Likewise, if a person has all sorts of good deeds but does not turn from their sin and trust in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour their good works will not get them into heaven.

Believing right doctrine is not sufficient for salvation, genuine saving faith is always connected to new birth and results in a life of good deeds. James describes both Abraham and Rahab as examples of those who had genuine saving faith which manifested itself with good deeds. Abraham's obedience in sacrificing Isaac did not save him but rather proved his faith was genuine (v. 21-23). Rahab, a woman and pagan foreigner, also had faith that resulted in obedience as she did the right thing in hiding the spies (v. 25).



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Thank the Lord for the opportunity of doing good works for Him! Ask Him to show you 3-5 things that you are doing well. Write a prayer committing to continuing in those good deeds.
2. Ask the Lord to show you an area in your life where you need to put your faith into actions through good deeds.
3. Pray for the lost to see the good deeds of believers and be drawn into the kingdom of God through that testimony.

DAY 7**READ:** James 3:1-12

When we are saved we become new creatures but unfortunately we still carry around with us our old sin nature which wars against the Spirit inside us. The tongue is one of the battlegrounds of this war. James describes for us the magnitude of the problem of the tongue using vivid illustrations to show us just how serious the problem of the tongue can be. He begins by teaching us that there will accountability for the words that we say by using the example of teachers (v. 1-2). James knows how easy it is to stumble (v. 2). We are all prone to sin! We must recognize the power of the tongue for good or for evil.

James uses two analogies in this passage: the bit and the rudder (3-5a). A bit is small but when put into a horse's mouth you can control the entire horse. The same is true of a ship's rudder. Similarly the tongue is small but can have a huge influence on your life. We must recognize the power of the tongue and use it carefully. James then describes the evil that can be done by the tongue by using the examples of a forest fire and tamed animals (v. 5b-8). Under control a fire is useful but when it burns out of control terrible things can happen. In the same way, a tongue that is out of control can cause terrible damage. James says the untamed tongue "corrupts the whole body" (v. 6) and even sets on fire the entire course of our lives.

James then uses the example of taming an animal saying that no one can tame the tongue adding that it is a "restless evil full of deadly poison" (v. 8). James does not say that the tongue is untameable; he only says no one can tame it. The tongue is humanly untameable but if you walk daily in the Spirit, allowing the Holy Spirit to control your heart, then you will produce the fruit of the Spirit instead of deadly poison! James concludes by telling about a common inconsistency in believers – praising God with one breath and then immediately thereafter saying evil things about another person (v. 9-12). The same spring does not produce fresh water one minute and salt water the next. Neither does a tree produce both figs and olives (v. 12).

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Ask the Lord to give you a word, thought or picture about the role that your tongue plays in your spiritual journey and/or personal relationships? Are you bearing good fruit with your tongue or is it holding you captive? Dialogue with Jesus about this. Confess if necessary.
2. Ask the Lord to remind you of a time where you have been hurt by someone's destructive words. Ask the Lord to bring healing into your life. If the hurt is quite large, consider booking a personal ministry appointment to work through this with a trained minister.
3. Pray that you would grow in being a truth seeker, fighting against lies and always seeking the good in situations. Pray that you would use your tongue to show kindness and love and not bitterness, unforgiveness or hate. Pray that you would use your tongue to restore and not tear down. Ask the Lord to give you the motivation to use your words to build up and encourage, pray that you would be strengthened and motivated to obey God in the area of your tongue.

DAY 8**READ:** James 3:13-18

Today's passage is about God's wisdom leading to harmony in personal relationships (v. 13, 17). He contrasts this with worldly wisdom that leads to conflict. It's easy to claim to have wisdom, but James says, "Show me your wisdom by your life" (v. 13). True wisdom is the ability to live in a manner pleasing to God, in constant submission to His Spirit, applying His truth to all areas of life. The source of this wisdom comes from God and is "pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere" (v. 17). Let's look a little closer at each of these traits of godly wisdom.

1. Pure – usually this implies moral living but in this context it speaks more of motives and being free from jealousy and selfish ambition. Our lives are to glorify God and not self! When we have disputes are we inclined to want to be right, even if it means hurting the person we are arguing with? Motives must be pure or we're not acting with godly wisdom.
2. Peace-loving – seeking peace in relationships is a common theme in scripture. We are not to stir up controversy over petty issues. We should never compromise doctrinal purity but neither should we fight over minor matters.
3. Considerate/Gentle - this means that we forgive when we could condemn and that we make allowances for people's mistakes.
4. Submissive/Open to Reason – being willing to defer to others as long as core doctrine or moral principles are not at stake. Wisdom will yield on minor matters, will listen to other's views and change if proved wrong.
5. Full of Mercy and Good Fruits – it is easy to show compassion for someone who is suffering unjustly but it can be much harder to show compassion for someone who is suffering because of their own sin and rebellion. Godly wisdom does both!
6. Impartial – not taking sides based on what someone can do for you. Wisdom holds firmly to the truth in love with no regard to personal benefit.
7. Sincere – wisdom does not mask or cover up, it does not pretend but rather is stable, trustworthy and transparent.

If believers would seek to live by these seven qualities, personal conflicts would be greatly minimized and relationships would grow! Yet many of us don't use godly wisdom, substituting instead worldly wisdom. As a result we have conflict in our relationships. James lists five things about worldly wisdom (v. 14-16):

1. It is rooted in bitter jealousy/envy and selfish ambition – the key here is to look at the motives of the heart. How do you handle when someone challenges your ideas or ways of doing things? Can you be happy when good things happen to other people? Do you regularly make decisions based on what's best for others or just do what's best for yourself?
2. It is arrogant/boastful - we must be aware of how easily pride creeps into our lives. Pride is a hard sin to expose because we often can't see our own pride. We need Jesus to show us areas of pride and confess them, breaking generational strongholds.
3. It is false to the truth/denies the truth – this has to do with practicing what you preach. You can know everything that a Christian should do but if you aren't actually working hard to put it into practice then you are living a lie and denying Christ with your actions.

4. It is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic – the source of worldly wisdom can be linked to Satan.
5. It results in disorder and every evil thing – the word disorder can be translated confusion, which means instability.

James sums everything up in verse 18, “peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.” Peace must be cultivated deliberately and intentionally, it rarely happens accidentally. . Many people want good fruit in their lives but they forget that a good harvest is not accidental. If you see a person or a home or a church or a business where there is unity, peace, love, respect, kindness, etc. then you can bet that it is because the people there have been working hard at applying godly principles (whether they realize it or not).



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Is there peace in your home? Are you at peace in your relationships? Ask Jesus to speak to you about how you can apply godly wisdom to a specific circumstance in your life using the seven aspects of godly wisdom listed in verse 17.
2. Which of the five traits of worldly wisdom are you prone to? Ask the Lord to speak to you about how you can exchange this worldly wisdom for His godly wisdom in your relationships.
3. Thank God for providing us with practical tools that we can use in growing harmonious relationships!

DAY 9



READ: James 4:1-10

Unfortunately, many Christian homes are full of conflict rather than peace. This could be because many believers focus on the minor issues, overlooking the major ones such as love, kindness, and forgiveness. Today's passage applies to relational conflicts, whether in the church, at home, at work or at school. The overall idea can be summed up as this – we are selfish people who need to submit to God through repentance, humbling ourselves before Him. James gives us three clear steps when it comes to conflicts. We will look at two today and one in the next devotional.

First, when in conflict, look at your own selfish motives (v. 1-3). James is saying that we shouldn't point fingers at others with blame but rather that we should look within, at our own personal selfishness. A big first step in resolving personal conflicts begins with taking a long hard look at ourselves. This includes asking Jesus to show us where we need to take responsibility for wrong attitudes and actions, however small they may be. We all have the tendency to seek our own good rather than doing what's best for others. The same is true in prayer - James mentions how people tend to pray selfishly, revealing motive issues. In relationships, selfishness will always lead to conflict. The decision to put to death selfishness is not optional for believers.

Second, to resolve conflicts we must submit to God, resist the devil, and repent (v. 7-10). This will require forgiving others and asking for forgiveness when we have done wrong. James writes, “draw near to God and He will draw near to you”. We cannot be close to God and hold all sorts of bitterness, forgiveness or anger towards someone else. If we think that we are near to God yet we harbour bitterness, jealousy, unforgiveness, anger, etc. towards someone then we have deceived ourselves. Repentance is part of the process

of drawing near to God. This takes much humility. Pride is at the heart of all disobedience and much of our relational conflicts. God opposes the proud but give grace to the humble (v. 6). When James writes, “Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom,” he is talking about thorough, heartfelt repentance for selfishness, pride and all other sin!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask the Lord to bring to mind a relationship issue that you are dealing with. Then, ask the Lord to show you ways where you have been acting selfishly in that relationship. Confess and commit to doing what is best for others.
2. Think about the relational problem you prayed about in question 1. Ask the Lord to show you if you have any wrong attitudes (unforgiveness, bitterness, anger, etc.) that you need to repent of today. Confess if necessary.
3. Pray that you will grow in humility and selflessness in your personal relationships. Ask the Lord to give you an encouraging word about how this will build positive relationships. Pray for your life to exhibit love for others.

DAY 10

Read: James 4:11-12

In the last devotional we looked at two ways to avoid interpersonal conflict. Today we are going to look at a final way. To resolve conflicts we must stop judging others (v. 11-12). The root of judgmental words is pride – thinking that we are better than others. There has been a lot of confusion in the church about judging others, mainly from the misinterpretation of the verse, “Judge not lest you be judged” (Matt. 7:1), so we will start by clarifying a few things.

First, it is not judging someone to be discerning with regard to his/her character. Second, it is not judging someone to challenge someone about sin in his/her life. The aim of confronting sin should always be restorative, protecting the church from sin and honoring God. Yet these things can be done with a wrong motive, which would then be judgmental. Motive is everything!

Judging others is when we criticize someone out of jealousy, bitterness, selfish ambition, etc. We must look at our motives for saying what we say to people and about people. Are you sharing it to make yourself look good or to put the person in a bad light? Do you think you are better than they are? Are you subconsciously elevating yourself with your attitudes or are you truly seeking what's best for the other person?

Second, it is wrong to judge others according to your own personal convictions. This is what the Pharisee's did. We often judge people according to our own personal preference and not according to God's Word. This can be true in the area of dress, entertainment, how money is spent, hobbies, food/drink, diet/exercise, parenting, etc.

Third, we judge people wrongly when we act self-righteously without dealing with our own sin. It is easy to think that we know everything about how someone else should be living their lives. This reeks of pride. Some even go as far as thinking that they know someone's eternal destiny. It is true that we can “know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16) but only God knows the heart. There is only one Lawgiver and Judges (v. 12) and only He can tell someone they are going to hell!!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Thank the Lord for being a righteous Judge. All His judgments are true!
2. Ask the Lord to speak to you about a time when you judged someone wrongly. Confess this as sin, then ask the Lord to show you the truth about this situation. Thank Him for what He shows you.
3. Pray that you would grow in selflessness and humility so that you would make good judgments. Pray that you would learn to discern wisely and know when to confront in love.

DAY 11



READ: James 4:13-17

This passage discusses how life is short and uncertain. As with the previous section of the chapter, this passage speaks of the importance of humility. Verse 16 confirms this when James writes, “*you boast in your arrogance*”. Basically, he is saying that it is arrogant to say that you know Christ yet not bother consulting Him with your everyday decisions. It is proud to make our own plans without consulting the Lord. These verses tell us that life is uncertain, “*you do not know what tomorrow will bring*” (v. 14).

There are no guarantees in life. We can try to make our own plans and control our own future but ultimately God is in control of our future and our successes and failures are dependent on Him.

It is not wrong to plan for the future. It is wise to have a will, to have retirement savings, investments, and future plans. Yet, we err when we arrogantly put our trust in our business ventures, savings accounts and stored wealth instead of putting our trust in God, who controls the future. When we plan for the future we must remember that if the stock market fails and we lose everything our hope is not lost. This really comes down to a heart issue. So, buy the life insurance policy, invest, save but remember that there is no such thing as financial security. It is impossible to plan ahead for all the things that could go wrong. The economy could crash, the housing market could collapse, terrorists could overrun our country, investments can fail – trusting in God is the only source of security for the future. Jesus wants to be functional Lord of our entire lives including our businesses and our personal finances.

Doing things on your own, without consulting the Lord, is pride. Many Christians profess to know God but practically they are atheists who don’t bring God into their everyday lives. These believers falsely think that they have been successful because of their own hard work and smart business sense but they forget that everything they have comes from God by His grace (1 Cor. 4:7). That even includes the ability to make money. The right thing to do is to take the Lord into consideration in all our endeavors, including finances. Failing to do this is sin.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Thank the Lord for being Sovereign over the future. Ask Him to show you an area of your life where He has been Sovereign – thank Him for this. Thank Him for being Head of the Church.
2. Ask the Lord to show you an area of your life where you need to inquire of Him. This could be for a decision, for your finances/personal budget, a work/family issue, etc.

Ask Him to show you if there is anything blocking you from receiving the truth from Him today. Deal with what He shows you (confession, etc.). Then listen in prayer about what He wants to say to you about this area. Commit to following through on any action steps that He gives you.

3. Pray for believers to move into deeper relationship with Jesus as functional Lord of their lives and for churches to invite Him to be functional head of their church.

DAY 12

READ: James 5: 1-6

Today's passage is written specifically to those who are living comfortably. Those who struggle making ends meet can also learn some important lessons here. Our culture values wealth but forgets that it can create problems. Too many people falsely think that an increase in finances will solve their problems. James warns us that wealth can actually bring more problems. In this passage James is speaking out against those who exploit the poor and is warning them of coming judgment. Wealth can be a dangerous trap that leads to eternal destruction. We know that money itself is not evil; in fact, it can be extremely useful for growing God's kingdom. Whether money corrupts or brings heavenly rewards has to do with the heart of the one managing it, no matter whether he/she is rich or poor. Nothing tests the character of people like how they use their finances.

There are a few things that we need to consider from this passage. First, we are accountable for how we earn our wealth. Are we good workers or do we spend hours fooling around on the job? Are we being truthful on our timesheets? Do we cheat or tell little white lies to make the sale?

Second, what is our primary motivation in life – pursuing wealth or relationship with God? Take a look at how you allocate your time. Are you a workaholic to the neglect of your spiritual and family responsibilities? What priorities are you modeling to your family? What are you teaching your kids through your lifestyle?

Third, we must be careful to manage our wealth according to biblical principles. Overspending, being a tightwad, failing to budget, stealing or cheating others, paying unfair wages and ignoring those who are in need are all signs that there is something wrong with our attitudes towards money.

Finally, we are to be careful in the area of self-indulgence (v. 5). Self-indulgence is when we throw off restraint and discipline and yield to the desires of selfish appetites and cravings. But it can also just be when we allow ourselves to have or do things we enjoy very much but which are not essential. For example, food, sex, vacations, toys/hobbies, even friendships can all be self-indulgent. We must be careful not to judge others but rather examine ourselves prayerfully and often so that we don't fall into this trap.

We must be careful to use our wealth not to indulge ourselves but rather to build into God's kingdom. It is the responsibility of each believer to be faithful to God through financial stewardship. Those who trust in the Lord and who are living for eternity will be good stewards of the money and possessions that God entrusts to them. God owns it all and we will give an account to Him of how we have used our resources. Wealth can be gone in the blink of an eye therefore use your wealth to bring people to Christ. If you want God to entrust you with spiritual riches in eternity then prove yourself to be faithful in managing your finances here on earth.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask the Lord to show you 5-10 of the ways that He has blessed you materially. Thank Him for His goodness and generosity.
2. Self-indulgence is when we throw off restraint and discipline and yield to the desires of selfish appetites and cravings. But it can also just be when we allow ourselves to have or do things we enjoy very much but which are not essential. Ask the Lord to show you an area in your life where you struggle with self-indulgence. What does Jesus want to say to you about your heart concerning this area of self-indulgence? Confess sin as necessary.
3. Pray that we would grow in using our resources wisely, not to indulge ourselves, but to build into God's kingdom. Pray that believers would grow in being faithful to God through financial stewardship.

DAY 13



READ: James 5:7-12

Today's passage talks about how to respond rightly when you are wronged. It's not a matter of "if" you will be wronged, but rather "when" you will be wronged since we live in a fallen and sinful world. As Christians we must learn to handle mistreatment rightly because God does not promise to protect us from being wronged. According to James, the key in overcoming mistreatment is patience. The Lord is returning as Judge and He will make all things right! This should encourage us to keep walking in righteousness in tough times. It should also be a warning because He will not just judge those who have wronged us He will also judge us. The passage illustrated patience's with the example of the farmer (v. 7), the prophets (v. 10) and Job's perseverance (v. 11). When the righteous suffer for no fault of their own, they must wait on the Lord to judge the wicked and reward them for their endurance.

The theme of patiently enduring trials is woven throughout the entire bible. When we read the prophets we find that following the Lord and serving Him does not protect us from all trials. In fact, many of the prophets were persecuted because of their message. Then there was Job, an upright and blameless man who feared God and turned away from evil (Job 1:1), yet he suffered tremendously. God blesses those who endure, not those who quit. This does not mean that we will always feel good about what we are going through – trials are hard. The point is to submit to God in the midst of the trial. We can only do this if we truly believe that God is in control of our hardships and that He has a purpose that He is accomplishing. No matter how difficult our trials we must not doubt God's goodness or love.

The final verse in this passage (v. 12) may seem a bit out of place as it has to do with taking oaths. The real issue is speaking the truth at all times as this verse is not a ban on taking oaths, such as in the courtroom. In the last two chapters James has been discussing worldliness, wealth and pride which result in relational conflicts. Here James is calling believers to truthful communication. Truth is essential for trust. Therefore let your "yes be yes and your no be no" (v. 12).



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. God is love and a God of justice. Thank Him that He will right all things in His time. Praise Him that we can depend on His justice and do not need to take things into our

own hands. Thank Him that by living in relationship with Him we can listen to His voice and know when to take a stand and when to be silent.

2. Ask Jesus to remind you of an injustice you have experienced in your life. Write down what you receive. Ask Him to give you clarity concerning this injustice in the area of what He wants to accomplish in you through this injustice. Thank Him for what He shows you.
3. If you are waiting for Jesus to do something in your life, ask Him if He may actually want you to do your part in taking steps and doing what is right even when you don't feel like it. What would these steps look like for you?

DAY 14

READ: James 5: 13-20

James concludes the book with a passage on prayer. No matter where you are at in your prayer life there are truths that you can apply through these verses. James begins with two short commands, first to pray when experiencing suffering and second to sing praises when cheerful (v. 13). When you encounter difficulties is your first response to pray? The automatic response for most believers when tough times come is to complain, throw a pity party or question God. But James says "pray"! God often sends allows problems in our lives so that we will learn to depend on Him in prayer. Those who do pray when they encounter tough times often just ask the Lord to bail them out instead of engaging and growing in prayer through asking Him about His purposes for the trial. We all have a lot to learn about going deeper in prayer.

Verse 14-15 talks about praying for sick people. When discussing this topic we must be careful to look at the entire Bible and not just take one or two verses out of context. We know that Jesus heals as He healed many people while He was on the earth. The early church also experienced many healings. But God does not always choose to heal. Suffering is sometimes God's will for believers and often in our best interest (Heb. 12:5-11; James 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:6-7). In fact suffering can be for our eternal good. We must not assume that all suffering is evil (not from God) and we should never condemn believers who suffer. So, how can you pray for someone who is struggling with health and not receiving healing? Pray for the ability to endure with joy, for a godly attitude through the pain, for godly character to grow, for spiritual fruit, etc.

Verse 16b says, "*the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective*". The qualification for an effective prayer life is righteousness. This does not mean that we have to be perfect in all things or else no one could qualify. Elijah was not a perfect man. Rather, to be righteous means to walk uprightly before God, confessing all known sin and striving to obey God. Elijah is given as an illustration of a righteous man whose prayers accomplished much (v. 17-18). James says that Elijah was just a plain, ordinary, man just like us. He struggled with fear, depression and did not have privileged status before God. Elijah lived in the time of the ungodly King Ahab. He took on the Baal worshipers in a direct challenge and his prayers affected the entire nation. Just like Elijah we live in ungodly times and we face circumstances that are far beyond our ability. We are inadequate. That's why we are to pray! Prayer acknowledges our need of God.

The book of James concludes with verses 19-20 telling us that believers are responsible to help restore straying believers to the truth. Believers can stray from the truth both doctrinally and morally although the two are often intertwined. Every Christian has a part to play in encouraging believers to make godly choices. We must not ignore sin! Notice

how this passage is also about restoration. These verses don't tell us to attack a person who has stumbled but rather to gently and lovingly help the person see the error of their way and bring him/her to repentance.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Thank God for hearing every one of our prayers. He is a God who listens and He loves when we bring our requests to Him. Ask the Lord to remind you of a time when He answered your prayer, thank Him for this.
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind a prayer request that weighs heavy on you. Ask Him to give you three key strategies that you can focus on in prayer and pray through for this request. Pray through what you receive. Commit to praying about these things over the next week.
3. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a word/picture/impression of a promise(s) related to your request. Thank Him for what He has brought to mind.



The Book of James

James is an extremely practical book that can easily be applied to daily life. This book contains challenges in the area of suffering, wealth, the tongue, the world, wisdom, and much more!

James 1:22 (ESV)

"But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."



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