



# JAMES

*The Shape of True Faith*

Leader's Guide

# Young Business Leaders

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# Lesson 1 : Introduction

## Why the Message of James is so Needed Today

### Some Background

Though we call James a book of the Bible, it is really a short letter. It was likely written only about twenty years after the resurrection of Jesus (approx. 44-49 AD), at a time when Christians all over the Roman Empire were beginning to be persecuted. History and Church tradition attribute this letter to James, who was the half-brother of Jesus and the early leader of the Church at Jerusalem. In the first sentence of the letter (1:1), James identifies his audience as ‘the twelve tribes in the Dispersion’. James identifies them as of ‘the twelve tribes’ of Israel because these believers saw themselves as true Jews. They walked in the path of the Historic Jewish faith, and rightly recognized Jesus as the Messiah (King) who was predicted in the Old Testament (2 Samuel 7:14, Micah 5:2-4, etc). He refers to them as the ‘Dispersion’ because they were beyond the borders of Israel and scattered all across the Roman Empire. As such, this letter is a sort of ‘open letter’ to all who believe in Jesus as the King who was to come, and the Savior of the world.

### The Situations That Prompted the Writing of James’ Letter

Letters are what we call ‘occasional’ documents. By that we mean there was a specific set of circumstances or events that prompted the writing of this book. There were several:

**Persecution:** By the time of this writing, Christians had been identified as a separate religious group, distinct from Judaism. This is important because Judaism had a protected status under Roman Law, but Christianity had no such protections. Sporadic and scattered persecution was a cause of concern and uncertainty in the early church. Christians were accused of all manner of mischief. They refused to believe in Roman gods, and Christian practices were misunderstood, such as the LORD’s Supper and their fellowship ‘love feasts’. The charge of treason was always the most dangerous and potentially fatal, because Christians believed in another King, Jesus. As you can see from the book of Acts, Christians faced hostility from Jewish groups as well as the Roman authorities.

James urges his audience to ‘count it all joy’ as they faced trials (1:2). Such tests would produce perseverance and perfect our character (1:3). He urged them to recognize that God would reward them and would not tempt them to fall (12-13) in their trials. James counsels patience (5:7), that we can be confident in God’s final justice, even if for a time injustice holds sway (5:1-6).

**Dissension:** It is clear that there was significant disunity in the churches and groups to which James was writing. Apparently there were many who were putting themselves forward as leaders and teachers (3:1), and the churches were suffering from attitudes of favoritism (2:1), quarrels (4:1), greed and presumption about the future (4:13).

James teaches that typical, worldly attitudes are fruitless and empty. Concerning favoritism toward the the rich, from whom we imagine we might profit, are the very ones who will mistreat us and take from us (2:6-7). Concerning wisdom, the truly wise do not push forward to shout their opinions, but rather demonstrate their wisdom with gentleness and good deeds (3:13).

**Nominalism:** The word ‘nominal’ means ‘in name only’. James was very clearly concerned that many in the churches had professed faith in Jesus, but there was little evidence to support the reality of it (2:14). Many were ‘hearers of the Word, but not doers of it’ (1:22).

James sought to expose such nominalism as completely different from real faith. James powerfully speaks to the shape of real of faith which results in activity. Such obedient faith is true faith (2:21-22), the way of real wisdom (3:13), and the proof of our hope (5:11).

## Why This Book is so Needed Today

Clearly, many of the situations which gave rise to the writing of this letter parallel our own experience in the world today. We see persecution, dissension and nominalism all around us. There is growing persecution across the world and increased hostility toward those who hold Christian convictions. We need to take to heart the encouragements of James that such trials produce good fruit of perseverance and patience in our character. The church is riddled with dissension and denominational divisions. We have many who are eager to speak their opinions but fewer who serve in love. We see many nominal believers, who claim to know Jesus, but demonstrate no real evidence beyond the mere claim. Many times we have heard the Word and done nothing about it. This book urges us to 'lean in' to Jesus in obedience!

## Questions for Review & Discussion

1. The author of this book was a son of Mary and Joseph, the half-brother of Jesus. Does that encourage your faith that Jesus really was who he claimed to be? How so? ***If anyone knows our faults, it is our family. James' faith confirms that even Jesus' early life and testimony backed up the church's teaching that Jesus was sinless.***
2. Why did it cause problems for Christianity to be identified separately from Judaism in the Roman Empire? ***Because Judaism had a special exemption from Rome. All other people were required to worship Roman gods and the Roman Caesar as a god. This put Christianity under a microscope.***
3. What were the problems which James saw in the Church which prompted this letter? ***Persecution, Dissensions, Nominalism***
4. Which of these problems hits home most with you? Why?

## James: The Shape of True Faith

### Lesson 2: Trials, Perseverance and the Order of Things (1:1-13)

<sup>2</sup> *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,<sup>3</sup> for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.<sup>4</sup> And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

<sup>5</sup> *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. <sup>6</sup> But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

<sup>9</sup> *Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, <sup>10</sup> and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass<sup>[c]</sup> he will pass away. <sup>11</sup> For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.*

<sup>12</sup> *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.*

----James 1:2-12 (ESV)

1. What is our typical response to trials? How does James urge us to respond? Consider 1:3-4. What does James propose to transform our perspective about trials? **Grumbling/Complaining. James says to count it all joy. By itself, that sounds like shallow optimism. Imagine if you were to tell a friend—'I feel sad', and they say, 'Don't feel sad, feel happy!'**

***The key to this is the logic James provides to transform our thinking about trials by focusing our attention on the outcome/fruit. Testing produces steadfastness/perseverance. He says that when it is fully developed, perseverance completes our character. This is similar to the football coach who said, 'I am going to push you beyond what you thought you could do—so that you can be what you have always wanted to be.'***

2. Look at 1:5. Why does the idea of asking for wisdom come directly after the talk about trials? How does the character of God help us to be bolder in asking Him for wisdom? ***It is in our trials that we often wrestle the most with what is the right thing to do. So it would be natural to ask God for wisdom in our decisions, especially when the pain of difficulties intensifies the urgency. James tells us that God gives to all generously and without reproach. Two main anxieties we might have about approaching God is that He would grow tired of us asking and deny our request, or even worse, would shame us for being so foolish and needing help all the time. God is generous. He does not get bothered, busy or weary. He will not shame us for our need or ignorance—just the opposite. God is pleased when we seek Him first and often. He delights to give good gifts to his children.***

3. See 1:6-8. Why must we ask in faith and not doubt? What does that mean? ***This can be difficult, because we all have doubts and fears. We can feel that this will certainly disqualify us from receiving from God any blessing of wisdom. But a totally lack of anxiety is not what James means. The key is in verse 8, where he says the man who asks with doubt is ‘a double minded man’. The point is that such a person is hedging their bets, asking God and also making plans in case God doesn’t come through. Such hedging of bets is not faith. Faith risks. Faith believes God precisely because we doubt ourselves.***

4. In verses 9-11, James inverts the normal order/perspective on rich and poor. He says the poor should rejoice in their high position, and the rich should rejoice in their low position. A couple questions on this:

A) What makes the position of a person rich in earthly wealth a low position? Consider particularly James’ illustration about the flower. ***The rich person has a low position because the wealth and influence they have are so temporary. James argues we should feel almost sorry for those whose riches fade away so quickly, like a flower in a field.***

B) What then makes the position of a poor person a high position? ***The poor person has a high position because they will not be subjected to massive losses of wealth and possession when they die. Their possessions are of a more enduring and reliable kind.***



Business Block: James 1:9-11 is addressed to Christians. It is possible to be wealthy and a Christian? If God has blessed you with worldly wealth and influence, how should you look at that wealth in order to communicate the right mindset to your family, employees and others? **Christians who are wealthy should hold loosely to their wealth. They should consider their position a low position, having responsibility for so much that will soon perish. They are to be stewards, caring for the resources God has given them with an open hand. Since most of the world fights and claws for wealth and the power it bestows, a Christian who has these things and loves the Eternal Kingdom of God preaches a powerful countermessage to everyone who sees and hears of their conduct.**

5. Look at verse 12. Notice that James speaks again of persevering in trials. He has never really left this theme, but it has continued through all we have looked at. How does verse 12 connect with the previous section (9-11) on rich and poor? How does this help us to count our trials ‘all joy’? **In contrast with earthly riches which fade like wildflowers (1:10-11), the one who perseveres under trial will receive the crown of life, which will not perish. This is the greatest blessing and reason to rejoice in trials, because as we pass through them, we know each one brings us closer to a lasting and imperishable reward from God.**

## James: The Shape of True Faith

### Lesson 3: Temptation and Obedience (1:14-27)

<sup>13</sup> Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. <sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup> Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

<sup>16</sup> Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. <sup>17</sup> Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. <sup>18</sup> Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

<sup>19</sup> Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. <sup>21</sup> Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

<sup>22</sup> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. <sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. <sup>24</sup> For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. <sup>25</sup> But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

<sup>26</sup> If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

--James 1:13-27 (ESV)

1. Consider 1:13. Does God tempt people? Does He control whether we are tempted? (See 1 Cor 10:13) What makes the difference between the two? **No, God does not tempt people, but yes, absolutely he has control over whether temptations come to us ('He will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear' (1 Cor 10:13). It is for this reason that we are told in the Lord's Prayer to ask God—'Lead us not into temptation' (Matthew 6:13). The difference between the two is this—motivation. Temptation inherently hopes the result will be failure, the way a hunter lays a trap because he wants to catch something. God tests us and wants us to pass the test. God does not test us to destroy us, but rather uses these trials to refine us and prove us faithful. 1 Peter 1:7 explains, 'These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.'**

2. See 1:14-15. Notice that desire is not sin. What causes a desire to become sinful? What is the logical end to which all sin leads? **Desire is the raw material of life. We all get hungry, tired, cold or hot. We desire to be safe, to be fed, to be happy, to be loved. The question is, what do I do with my desires? Do I try to fulfill them in the ways God has proscribed for them to be fulfilled, or do I reject His wisdom and instruction? C.S. Lewis said in the Screwtape Letters that 'sin is wanting something good at a time, in a way, or to an extent that God has not commanded.' In those cases, we make our pleasure and our will absolute over God, Who is our greatest good. If we do that, we actually destroy the good and ruin the pleasure. All these things exist to point us back to God as the Giver and our greatest Good.**

3. Consider 1:16-17. James warns us not to 'be deceived, that every good and perfect gift comes from' God. What is the deception He is warning us about? How does that relate to the issue of temptation in verses 1:13-15? **The deception is to believe that there is some good thing that exists outside of, or comes from some other hand than God our Father. That relates to verses 13-15 because it is the essence of all temptation.**

4. In verse 18 it says God saved us so that we might be the 'first fruits' of all He created. What does 'first fruits' imply? How does this help us understand the purpose of God's saving us and bringing us into His family? **The idea of first fruits is that there is more fruit coming. God's activity in our life is designed to be the means through which even more people will be 'given birth through the Word'. You were (to borrow the phrase from God's blessing to Abraham in Genesis 12:3) 'blessed to be a blessing'.**

5. What three things does James encourage us to do in 1:19? What is one reason he gives for this in verse 20? Verse 21 helps explain ‘how’ we do these three things. What does he advise we do? ***In 1:19 James urges us to be 1) quick to listen 2) slow to speak and 3) slow to become angry. In verse 20, he says that one reason we should be slow to become angry is that ‘man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.’ Ephesians 4:26 counsels ‘In your anger, do not sin’—this points out that anger itself may not be sinful, if directed wisely. However, it is one of those ‘desires’ from James 1:14 that quickly slides into sin. For this reason we need to be aware that a life characterized by regular anger is not likely to be righteous. These three things (quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry) are linked, because anger tend to cause us to stop listening and to speak rashly. Verse 21 helps explain how we do this: flee the out of control desires (filthiness and wickedness—hearkens back to 14-16) and humbly accept the implanted word of truth which saved you (recalls verse 18—notice the agricultural metaphor-‘implanted Word’).***

6. How does a person become self-deceived, according to 1:22? What metaphor does James liken this to in verses 23-25? ***We deceive ourselves when we hear the Word, but do not practice it. It is possible to become very good at hearing and ignoring, rather than hearing and doing. James likens this to how a person responds after looking in a mirror. We would think a person crazy for immediately forgetting what they just saw—but we are equally crazy if we look at the truth of God’s Word and immediately go away and act contrary to what we just saw.***

7. How does James describe the law of God in verse 25? Do you find that ironic or surprising? Why? ***James calls it the perfect law, ‘the law of liberty’. This would have likely been ironic to his hearers, and to many of us because we picture laws as constraining behavior, not giving freedom. This is key to James’ understanding: since we are designed by God, we operate with the greatest freedom when will live according to His design. It would be similar to using a shoe to smash a bug. Yes it can do it, but the shoe is maximally valuable when used for its designed purpose.***

**Business Block:** It is possible to sit in church on Sunday with one mindset, and then live totally differently when work starts on Monday. Why do you think that is? Are there areas of your life where your practices do not follow what you profess to believe? ***Sometimes it comes down to the fact we don't really believe. The Christian faith can sound like nice sentiment, but we doubt that such really works in the difficult and often harsh realities of the business world. But if the gospel is true, it is always true. It will work in the sanctuary and in the boardroom.***

***Sometimes it comes down to we do not know how to apply the Word to our situation. That is why James 1:25 says we should look intently into the perfect law that gives freedom. The same mental effort you might take to solve a staffing or accounting problem needs to be exerted in understanding how God's Word applies in a particular situation.***

8. We get another warning to be slow to speak in verse 26 ; what does James say about an 'unbridled' tongue? ***If you have one and think you are religious, you are deceived. Your religion is worthless. This goes back to whether or not the implanted word is having any impact on you (18,21). Notice that James does not say religion is worthless. Religion is not a dirty word to him. Religion is simply how one professes to relate to God—there are worthless and pure ways of doing so in James' mind.***

9. In contrast to worthless religion (26), what two things demonstrate true religion? ***1) To be rich in good deeds – to look after widows and orphans in their distress—the helpless and truly needy. 2) Personal Holiness --- Keep oneself from being polluted by the world. (Romans 12:1-2, 1 Thess 4:3)***

**Question for Reflection:** There is an unfortunate divide in many people and churches today, who want to make religion either only about good deeds (social justice) or about personal holiness (piety). James rejects the idea of such a divide. We must hold on to one without letting go of the other. Which aspect resonates more with you and your background? Have you at times only focused on one of these?

# James: The Shape of True Faith

## Lesson 4: Flee Favoritism (2:1-13)

*My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. <sup>2</sup> For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, <sup>3</sup> and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” <sup>4</sup> have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? <sup>5</sup> Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? <sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? <sup>7</sup> Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?*

*<sup>8</sup> If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. <sup>9</sup> But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. <sup>11</sup> For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. <sup>12</sup> So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. <sup>13</sup> For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

James 2:1-13 (ESV)

Having called our attention to the importance of rejecting temptation and obeying the truth as revealed in God’s Word, James gets very specific with his audience. This section is dedicated to interpersonal relationships, and rooting out a pervasive and dangerous temptation – favoritism.

1. What descriptive phrase does James use to describe Jesus Christ in verse 1? Why might that be important in a discussion on favoritism? **James calls Jesus, ‘The Lord of glory’. This title is significant because we serve the King of Heaven and Earth, to whom all glory and honor is due—as such, we should not be dazzled by a little earthly honor or wealth or glory. We should be just in our judgments, unswayed by personal power or wealth or charisma, for no man has anything like the glory of Jesus.**

2. Consider the scenario James describes in verses 2-4. If you show partiality to a person in fine clothes or dismiss a person in shabby clothes, in what way are you acting as judges (4)? What kinds of assumptions are being made which James calls ‘evil thoughts’ (4)? ***We act as judges by declaring, through our treatment, that one is more deserving of kindness or love because of their external appearance or situation. We are harboring the thought that if you are rich, it must be because you are good and blessed by God, and if you are poor, then you must be lazy or under God’s judgment. Jesus refuted this assumption that health and prosperity were always correlated to righteousness, or that suffering was always the result of personal sin in John 9:1-3. See also Psalm 73, where the Psalmist expresses a powerful struggle in his heart because, to the contrary, the wicked are often rich and enjoy a disproportionate amount of blessing in this life—for a season. A wise man rejects the prosperity gospel and its evil thoughts.***

3. In verses 5-7, James gives us substantial logic to refute the temptation to favoritism. He gives us four specific reasons why we should. What are they? ***1) Often the poor are rich in faith – many times those who suffer are the ones who believe in the gospel 2) Therefore the poor may be your brother in Christ, mathematically, anyway, more often than the rich. 3) The rich often oppress Christians – they are tempted to worship and preserve their wealth, even through unjust means. Most often, they want more than they have. 4) The rich are the ones who cause Christians harm through dragging them to court 5) The rich often blaspheme Christ***

4. Verse 8 explains the positive alternative to favoritism. What is it? ***We are to love our neighbor, which is a quotation from Leviticus 19:19, and which Jesus said was the second greatest commandment next to loving God (Matt 22:38-39). Note that the reasons given in 5-7 were not justification to practice a reverse favoritism like Robin Hood, of robbing from the rich and giving to the poor. He is simply giving weight to the other side to balance the scales. The righteous man makes no judgment based on wealth, good or bad. Leviticus 19:15 says, “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.”***

5. Verses 9-13 say that if you break one part of the law, you are guilty of breaking all of it. Why might James include such a stern warning at this point? ***It is likely that people might have dismissed a favoritism as a harmless vice. They might have felt like other sins were serious, but they were not fighting this sin with the same concern. James warns that if we allow these kinds of sins to live in our hearts, we are in open rebellion to the Wise King who gave us every law. If we decide which laws are important and which ones are not, then we are the ultimate rulers in our own minds. We are sitting in judgment on the law and the lawgiver.***

**Business Block:** One of the main temptations to favoritism is the assumption that rich people have something to offer us. Are you tempted to treat the wealthy more kindly in hopes of getting something in return? How does serving the Lord of Glory (James 2:1) help us to reject that motivation for favoritism as well?

## James: The Shape of True Faith

### Lesson 5: Real Faith has Feet (2:14-26)

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup> So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

<sup>18</sup> But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. <sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! <sup>20</sup> Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; <sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup> And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? <sup>26</sup> For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

*James 2:14-26 (ESV)*

James established the importance of obedience to the Word of Truth (or law of liberty, as he calls it) at the end of chapter 1, and then he took a practical illustration by looking at the issue of favoritism and the importance of mercy to all. Now James turns his attention to the general question of the relationship between faith (what we believe) and works (what we do).



1. James begins by asking a rhetorical question in verse 14 (a question that does not require an answer because it assumes a certain answer built in) and a practical example (15-16). What is the question (and the answer)? What is the illustration? How does verse 17 connect the illustration and the question? **The question is, 'Is there any value to a claim of faith that has no works? Or the similar question – 'Is that saving faith?' The answer to both is, no, there is no value and such faith cannot save. The illustration shows how sentimentally wishing a needy person well accomplishes nothing in the way of actually improving their situation. They are just empty words. Verse 17 states the conclusion plainly—just as words alone do not help a needy person, so a faith that has no feet (actions/deeds/works) is dead or useless faith.**

2. In the first part of verse 18, it looks like the discussion is being set up that a person either has 'faith' or they have 'works'. James rejects such a tension. How does the second part of verse 18 blow up the idea that works are in opposition to faith? **James says that the real comparison is not between faith and works, but between a faith apart from works and a faith proved by its works. The point is, faith is a generative thing. Where it is truly present, it produces things. We should have real reason to question whether a non-producing faith is actually real.**

3. In verse 19, James points out someone might say they believe in God. Does that mean much? What counterexample does he give? How does that further explain the connection between faith and works? **No, a mere profession of belief in God, even in one God, does not prove they have saving faith. That is evidenced by the fact the demons themselves believe the same—and yet live in rebellion to that one God and stand condemned. You can have 'devil faith', which believes in God, but on some level does not accept or rejoice in God as the rightful King over your life. We call it 'practical atheism'—God and His Authority have zero practical impact on your choices.**

4. What two Old Testament examples does James offer as examples of the kind of faith that saves? Why are they noteworthy examples? **Abraham (21-23) and Rahab (25). Abraham would be recognized as the ultimate example of faith in the Old Testament. If anyone had a saving faith, it would be him. Genesis 15:6 says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.**

**Rahab is interesting because she was a prostitute, and had a life of bad deeds prior to meeting the Israelite spies in Joshua chapter 2. Her transformation (saving faith) is confirmed by the actions (Joshua 2:4-6, 15-16) that accompanied her profession of faith (Joshua 2:8-13). She also serves to show that James is not just advocating that people have to have a lot of good deeds that outweigh their bad. It is not a 'weight' argument, but an 'evidence' argument.**

5. In verse 24, we read, 'You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.' Is James teaching that we are saved by works? What evidence is there in this passage (2:14-26) to support your conclusion? Likewise, when we are uncertain, we always let scripture interpret other scripture. Is there evidence in other parts of the scripture that support your conclusion? **No, James is not teaching that we are saved by works. Works are the visible proof (evidence) that we have saving faith. Just six verses earlier (2:18), he said, 'show me your faith apart from works, and I will show you my faith by my works. Likewise, in Ephesians 2:8-9, to a different group of people who had a different temptation—namely to place their confidence in their own deeds, Paul writes, ' For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.' To people with a similar mindset in the Galatian churches, Paul said, 'I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!' (Galatians 2:21) We are saved by the grace of God through the sacrifice of Jesus. As John Calvin phrased it, 'We are saved by faith alone, but saving faith is never alone.'**

**Question for Reflection:** Does your faith have feet? Are you (albeit imperfectly) living out what you claim to believe? Pray and ask God to give you both the wisdom of faith and the evidence of obedience.

# James: The Shape of True Faith

## Lesson 6: Controlling our Speech (3:1-12)

*Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. <sup>2</sup>For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. <sup>3</sup>If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. <sup>4</sup>Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. <sup>5</sup>So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.*

*How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! <sup>6</sup>And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. <sup>7</sup>For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind,<sup>8</sup> but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup>With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. <sup>10</sup>From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. <sup>11</sup>Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? <sup>12</sup>Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.*

James 3:1-12 (ESV)

One of the situations in this letter which James addresses was a power struggle in this Christian community. Many wanted to be teachers, in the prospect of telling others what to do, and enjoying the honor afforded to those in positions of authority. James offers strong words of correction to those who are thinking in this way.

1. What is the first reason why a person should be wary of putting themselves forward as a teacher (3:1)? ***Those who teach will be judged more strictly. Far from getting special treatment, teachers will be judged more severely, for they are responsible for the example they give, and also whether they teach what is true or mislead others.***

2. What does verse 2 point out as one of the reasons to be wary of the stricter judgment of a teacher? ***Every person stumbles in their speech—either by misspeaking or in outright sinful speech. We should ask ourselves whether what we have to say is important enough to be spoken, accurate enough to be closely scrutinized and from a right motivation, which God can and will evaluate.***

3. Consider verses 3-5. What two word pictures does James compare the tongue to? In what way is the tongue similar? **James compares the tongue to a bit in the mouth of a horse, and to the rudder on a ship. The tongue is similar because these relatively small components control an extraordinary amount of influence and impact.**

4. Look at 3:5b-8. Here James uses two more metaphors to describe the tongue and its impacts. What are the metaphors? What is the shared quality of the tongue and these metaphors? **James compares the tongue to a spark in a forest (5), and an untameable (7), poisonous creature (8) like a mamba. The quality of these things is that they remain deadly, capable of causing destruction far out of proportion to their size. To a people in love with airing their own opinions, James is teaching them to treat their words with utmost care and their tongues with great suspicion, aware of their inherent danger.**

5. Consider verses 9-12. One of the surprises of the tongue is that it can be used for such different purposes. What is shocking about the way the tongue can be used in verse 9? Why do you think James brings up this irony? **We use the same tongue to praise God, which in the next breath we use to dishonor the image of God (men). James points this out because this was not theoretical. This is what was happening in their churches. He is exposing their own hypocrisy. And we are not beyond this, either. These things are still a problem now.**

6. How does this lesson about the tongue and the use of it connect to the previous lesson, 'Real Faith has Feet?' ***Now that we are aware of the irony of using our tongue at cross purposes (praising God/dishonoring His Image in men), the question is, will we merely give lip service to this truth, or will our actions confirm our belief through a restrained tongue?***

7. Proverbs 18:21 says, 'The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat of its fruit.' That proverb seems to have more balance, focusing on the idea that the tongue can do great good or great evil. Why do you think James only focuses on the negative aspect of the tongue in his writing? ***All the letters or 'Epistles' in the Bible are addressing specific situations. All truth is complex. Wisdom is knowing what aspects of the truth to emphasize and when. As there was too much talk and rampant slander and struggle in this church, James focused on speaking less and listening more (1:19). He has another solution to this problem, which he will address in the next section, which we will cover in the next lesson.***

# James: The Shape of True Faith

## Lesson 7: A Better Way of Wisdom (3:13-18)

<sup>13</sup> Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. <sup>15</sup> This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. <sup>16</sup> For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. <sup>17</sup> But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. <sup>18</sup> And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

James 3:13-18 (ESV)

Having demonstrated the disorder that comes from tongues out of control, James proposes a better way of determining who the actual leaders of the community are.

1. How does someone typical demonstrate how much they know? Look at 3:13. How does James propose that a person shows that they are wise? ***Typically we tell people how smart and wise we are—we show off our knowledge. We know this was a problem in the group James was writing to, based on the first twelve verses of chapter 3. James encourages them that the real way people show their wisdom is through ‘deeds done in the gentleness that comes from wisdom’ (NIV). If you are truly wise, you demonstrate it through costly acts of obedience, and by a character that has been made gentle through wisdom. Harsh words betray a lack of wisdom, and a lack of understanding of how in God’s design, ‘mercy triumphs over judgment’! (James 2:13, NIV)***

2. Consider verses 14-16. What is the root of boasting and the lying about our intentions? What does this root produce? ***Verse 16 says that this comes from jealousy and selfish ambition. I say root because jealousy is how a person with selfish ambitions looks upon others and what they have. It is the same thing. This root produces disorder and every vile practice. Other sins spring from this basic core—a worship of self and of its own honor and pleasures, irrespective of God and His rightful claims over us.***

3. In contrast to the dark spiral of ‘earthly wisdom’ in 3:14-16, look at 3:17. True wisdom begets good after good. What are some of the fruits and qualities of heavenly wisdom? What is the outcome of wisdom from above (3:18)? ***The fruit described is that such wisdom is peaceable, gentle and open to reason. Heavenly wisdom does not go to war. It exhibits an approachability in its gentleness. It cools things down by allowing others to speak. It operates in a world of reasonable discussion, and it is merciful towards others where they err. Good fruits—It produces all manner of positive results when it is present, and it is impartial—not intentionally slanted, but open to correction. It is sincere, which means it springs from a place of desire for truth—in contrast to demonic wisdom, which uses words as a means of promoting selfish ambition (James 3:16). Such wisdom does not generate conflict, but results in peace. Such wise people (called peacemakers in 3:18) raise a harvest of righteousness—they produce both in their own lives and in the lives of others great blessings of love and obedience toward God and love to others.***

**Question for Reflection:** This section of James (3:13-18) exposes that there really is only one type of wisdom—heavenly wisdom or wisdom from above (17). The other (earthly or unspiritual wisdom-James 3:15-16) is actually selfish ambition co-opting words to manipulate others in order to get what it wants. A wise man once said, before you speak, remember the acrostic, WAIT. It stands for: Why Am I Talking? Ask yourself this week, before you speak, why are you talking? Does it come out of a desire to control and manipulate others, or to be a blessing to them?

# James: The Shape of True Faith

## Lesson 8: Dueling Kingdoms – The Real Source of Conflict (4:1-12)

*What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this that your passions are at war within you? <sup>2</sup> You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. <sup>4</sup> You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. <sup>5</sup> Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? <sup>6</sup> But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” <sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

*<sup>11</sup> Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. <sup>12</sup> There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?*

James 4:1-12 (ESV)

In this section of scripture, James goes deeper below the surface of the words and quarrels. He identifies the root cause beneath all the conflict.

1. Look at the first three verses of chapter 4. What does James say is the cause of fights and quarrels? **Passions at war within you (1), unfulfilled desires (2), unsatisfied wants (2), a failure to pray (3), self-centered prayers (3).**

2. a) With what phrase does James summarize the root of all of those different causes in verse 4? **James says the root of the conflict is ‘friendship with the world’.**

b) Why is this ‘root’ incompatible with true faith in Christ? **The priorities of this present fallen and corrupted world are in direct opposition to the priorities of God. To be actively a friend of the world means to be an enemy of God.**



3. Verses 5 says the spirit God made to live in us envies intensely? Is it right for God's Spirit to be envious of our friendship with the world? Isn't jealousy wrong? **Yes, it is right. Envy—a desire to have something given or belonging to another—is a sin when that thing properly belongs to the other. Jealousy is a possessive desire for something. It is a sin when that thing does not belong to us, but it is an appropriate emotion if something belongs to us and cannot be shared. About the only human example that makes sense is marriage. It is appropriate for a husband to be jealous if his wife is giving attentions to another that are supposed to be his alone. Likewise, as people, we belong to God, and His Spirit becomes rightly jealous when we worship and love inferior pleasures and things instead of Him.**

3. How does this section explain the source of interpersonal conflicts? **If everyone is actively working to build their own kingdoms and seeking their own selfish ambitions, then they will be brought into conflict with others who are seeking the glory of their own kingdoms and ambitions. You can only build one glorious shrine at a time. We all essentially become little competing gods vying for worshippers and offerings. This is why all such 'friendship with the world' is hatred toward God—God alone is worthy of our worship. Divided loyalties or misdirected loyalties not only bring us into opposition to God, but every other person who is seeking their own honor.**

In relation to competition and conflict and the source of it, consider this quote from C.S. Lewis and his book, 'Mere Christianity'.

*There is no fault that makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others. The vice I am talking of is Pride or Self-Conceit: and the virtue opposite to it, in Christian morals, is called Humility. You may remember, when I was talking about sexual morality, I warned you that the centre of Christian morals did not lie there. Well, now, we have come to the centre. According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.*

*Does this seem to you exaggerated? If so, think it over. I pointed out a moment ago that the more pride one had, the more one disliked pride in others. In fact, if you want to find out how proud you are the easiest way is to ask yourself, "How much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take any notice of me... or patronise me, or show off?" The point is that each person's pride is in competition with everyone else's pride. It is because I wanted to be the big noise at the party that I am so annoyed at someone else being the big noise. Now what you want to get clear is the Pride is essentially competitive – is competitive by its very nature – while the other vices are competitive only, so to speak, by accident. Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better looking than others.*

4. Look at verses 7-10. How does James urge people who are guilty of such 'friendship with the world' to respond? Describe the specifics.

**1. Submit yourself to God (7). Lay off building your own Kingdom—acknowledge His rightful authority.**

**2. Resist the Devil (7). This is a spiritual struggle—recognize the real enemy who promotes 'friendship with the world' as his battle strategy! Amazing the scripture says the Devil will flee if we resist him – not because of our power, but because of God's power.**

**3. Draw near to God / cleanse your hands/ purify your hearts (8) – Seek communion with God. The picture is similar to Old Testament Priests approaching God in his holiness. They cleanse their hands (stop doing external sinful deeds) and they purify their hearts (recognize that sin is not merely outward, but a condition of our heart, a choosing to love and worship things inferior to God in His excellence and glory and beauty.**

**4. Be wretched, mourn and weep—change your laughter to mourning / joy to gloom / humble yourself before the LORD (9) – When we recognize that we have been far from God, it is appropriate to be full of sorrow. The laughter here described is a satisfied laughter that does not see its need for God or His grace – the contrast is to humble ourselves. James says when we do this, God Himself will lift us up. Our restored hope and joy will be solid and grounded in Him, rather than the clueless laughter of a drunken man, which gives way to hangovers and a thousand other consequences.**

5. Consider verses 11-12. As a further remedy to prevent quarrels between them, James urges them plainly to not speak evil against one another. He then backs up that command with this reason: 'The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks evil against the law and judges the law.' So we cannot speak evil against our brother without judging the law. Where is the connection? How is it that speaking evil against our brother is a judging of the law? **The law commands that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (Leviticus 19:19). How do we love ourselves? We love ourselves faithfully, constantly, unconditionally, warts and all. If we do not submit to the law to love our neighbors as ourselves, then we have declared that the law is wrong. We have decided in our minds which laws are right to follow, and which are not. That is what he means that we have become 'not a doer of the law, but a 'judge'. If we do that, we have taken God's place (12a), for we have no right to decide which of our neighbors we love and which we do not. We are commanded to love all men.**

**Business Block:** How does loyalty to God and His Kingdom enable you to avoid quarrels with others?

## James: The Shape of True Faith

### Lesson 9: Plans, Wealth, Patience and Humility (4:13-5:12)

<sup>13</sup> Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—<sup>14</sup> yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. <sup>15</sup> Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” <sup>16</sup> As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. <sup>17</sup> So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. <sup>2</sup> Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. <sup>3</sup> Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. <sup>4</sup> Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. <sup>5</sup> You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. <sup>6</sup> You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

<sup>7</sup> Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. <sup>8</sup> You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. <sup>9</sup> Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. <sup>10</sup> As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

<sup>12</sup> But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

James 4:13-5:12 (ESV)

Pride is the common theme in this section. Those who have pride, and those who have been the victim of the pride of others. The solution to all is given.

1. Look at verses 13-17. a) Describe what is wrong with the business mindset in verse 13. **2. Resist the Devil (7). This is a spiritual struggle—recognize the real enemy who promotes ‘friendship with the world’ as his battle strategy! Amazing the scripture says the Devil will flee if we resist him – not because of our power, but because of God’s power.**

b) How do verses 14 & 16 describe the error of verse 13? **v.14—Try as we might, we do not know the future. Likewise, our lives are so short and uncertain that they could be compared to a vapor.**

**v.16—Here the mindset of verse 13 is plainly described as boasting, and as such, it is evil. We are taking God for granted and acting as if we are in control and not Him.**

c) What is the better mindset described in verse 15? **‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’ God does not like to be assumed or taken for granted. As we make our plans, we should always openly acknowledge to ourselves and others that God’s prerogatives belong to Him, and all our lives are always subject to His will and plan.**

d) How does verse 17 connect to all this? **Verse 17 explains that, if we are aware of the right way to talk and think about our lives and work, we should actually do it! Otherwise, we commit a sin of omission by leaving God out of the conversation.**

**Business Block:** How would you apply this mindset of humility and submission to God’s will into a Business plan or strategic planning discussion? Do a ‘what if’ from the perspective of your vocation.

## Read James 5:1-6.

**Study Note:** This section is very much like an Old Testament ‘woe’ passage. It was common for prophets to clearly condemn sinful practices and warn of impending condemnation. (Examples: Isaiah 5:8-12, 18-23. Amos 4:1-2) Always implicit in these condemnations is the idea that, if you find the condemnation describing you, then you would humble yourself and repent of the sins described. If any wealthy Christians (or perhaps non-Christians in their midst) see themselves thus described, they would recognize their sin of victimizing the poor and repent.

2. There is always a reason and an order to scripture. How does this section, 5:1-6 relate to the previous passage in 4:13-17? **James 5:1-6 describes wealthy businessmen who have conducted their business without considering God. They have forgotten that God is a just judge, and they have neglected their duty to love their neighbor as a result. This ‘God forgetfulness’ (or practical atheism) is the same attitude exhibited by the person who presumptuously assumes profits and business success without acknowledging God as the giver (4:13). We must remember God is present at every conversation and deal and decision we make. We will answer to Him, not to men for how we have conducted ourselves.**

3. How does the previous section in 5:1-6 encourage the people addressed in 5:7-11? **The poor who are being oppressed are encouraged to have hope in God’s deliverance, and thus to be patient in their sufferings. Even if wicked men seem to continually rig the contest so as to take advantage of the poor, God knows what is happening. He is the Judge, and He will make things right in His time. God knows what happens to the poor, and in His Court, they will find justice. This is why they can endure patiently.**

4. What are some of the illustrations and references in 5:7-11 that James uses to strengthen his case that we remain hopeful in our suffering? **1. The patience of the farmer, who waits for the early rains (which cause the plant to sprout out of the ground) and the late rains (which cause the crop to grow ripe and the fruit its fullness) 2. The endurance of the prophets (10) 3. The patience of Job (11).**

5. Just as the rich and powerful are tempted to pride, there are temptations in suffering as well. What is the temptation which James gently warns of in verse 9? How is this similar to the temptation of the proud businessman warned of in 4:13-16? **James warns those who are suffering affliction not to grumble in their hardship. The idea is that, as one grumbles, they grow angry at the feeling no one cares about the injustice they are experiencing. This is similar to the temptation of the proud businessman in 4:13-16, because in both cases, the individual is forgetting to account for God and His activity in their situation.**

6. James 5:12 says we should not swear, but let our ‘yes be yes and our no, no.’ (Which harkens back to Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:33-37) How does this command not to swear connect to humility? **There is a certainty implied in swearing to something, which implies that the final decision lies with us. Both this passage and the Matthew passage are not forbidding the taking of lawful oaths (such as in marriage or as a witness in a court of law), rather this is calling to mind how we think about things, always remembering the final outcome and decision in all matters rests in God’s hands.**

## James : The Shape of True Faith

### Lesson 10: The Walk of Faith – Together (5:13-5:20)

<sup>13</sup> Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. <sup>14</sup> Is anyone among you sick? 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. <sup>15</sup> And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup> Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. <sup>17</sup> Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. <sup>18</sup> Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

<sup>19</sup> My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, <sup>20</sup> let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

James 5:13-20 (ESV)

In this final section, James encourages believers with practical illustrations of what the life humbly submitted to God looks like.

1. What do the activities in 5:13-16 all have in common? **Prayer (13), Praise (13), Anointing of the Sick (14) and confession (16) are all activities which acknowledge and promote conscious communion with God.**

2. How do these activities relate to the previous lesson from James 4:13-5:12? **Whereas the previous lesson reflected a lot on our need for humility and acknowledgment of God, these activities are the practical application of and submission to God's authority. Humility is recognizing our rightful place, and giving God His.**

**Study note:** Anointing of oil was a part of the process of caring for a sick person. The elders of the church would come to the sick person, anoint (dab oil on their forehead or wrists as a picture of the blessing of the Holy Spirit), and pray for them. They would always give the person an opportunity to make confession of sin, either in recognition that they may be guilty of some sin which is responsible for the sickness, or that they may soon die and want to keep short accounts with God.

3. Some have taught that **all** sickness is a result of sin, or a lack of faith (Often referred to as the prosperity gospel or the word-faith movement). As background, read John 9:1-3. Are people always sick because of some sin they have committed? ***In John 9:1-3, Jesus explains to the disciples (who held a misconception common to the time similar to the modern prosperity gospel—that things like birth defects or remarkable suffering were always due to a specific and extraordinary sin. The disciples' only question was whether the man himself or his parents caused it. Jesus rejects both conclusions and says he was born this way so the glory and works of God might be displayed in him.***

***James is teaching standard practice of confession of sin in sickness—and encourages people that such a practice will lead to healing. This is not a prosperity gospel concept, because certainly not everyone who prays for healing will be healed. Just a few paragraphs ago (4:14) James assured people their lives were a vapor, a mist that appears and then vanishes. Everyone will have at least one sickness from which they will not get well. (I have yet to meet a 500 year old prosperity preacher....). This is why the apostle Paul said, 'If there is no resurrection, we are of all men most to be pitied.' We expect to one day, die. We also fully expect that God will one day raise our dead bodies in an imperishable form and reunite them with our souls.***

***At the same time, there is something here to the idea that sin can beget sickness at times, and that a culture of openness and confessing sins one to another will lead to both greater physical—and most certainly spiritual health (some past medical studies have shown some correlation between those who stuff major life issues and the onset of illness like cancer).***

4. Which Old Testament figure does James refer to when he encourages us to pray? While it might be easy to dismiss this on the grounds that he is a famous religious figure, how does James describe him that gives us hope that God will answer our prayers, too? ***Elijah. It would be easy to say, 'Well, that was Elijah, and I am just me, and no one special.' However, James tells us that Elijah was 'a man just like us.' He would not make the comparison unless he hoped it would motivate us to pray, as Elijah did. As for the prayer of 'a righteous man' (16), we are counted as righteous because of Jesus. God hears our prayers because if we rest in and treasure Jesus by faith, we are washed clean by His perfect sacrifice. We, amazingly, are also counted as righteous men for His sake, whose prayers are 'powerful and effective' (16, NIV).***

5. Consider verses 19-20. How does confrontation relate to this idea of living life together, *Coram Deo* (Before the face of God)? ***This connects with this culture of prayer, praise and corporate confession, because as we engage one another, sometimes we will need to confront. No one likes the unpleasantness of confrontation, but we should be willing to do it, because we are responsible for each other, not only not to do injustice (5:1-6), but also to actively seek our brother's good, healing and restoration before God.***

6. Why do you think James chose to end his letter with these two verses? ***Considering much of James' own letter has been a call to repentance (from double-mindedness, favoritism, self-seeking and destructive speech, of practical atheism (or God-forgetfulness), this concludes the letter by encouraging the people who read it that James (through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) wrote these hard and confrontational things because he truly cared for them, and was hopeful of their repentance.***