



JAMES

The Shape of True Faith

Study 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?
2. Why did it cause problems for Christianity to be identified separately from Judaism in the Roman Empire?
3. What were the problems which James saw in the Church which prompted this letter?
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)

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

⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶But 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. ⁷For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

⁹Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰ and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass^[c] he will pass away. ¹¹For 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.

¹²Blessed 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?

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?

3. See 1:6-8. Why must we ask in faith and not doubt? What does that mean?

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.

B) What then makes the position of a poor person a high position?

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?

e 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'?

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

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

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

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ 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. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ 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.

²⁶ If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. ²⁷ 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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

6. How does a person become self-deceived, according to 1:22? What metaphor does James liken this to in verses 23-25?

7. How does James describe the law of God in verse 25? Do you find that ironic or surprising? Why?

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?

8. We get another warning to be slow to speak in verse 26 ; what does James say about an 'unbridled' tongue?

9. In contrast to worthless religion (26), what two things demonstrate true religion?

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?

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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. ² 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, ³ 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,” ⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ 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? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

⁸ If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. ¹¹ 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. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. ¹³ 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?

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)?

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?

4. Verse 8 explains the positive alternative to favoritism. What is it?

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?

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?

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

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ 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? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! ²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³ 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. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵ 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? ²⁶ 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?

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?

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?

4. What two Old Testament examples does James offer as examples of the kind of faith that saves? Why are they noteworthy examples?

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?

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.

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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. ² 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. ³ If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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! ⁶ 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. ⁷ For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind,⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? ¹² 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)?

2. What does verse 2 point out as one of the reasons to be wary of the stricter judgment of a teacher?

3. Consider verses 3-5. What two word pictures does James compare the tongue to? In what way is the tongue similar?

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?

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?

6. How does this lesson about the tongue and the use of it connect to the previous lesson, 'Real Faith has Feet?'

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?

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

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

2. Consider verses 14-16. What is the root of boasting and the lying about our intentions? What does this root produce?

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)?

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 acronym, 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?

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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? ² 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. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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”? ⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

¹¹ 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. ¹² 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?

2. a) With what phrase does James summarize the root of all of those different causes in verse 4?

b) Why is this ‘root’ incompatible with true faith in Christ?

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?

3. How does this section explain the source of interpersonal conflicts?

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.

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?

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

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

¹³ 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”—¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ 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. ² Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. ³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

⁷ 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. ⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ 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.

¹² 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.

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.

b) How do verses 14 & 16 describe the error of verse 13?

c) What is the better mindset described in verse 15?

d) How does verse 17 connect to all this?

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?

3. How does the previous section in 5:1-6 encourage the people addressed in 5:7-11?

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?

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?

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?

James : The Shape of True Faith

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

¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

¹⁹ My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰ 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?

2. How do these activities relate to the previous lesson from James 4:13-5:12?

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?

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?

5. Consider verses 19-20. How does confrontation relate to this idea of living life together, *Coram Deo* (Before the face of God)?

6. Why do you think James chose to end his letter with these two verses?

