



# James Bible Study

*This is part 1 of a 15 part Bible Study on the book of James*

By  
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**About Norma Becker**



Norma Becker:

Norma was born in the state of Oregon, USA in 1929. She received her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Business and Education from the University of Oregon. She and her husband Ed raised three children (have two now) and four grandchildren. They have travelled to over 30 countries sharing their spiritual journey with thousands of people.

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produce the by-products of maturity and spiritual fulfillment. It will provide the atmosphere in which other virtues can grow. (2 Peter 1:5-8)

This is the **theme** of this epistle. **James' main point was to show how to achieve spiritual maturity.** Trials can be faced with joy because when faith is added, perseverance results. When perseverance goes full term it will develop a thoroughly mature Christian who lacks nothing. We will be all that God wants us to be. That's all well and good but it is still difficult to see how trials can be welcomed with an attitude of joy. Where do you go for help to understand this paradox.

### Part 3 - How to Welcome Trials with an Attitude of Joy

*"If any to you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).*

Remember in Colossians when Paul prayed that they might be "*filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding*" (Colossians 1:9)? Wisdom in Scripture always means knowledge of the course of action that will please God, so the promise of James 1:5 is in effect a promise of guidance.

*"When the work of perseverance is finished we will lack nothing; but before perseverance has finished its work in the trial if anyone 'lacks wisdom,' he may have it by asking" (James 1:4).*

It is the wisdom that gives understanding of the nature and purpose of trials and knowing how to meet them victoriously - practical insights into life, not theoretical knowledge. The Greek present tense gives the meaning of asking repeatedly. It is the practice of God to give generously and without finding fault. He does not scold his children for asking nor berate them for their deficiency.

We can also remember that Proverbs 9:10 says: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

*"But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind" (James 1:6).*

God's promise of help has some pre-requisites. He must ask in faith. He must believe and not doubt. We must be sure we want what we ask for and we must be confident that God will give us what we have asked for.

*"Because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind."* He is someone who wavers between two opinions. One moment he voices the yes



of faith; the next moment it is the no of disbelief. James says doubts leave us as unsettled as the restless waves.

**Our Prayer Must be Marked by Unwavering Faith**

*"That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does" (James 1:7-8).*

He is unstable in all he does. In our prayers, are we sometimes double minded? Do we sometimes have mental reservations about our prayer itself and about the request we are making to God. Does that mean we are double minded in our personal, business, social as well as our spiritual life?

How is this man different from the man in Mark 9:24-27 who cried out, *"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief."* The father was not oscillating between belief and unbelief. He desired to believe but because he felt his faith was inadequate, he asked for help in believing. He was not facing in both directions at the same time like the man in verse 8. He knew he was weak but wanted to believe. Christ responded to his faith and healed his son.

*"The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business" (James 1:9-11).*

I struggled a long time with these versus, but the commentary that seemed to say it the best was The Wycliffe Bible Commentary. Paraphrased it says: *"He seems to still be talking about trials. Poverty is an external trial. The poor Christian is to rejoice in his new status in Jesus because it has brought him true wealth. He is an heir of God and a joint heir with Jesus."*

A rich Christian, on the other hand, is to rejoice because he is in Christ he is where the 'deceitfulness of wealth' talked about in Mark 4:19 and the desire to gain and retain it, along with the anxiety and stress that accompanies it, are no longer primary or even relevant now that he knows Christ. Besides, riches are temporary. He is like the grass that will fade away.

**What are we Supposed to do When Difficulties Don't Let Up?**

*"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him" (James 1:12).*





enticed," we see that it is allurements that attracts the desire to the bait, whether in fantasy or actuality. These words do not suggest brutality or force, but persuasion. The end result is death. According to Chuck Swindoll he is not referring to physical or spiritual death, but to a 'death existence.' There might be pleasure for a time, but the growing emptiness soon overrides the short term enjoyment. This is often what an unbeliever experiences too.

### **Everyone is Tempted**

The devil knows the precise bait each of us prefers. He's been fishing for souls longer than anyone else on earth. He knows our weaknesses and spends his time trying to get us to strike at his bait.

In verse 14 it talks of desire, then enticement and then sin. Can you think of any examples in the Bible where this is exactly what happened? Genesis 3:6-22 and 2 Samuel 11:2-17. What was the desire, the enticement, the sin?

### **How to Avoid & Resist Temptations**

Let's look at some verses that can help us avoid and resist temptation as well as encourage us:

*"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things" (Philippians 4:8).*

*"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalms 119:9-11).*

*"So if you think you are standing firm be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:12, 13).*

*"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb. 2:18).*

### **God Does Not Change**

*"Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be kind of first fruits of all he created" (James 1:16-18).*



He says, "Don't be deceived." Believing a lie is often much easier than believing the truth. He is saying don't keep thinking that God is the author or temptation. Instead of sending temptation, God is the giver of every good and perfect gift. The concept of goodness rules out the possibility that God would send an influence as destructive as temptation.

Unlike the shifting shadows that are caused by the sun and to a certain extent the moon, God does not change. With him there is no variation at all. The shadows cast by the sun are minimal at noon, but just before sunset they stretch out for a long ways. God is not like that. He does not change. He is always the giver of good gifts, never someone who would entice us to destroy ourselves in sin.

Then in verse 18 he gives his final reason for denying that God is the author of temptation: "*He chose to give us birth through the word of truth.*" The word of truth is the gospel so the birth referred to must be spiritual rather than natural. He did this by his deliberate choice so we might be a kind of firstfruits. The term firstfruits referred to the first portion of the harvest given to God. It seems that he means that the early Christians were the beginning of all the people in the future that would be born again.

*"My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you" (James 1:19-21).*

In our first lesson we said that the reason James wrote this was to bring the early believers to Christian maturity and holiness of life. Verse 18 indicated that salvation comes through the Word of God, now this section emphasizes listening to and receiving the Word then the next section stresses the doing of the Word.

## Part 5 - What is the Key to Responding to Trials?

The key to responding to trials and resisting temptation is found in one's reaction to God's Word. James starts out by making it clear that what he has to say is important. The NIV says, 'take note of this.' To receive the Word your must be ready to listen. It also demands that you don't talk too much. In a discussion about what the Word says, which is usually an argument, the one who is listening rather than lambasting is the one who is slow to anger. Why does he say this?

*"For anger doesn't produce the righteous life that God desires" (verse 20).*



In further preparation for the reception of the Word, as the Living Bible says we have to 'get rid of all that is wrong in your life, both inside and outside. Then we can humbly and meekly receive the truth.'

**Putting it into Practice**

*"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it -- he will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:22-25).*

Now he goes on to discuss putting the Word into practice. It is not enough merely to 'listen to the word' or by the same token, merely 'to read it.' Those who only listen to a lot of preaching and read a lot of Christian books deceive themselves. The deception comes from thinking they have done all that is necessary when actually listening to the Word is only the beginning. God isn't looking for activists who do their thing without information, or is He looking for those who are informed and do nothing. There must be a balance. First we must be hearers and then we must be doers. Romans 2:13 is the only other place in the New Testament where hearers and doers are mentioned.

**Use God's "Spiritual Mirror"**

*"For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous" (Romans 2:13).*

Then he goes on to use a mirror as an example of God's Word. It illustrates that God's spiritual mirror shows us the kind of people we are. The forgetful hearer is the person who takes in scripture, looks at it, but once he leaves the setting, he forgets what God has said. His life is unaffected. In contrast, the effectual doer looks at the mirror intently and does not forget but does what he hears.

The Word is called the perfect law of liberty and the perfect law that gives freedom. The perfect law is the moral and ethical teaching of Christianity, which is based on the Old Testament moral law, as embodied in the Ten Commandments but brought to completion or perfection by Jesus Christ. In contrast to the sinner, who is a slave to sin, obeying the moral law gives the Christian the wonderful freedom to be what he was created for. In John 8:31-32 Jesus said,

*"Hold to my teaching, then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*



In looking back over verse 18-25, what is the key word that is repeated the most?

**Ultimately** the key both to responding to trials and resisting temptation is to be found in one's reaction to God's word.

- Verse 18 - receiving the Word
- Verse 22 - responding to the Word
- Verse 23-25 - realizing that the Word is essential to spiritual growth.

We must accept God's Word, act on it and abide by it.

**Rein in That Tongue!**

*"If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this; to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:26-27).*

Being eager to receive the Word and responding to what it says must be coupled with a new approach to life. The Living Bible says,

*"Anyone who says he is a Christian but doesn't control his sharp tongue is just fooling himself, and his religion isn't worth much."*

Being a Christian or being religious is referring to the outward acts - going to church, fasting, giving to charity, public praying - these acts are useless if there is no control on the tongue. The verse isn't specific, but what are some of the ways that the tongue can reveal that our religion is worthless? Cutting criticism of others, uncleanness, dishonesty....

**Orphans and Widows**

Do you think James 1:27 is a total description of religion? Is this all we have to do? What do you think this verse is illustrating. What does it mean? Looking after orphans and widows refers to our conduct; keeping oneself from being polluted refers to our character. God wants us to have the kind of religion that exerts a positive influence on our life. He doesn't give us a definition of religion but insists that genuine religion is life changing. It expresses itself in love to others and holiness before God.















**Think Twice Before Teaching**

*“Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check” (James 3:1-2).*

**Verse 1** says,

*"Not many of you should presume to be teachers because they will be judged more strictly" which is a little scary when that is what you are trying to do.*

The Greek is literally "Stop becoming many teachers."

In other words James was telling them not to run too quickly into the role of teaching. Here are a few reasons:

- Because the teacher is responsible to teach the truth and not his or her own opinion.
- Because what a teacher teaches affects many lives.
- Because the teacher is expected to live the truth he or she teaches the responsibilities are strict and heavy.

Since the tongue is so difficult to control - we all stumble in this area - if anyone controls it perfectly, he gains control of himself in all other areas of his life as well.

**The Tongue has Tremendous Power...**

James is great at illustrations. In verses 3-5 he shows what the tongue is like:

*“When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.”*

The first two examples show how the tongue, even though it is small, can do good. In **verse 5** the NIV says, *“likewise the tongue,”* the NASB says, *“so also the tongue.”* This gives the application of the two preceding verses. Like bits and rudders the tongue also is a small item.

Yet also like them, it exerts a powerful influence. "It makes great boasts." It can sway crowds, it can alter the destinies of nations, and it can preach great sermons. These can be great things but 5b and 6 show the **destructive potential** by picturing





From nature, opposites cannot come from the same source. What would happen to fresh water if fresh water and salt water flowed from the same spring? How is this like what happens to our praises if curses or derogatory remarks also come from our mouths?

**Is the Tongue Necessary or Dangerous?**

Why can't man tame his own tongue? How would you say it would be possible to control our tongues and become mature? Let's look at some passages that deal with the tongue - Proverbs is a rich source of wisdom:

**Proverbs 6:16:**

*“There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.”*

**Proverbs 10:11:**

*“The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked.”*

**Proverbs 10:14:**

*“Wise men store up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool invites ruin.”*

**Proverbs 10:18-21:**

*“He who conceals his hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool. When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value. The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgment.”*

**Proverbs 12:1:**

*“A truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies.”*

**Proverbs 12:18:**

*“Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”*

**Proverbs 15:1-2:**



*“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of a fool gushes folly.”*

**Proverbs 15:4:**

*“The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.”*

**Proverbs 16:27:**

*“A scoundrel plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire.”*

**Proverbs 16:28:**

*“A perverse man stirs up dissension and a gossip separates close friends.”*

**Proverbs 17:27-28:**

*“A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered. Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.”*

**Proverbs 21:23:**

*“He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.”*

**Proverbs 26:18-25:**

*“Like a madman shooting firebrands or deadly arrows is a man who deceives his neighbor and says, “I was only joking!” Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down. As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife. The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man’s inmost parts. Like a coating of glaze over earthenware are fervent lips with an evil heart. A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbors deceit. Though his speech is charming, do not believe him, for seven abominations fill his heart.”*

**Proverbs 29:20:**

*“Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”*

**Psalms 34:12-13 says:**









lives from above which is unnatural to us. God must give us his life giving water: the Holy Spirit.

We can contrast the earthly, unspiritual wisdom from the devil (in verses 13-14) with the heavenly, spiritual wisdom of God.

With heavenly wisdom we are more open and teachable. We are not selfish and ambitious but more conciliatory and amenable. Instead of being disorderly which leads to evil practices, it is full of mercy and good fruit. Disorder and mercy are the attitudes; evil practices and good fruit are the actions. Heavenly wisdom does not have the evil practices of showing favouritism or discrimination against anyone nor is it hypocritical.

**Peacemaker**

Verse 18:

*“Righteousness will grow only in a climate of peace.”*

Peace has to be sown and cultivated by the 'peacemakers.' These people not only love peace and live in peace but also strive to create conditions of peace.

Describe this peace. Do you think a peacemaker avoids conflict at all costs? Does a peacemaker impose his solution on others? Does he always give in when opposed? When we have heavenly wisdom we can live at peace with others.

Chuck Swindoll had some good words in his Bible study on James:

*“The seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. Peace refers to horizontal harmony, which results when one person is rightly related to another. This peace is not theological, but relational. When we live according to true wisdom, we can maintain peaceful relationships without violating God's standards. By contrast, the individual who disturbs the peace between himself and others will know nothing of living a righteous life style.”*

**Part 10 - What Causes Fights and Quarrels among You?**

James has just finished talking about a climate of peace being necessary to produce righteousness - but what were the people doing that he was writing to? It can apply to all of us at one time or another too.







**What is the Principle?**

*"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).*

God in grace (giving us something we don't deserve) gives his people the help they need to resist the draw of the world and to remain loyal to him. God gives greater grace -greater than the selfish drive within our own hearts.

**What is Humbleness**

Meekness, gentleness, power under control. Willing to accept what God commands and to seek help from Him rather than trusting in one's own abilities - someone who forgets himself and trusts God's goodness and His control over situations.

Why does He give us this grace only if we are humble, never if we are proud? Read verses 7-10:

*"Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up."*

**Practical Advice**

Now, James gives some practical advice. He gives ten commands; in Greek each one is stated in a way that calls for immediate action in rooting out the sinful attitude of pride:

1. **Submit yourselves**  
We are to submit our will and that leads to obedience. Stop fighting and surrender. Submission is not the same as obedience. Instead it is the surrender of one's will, which leads to obedience.
2. **Resist the devil**  
Rather than resisting God's will for us, we are to resist the devil. It is remarkable that Paul's inventory of the Christian armour includes nothing to protect the back. We are given no promise of protection if we run away, but we are promised victory every time we stand and resist him. We are to reject his plans, because they encourage our self-assertiveness. When he is resisted, he will flee.
3. **Come near to God, and he will come near to you**  
We're to stay close to Him and develop companionship with Him. James' readers had set their hearts on pleasure and had drifted away from God. Even when we fall away we have the assurance that he will come near to us if we return to Him.



4. **Wash or cleanse your hands**

This spoke to the Jewish converts that James was writing to. Under the old covenant, the priests had to ritually wash their hands before performing their ceremonial duties. It taught the great lesson of the holiness of God. From this came the expression that was applied figuratively to the removal of sin. "Wash your hands you sinners," reminded them to wash their hands or to repent - make their conduct pure.

5. **Purify your hearts**

Whereas the command to wash your hands dealt with making your conduct pure, the command to purify your hearts insists on purity of thoughts and motives. In verse 3 and 4 he talks of his readers going after pleasure and having friendship with the world. A double-minded person is characterized by divided allegiance. And worldliness is basically divided allegiance.

Psalm 24:3-4 says,

*"Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart."*

James 4:6-8: Grieve/be miserable, mourn and wail/weep. This is a call to repentance. In contrast to the worldly pleasures they had been seeking, his readers are to repent in misery.

Verse 9:

*"Turn their laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom."*

Apparently they had felt their pursued pleasures had been fun and games that had brought laughter and joy. Now they were to be ashamed and sorry and repent in sorrow - sorrow for the fact they have been missing God's blessings.

In the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus starts by saying,

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

They are the ones that realize they have sinned by following their own desires. Then it goes on,

*"Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted."*

The ones that realize they have sinned and come in sorrow and ask for forgiveness - they will be comforted.



### Part 11 - Is This How We Are To Be?

Some have imagined that the attitude expressed in verse 9 (James 4) is to be the constant characteristic of a Christian. Such an interpretation, however, overlooks the situation that gave rise to these commands. It was the desire for pleasures that led James to give this call to all-out repentance.

In verse 10 James says,

*“Humble yourself.”*

With the words

*"humble yourselves,"*

James returns to the text quoted from the Old Testament in verse 6. God graciously gives aid to the humble; therefore we need to humble ourselves. The Greek for this "humble" means an act of repentance for the sin of transferring affections from God to pleasures of the world. We are to humble ourselves and He will lift us up. We will be comforted, restored, and brought near to Him.

#### What Keeps us From Humbling Ourselves Before God?

**Pride** - *“Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbour?”*(James 4:11-12)

The NASB has a better translation of

*"Do not speak against one another."*

There are two thoughts on this section. One is that it is connected to verse 10 about humbling ourselves. To slander or judge another Christians is totally against the humble spirit God desires. Isn't it true that those who run down their neighbours or a fellow member of their church often do so because by doing it they are implying that they are better than the ones they are running down. Backbiting others is, in fact, a subtle form of self-exaltation.

#### Is Judgement Ever Good?

We have judges in the courts that pass judgement all the time - how do they go about it? First they hear the charges and after all the facts that can be discovered are presented, they weigh both sides of the question and then pass judgement.







*"Now that I have pointed all these matters out to you, you have no excuse. Knowing what should be done obligates you to do it."*

Again the **whole letter is how to attain spiritual maturity** so as believers they must do the good they now know. Let's go over again what he has said. A believer must:

- Stand confidently on God's Word even in trials and temptations.
- He must compassionately serve fellow believers without favouritism but with practical faith.
- He must speak carefully with a controlled tongue and wise thought.
- He must submit to his all-powerful Father, Lawgiver and Judge with a humble spirit, just actions and trusting heart.
- He must be what God wants him to be, do what God wants him to do and speak what God wants him to speak.
- To know the will of God is the greatest knowledge.
- To do the will of God is the greatest achievement.

## Part 12 - What about My Plans?

*"Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you"* (James 5:1-6).

Back in James 4:13 he says, "Now listen" or "Come now" to those who say they will go to a certain city, spend a year, do business and make money - trying to arrange their future and lives as though God did not exist. He starts chapter 5 the same way speaking to those who accumulate and spend as though there is no God.

It's not true that poor people always go to heaven and the rich go to hell. There are some godless poor and there are some godly rich.

### **In the Bible there are Essentially Four Kinds of Economic Groups:**

1. There are ones that are poor on the outside and also poor inside. They have none of the worlds goods and at the same time, know nothing



about Jesus Christ or God's love. They are the ones to be most pitied.

- 2. Some are rich on the outside and also rich inside. They have a lot of material goods and they also have a close walk with God. We know people in the world that are that way and in the Bible there were many, such as Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, Job, Joseph of Arimathea, etc.
- 3. Then there are those who are poor on the outside and rich inside. They have few possessions, but are born again and have eternal life.
- 4. Then there are those who are rich on the outside and poor on the inside. They have a lot of wealth but have no foundation of Jesus in their life. This is the group that James is writing to. In his day there were a few who controlled the lives of most people.

These last verses especially were aimed at the unbelieving, oppressing rich who were then, and who are today, spiritually impoverished.

**First Crime: Corroded Wealth**

Apparently wealth in those days consisted of both money and such things as grain, oil and expensive luxurious clothes. The rich had hoarded so much food and clothing that it was going to waste. Even the gold and silver they owned had been hoarded so long it had lost its luster in corrosion and rust.

He tells them their corrosion or rust will testify against them and eat their flesh. This is just a graphic way of saying that their greed will result in their own destruction. He says they have hoarded wealth in the last days. He has the future judgment in mind. The New Testament regards the whole period between Christ's first and second comings as the last time of last days. The rich are even hoarding wealth just before Christ comes. They didn't realize that the last days were already present.

**Second Crime: Greed & Selfishness**

Verse five tells of the second crime. It tells of the greed and selfishness of these men who had far more than they could ever use while their workers were deprived of their wages.

In the Mosaic Law, the prohibition of this offence is clear and specific. Deuteronomy 24:14-15 says,

*"Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. Pay him his wages*







*not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "no," no, or you will be condemned."*

James is talking to believers who had these same feelings and reactions against the rich who mistreated them in verses 1-6. Perhaps someone came to James and asked him "How should I correctly react when I have been treated incorrectly?" Be patient. Have long patience or be long suffering. Then there is another of James' illustrations...the farmers then were entirely dependant on the autumn and spring rains and the faithful farmer knew that God would be true to His promise of Deuteronomy that "if His people kept His commandments He would give them the autumn and spring rains." So his patience was more like confident expectancy. His faith in the reliability of God gave him confidence during a time that could have been full of anxiety.

**Be Patient in the Face of Injustices**

Now, in the same way, the faithful Christian knows that Christ will be true to His promise to come again to His people. We can't be sure of the time in the same way that the farmer could determine the time of the harvest but our patience is grounded on the certainty of our faith.

When the Bible speaks of God's patience with humans as in Romans 2:4:

*"Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?"*

and 1 Peter 3:2:

*"He was patient when the ark was being built"*

it is significant that these words are used. God is patient because He is slow to anger and of great kindness and doesn't punish transgressors as they deserve. If the all-holy God, faced with all our human sin, is patient, James implies that Christians should be patient in the face of the injustices of human life. His patience should be extended to God for failing to avenge immediately and to his fellow men. He also shouldn't attempt to vindicate himself by assuming the role of judge of his fellow men. And the power to exercise this patience is available for him just as far as he submits himself to the Holy Spirit, for a fruit of that Spirit is long suffering (Gal. 5:22).

*"Be patient and stand firm" (James 5:8).*

If are patient and hold back a reaction, we may have a tendency to become discouraged or fall into self pity. So he says, "Stand firm - literally, strengthen your heart." The Lord will come and give you comfort and peace. Also, in the scheme of

eternity, the Lord's coming is near and then everything will be set right. If we are confident in this, it should strengthen our hearts. Do we really live like He could be coming today?

He tells us in verse nine that believers are to be patient toward both outsiders who oppress them and insiders who irritate them. We just have to remember that the Lord knows even our inward thoughts and feelings.

#### **If YOU Think You Have Problems...**

Then James says, more or less, "*If you think you are having problems, just think of what some of the prophets went through.*" Most of the prophets that the Old Testament tells about were examples of suffering and patience.

**Jeremiah:** He was told by God to deliver several messages to his countrymen that were very unpopular because they were so pessimistic. He had to tell them of their sins and what was going to happen as a result. Consequently he was beaten, put in stocks, imprisoned in a dungeon and thrown into a cistern by those he was trying to help. Instead of blaming those who persecuted him, he continued to obey.

**Job:** Verse 11 goes on to say:

*"As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered."*

We have the expression "*the patience of Job,*" but interestingly, he doesn't say Job had patience but that he had perseverance, steadfastness and endurance.

Remember back in James 1:2-3 he said, "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.*" Job faced blow after blow.

First all his livestock and servants were killed, then all of his children and their families were destroyed and he said,

*"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."*

When he continued to have one problem after another, his wife told him to curse God and die, but he said, "*Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?*" To his "so called friends" who kept telling him to repent because God was punishing him for his sins he said, "*Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him.*" He was determined to endure his sufferings without losing faith in God. In the end he was able to say, "*I know that my Redeemer lives.*"



The end of verse 11 says: "*The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*" Job's experience was also proof of that statement when we see what the Lord finally brought about for him. Because Job persevered, God gave him "twice as much as he had before" in family, material possessions and worldly prosperity. He came to have a fuller understanding of the sovereignty of God and became capable of greater penitence. Even before all of this was restored to him he said,

*"My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."*

**Application:**

What do you think James 5:7-11 is teaching us?

How are we to apply it?

We are not to fight back but to exercise long suffering patience toward those who cause us pain and he is calling for stout-hearted perseverance in trying circumstances that confront us.

Chuck Swindoll gives some good advice based on these verses:

- Don't focus on the situation, or you'll become angry - be patient.
- Don't focus on yourself, or you'll become filled with self-pity - stand firm, strengthen your heart.
- Don't focus on someone to blame, or you'll begin complaining - don't grumble against each other.
- Honesty  
*"Do not swear...let your yes be yes and your no, no or you will be condemned."* (James 5:12).

Rather than using an oath to convince people that a statement is true, the Christian should let his, "yes be yes" and his "no, no." He should be honest in all his speech so that when he says 'yes' or no people will know it is unquestionably the truth.

## Part 14 - The Power of Prayer & Praise

What better way to endure trials and grow in Christian maturity than to use the power of prayer and praise.

*"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise"* (James 5:13).





The word here for suffering is different from the word for sick in verse 14. Suffering is a general word that may involve mental or emotional problems or a combination. In context, it looks back to verse 10s reference to the prophets who suffered.

**Praise Him in ALL Circumstances**

*"If you are having problems because of circumstances, you are to look to God and pray. If everything is going well and you are happy, look to God with praise."*

In verse 14 he says:

*"Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord"* (James 5:14).

The Greek word for sick literally means "to be weary." He was not referring to the bedfast, the diseased or the ill. Instead he wrote to those who had grown weary and had become weak both morally and spiritually in the midst of suffering.

These are the ones who should call for the help of the elders of the church. The elders are to be righteous men of prayer and spiritual leaders like Elijah.

The early church leaders were instructed to *"encourage the timid and help the weak"* (1 Thessalonians 5:14). These men were *"to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord."* The word for anoint here is a word that means 'rub with oil' not the word that is used for a ceremonial or ritual anointing. In the New Testament, oil was used for medicinal or refreshing purposes. A host put oil on the head of his guest.

**Thy Will Be Done**

They were also to pray for him and both were done 'in the name of the Lord.' This always has the underlying meaning of 'thy will be done' or 'if it is your will.'

*"And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well"* (James 5:15).

Does this indicate that if you get sick you pray about it and you will get well, and if you don't, it is because you don't have enough faith?

This exposes the error that if one has enough faith he will be healed, or if one is not healed at a healing service it is because of his lack of faith. These assertions do not square with James chapter 5. It is the effective prayer of righteous elders that accomplishes much on behalf of the sick one who calls.

*"The Lord will lift him up."*





It is the Lord’s direct intervention, rather than the power of the prayer of the elders that lifts him up.

Can unconfessed sin cause sickness? Why? Does God ever chastise sinning believers by allowing sickness - both physical and emotional?

**Examples...**

In the Old Testament, Numbers 12 tells the story of Miriam who was Moses' sister. She rebelled against the authority and leadership of Moses and God chastised her by making her leprous. Moses pleaded with God on her behalf and she was restored after a period of isolation from the people.

*“And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punished everyone he accepts as a son.” Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?”*  
(Hebrews 12:5-7)

**Guilt Can Also Cause Sickness**

*“Look at Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’ - and you forgave the guilt of my sin”*  
(Psalms 32:1-5).

*“For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep”* (1 Cor. 11:29-30).

Is this saying that all problems are caused by sin? No, it says IF he has sinned, he will be forgiven.

**Part 15 - In Summary**

To sum it up, it seems that the restoration is spiritual, not physical, is further clarified by the assurance, 'if he has sinned, he will be forgiven.' Many physically ill Christians have called on elders to pray for them and to anoint them with oil, but a





One the other hand, we cannot assume from this passage that James is saying they should make a public confession of ALL their sins in a public meeting, or to unload COMPLETELY even to a chosen individual in private. Giving public confession is practiced in recent years but it is apt to have more harmful than beneficial results. Too often it gives an outlet for an unhealthy exhibitionism. You need to use discretion as to the extent to which, and the people to whom you are prepared to tell your sins of thought, word or deed.

In verses 17-18 he is saying Elijah was a righteous man who prayed earnestly. Also he is assuring his readers that such answers to prayer were within the reach of any believer.

*“My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone would bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20).*

This conclusion just amplifies verse 16 and could be expanded from the Greek to read: "My brothers, if any believer among you strays from the truth and another believer turns him back so he returns to the straight and narrow, let him know that he who turns a sinning Christian from the error of his way will save his soul from physical death and will restore him from the consequences of a multitude of sins."

The text literally reads, "will save his soul," but we know a saved person has already had his soul redeemed. The Greeks often used the word for soul to describe the whole human being. The redeemed sinner will be saved from physical death which can come through God's chastising discipline.

### **Restoration**

The goal is always restoration such as in Galatians 6:1

*"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."*

### **Conclusions from James 5:19-20**

Christians are responsible for restoring straying believers, in gentleness, according to Galatians. Continuing in unchecked sin can result in death because the believer has disqualified himself from representing God or accomplishing His work.

Restoration is possible even if the sins are frequent and serious; confrontation will cover a multitude of sins. We cannot sin so badly that God cannot forgive us, but for God to forgive us, we need to turn from our sin back to Him.



**How Should Christians Face Sickness?**

It would be wonderful if we had one clear scripture that said,

*"When you are sick, this is what you should do."*

Unfortunately there is none but we can draw a prescription from various portions of God's word:

**First**, acknowledge that God is sovereign, then rest in that unshakable truth. (Deuteronomy 32:39; Romans 8:28)

**Second**, remind yourself of the biblical reasons for sickness - those purposes God can accomplish through illness.

**Third**, determine if your sickness is because of continued pattern of sin. Is God using your illness as chastisement? For most of us, the answer will be no. If you know of someone where this is true, follow James 5.

**Fourth**, by faith commit the matter to the Lord. Wait patiently for His response.

**Fifth**, seek professional medical attention. Do not presume upon God and wait too long or ignore your doctor.

**Sixth**, recognize that it is not necessarily God's will for you to recover. Many of God's great servants were sick - Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Job, Daniel, Paul, Epaphroditus and Timothy. Thank God for the circumstances in which He has placed you (Ephesians 5:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:18). You are not thanking God that you hurt, but rather that He is who He is and that He will work through your circumstances.

**Seventh**, ask God for the faith and patience to endure and the wisdom to understand why (James 1:2-5). God has promised that His grace will be sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9). Claim that promise for yourself and rest in it. Have other Christians pray with you and for you.

Finally, pray that your circumstances may work out for the glory of God. *"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God"* (1 Corinthians 10:31).

There is nothing wrong with praying for healing. Paul asked three times to be relieved (2 Corinthians 12:8). But we also need to be willing to receive God's answer - regardless of what it is.



There was a Norwegian theologian, Ole Hallesby that prayed: "Lord, if it will be to your glory, heal suddenly. If it will glorify you more, heal gradually; if it will glorify you even more, may your servant remain sick awhile; and if it will glorify your name still more, take me to yourself in heaven."

**This brings us to the end of James** and he has given us clear instructions about how to achieve practical holiness and spiritual maturity.

He exhorted his beloved Jewish brothers - and now us - to stand with confidence, serve with compassion, speak with care, submit with contriteness (sorrow for sin) and share with concern.

A believer should be what God wants him to be, do what God wants him to do, say what God wants him to say, sense what God wants him to sense and share what God wants him to share.

*Spiritual maturity involves every aspect of life.*