



As James Said

Devotional Articles Based on the book of James

Warren E. Berkley

These were written in 2007 while I was teaching an adult Bible class based on the book of James. My initial purpose was not publication, but to help me craft my statements for good teaching. They are offered in this format to help other teachers in their focus on the simple, practical lessons from James.

Count It All Joy

Most of us – at least on the surface of our emotions – have this thought: **If I didn't have any problems I'd be fine.** Yet in our moments of mature thought we know that in the ebb and flow of earthly life, there are un-welcomed difficulties. We also know, we must discover the tools to successfully negotiate those difficulties. One of the first steps toward patient endurance of difficulties is to accept the reality of difficulties.

Christians know, the Word of God is the resource that supplies both the instruction and the motivation to handle the diverse difficulties that may come to us. Knowing who God is, becoming acquainted with Christ, learning and believing all that the cross and the resurrection mean and embracing the hope granted to believers – *all of this becomes our strength against the trials of life.* Even trials that find their strength through our internally flawed thinking can be defeated by the activity of faith in Christ, as we accept all the moral exhortation of the apostles.

Part of this patient endurance is understanding that God, through difficulty, can forge good character. Fully developed stability, steadfast, growing reverence for God and obedience can shine through in our days of darkness, and we can become victorious and complete.

Or, as James said: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." {Jas. 1:2-4}

Need Wisdom? Ask.

There is a difference between knowledge and the use of knowledge. First, we acquire knowledge, then we use that knowledge in real life. The second part of this can be more challenging than the first. It is one thing to sit in a class room and learn something taught in the Bible; that could be relatively easy. The challenge comes in using that knowledge in life, something we often call "application."

I can get up every morning and check the financial data easily accessed through my online computer. I can read on the screen: the S&P, the NASDAQ, current interest rates, even the Asian and European market numbers. I can acquire knowledge as easily as financial consultants and brokers by reading the figures they read. But I can't use that knowledge to advise people about their investments. Knowledge in many cases can be easily acquired, but the challenge is to use it. Let's call that "wisdom."

Many who read this article read similar literature. We read the Bible, listen to sermons, attend Bible classes or perhaps prepare and present material from the Bible. Diligence of mind enables us to acquire knowledge, but that isn't the end of the process. **After acquisition there must be practice.** The purpose of learning the truth is to obey the truth in real life. **We need help in connecting the truth we learn to real life. God promises to provide that help.**

Or, as James said: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him," (Jas. 1:5).

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Let The Lowly Brother Take Heart

There is a common tendency on the part of people in general to base their self-concept on their circumstances (income, assets, economic level, etc.). If you are struggling to put food on the table and clothes on your family, you may be tempted to think, you are not worth much. (We typically place way too much emphasis on such things; see Jas. 2:1-4).

James says to poor Christians: *Though you live in humble circumstances, you "ought to take pride in" your "high position."*

Let's be certain we get this. There is nothing better for a person, than to be in fellowship with God, through Jesus Christ, and to be actively involved as a daily disciple. It doesn't get any better. For a while on earth, you may struggle; undergo trials and difficulties, and it may be, rich, powerful people mistreat you. But in Christ, you have a high position, that should cause you to "glory" or "take pride."

In contrast, the rich man has "his humiliation" in the fact that he will pass away with nothing. Whatever your economic situation, it is temporary, so don't depend on it (Matt. 6:19-24; Jas. 5:1-6; 1 Tim. 6:17-19; Lk. 12:19,20).

Or, as James said: "Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits," (Jas. 1:9-11).

Listening → Living

When I read a paragraph in the Bible, once I'm convinced I have a united section or complete thought, it helps me to observe how it begins and how it ends. Once I find the beginning and end, I can go back to trace the movement from start to finish.

With James 1:19-27 it is easy to do this. **It begins with listening and ends with living.** "Let every man be swift to hear," or "quick to listen," (NIV). As you move toward verse 27, **listening moves toward living:** "be doers of the word," (22), and "what kind of man," (24), etc.

In the attention we give to the Bible, if we don't get this we miss the whole point! If we listen and learn, but never live what the Bible teaches, we fail. The whole point of having a Bible class – for example – is to listen with such a good heart, you leave the class prepared to live better. Listening that falls short of practical living is incomplete.

Typical human behavior is the perpetuation of a careless pattern of living: *we don't listen, we talk too much and we get mad too easy.* We read the Bible, attend Bible classes and listen to Bible preaching – but never get it all connected in daily life.

*Or as James said: "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful*

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hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion *is* useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

On The Use Of Mirrors

The mirrors used in Roman antiquity were slightly convex disks of metal, either bronze, tin or silver, that reflected light when the surfaces were highly polished.

There are about four references to mirrors in the Bible (Job 37:18; 1 Cor. 13:12; 2 Cor. 3:18 and Jas. 1:23). In ancient times, mirrors might be used for a variety of secondary purposes (some suggest in military battle, mirrors may have been used to send signals or confuse the enemy). While the idea is intriguing, there is no solid evidence that the Roman chariots were equipped with rear view mirrors!

The primary use, however, was the popular current use: **to see what you look like**. To see if your face is dirty; to apply make-up or jewelry; to arrange hair.

Here's something self-evident: To use a mirror and find something that needs attention, then do nothing about it, is futile. The point is totally uncomplicated, and finds ready application: **To use the Word of God and find something that needs attention in your life, but do nothing is futile.**

Why read the Bible, if you're not going to do what it says? Why come to a Bible class and learn truth for a good life, then make no effort to apply it in your life? Why listen to Bible preaching, then ignore that teaching in the way you live?

Or as James said – “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does,” (Jas. 1:23-25).

Playing Favorites

Make a list of character-neutral traits. Let me help: *skin color, genealogy, level of education, geographic origin, being bald, gender, age, income level, etc.* These are **character-neutral**, meaning these traits (singularly or combined in one person), have nothing to do with the real character of the person. Hence, we have no right to reject, shun or degrade anyone based on anything in this list. Are you with me?

In typical human interaction, this is a problem. I grew up in a time and place where racial discrimination was common. The public schools I attended did not integrate until the second semester of my senior year. My father forbade any racial attitudes or remarks in our home. But outside our home, we lived in a community that was discriminatory. (In southern local churches in the 1940's and 50's, black brethren were often welcome to visit meetings, but in a roped off section at the back of the auditorium. I recall a black preacher being asked to lead in prayer. He came forth from the roped section, stood before the audience and led the prayer, then returned to his place.)

I hope we all now see the inconsistency of that. And I hope we are committed to steer clear of all other forms of discrimination, where people are treated as inferior based on some character-neutral trait.

As James said, "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality," (Jas. 2:1).

Contrary Reality

There may be a gap between what we think we are and what we really are. I may think I am young, gorgeous, brilliant and wealthy. If I feed this self image long enough, and if I get a little help from flattering friends, I may deceive myself into thinking this is real. Doesn't change reality does it?

This is common, and especially in regard to religious profession. We may think we are religious over such a long period of time, we deceive ourselves into believing everything is all right. We do what we have always done and say what we have always said, carrying through life the assumption that we are saved. What we think doesn't change contrary reality.

If your heart hasn't been changed by the gospel of Christ; if your life is not really being lived in Him and according to His teaching, there is a gap between what you think ("I'm saved") and how you are living (the contrary reality).

Or as James said: "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless," and "...someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works," (Jas. 1:26 & 2:18).

Different People – Same Faith

Early in our Bible reading we are introduced to **Abram (Abraham)**. He was called by God to leave the land of his fathers. He went. He was promised he would have a son in his old age. He did. He was told to sacrifice that son. He got up and set himself to that dreaded task, that was brought to a good conclusion. Isaac lived and from him the promised nation came into existence (Gen. 12-22).

Much later in Bible history we meet **Rahab**. Whatever we find detestable about her past, when she heard what was about to happen in Jericho, she hid the messengers and Joshua spared her and her father's household (Josh. 6).

Very different people! A rich landowner, chosen by God to father the nation that would deliver the Messiah to the earth. A poor harlot of Jericho. What did they have in common? Their faith was not passive!

As James said: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirits is dead, so faith without works is dead also," (Jas. 2:21-26).

Teacher Accountability

In dialogue about public education, you may hear this phrase, “teacher accountability.” The discussion that follows generally runs along the lines of continuing education, personal improvement, professional excellence and student results.

Teaching is a challenge that is multi-leveled. It is essential to (1) impart the right information, (2) maintain a well disciplined class room atmosphere, (3) demonstrate the practical value of the knowledge imparted, and (4) motivate the students to apply what they have learned, and (5) teach students how to learn for themselves. In order to accomplish these things, the aspiring teacher must pay the price of spending time learning the information, and discovering how to best present it.

You cannot teach people what you do not know, and you cannot effectively teach people what you do not live! The Bible teacher must spend time with the text of Scripture, and live with the author of the text. The Bible teacher needs to teach people what the Scriptures teach, but also, teach them how to read and study for themselves. The Bible teacher must not only present facts, but present them so they will come alive in the hearts of good hearers. This carries the highest kind of accountability.

Or as James said: “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment,” (Jas. 3:1).

A Small Big Problem

The last two summers I've enjoyed the recreational pursuit of riding a horse through a beautiful Ozark mountain trail. I'm not an experienced horse rider. The experience to navigate the steep, rocky trail belonged to the horse, not the rider. The horses available at West Mountain Trails are raised and trained for nothing but carrying inexperienced tourists through the mountain trails.

There is a purpose in all the equipment the horse wears, like the bit. Even the inexperienced rider can learn quickly to use the reins and bit to guide this powerful animal. As well trained as the trail horses are, you can actually lead them away from the familiar path, if you know how to use the equipment. While the bit is a very small instrument in proportion to the animal, it holds great power.

This is like the human tongue. One of the smallest members of the human body, but what great power it holds for good or evil! One false accusation can arouse suspicion about an innocent person - suspicion that will never really go away. One lie can hurt a whole family; one false doctrine can destroy a soul; one insult can discourage a struggling young person; one angry word can divide a church.

Or as James said: "For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body . . . Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles . . . no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison," (Jas. 3:2,3,5,8).

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“If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless,” (Jas. 1:26).

Jumping Outside Your Kind

Do you like grapefruit? Have you ever had any of the famous south Texas Ruby Red grapefruit? I grow some of the best in my backyard, and this year's harvest may be a superior crop, with all the rain we've had this summer.

But what would you think – at harvest time – if I reported to you with these words: “Just picked my grapefruit for this season. Funny thing happened. On one tree I had watermelon, tomatoes, olives and grapes.” Such a statement would put you on alert, not about the tree but about me. What is it? Early onset of dementia; complete loss of sanity? Whatever you may not know about South Texas citrus, you know that **seed produces after its' kind**. The seed, the tree and the fruit will never jump outside the kind.

Christians are “a kind of firstfruits of His creatures,” (Jas. 1:18). If we are living in keeping with our birth (reproduction), what we think and say is the expected fruit (Gal. 5:22-26). It should strike us as unnatural and against our birth to speak with an unruly tongue.

Or as James said, “Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh,” (Jas. 3:10-12).

Wisdom ~ Human Or Divine?

We are bombarded by secular, earthly wisdom (such as men promote). We are exposed to shallow and ungodly thinking all the time. It may come through television or the internet, or through people who attempt to impose their worldliness on us. Or it may be, we let our own inner desires propel us into sin (Jas. 1:14,15).

Christians must take into every day an awareness of the difference between human wisdom and divine. You can be certain, there are some behaviors distinctively earthly. "For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there." On the other (better) side: When God's will lives within us, that wisdom "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits." Your personal commitment to Christ must include this discernment, this understanding – there is a difference between earthly wisdom and God's.

Secular, earthly wisdom, according to Albert Barnes: *Has its origin in this world, and partakes of its spirit. It is such as men exhibit who are governed only by worldly maxims and principles.*

Or as James said: "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace," (Jas. 3:13-18).

Behind All Fighting – Poor Attitudes

External conflict always means, there are some wrong attitudes somewhere. Conflict is not the result of some sort of mystical fate or “karma.” It cannot be explained away as simply chance and time, bringing different personalities together. External conflict always means, somebody has an attitude issue (maybe more than one). This is true on the international scale, within nations, in communities, institutions, local churches, marriages and families. External conflict is always evidence of internal trouble. About this, James 3:16 is clear: “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there.”

What does this mean? When you find yourself in conflict with someone (in the middle of a fight, or ugly division – maybe before the fight breaks out), **FIRST – examine yourself.** Are you thinking clearly, objectively and according to truth. Read James 3:17,18 and use that to measure your heart. Take full inventory of motives and methods.

Or as James said – “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures,” (Jas. 4:1-3).

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Befriending A Cruel Master ~ Becoming A Slave

What does it mean to befriend someone? It means to attend to, care for, love, please and serve. Have you ever befriended someone, only to become a slave in the process? You attend to, care for, love, please and serve – only to become a slave. You have befriended a cruel master.

This is exactly what is happening when we befriend the world (*the world* that is hostile to God; the secular, temporal culture that pays the highest tribute to man, taking little or no notice of the Creator, as in 1 Jno. 2:15-17).

When we attend to this world, care for it's cares, love it, please it and serve it, we become, not simply woefully misguided, but slaves to the world. Lutzer was right when he said: "Worldliness is excluding God from our lives and, therefore, consciously or unconsciously accepting the values of a man-centered society." And, "Worldliness is not only doing what is forbidden but also wishing it were possible to do it. One of its distinctives is mental slavery to illegitimate pleasure."

Or, as James said: "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God," (Jas. 4:4).

Bad News ~ Good News

Have you ever read some portion of Scripture you found to be depressing? You read the passage and your first response is, this is ugly. It might be Romans 1:18-32, Gal. 5:19-21, or Eph. 2:1-3. Sin is identified in such detail, the reader with the good and honest heart wants to turn away.

Actually, such passages have a crucial purpose. They help us recognize exactly what is offensive to God and destructive to us and others. We need to be disturbed by sin; it can awaken in us a wisdom we need about life.

Also consider this. Following each of these passages, there is the good news, of God's grace. After Rom. 1:18-32, reference is made to "the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering." The goodness of God leads you to repentance (Rom. 2:4). After Gal. 5:19-21, the good fruit of the Spirit we are able to bear, and after Eph. 2:1-3, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)...," (Eph. 2:4,5).

James exposed earthly wisdom, involving "envy and self-seeking ... confusion and every evil thing," that generates fighting, lust, coveting, killings, and enmity with God. But this directory of depravity is also followed by a comforting affirmation of God's grace, with the call to repent, resisting the devil.

Or, as James said: "But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Therefore submit to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to

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gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up," (Jas. 4:6-10).

Vow of Silence?

“Do not speak evil of one another,” (Jas. 4:11). Do you know one way to be sure you don’t speak evil of anyone? **Don’t speak at all.** Now that doesn’t sound realistic does it. But there have been people in history who took this extraordinary measure, to perform their perception of reverence, and to make sure they didn’t speak evil of anyone. They took a vow of silence. That would be one way to make sure you didn’t speak evil; just don’t speak at all. You wouldn’t say foolish things; you wouldn’t tell any lies; you wouldn’t insult anybody. Just never say anything.

But God didn’t give us speaking ability, only for us to refrain from speaking. Good speech can be a great blessing. We are to speak the truth in love. The gospel is to be preached. We ought to want to relate to people in a good way, with healthy conversation, encouragement, a helpful exchange of ideas, etc. So let’s just rule out the vow of silence, and make an effort to learn godly thinking and godly speaking.

Or, as James said: “Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?” (Jas. 4:10-11).

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What We Think & Say About Another's Eternal Destiny

This is not just a hypothetical situation: Someone wants you to say if they are going to hell. **"So, do you think I'm going to hell?"**

First, what we think and say about someone's eternal destiny should not be the question for discussion, or the focus of dialogue. What I think about someone's eternal destiny carries no weight at all, now or then! Could be, when I read the Bible and observe someone's conduct, I can see that, in the absence of repentance, the Bible says the one with that conduct has no hope. But to make *my application* the center of study or discussion is ultimately pointless, since I don't get to make the final call. And one should be motivated to obey the gospel, not because someone says they are going to hell. The motivation should be, respect for God and trust in Christ, with the highest interests in the hope of heaven.

Second, arguing with someone about who we think will go to hell quickly turns into a highly emotional contest, that seldom turns into good study, the creation of faith and the activity of obedience to God. It generally becomes an exercise in self-defense up against aggressive assertions of condemnation.

Let's read to people from the Bible, to show them what God says about specific beliefs and practices. Then read to people from the Bible, what God says about eternal punishment. But we must never imply that the call is ours. God alone holds the power of ultimate judgment.

Or, as James said: "Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?" (Jas. 4:10-11).

Planning With God

In 1984, in all the interests associated with Stephen Covey's book, **The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People**, a personal planning management system was developed and marketed called **The Franklin Planner**.

It looked like a calendar book, where you plan and schedule appointments. It also included prioritizing tasks, expense logs, a section for journaling your goals, addresses & contact information, etc. For many years – *before computer planners really came into use* – **The standard day planner or personal memo tool was THE FRANKLIN PLANNER**. Today, there is an electronic version of the **Franklin Planner**.

The popularity of such tools lies in our interests in getting organized . . . following a good schedule . . . planning the events in your work and your life. All of that is fine, and may be – we need to do more planning and organizing. **But the Bible teaches → Never Plan Anything Independent of God!!** His will, His sovereignty and His claim on us **must be soberly accounted for, in any and all planning we do.**

Or, as James said: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.' But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin," (Jas. 4:13-17).

“Come Now,” What Is The Problem?

There is this passage in the New Testament where James reports and comments on a typical dialogue. This might even be called, a **business planning session**: “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit.’”

What’s wrong with this? Profit is all right, so long as people are not oppressed (see Jas. 5:1-6). Planning is all right, for each one of us should plan to do good (see Jas. 4:17). Conversation with others is all right, provided we do not speak evil of each other (see Jas. 4:11). Traveling is all right; James was writing to Christians who had traveled (Jas. 1:1).

The problem is, making plans with a self-assured certainty, absent any acknowledge of God’s control of time. All the planning we do must involve the fundamental thought, we do not know the future, only God does. “You do not know,” James says. **We need to know what we don’t know**, and all our planning should include that knowledge of our ignorance.

Or, as James said: “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’ But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin,” (Jas. 4:13-17).

The Peril of Putting Prosperity Above People

Reading what James and other New Testament writers say about wealth, there is a typical distortion we need to guard against. James does not take a dim view of wealth itself. He has no axe to grind against all who have above average assets; nothing is argued against being a landowner, having employees, or making a profit. There is no encouragement from James to justify any common prejudices against people of means, nor any elevated value assigned to poverty.

James puts the spotlight of exposure and condemnation on a very specific kind of people. He is talking about wealthy landowners who were building their empires of luxury on the backs of their workers. The sin is, making your money and building your empire on the backs of your workers.

We find the principle for us here: *We must never advance our interests at the illegitimate expense and suffering of others.* Climbing your way to the top, under a trail of crumpled, oppressed, hurt people is the corruption James condemns.

Or, as James said: "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you," (Jas. 5:1-6).

The Dynamics Of Waiting

The waiting farmers do is hard psychologically. There are so many variables involved before harvest time, sometimes generating a helpless attitude. Unexpected weather can destroy a crop in a few hours. There is pest management, too much or too little water, equipment failure, the labor force and the market prices. The success of a season is not history until the money is in the bank.

It is similar for Christians waiting for the Second Coming of Christ. Some things may happen that we didn't cause and cannot control. Serious illness or injury may test our fortitude. Persecutors could oppress us and punish our loved ones. False teachers and tempters may seduce people we love, even though we've acted to save them. We must wait patiently through the variables of life on earth.

Yet, the eventual outcome is an absolute promise to those "who have loved His appearing," (2 Tim. 4:8). "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart," (Gal. 6:6-8).

Or As James Said: "Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand," (Jas. 5:7,8).

Are You Ready To Be Rich?

Traveling with a friend on a long trip one time, just to pass the time with conversation, I asked: **If you were really wealthy, would you be able to handle it?** He said, "I'd like to try," and then he said: "I would use my wealth for good purposes!" I inquired further and he said, "Of course, first, there would be some things I would have to take care of." "Like what," I pressed. "Well, it would be wise to pay off all my debts, get into a better house (pay cash), and get some reliable transportation. Then after my vacation, I would sit down and start donating to all these good causes. I would support preachers in remote places, help poor Christians, give more to the local church, etc."

Did you catch the fine print? "...first, there would be some things I would have to take care of." Then the list of debts paid, better house, better car and vacation. My friend is like most of us. And we may all be like the man who once said: "They say it's better to be poor and happy than rich and miserable. But couldn't something be worked out, such as being moderately wealthy and just a little moody?"
{Reader's digest, 9/82}

If you were to suddenly become wealthy, you would use that money according to your present character. The windfall wouldn't change your present character, it would be used *according to* your present character. The prophets of the Old Testament issued thundering condemnations against the ungodly rich, who by their greed and oppression of people, called judgment upon themselves. The problem was character, not cash. Using their cash according to their character (bad character), they brought upon themselves the displeasure of God and the consequences.

As James Said

Warren E. Berkley

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Or as James said, "...the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth," (Jas. 5:4).

Grumbling

When a group of people are oppressed, under fire and suffering, they should unite, pull together and help each other, right? No doubt. But sometimes people in an oppressed group act on other impulses; become bitter and impatient and allow the pain to erode their character.

And, they may turn against each other. There is some good possibility, this happened among some Christians in first century churches. Under pressure, suffering injustice, isolation and persecution, some became impatient with their situation and turned on themselves. Of course, this doesn't help and is offensive to God.

The word "grumble" suggests **the words and behavior expressing one's bitter perception that life is unfair and that everybody is to blame, maybe even God.** Could it be, this rings true because we have felt this way and acted out this bitterness? It's one thing to report to people that you feel bad, and to tell people of your pain. But to treat people as if they are to blame, discourage others and speak against your brethren is inexcusable. Negative attitudes have negative power.

Or, as James said: "Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! My brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord – that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But, lest your 'Yes,' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No,' lest you fall into judgment," (Jas. 5:9-12).

“Take The Prophets”

Some of the most dramatic, informative and character-building reading is found in the Old Testament books of prophecy. In times of moral crisis, political confusion, invasion and conflict, “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit,” (2 Pet. 1:21). They were not treated with the warm welcome and hospitality many preachers enjoy today. They had to preach repentance, expose sin and tell people their judgment was at hand. Often, their message was ignored, they were falsely accused, threatened and punished.

How did they survive, keep their hope up and get up everyday? The answer comes back in two simple words: **By Faith.**

“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Sampson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens ... And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us,” (Heb. 11:32-40). *And we sometimes think we’ve had a bad day?*

Or, as James said: “My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord – that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful,” (Jas. 5:10-11).

Right Responses

Here is a simple truth: **For every event in life, there is a right response.** By our steady and vigilant use of the Bible, accompanied by fervent prayer, we can discover the right response to every event. This idea stands out in James, chapters four and five. Impatient grumbling, fighting, coveting, worldliness – *never a good response to anything*, James writes.

What kills us spiritually is our impulsiveness. Something happens and we just react, often emotionally, selfishly or according to personal tradition, habit or peer pressure. Reading the Bible can train us in **the best responses to the events of life.** Flying off from one event to another, fueled by the pleasure of the moment is no way to live.

As James said: “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. 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,” (Jas. 5:13,14).

It matters not what is the form of the trial, it is a privilege which all have to go to God in prayer. And it is an inestimable privilege. Health fails, friends die, property is lost, disappointments come upon us, danger threatens, death approaches--and to whom shall we go but to God? He ever lives. He never fails us or disappoints us if we trust in him, and his ear is ever open to our cries. – Albert Barnes.

Bring The Oil

Most of us don't suffer well. We are not good patients and our first responses to difficulty are usually not good disciplined, godly perspectives. Generally, people find little value in suffering and have pre-determined not to find any triumph in it.

If suffering is to be a spiritual discipline, we must learn right responses before the suffering begins. We should respond to our suffering friends and brethren with fitting prayer, encouragement, and the sharing of every resource we can supply. For the most part, we are not good at this.

The first aid kit in the time of Christ and the apostles included oil (Lk. 10:34, Mrk. 6:13). While I cannot objectively and perfectly describe what kind of oil or mixture this was, I believe it was practical and medicinal, perhaps Olive Oil. When we suffer, we need both spiritual and practical help. Good leaders and good people will be ready with both.

Or as James said, "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," (Jas. 5:14).

Confession

The word “confess” simply means an open acknowledgement or admission. The context may be your initial statement of your belief in Christ (as in Acts 8:37), or it may be, your private, penitent acknowledgement to God that you have offended Him and seek His mercy in pardon (1 Jno. 1:9, Psa. 38:18). In either setting, there is an ideal of honesty implied.

James highly values **confessing our trespasses to one another**. This implies (a) others who love us need to hear us admit our guilt and inform them of our remorse and repentance, and (b) those we confess to can supply what we need to get back up and walk uprightly again.

The application of this may be fulfilled by making a statement publicly, to your spiritual family (local church), but is not limited to that format. There may be private struggles, individual weaknesses and sins unknown to others you can confess to a Christian friend you are close to, a confidant who can be trusted to help you, pray with you and watch with you.

Or as James said, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much,” (Jas. 5:16).

Witness & Commentator Or Rescuer?

It is relatively easy to be a witness and a commentator. Cable TV news is largely occupied with reporting to us what people saw and what people say. During an event or shortly after, towering technology is applied to tell us what people saw and what they say about it. No soaring qualifications are required.

In our association with and knowledge of Christians, it is with some ease that we fill the roles of witnesses and commentators. We observe misconduct and offer our comment. **Often, that's it.** Even if we don't see the misconduct or have much evidence, we may feel compelled to offer our commentary. "Did you hear what bro. ____ did? Isn't it awful?" Or in the local church setting, we witness someone quit serving the Lord. We witness it and comment on it. That's it.

It behooves us to do less witnessing, reporting and commenting and instead, fill the role of rescuer.

Or as James said, "Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins," (Jas. 5:19,20).

Orthopraxy

Here's a word you didn't use last week: *Orthopraxy*. The first thing you may see in the term is the familiar prefix, *ortho*. That is about what is correct or straight. To correct your dental arrangement, you visit an Orthodontist. His work is to correct the alignment of teeth. In religious use, you may know the word orthodoxy: correct doctrine. *Orthopraxy* refers to correct practice.

For Christians, our orthodoxy is not something we produce, negotiate or revise. Our commitment is, correct teaching has been given. Through Jesus and His apostles, the New Testament came into existence. That's our complete resource and it might be said – when we express our belief in the teachings of the New Testament and deliver those teachings to others, we are involved in biblical orthodoxy.

We cannot stop with orthodoxy. There must be **orthopraxy**. That occurs when we use the teachings of the New Testament in our lives on a daily basis. We cannot please God, honor Christ or be effective disciples in the world as long as there is an absence of orthopraxy! **Both teaching and practice must find good, wholehearted combination, if we are to be the kind of people the gospel calls us to be.**

Or as James said, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves," and "So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty," (Jas. 1:22, 2:12).