

James Part One

Key Bible Passage: James 2:14-26

2:14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

18 But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. 19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

20 You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? 21 Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. 24 You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? 26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

Reflection Questions:

-How does it make you feel to hear James describe the faith of some people as dead, useless, or worthless? Have you been through a season in your life where you now look back and think your faith could be described as dead?

-Why do you think it is so easy for faith to atrophy, decay, or become “dead” without us realizing it?

-Some followers of Jesus read this passage in James and think he puts too much emphasis on our “works” and not enough on God’s work. Do you think this is fair? Why or why not?

-What in this passage do you find most challenging?

-If you could describe the kind of faith that you want to have, but maybe do not currently have, how would you describe it?

James Part Two

Key Bible Passage: James 1:1-12

1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. 6 But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. 8 Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

9 Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. 10 But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. 11 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 will fade away even while they go about their business.

12 Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

Reflection Questions:

-As you think about the last ten years of your life, what is one of the hardest “trials” that you’ve been through?

-Why do you think James picks the word “joy” as a posture we should choose in trials?

-James never says anything in this passage about God being the source of our trials. The implication is that trials are a result of living in a broken world, but God can still use them for our benefit. Does this seem to be the overall biblical picture of trials?

-C.S. Lewis says: “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” Do you agree with this?

-Name the trials (big and/or small) you are facing right now. Write them down. Make it a point each day this week to ask God for his wisdom in whatever you face. Also consider reaching out to others for support, prayer, or encouragement.

-Do you have any friends or loved ones going through a trial? Is there a simple way you can encourage or support them? Consider writing a note, giving a gift, or doing something tangible to show them support this week.

James Part Three

Key Bible Passage: James 1:19-27

1:19 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. 21 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.

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

26 Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. 27 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.

Reflection Questions:

--Of the three instructions James gives in 1:19—be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger—which is most challenging for you? Why?

-Read James 1:21. How does this verse challenge you? Is there something specific you need to get rid of? What often “plunges your heart to ruin”? Be as honest as you can.

-Read James 1:22-25. If we listen but do not do, how does this deceive ourselves? Why is this so detrimental?

-Read James 1:26-27. What surprises you about these statements? What challenges you most?

-Is there something specific that God might be inviting you to *do* in order to more fully live out your faith?

James Part Four

Key Bible Passage: James 2:1-13

2:1 My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Reflection Questions:

-What is an example of a time in your life when you were shown favoritism in a way that benefited you? How about a time when it was detrimental?

-James gave an example of showing favoritism toward a rich man vs. a poor man (2:2-4). There are other ways we often show favoritism in our culture. In what ways are you most prone to show favoritism? Be honest.

-Why do you think favoritism is such a big deal for James? Shouldn't he be more concerned about other sins that have much worse consequences? Or are the consequences of favoritism greater than we think?

-Consider the categories of people that you most often show favoritism (positively or negatively) toward. Identify something specific you will do this week to live out this message.

-Read James 2:12-13. How does James contrast mercy and judgment? What do you think James means when he says "mercy triumphs over judgment"?