



**THRU** the **BIBLE**

with *J. Vernon McGee*

# JAMES

BIBLE COMPANION



EPISTLES

# READ THIS FIRST

This Bible Companion is a summary of Dr. J. Vernon McGee's teaching of the book of James heard on THRU the BIBLE. These summarized lessons get to the heart of Bible passages and are intended to stir your own thinking, prayer, and study.



**Begin with prayer.** Dr. McGee said, "We are living in the day of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the day of grace, when the Spirit of God takes the things of Christ and reveals them to us." Before you start each lesson, ask the Lord to use it to grow you up in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as He is revealed in that section. Dr. McGee said, "This is the secret of life and of Christian living."



**As you study, read the Bible passage first.** Invite God to open your eyes and deepen your understanding of His Word. That's a request God loves to answer!



**If you want to listen to Dr. McGee's complete teaching on any specific passage, go to [TTB.org/James](http://TTB.org/James)** (or any book of the Bible). The corresponding audio messages are listed at the top of the summaries. You can also use this Bible Companion to follow along and take notes while you listen to Dr. McGee teach a book of the Bible on the radio or online.



**After every lesson, several questions are listed for your personal consideration or, if you're reading this as a group, for your discussion.** Ask the Spirit to help you take to heart what He wants to show you.

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LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU  
RICHLY IN ALL WISDOM AND TEACHING...

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COLOSSIANS 3:16<sup>A</sup>

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## LESSON 1

# WHY DOES GOD TEST OUR FAITH?



Begin with prayer



Read **James 1:1-18**



Listen at [TTB.org/James](https://www.TTB.org/James) to **James 1:1-3**, **James 1:3-11**, **James 1:3-13**, **James 1:13-15**, and **James 1:14-19**

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Of all the books of the New Testament, the Epistle of James was written first, sometime between 45-50 A.D. Some say it was written to argue with Paul's book to the Thessalonians, but in fact, James wrote his book years before. He wrote this letter to the Jews, all twelve tribes who were scattered abroad. The early church was 100 percent Jewish in those early years.

Although James was Jesus' half-brother, he never refers to himself as such; instead, he calls himself Jesus' bondservant—His slave. Perhaps he never boasted about his relationship with Jesus because before the resurrection, James didn't believe Jesus' claims to be Messiah. Once he believed, however, he followed the Lord faithfully. In fact, James likely became head of the church at Jerusalem, and in Acts 15 he presided over the history-defining great council there.

James wrote this very practical letter to the Jews living abroad about what it means to walk by faith, specifically how we should be characterized by our good works. Faith prompted our salvation, but our works are the *result* of our

salvation. God looks down and sees our hearts, and He knows whether we believe or not—that is justification by faith. But our neighbors next door don't see our hearts; they can only judge by our works, the *fruit* of our faith. James urges us to act on what we believe—to let God's Word inform the way we live. Tradition says his nickname was "Old Camel Knees" because he spent so much time in prayer.

The Epistle of James deals with the ethics of Christianity rather than doctrine. James bears down on some practical issues but weaves the theme of how faith produces these good works into every chapter. He talks about how to prove faith is real and illustrates some of the ways God tests faith.

"Count it all joy when you fall into various trials," he begins. Trouble will come, so don't think it strange that something terrible is happening to you. Instead, rejoice that God is testing you in this way. James isn't saying Christians will necessarily experience joy when we go through trials. Trials are meaningless, suffering is senseless, and testing is irrational unless there's some good purpose for them. God assures us there is (see Romans 8:28).

When you stand under the pressures, be alert to your heart's attitude toward your trouble. Believe that God has permitted this trial for a purpose. Be confident He is working something out in your life. You may not *understand* His purpose, but it pleases Him when you walk by faith and not by sight.

What are some of God's purposes in these tests of faith?

James urges us to let patience develop us into mature and well-developed Christians. Patience is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. You won't become patient by *trying* to be patient, but neither will the Holy Spirit deliver it on a silver platter. Patience comes through suffering and testing. Testing and trials produce patience in our lives so we might develop into full-grown children of God. This is so relevant to today!

God allows trouble so that we learn patience, which will then produce real hope and love in us. We'll also gain wisdom related to our trials if we ask Him for it.

Wisdom is the exercise and practical use of knowledge. Wisdom is knowing how to act under difficult circumstances, or when you face problems or questions. Life is filled with these situations, and we clearly need God's

wisdom to navigate them. God is in the business of giving out wisdom “liberally”—that is, pure, simple giving of good without mixing in evil or bitterness. If you lack wisdom, go to God who will hear and answer your prayer. Just believe Him when He says He will help you.

Turn these problems over to Him. You don’t have the brains to meet the problems of life, but you do have a heavenly Father who can supply the wisdom you need. Tomorrow you’re going to be tempted to solve the problem yourself, but that’s a mistake. When you’re tempted to doubt God’s purposes, turn the problem back over to Him. Start each day by giving Him your issues and trust Him that He’ll give you the wisdom you need to face the challenges.

Rejoice today that you have a Savior who is not only going to save you for heaven—that’s certainly good enough—but who will help you this very day. It doesn’t matter if you are the humblest saint or the poorest person on earth; you are rich in Christ, and you have something to rejoice over.

The book of James is sometimes compared to the book of Proverbs, which is written like a college curriculum on wisdom. Here in the Epistle of James, we find a different school—the “School of Hard Knocks.” God wants to bring His own to full Christian maturity. He tests His children to weed out the phonies and the fake saints and to assure His true children that He will help. Our trials are proof positive of our faith. If you are having trouble, that’s a good sign you belong to Him. He also wants to produce patience in your life and confidence that God is working out His purpose in your life.

When faith is tested and surrounded by darkness, when the waves are rolling high and all seems lost, the child of God knows this is not the end. It may be gloom now, but it will be glory later on (see Psalm 30:5). James says someday the one who has suffered “will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

James says the person who endures and overcomes in this kind of test (sometimes called a “temptation”), yet still believes God is allowing it for a definite reason, this Christian will be awarded “the crown of life.” Testing of any kind tends to create pessimism, bitterness, and cynicism; it’s easy for people to get caught in the “why?” or “why me?” loop. But God tests us to grow our faith and develop our patience, and He has something very specifically in mind for the future.



People who have suffered a great deal often enjoy a closer, more loving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Suffering causes them to look forward to the day when the Lord welcomes them into His presence, when He will reward them with the crown of life.

Scripture mentions a half dozen different crowns given as *rewards* to believers. The crown of life is a reward for those who endure trials in their lives, yet they still love the Lord. Testing will either drive you to the Lord or it will drive you away from Him. So many Christians become bitter when life gets hard. But keep thinking about the moment you will stand in the Lord's presence. Don't let the very thing your heavenly Father was using to develop your character and to bring you into a loving relationship with Him make you bitter. We will each endure trials, but if you emerge from them, still loving the Lord Jesus Christ, then there's going to be a reward waiting for you.

Someday you will stand before Jesus Christ—everyone will. If you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, you will stand before God at the Great White Throne judgment that will determine your eternal destiny. If you do know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you will go beforehand to the Bema seat of Christ. Here, your life will be evaluated to determine rewards. It is here you will be awarded the crown of life which Jesus Himself offers to those who, after they have endured the testings of this life, *love* Him.

People often blame God for many things for which He is not responsible. Does God tempt you to do evil? James says no. God can't be tempted with evil, nor does He tempt with evil (vv. 13-14). God tests, He doesn't tempt. Jesus was tested to prove we have a Savior who could not sin. God cannot be tempted with sin, and God will not tempt you with sin. There is no evil in God. In Him all is goodness and all is light and all is right (see 1 John 1:5).

From the beginning of time, mankind has blamed God for his own faults and failures and filth. Remember the Garden of Eden? Adam blamed God for tempting him to sin, then he blamed the woman (whom God gave him), and then she blamed the serpent (see Genesis 3:12-13). But who causes you to sin? You choose it. Who draws you away to do evil? Who makes you yield to evil temptation? God doesn't. The devil doesn't. *You* are responsible. Every person is drawn in our own way to sin.

One person may be tempted to drink. Another may be tempted to overeat. Another may be tempted in the realm of sex. The problem is always within the individual. No outside influence can make us sin. The trouble is within us;

it's our old nature. We may try to rationalize it away, but the Bible calls them *sins*. James says it's your own lust (an uncontrolled longing) that draws you away into sin. Our old nature joins with the outward temptation, and we act on it. On its own, temptation is not sin. But when sin in our hearts becomes an action, our fellowship with God is broken—and that is a death (see 1 John 1:6).

“Do not be deceived,” James warns. The word “deceived” here means to wander or to stray, like the lost sheep the Lord Jesus said the shepherd went after. *“Don’t wander. Don’t think that somehow you can get by with sin.”* If you have never been born again, you are a habitual and perpetual sinner who doesn’t have a line of communication with God. If you can live in sin and enjoy it, you are not a child of God—it’s just that simple.

Test your own heart today. Ask the Lord to show you if there’s anything between Him and you (Psalm 139:23).

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**NEXT: What happens when you obey God’s Word?**

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4. The process which ends with wisdom begins with patience, but patience has to grow. Are there areas of your life where you are resisting growing in patience?

5. Wisdom is so important that we can never just rely on our own. Who do you know who has wisdom you can turn to when you need it?

6. Trials will come. What can you do before they arrive to help make sure they produce patience in your life rather than anger and bitterness?

7. James tells us that, when we sin, we have only ourselves to blame. He reminds us of Adam blaming God and then Eve for his sin. If you could ask Adam, what reason do you think he would give for blaming Eve?

## LESSON 2

# EVERY GOOD GIFT



Begin with prayer



Read **James 1:19-27**



Listen at [TTB.org/James](https://www.TTB.org/James) to **James 1:19-22**, **James 1:22-25**, and **James 1:25–2:2**

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It's been the custom down through the centuries to blame God for such things as tornadoes, earthquakes, and floods ("acts of God"). But if you have a *good* gift, it also came from Him. Count your many blessings today: The sunshine, the rain, the cloudy day, the bright day, the green grass, the water you drink, and the air you breathe. We really don't understand how good He is.

In fact, it's God's will that every person be born again—that's how good He is. It's our choice whether we are or not. When God's will joins with our will, we will be born again. When you willingly come to Him and believe His Word and accept Jesus Christ as your Savior, you will be born again.

And that's just the beginning. After we're saved, we need to be quick to hear the Word of God. This is how you will grow in your Christian life. You take something that is living, powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword (see Hebrews 4:12) and then listen to the Spirit of God who indwells you and who wants to teach it to you. The Creator of this universe and the Redeemer of lost sinners wants to talk to you—so be alert and quick to listen.

James also tells the child of God to be "slow to speak." God gave us *two* ears and *one* mouth—there must be a very definite reason for that. Talking too

much puts us in danger. Next, be “slow to wrath.” Don’t argue about stupid stuff. An uncontrolled temper wrecks your testimony. You may feel you are angry because you are defending the faith, but the wrath of man simply does not work with the righteousness of God. Don’t kid yourself that you are angry for His sake, because He’s not angry—He’s in the saving business.

God is pleased when we leave the “filthiness” of the flesh behind us and instead receive with a humble spirit the Word of God, which is rooted in our hearts. This is the Word that introduced you to Jesus your Savior. It is also the Word that will keep you from sin. The Word has already brought salvation to you; now it shows you how to live as a Christian. Salvation is in three tenses: You have been saved, you are being saved, and you will be saved.

The child of God can never get away from the Word of God. Every child wants to hear his father’s voice, especially if it’s comforting. Correction is OK, too, when it’s delivered with encouragement. If a Christian isn’t interested in the Word of God or doesn’t stay near it, they’re going to get into trouble.

James really likes to get practical with faith issues. Prove yourself to be a “doer of the word,” he says. Obey the Word, don’t just listen to it without really pondering what it means. Don’t fool yourself into thinking you’re following God if you ignore what He says.

The Bible is different from any other book. You can read most books to gain information, knowledge, intellectual stimulation, spiritual inspiration, amusement, or entertainment. But the Word of God *demands action*.

A book about history asks nothing of you. You can read literature, but you’ll have no imperatives, no declarations, and no explanations to follow. Science books make no demand on you whatsoever. A cookbook gives you a recipe, but it doesn’t say you have to cook. However, the Word of God is a command. It is a trumpet, an appeal for action. Here’s an example. John 3:36 says, “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” The message of the Lord Jesus Christ is (1) “repent,” (2) “come to Me,” and (3) “believe” (see Matthew 11:28 and Mark 1:15). The Word of God demands belief.

God isn’t asking anything of you until you become His child. But to those of us who have become children of God, He says, *do the Word*. God doesn’t ask the unsaved person to do anything at all; He wants to tell them that *He* has done something. God just asks the unsaved person to believe.

But we who know Him should hear the Word of God and then go do it. God intends the Word to produce creative action in us and to make for practical

application, exciting living, and a thrilling experience. If we are motivated by an inner desire and enjoy Spirit-filled living, we can enjoy life and all its thrills, and then enjoy Bible study equally as well—in fact, it will be thrilling to us.

We won't just hear the words, like we're just auditing the class. No, we'll be students of the Word. We'll take notes, go through exams, write papers, and be rewarded with a diploma. Faith leads to *action*.

It's too easy to fall into the trap of rationalizing our inaction and rationalizing our sin (see 1 John 1:8). Have you ever looked in a mirror, noticed the big glob of ketchup on your cheek, and then ignored it? James says if you don't do the Word, it's like you see a reflection of yourself in a mirror—the you as you really are—and yet do nothing about the flaws you see.

James says, in effect, *Take time in front of the mirror*. Give it your attention, be alert to the Word of God. Don't treat it casually. Instead, let God's Word remind you of Him and call you back into a relationship with Him.

God saves us by grace. He calls us to live in that grace, too. It's "the perfect law of liberty," James said. This isn't Moses' Law that other books of the Bible talk about. This is the law of faith and of love. The Lord said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15), and John says in his first letter, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3).

When you drive down a freeway, you notice all the traffic. If anyone wants the freedom to drive down that freeway, they had better obey the laws. The freedom we have in Christ is in obeying His laws of love and faith and grace. If we love Him, we'll want to obey them. But His laws aren't hard or rigorous. Your freedom doesn't entitle you to break the Ten Commandments. Those laws are for the weak, for the natural man. Laws are for lawbreakers: What to do, where to go, and how, with a punishment prescribed for those who break over. Honest citizens don't need the law.

Today God has called His children to a higher level. A child of God has a spiritual spontaneity, a high and lofty motive, an inspiration of God. The believer has no desire to murder. He lives above the law. He is now motivated by the love of the Savior, and he wants to obey Him. The more we read and study the Word, the more we will learn, we will love, and we will live. Joy fills and floods the soul. We are not like galley slaves, whipped and chained to a bench and doing that which we don't want to do.

If we are to live for God, then we need to know His Word. As a healthy, growing child of God, you keep learning what pleases Him.

Next, James tells you a specific way to please the Lord—and it may not be what you think. James uses the words “religious” and “religion” more than any other New Testament writer. The word “religion” comes from a Latin word which means “to bind back.” It means to go through a ritual or ceremony.

Many religions today have faithful, zealous followers. But Christianity is not a religion; it is a person, and that person is Jesus Christ—you either have Him or you don’t have Him. James says to live a pure life before God means to live out the Word. That’s the kind of religion that pleases the Lord. Christianity certainly ought to produce this kind of compassion and mercy. We need to practice a “religion of the street” where we are in contact with the world in a personal way, with tenderness and kindness and helpfulness.

But contact with the world doesn’t mean we should act like the world or let its ugly mark rub off on us. As believers, we are *in* this world but we are not *of* this world. Go ahead and touch those around you with love and kindness and grace, but be careful not to be sucked into its mold. You belong to Jesus.

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**NEXT: What genuine faith looks  
like in the life of a believer.**

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## LESSON 2



# FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Most Christians know they need to be immersed in the Word of God, but that doesn't mean it is easy to do. What do you need to change or do differently to be in the Word more than you are right now?
2. Being slow to speak isn't just a matter of verbalization, it has to be a change in mentality. And most of us find talking comes more naturally than listening. Who do you know who is a good listener? What can you learn from them?
3. Are there any practical steps you can take to put the command to be "slow to anger" into practice?



7. If you could go back and ask James, "In one sentence, what is the difference between a religion and Christianity?", what do you think his answer would be?

**The Creator of this  
universe and the Redeemer  
of lost sinners wants  
to talk to you—**

*so be alert and  
quick to listen.*



**THRU** the **BIBLE**

## LESSON 3

# FAITH ALIVE



Begin with prayer



Read **James 2**



Listen at [TTB.org/James](https://www.TTB.org/James) to **James 2:1-13** and **James 2:14-26**

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Both poverty and riches can be a curse. Proverbs 30:8 says, *Give me neither of them.* What then is God's solution to the problem of poverty?

God's war on poverty and riches does not march under the banner of the dollar, where millions are appropriated for relief. And it is not aimed primarily at the head or at the stomach, but at the heart. This is a war against class.

In this section, James talks about distinctions and divisions among believers brought about by money. *Don't say you love Jesus Christ and be a spiritual snob*, he says. *All believers are your family in the body of Christ, whatever their denomination.* There is a fellowship of believers—the rich, the poor, the common people, the high, the low, the bond and free, the Jew and the Gentile, the Greek and the barbarian, male and female. We are *one* when the Lord Jesus Christ is the common denominator. Friendship hangs over us like a banner.

Friendship and fellowship are the legal tender among believers. If you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ and another person belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, he is your brother. Furthermore, if a sinner comes into your church or

you otherwise come into contact with him, remember he is a human being for whom Christ died. He stands at the foot of the cross, just as you do.

Some people walk into church in fine clothes and lots of bling. They look like peacocks strutting their stuff. Others come in with torn, shabby clothing. James contrasts these two people at the extremes of the social ladder. Be careful not to tell the poor man to stand up in the rear and put the peacock down in front. Don't be partial in yourselves or act like a judge discerning motives. Who knows if the poor believer may be the most spiritually rich person in that church?

God has made it very clear from Genesis to Revelation that He has a special concern and consideration for the poor. They have been despised by the world. Their only hope is in Jesus Christ. When you mistreat the poor, you are blaspheming the name of Christ.

If you want to please God, obey Him and act responsibly. James makes it very clear what you are to do: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Moses' Law condemns discriminating between the rich and poor. Some will say, "Well, at least I didn't commit murder or adultery." But James writes that we are guilty of breaking the commandments no matter which one it is that we broke. We all stand before God as lawbreakers.

The Lord Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments.... This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 14:15; 15:12).

In addition to how we treat each other, God also tests us by our works, our actions. For generations, Bible teachers have argued that James' discussion of good works contradicts the apostle Paul's assertion that faith alone can save you (Galatians 2:16). But James and Paul are in perfect agreement; they are discussing the same subject from different viewpoints. They stand back-to-back, fighting opposite foes.

In that day, some religious people said you had to come to the Law to be saved. Paul answered that by saying only faith in Christ can save you. *Saving faith*—a faith which is genuine and real—will transform a person's life. If it doesn't, it was just an empty faith. James says the faith which saves you will produce works of faith. The faith that doesn't produce good works is phony and counterfeit. *Doing* follows *believing*. As John Calvin put it, "Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone."

James says the works you do are the fruit of your faith. Paul talks about the root of faith being Jesus alone; you can't ever be good enough to work your way into heaven. In spite of their different focuses, both Paul and James say that faith alone saves and saving faith shows up in your life by good works. This is faith alive!

You can tell when faith is genuine, just look at someone's life. James gives the practical illustration of a phony Christian who meets someone in need—whether it be for food or clothing. They bless the needy person with flowery words but send them on their way still naked and hungry. What good is that? There must be a vocation to go along with the vocabulary. You can say pious words and sound very spiritual, but unless you follow through with action, it means nothing. A living faith *produces* something—you can *identify* it.

You cannot say you are a child of God and live completely unto yourself. Let your actions speak for you. You are telling by your life whether your faith is genuine or not. Lip service is not the evidence of saving faith—even the demons believe. Saving faith produces living faith. Without evidence of a changed life, your faith is empty and futile, as far as the world is concerned.

James gives two illustrations of this from familiar Old Testament people.

Remember Abraham? (Of course, they would.) Both the apostle Paul and Genesis say that Abraham was saved by faith (see Genesis 15:6; 22:1-14). Was Abraham justified when he offered his son Isaac? *Did* he offer his son Isaac? No. Then what was Abraham's work of faith? His faith caused him to lift that knife to do a thing which he didn't believe God would ever ask him to do. But since God had asked him, he was willing to do it. He believed God would raise Isaac from the dead. Abraham never actually offered Isaac, because God provided a substitute, but he would have done it if God had not stopped him. What saved Abraham? He believed God.

The second person James described was Rahab, known as "the harlot"—hardly someone you would consider "religious." But Rahab also believed God and this faith saved her, as she proved with her actions. Rahab lived on the walls of Jericho at the time when the Israelite spies were planning on attacking the city. Rahab received the spies, hid them from her own people, then told them how to escape without being detected (see Joshua 2 and Hebrews 11:31). She turned her back on her old life and did something. She said in effect, *I will hide you because I believe God is going to give the people of Israel this land. We have been hearing about you for forty years, and I*



*believe God.* She was justified before God by her faith. However, before her own people and before the Israelites, she was justified by works.

Faith is the root, and the root produces the kind of fruit that the root itself is. If you have the root of a plum tree, it will grow and produce plums. If you have a living faith in God, you will produce godly fruit in your life. Faith without works is like a dead body in a morgue. But faith alive shows us in whom you believe.

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**NEXT: What our words say about us.**

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LESSON 3

 **FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION**

1. Applying James' words about friendship and fellowship means putting effort into relationships with other members of God's family. Who do you think the Holy Spirit might be leading you to pursue a relationship within the body of Christ?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Are a person's economic status and their level of spiritual maturity related? Why or why not?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Why are members of the family of God so susceptible to the temptation to discriminate against others, even fellow believers?



7. If you were James, would you have used Rahab as an example in your letter? Why or why not?

**Faith alone saves, and  
saving faith shows up in  
your life by good works.  
This is faith alive!**



**THRU**the**BIBLE**

## LESSON 4

# GOD BUGS YOUR CONVERSATION



Begin with prayer



Read **James 3**



Listen at [TTB.org/James](https://www.TTB.org/James) to **James 3:1-4** and **James 3:5-18**

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God has the right to bug, or listen in on, our conversations. He has had that right for a long time and has heard everything you have ever said. The average person says about 30,000 words every day. That's a decent length book. In a lifetime, we could fill a library with our words.

This is just one of the ways God tests if our faith is genuine. Previously we've studied how God watches how we act when we're going through trials, how we treat people, especially the poor, and how much our lives blossom with good works. All this is evidence of saving faith.

James now has quite a bit to say about the use and abuse of the tongue—the words we say and what they say about us.

James has already told us he was going to get to this. In James 1:26 he said that if anyone thinks he's religious yet can't control what he says, then he's fooling himself. James also told us we have two ears, and God gave them to us so we can hear twice as much as we can say.

The tongue is the most dangerous weapon in the world. More deadly than the atom bomb, no one makes a careful inspection of it. Someone has put it like this: "Thou art master of the unspoken word, but the spoken word is master of you." Once you have said them, they are beyond your control.

Teachers should be especially mindful of this because they have a greater responsibility in that they are in grave danger of teaching the wrong thing. Listen up, those who teach God's Word: God will judge us for what we teach and the way we teach. The more opportunity you have to give out the Word of God, the greater is your responsibility to God Himself.

We all stumble and fail, but the mature, godly person is "able also to bridle the whole body." In other words, if he can control his speech, he can control his entire body—in fact, his whole life. The tongue lifts man from the animal world. A person can put thought into words; he can express himself; he can be understood; he can communicate on the highest level. The tongue is a badge we wear—it identifies us. It is the greatest index to life, the table of contents of our lives.

James will first deal with the unbridled and unrestrained tongue. Just imagine if everything you said this past month was recorded and shared with the world. Now you're ready to listen to the various ways James describes someone who doesn't have control over what they say.

First, James describes how to control your speech like a horse being controlled by a bridle in its mouth. The bridle bits are not big, but they can hold a high-spirited horse in check and keep him from running away.

Large ships are also controlled by a little rudder that few people even see. A fierce storm may drive a ship, but a little rudder can control it. The tongue can also change the course of our lives. People have been ruined by gossip.

The tongue is more dangerous than a runaway horse or a storm at sea. The tongue is like the one little animal no zoo has in captivity, no circus can make it perform, no man can tame it. Only a regenerate tongue in a redeemed body, a tongue that God has tamed, can be used for Him.

The tongue is like a spark that lights a forest fire. Our words can burn through a church, burn through a community, burn through a town, and even burn through a nation. It might be little, but it can defile the whole body.

Of course, fire has been one of the greatest friends of man and nature. Some historians say civilization began when man discovered fire. When it is under control, it warms our bodies, it cooks our food, and it generates power to turn the wheels of industry. When it's under control, fire is a blessing; when it is out of control, it is devastating. It can be a cure, or it can be a curse.

You remember how Simon Peter's tongue betrayed him? On the night before Jesus went to the cross, Peter spoke affirming words to the Lord, and later



that night he denied he knew Him. But on the Day of Pentecost, what was it the Lord used? It was Simon Peter's blundering, stumbling, bumbling tongue. He was a man set on fire for God.

Isn't it interesting that Romans 10:9 says that to be saved we are to confess the Lord Jesus *with our mouths* and believe *in our hearts* that God raised Jesus from the dead? In other words, our tongues and our hearts are to sing a duet in tune. Even the Lord Jesus Himself says our mouths will speak whatever the heart is full of (Matthew 12:34). What is in the heart will come out sooner or later.

With our words, we can both praise God or blaspheme God. We can be two-faced, double-minded, and forked-tongued. We can say both good and bad. James reminds us that no fountain on this earth will give both sweet and bitter water, nor will a tree bear both figs and olives. But our words can also reveal genuine faith. We testify for God. We can speak wisdom. That is, if our hearts are right with God.

If we aren't right with God, our words can stir up bitterness. James contrasts the tongue of the foolish believer and the tongue of the wise believer. First, it's important to note that an uncontrolled tongue raises the question whether or not a person even is a child of God. Can a genuine believer curse six days a week and then sing on the worship team on Sunday? Can he tell dirty jokes all week at work and then teach about the love of Jesus to a Sunday school class? Your tongue can do either one, but if it does both, it will stir up strife. A lying tongue is one that denies the Lord during the week by its conversation.

This kind of strife isn't from God but is "earthly, sensual, demonic"—and it's confusing. Scripture makes it very clear God isn't the author of confusion. The confusion we find in the world today is brought about by the work of the devil who uses our little tongues to cause so much trouble. The wickedness of the world is not merely human, it's human plus the evil supernatural from below, causing divisions and strife in our homes and churches. This is pure worldliness, as we'll discover in our next study. Worldliness in the church produces the cults, denominations, factions, divisions, and cliques. It fosters a spirit of rivalry and jealousy. This is "earthly"—that is, it is confined to the earth. It is "sensual"—that is, psychological. And then it's demonic.

"But the wisdom that is from above is first *pure*"—that is, it's not mixed or diluted. It comes directly from God. It's "peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy."

These are the fruits of faith. Works of faith develop meekness or humility, and

humility leads to submission. You cannot have peace without this righteous chain.

How do we discern genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? We've learned that *saving faith* produces good works and perseverance through trials, and it also affects how we treat people and how to control what we say. These all clearly point to genuine faith, obvious in the life of someone who follows Jesus Christ.

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**NEXT: The solution to worldliness and war.**

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4. Why should teachers pay special attention to the words of James about the tongue?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. James talks about a sinful tongue being “unrestrained.” What are some practical ways you can restrain your tongue?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. How can we tell if the words we want to say are spiritual or earthly?

7. If you were the one writing the book of James, would you have written this much on the tongue? Why or why not?

## LESSON 5

# THIS IS WAR



Begin with prayer



Read **James 4**



Listen at [TTB.org/James](https://www.TTB.org/James) to **James 3:14–4:4** and **James 4:5-17**

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What is worldliness?

Some say worldliness is a matter of how you entertain yourself. What kind of movies you go to, if you drink, etc. The book of James wouldn't agree.

Others say worldliness is the kind of crowd you run with. If you are with a worldly crowd who engages in these things, then you are worldly. Or is it the way you dress? The words you say? If you learn to throw in "Praise the Lord" and "Hallelujah" at the right times, perhaps you're not so worldly.

The worldly person must be the one who wants to make money to the exclusion of all else and who neglects the church. Or maybe the worldly person doesn't go to church at all but spends their Sundays on the golf course, fishing, boating, or watching their favorite team play baseball.

None of these define worldliness. They may not be good practices and might be sins of the flesh—but they're not worldliness. They may be symptoms of the disease, but nobody ever died of symptoms—they die of the disease. These are simply evidence of the deeper, actual problem.

James, the writer of this letter, says worldliness is strife and envy which produce "confusion and every evil thing" (3:16). And what do these produce? Wars and fighting. Big, global conflict as well as that little skirmish you had

at church last week. You wanted to have your own way. So did they. The “desires for pleasure that war in your members” speak to the overwhelming demands of the members of your body for satisfaction.

James makes it very clear: Selfish desires lead to war. What James describes here is the spirit of the world. This spirit of strife is worldliness, and it represents your old nature. When the spirit of the world gets into the church, you have a worldly church. It may be bad on the global battlefield, but it's just as bad inside some churches and inside some hearts.

The dog-eat-dog competition in the business world—worldliness. Political parties split, and one group is pitted against another—worldliness. As capital and labor meet around the conference table—worldliness. In the social world, some climbers on the social ladder step on the hands of others. In your neighborhood, one family doesn't speak to another. Then this same spirit gets into the church. *That* is worldliness.

So what is the cure for this disease of worldliness? Surprisingly, it's prayer. It's expressing your faith in God. The apostle John says it's our continuing, persistent faith in Jesus the Son of God that is the victory that conquers and overcomes the world (see 1 John 5:4). The answer is to trust God absolutely, go to Him in prayer and commit to Him what's on your heart. When you find strife and envy there, talk to Him about it.

Many of us go to the Lord to tell Him how good we are, but that doesn't help anything. Tell Him where you need help, don't ask Him for something selfish. If all you want is your own way, flirting with the world every chance you get, you end up with God as your enemy. This is the way the world works: Take by force what you want, by hook or by crook lay hold of it, be envious and jealous of other folk, and cause strife.

James says the solution to the problem of worldliness is to go to the Lord Jesus and tell Him about our problem, tell Him everything. God is overloaded with grace. We can't even fathom the depth of His grace.

Grace has been defined as unmerited favor, but it's really love in action. God didn't save us by love, He saved us by grace. He has so much of it. God gives abundant grace—but we must carry it around in a humble container. We also must be ready to submit to Him.

When you go to a doctor for medical care, you submit yourself to him. Submit yourself also to God. We are surrounded by evil influences. We can't resist the devil in our own strength. Temptation, as we have seen, is on every

hand. But God supplies His grace as needed, and His supply never runs out. *"This is yours,"* God says. *"You are to lay hold of it."*

God is a gentleman. He only comes as far as the door of your heart. He knocks, and you have to let Him in. But draw near to Him and He will draw near to you. When you've sinned, get clean again by confession and repentance. If you've been unfaithful, get your heart made true once more. Don't ever treat sin lightly. Mourn over your sin.

The devil will not get to you unless you get too far away from God. A wolf never attacks a sheep as long as it is with the rest of the sheep and with the shepherd. And the closer the sheep is to the shepherd, the safer it is. Our problem is that we get too far from God.

Humble yourself before the Lord, and He will lift you up. *He* will. Too often we think we are smart or strong or skilled. We think we are good enough, but God says we have no good in us. Nothing in us attracts Him but only our great need draws Him to us. If we are willing to humble ourselves and get down where He can lift us up, He will.

Don't bad-mouth each other; don't act like you're the judge. If you judge your brother, you put yourself above the law and treat it with contempt. Seriously, who do you think you are? When you talk about your brother, you put yourself in God's place.

Two types of people seek to take the position of God. One is the sinner who says, "I'm good enough to be saved. Lord, I don't need your salvation. You just move over and I'll sit beside you. I am my own savior." Then there's the other one who sits in judgment on everyone else. James says judgment is God's business (see also John 5:22). We are to judge ourselves and go to God in humility.

We also like to make big plans for the future, but James reminds us we don't know what tomorrow holds.

Human life lived apart from and without God is the most colossal failure in God's universe. Many of us never learn to really live down here on earth. Good thing our lives are in God's hand. We can't brag about a thing. We even mess up and don't even know it. If you know you should do a certain thing or help a certain cause—and you do not do it, *that* is sin.

Our lives are brief. Let's not spoil it with strife and envy. Come to Jesus Christ, put your life down before Him, and really start living. He wants to give you a life that's out of this world.



**NEXT: What the Bible has to say  
about the rich and the poor.**

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4. If grace is love in action, who are some people you need to show grace to?

5. The way to resist temptation is to submit to God. What are some ways you can intentionally submit to God in your life?

6. Do you know anyone who is an example of humility in your life? How can you follow their example?

7. Think about what life was like in the first century. Do you think worldliness is more of a temptation now, back then, or is it the same? Why?

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God supplies His  
*grace as needed,*  
and His supply  
*never runs out.*

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## LESSON 6

# RICH MAN, POOR MAN



Begin with prayer



Read **James 5**



Listen at [TTB.org/James](https://www.TTB.org/James) to **James 5:1-6** and **James 5:5-20**

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Being rich isn't the problem. But neither does being poor make you more godly. The lesson isn't in the coin, it's the heart, says James. The Bible doesn't condemn money—only the love of it (see 1 Timothy 6:10).

In the Roman world of James' day, there was no middle class. There was only the filthy rich and the filthy poor. Most of the Christians came from the very poor and slave classes.

James addresses now our wrong relationship to money, how we get it, and what we do with it after we've got it. The Lord Jesus Christ had a great deal to say about money. He taught three parables which help illustrate James' point.

Jesus tells the story of the poor man, Lazarus the beggar, who sat at the rich man's gate and what happened when they both died. In another parable, the Lord Jesus told about a rich man who hoarded his money, built big barns, and never gave a thought about eternity. The Lord called him a fool. In Jesus' third parable, the unjust steward teaches us that God holds us responsible not only for how we make money but also for how we spend it.

When James talks about money, he warns the rich to see money properly—a lesson appropriate for every generation. The rich of James' day lost all their

wealth when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70, just a couple decades after they received this letter from James.

But at Jesus' second coming, all of the world's wealth will mean nothing anyway. Regardless, riches are uncertain in any age. You always face a danger of a panic, a crash, a drought, or a depression. This is the way it's been since people started minting money.

*"Don't you know that your silver and gold are going to rust?"* Why? Because we are going to rust out, too. Death separates a rich man from his money. God gave us wealth to be dispersed, not hoarded.

Just like in Jesus' parables, James condemns the godless rich not only for hoarding money but for making it in a dishonest way. They robbed the poor to get rich. They made their riches by stepping on the hands of those beneath them (see also Proverbs 22:7). But be assured, God may do nothing about this now, but He says you are a fool. If you've decided to live for this life only, be sure to live it up now, because He will judge you in the future.

There's a lesson here for the rich man who is a Christian. How big is your bank account? If Jesus should come right now, would you be willing to let Him look into your safety deposit box? He'll do that someday. How are you making use of your riches? Just remember that riches never bring mankind happiness.

The Word of God has a lot to say about when Jesus Christ sets up His kingdom on earth. The poor are going to get a right and honest deal for the first time in history. All of the prophets emphasized this (see Isaiah 11:4 as an example). Christ Himself made it clear in the Sermon on the Mount (which will be the law of His kingdom) that He intends to give the poor a square deal under His reign (see Matthew 6:19-24).

Today, no political party will surprise us with a good deal for the poor. You can't look to mankind, to people who grasp for power and money, and expect them to act righteously. Our only hope is in Jesus Christ. *"Be patient. The harvest is coming,"* James says.

Throughout Scripture we are taught we should live in the light of the coming of Christ. James tells us to get our affairs straightened out before He comes, because if we don't, He will. This is a good word to each of us.

*"Look at the prophets,"* James says. They are an example to us in how they were patient even in suffering. Job was an impatient man, but he learned patience. At the end of Job's trial, you'll see he learned a great lesson about how compassionate and generous the Lord was with him.

Since the Lord is compassionate, let your promise to Him be like an oath—like you were in a courtroom and swore an oath to tell the truth. All your conversation with others ought to be like that.

And speaking of conversations, your prayer life with God ought to have great passion and enthusiasm, too. James was a great man of prayer. He was nicknamed, “Old Camel Knees” because, having spent so much time on his knees in prayer, his knees were calloused.

*“What do you do when someone is sick among you?”* James asks. Call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him. That’s the first thing. Then they are to anoint him with oil in Jesus’ name. James is practical—get some medicine, then get people to pray. The prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

We are to confess our sins to God and our faults to each other. If you have injured someone, then you ought to confess that to them. But confess your sins only to the Lord. First John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins [to God], He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Man cannot forgive sins; neither can any clergyman forgive sins—only God can do that.

But man’s prayers can do a lot. The prayer of a person living right with God is powerful. Another great man of prayer, Elijah, a regular guy just like any of us, prayed hard that it wouldn’t rain, and it didn’t for three and a half years. Elijah wasn’t a superhero; he was just like us, but he prayed with passion, and God answered him.

Then as a closing thought, James asked them if they knew an unsaved person who had not yet come to the truth. Don’t write them off. Go after them. It doesn’t matter if they’re blatant, obvious sinners. When they come to a saving knowledge of Christ, their sins—though they be great—will be covered by the blood of Christ. The wonder of justification by faith is that once God has pardoned our sins, they are gone forever—removed from us as far as the east is from the west.

This is a wonderful conclusion for this very practical Epistle of James.







7. If you could go back and ask James why he ended his epistle talking about pursuing unsaved people who needed the truth, what do you think his answer would be?

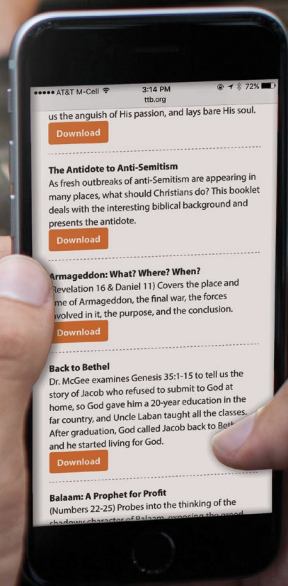
A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are both gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a park-like setting.

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