

THE LETTER FROM JAMES

FAITH THAT WORKS

Sermon Notes

by
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These notes have been produced from my personal study of James' letter assisted by William Barclay's *'The Daily Study Bible'*, *'Early Christian Letters'* by Tom Wright, various study Bibles and some of the multitude of resources available in *e-Sword*.

This is not intended to be an academic work, but originally written as a sermon series. It is my hope that the reader may gain a deeper and practical insight into God's Word.

FAITH THAT WORKS

Jas 1:1 CEV From James, a servant of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ. Greetings to the twelve tribes scattered all over the world.

INTRO:

The "General Epistles" at the back of this great collection of books generally don't get as much of a look at as Paul's letters do. That's why I wanted to study them. In order to get the most out of it and to understand as much as possible the Author's meaning and intent, we need to understand its context. This means knowing who wrote it, who was intended to read it, when it was written and why it needed to be read – among other things. I'm not intending to go into all of that in great detail, but I would like to cover a few basics.

AUTHOR:

There are a few blokes called James mentioned in the NT. However, for this letter to have the authority that it does, it would have to have been either Zebedee's son (John's brother), or Jesus' half brother. Seeing as James the son of Zebedee was martyred by Herod fairly early in the piece, it is pretty much universally accepted that the author of this letter was James, one of Jesus' half brothers (Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55).

Although at one time, as John records in John 7:5, Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him, by the opening chapters of Acts, (1:14) we see them joining with those who believed. Paul records in 1 Corinthians 15:7 that the Lord showed Himself to James in particular, which would go a long way to explain the change in his attitude. He who had been hostile and unsympathetic to Christ became His life-long servant even to the point of a martyr's death.

There has also been some debate as to the quality of Greek used in writing the original text. James was certainly not a speaker of Greek as a first language, yet the book was written in very good Greek. In considering this fact, we need to realise that this letter is also written in the common form of a sermon of the time. Jewish preaching was deliberately disconnected – lingering for any length of time on any one topic was likely to cause the audience to lose interest. One name for preaching was *charaz* – literally 'stringing beads'. James is a string of moral truths and exhortations, strung together as pearls on a necklace. It is very possible that this letter was a sermon transcribed and translated and distributed to the church at large so that many could benefit from it

RECIPIENTS:

It's important to know to whom James was writing because that will put into context what he says. For while some things are universal, there are certain cultural things that vary even among people with the same language. Consider how some nationalities just don't 'get' Aussie humour. It needs to be in context to be understood.

James was responsible for the church in Jerusalem. Even if not, he was certainly someone held with a great deal of respect. It was to him that Peter sent news of his escape from prison (Acts 12:17); it was James who presided over the council in Jerusalem when admission of gentiles into the church was debated (Acts 15); when Paul brought the collection from the gentile churches (Acts 21:18-25) it was brought to James.

No doubt because of his responsibility for the church in Jerusalem, this letter is addressed to "The twelve tribes scattered over the world". James was not writing to people who had turned away from paganism, idolatry or godlessness to follow Christ. Rather, he wrote to people who had been following a set of rules in order to get right with God, but had turned from this to rely on Faith in God's provision for reconciliation. That means that we need to see the contents of this letter with 'Jewish eyes', if at all possible. That is not to say that much will be irrelevant. On the contrary – this letter is very relevant to those who have been brought up with a knowledge of God. While

Paul's ministry was to people who had no prior knowledge of God at all, James would have been working among people who grew up knowing, indeed living the Old Testament. The accounts of Israel's walk with God would have been common knowledge, the expectation of The Anointed One who would rescue them would have been in everyone's heart. This is not at all unlike where we stand today. Many of us have been brought up in Christian homes, many of us had Bible stories read to us as bed time stories – some may even have learnt to read from a children's Bible.

That puts us in a very special position. It is a position of great responsibility. What do we do with this great treasure that we have?

CANONICITY:

It took some time for this letter to be accepted as a genuine and valid part of our scriptures. Once its authorship was beyond doubt, acceptance came. Luther had some issues with it, though acknowledged that it contains "many excellent passages". This was due to the lack of mention of Christ and the emphasis of works rather than grace.

CONTENT:

So James has copped a bit of flak in the past for being too 'works oriented'. That is, he has insisted that believing God in and of itself is not enough to save. Is James saying that faith is irrelevant to our salvation? Does he contradict Paul's teaching? Clearly, Paul insisted that there was nothing we could do that would achieve our rescue – [Ephesians 2:8-9](#) confirms that:

8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. **9** Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

Yet that is not all. The passage in Ephesians goes on:

10 For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Paul then taught that we have good stuff to do, that God has a whole bunch of good stuff set aside especially for you to do. But wait, there's more in [Romans 6:1-2](#):

1 Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? **2** Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?

There is an expectation that a New Life in Christ produces a change in thinking and behaviour. James puts it like this:

14 What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? **15** Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, **16** and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

One thing that is consistent in the teaching of these two Apostles is that acceptance of God's underserved love (Grace) through simply believing Him (Faith) produces a change in lifestyle and a practical demonstration to others of that change. If the evidence is not there, it must be questioned whether that faith is truly alive or not. As James says:

17 So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

If I tell my wife that I love her, that's a good thing, right? What if my behaviour doesn't match up with my words? It doesn't have to be as blatant as verbal or physical abuse. If I put my needs ahead of hers, if I don't help grate the cheese when she asks, or deal with the kids when they muck up – those things speak far clearer than any words I utter. That's something that God knows – in [Romans 5:8](#):

NASB. But God *demonstrates* His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Faith, like love, is a doing word. They are not passive, they require action on our part or they are not truly alive and real. Love that does not reach out without conditions to meet a need is not Love. Faith that does not result in action is not Faith.

There must be genuine evidence that what we believe is real, that it has made a real difference in the way we live. The Religious Establishment of Jesus' day was filled to the brim with knowledge - they knew what God had said word for word! We too can have all the training and knowledge there is, but what difference does that make to our lifestyle? Is there anything about how we live that is different from those around us who don't know or claim to follow Jesus? Sadly, far too often there is not.

People tend to swing between extremes. We tend to want to do it all ourselves (rescue by our own efforts) or we swing to the opposite pole and expect God to do everything so to the point of us not needing to change our lifestyle one bit. The truth, as usual, is found in the balance. God does what we cannot do – pays the debt owed and gives us His mind – while we do what we can, motivated by a grateful love and a changed way of thinking to show that same love to others.

By God's gracious, undeserved love we have been rescued from slavery and death, through believing God's promise - through faith. It is Faith that is fully convinced without wavering that God will do as He promised. It is Faith that produces a change in the boundaries of our behaviour. It is Faith that works.

1:1-18 Faith That Endures

"Nothing in the world can take the place of Persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent." [Calvin Coolidge]

Real Faith, Faith that works, empowers us to hang in there, to persist, to endure, giving both the strength and wisdom required. In fact it can empower us to endure many things that before we actually face them we would consider impossible to pass through.

1:2-4 Trials are inevitable

Trouble, testing, trials – no matter what you call them, they are to be expected.

1Pe 4:12-13 NLT Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. (13) Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in His suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing His glory when it is revealed to all the world.

When going through difficult times, we must remember that we are not above our Master. If Christ was subject to "Fiery Ordeals" then we must expect that we will face them also. Sharing in Christ's sufferings mean that we will also share in His Glory.

The image Peter used in this letter is one of smelting metal – removing the impurities and turning it into something useful and precious. I can't help but to draw on the similarities that this has with my current trade. We use heat to alter the properties of a metal to make it stronger and more durable. Yet when I heat treat metal, I have to prove that it meets the standard specified in the repair manual or drawing. I do this by recording the temperature and time that it is heated for as well as its hardness and conductivity. It is both the process of the treatment and the tests carried out that prove that product is serviceable. We do not put a new aeronautical product into service until it has passed its tests.

Likewise, there is a process that causes growth and tests that we are subjected to that demonstrate that we have achieved the standard required by the Design Engineer. God will use us as soon as we are willing but full use will only come after passing the trials.

Trials can be overcome.

Joh 16:33 NLT I have told you all this so that you may have peace in Me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."

The word for "trials and sorrows" in this text is the Greek word for "pressure". When an hydraulic tube is manufactured, it is tested with pressure several times its normal operating pressure before being placed into service. This is to ensure that it will not fail while in use. I believe that God does a similar thing with us. He will allow us to be tested beyond the normal range to prove to us that He can be trusted to bring us through and to prove to ourselves that we can endure. Being under pressure is to be expected, yet Christ urges us to not fear the pressure, but to face it with courage. Why? It is because He has overcome the World. That is to say Christ Jesus has already successfully negotiated anything this life can throw at us. That would include unrelenting pressure at work and sleepless nights. Never forget that it is heat and pressure that turns coal into diamonds.

Trials produce strength.

The quickest way to build fitness and strength on a bike is to ride up hills. While it is far easier to ride on flat ground it does not produce the same kind of strength and endurance that the hills will. There is also the pay off that comes with the descent – nothing compares to the terrifying exhilaration of hurtling down the road in excess of 70 km/h! There is an obvious parallel here to

testing times that come with life's difficulties. Yes they are hard, yes they are tiring – physically, mentally and spiritually, but they produce strength and an ability to endure that nothing else can.

Just as riding through the hills will bring both rapid descents and grueling climbs, so too in life the tough times are often close to the good times. Trust the One who knows the road. He is there to share the thrilling times as well as the tough times. "If Jesus isn't Lord when you're sick, He don't deserve to be Lord when you're skipping rope".

Trials produce maturity.

There is a progression from trials that test or prove faith to endurance and on to perfection - or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, 'Grown up' instead of perfect. Maturity comes after the tough times. It is only through a heap of training and practice that an athlete of any kind is in a position to win a championship. They need to have the best training, the toughest tests and be kitted out with the best equipment.

In speaking of maturity, I'm not just talking about being older. Generally, in a New Testament context, the term "perfection" or "maturity" equates to "completeness" – fully trained, fully equipped, proven in contest ready to be deployed. Those that have been through difficult stuff are in a position to mentor (or disciple) those who are struggling through similar issues. We are obligated by Christ's Love to equip others of our family-in-Christ with the tools they need to not only survive whatever fiery ordeal they are going through, but to help them to learn how to benefit from it.

1:5-8 Wisdom is available to find a way through.

Now, my head of grey hair does not guarantee either my maturity or my wisdom. Although I could argue that the stresses involved in achieving both are what sent me grey. However, there is One Source of both of these things:

Pro 2:6 NLT For the LORD grants wisdom! From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.

The testing we endure helps us to 'grow up' so that we are 'not lacking anything'. However, if you do lack something, then ask for it! Wisdom is born out of experiencing God's provision and direction through these dark and difficult legs of your life journey. God is not a meany. He will not get angry with you or tell you off or insult you when you ask Him for what you need. His generosity and graciousness, as shown in verse 5, give us confidence to ask and the certainty of an affirmative answer.

There are few things as valuable as wisdom. There are few things that can give you what you need to find your way through the maze of this life.

Pro 4:5-7 NLT Get wisdom; develop good judgment. Don't forget my words or turn away from them. (6) Don't turn your back on wisdom, for she will protect you. Love her, and she will guard you. (7) Getting wisdom is the wisest thing you can do! And whatever else you do, develop good judgment.

Or as one translation put it, 'In all your getting, get wisdom'. No amount of riches, or talent or education or genius is worth what Wisdom can give you. Seeing as that comes from the wisest man who ever lived it's worth taking on board.

Single-minded determination is required.

In order to do something really well, you need to focus on just one thing. The same applies to achieving any specific goal. Single-minded determination – that is what I think Calvin Coolidge had in mind when he spoke those words I quoted at the start. This double-mindedness of verse 6 is a divided loyalty - belonging to God, but holding onto the old self-sufficient way of thinking. Being double-minded is doubting God's character and therefore doubting His desire or ability to give what we lack. Consider what Paul says of Abraham in [Romans 4:20-21](#):

Rom 4:18-22 NLT Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping—believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, "That's how many descendants you will have!" (19) And Abraham's faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah's womb. (20) Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. (21) He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever He promises. (22) And because of Abraham's faith, God counted him as righteous.

In spite of all the scientific impossibility of it, Abe was completely certain that what God had promised, He would fulfill. God has promised to finish what He started (Phil 1:6). He will do what is necessary to bring you to full maturity and give you the wisdom you need, so long as you continue to hang in there with Him.

1:9-12 Different Trials for different people

Those with means and those with none are both called to rejoice. Their circumstances are different and the ways that they are tested are different.

For those who have little by way of status, position or wealth in this world the lack of those very things is a constant trial. Yet God's economy is fundamentally different from ours. God values all people, but His special concern is for those who are powerless. It is when you have nothing to rely on but God that His power can be demonstrated in you. Not only that, but the equality that we have as family in Christ tears down barriers that would otherwise rob a man of any dignity.

What is it that endures? Certainly not riches! While we do not find much in scripture that overtly condemns wealth in itself, what we do see is the reliance on wealth instead of God condemned as sin. There is no certainty in wealth - just ask those who are relying on investments for income in a global recession! Those who have little by way of this world's wealth have little choice except to rely on The All Sufficient One. That's where we need to be, regardless of whether we are cashed up or not. That is a friendship that can endure.

Whether the trial is one of sustained poverty or a sudden scorching of wealth, we are called to hold firmly onto the God Who Is, to trust and rely on Him and to remain doing so. The approval process is an on-going, life-long thing - unlike my hardness testing. It is only after staying in the race and finishing it that the reward will be given.

Just as each one of us is unique, each one's experiences and periods of testing will be different. What matters then, is not what each individual trial is, but rather how you respond to each test.

1:13-18 God only gives good stuff.

Where do all these difficulties come from? Why is it that there is so much that stretches us almost to breaking point? Why do we keep falling over the same old temptations? Much of the problems we face are of our own making.

Job 5:6-7 NLT But evil does not spring from the soil, and trouble does not sprout from the earth. (7) People are born for trouble as readily as sparks fly up from a fire.

The trouble Eliphaz speaks of is 'wearing effort' – certainly an apt description of the trial Job experienced. There is the sense that people make their own trouble with bad choices and consequence of their own sin. James mentions this also in verses 13-15. It is not God who tempts us; it is we who get carried away with our own sinful desires. Never the less, God does not usually shield us from difficult times.

James is not writing specifically about the temptation of riches here, it is more than just that. Peter speaks of 'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life'; these three key areas are the kind of temptations to which James refers here. Far too often I try to blame everyone but me for my failure. Satan is not mentioned here, even though clearly he was involved in Job's test. Most of us do not warrant special attention from his fellow fallen. All he needs to do

is to keep promoting 'the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the boastful pride of life' on TV and junk mail and the Internet and we get sucked in.

The natural and logical result of doing your own thing rather than God's is a permanent end. There is no escaping it, just as surely as jumping up results in falling down. We need to be wise (v 5) in order to be alert to Satan's con and to differentiate between what appears to be good and what is Truly Good. The Deceiver's promises are empty - they produce nothing worthwhile or enduring. Even if at first glance they seem so good, all that they do is to strip away anything of worth.

In contrast to Satan's empty promises we have the Father who will always give what is best. God gives His Word that even when the path seems to be leading to emptiness it will certainly bring genuine fullness and life. He has been consistently Good, even when disciplining His children. The goodness of the gift is assured by the price paid to give it. 'He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?' (Rom 8:32).

In all that happens, we are assured that He will turn it to our good. Romans 8:28 give those of us who are His, the certainty that this is so. He chose us! God made a deliberate choice to make you someone highly valuable to Him – 'His prized possession'

In conclusion...

- We know that pressure and heat produce diamonds. In the same way, testing times produce valuable character in our lives.
- Wisdom is freely available to help you find a way through whatever maze you find yourself in.
- While we bring much trouble on to our own heads, God is consistently good and will only allow stuff that will do us good.
- God will do what He needs to do to in order to develop in you Christ's character and glory – even though this will involve sharing in Christ's sufferings.

1:19-27 Faith That Hears

Isa 42:19-20 NLT Who is as blind as My own people, My servant? Who is as deaf as My messenger? Who is as blind as My chosen people, the servant of the LORD? (20) You see and recognize what is right but refuse to act on it. You hear with your ears, but you don't really listen."

This is not a new problem – the people of God have been not hearing and not seeing for centuries. 'You observe, but do not pay attention to what you see; your ears let sound in, but you make no sense of the sound'. God speaks, through His written Word, through people speaking on His behalf, we are shown great need all around – opportunities abound to demonstrate God's love. In all this we are blind and deaf.

I am not immune from this problem. In fact, I am sure that God is trying to prod me into action on this point. God's goal for you is to cultivate Righteousness in your life. That provokes two questions – what is Righteousness and what is required to achieve it? Hopefully we may stumble across some kind of answer in James' letter.

1:19-21

God's choice to adopt us into His family (verse 18) places us in a relationship that produces a paradigm shift in how we function as people. To put that in every day language, it changes the boundaries of our thinking and behaviour. Or at least it should.

'Hearing Listening' is a phrase coined to describe true listening. That is not just recognising that someone has spoken, but taking the words to heart and acting them. Listening indicates an interest in what the person is saying. My natural tendency is to want people to focus on me because what I am saying is important – at least to me it is! Have you ever stopped mid-sentence when you realised that no one was listening and that no one even registered, or cares, that you had stopped? Philippians 2:4 calls us to look out for the interests of others and to hold them in a higher regard than ourselves. This means '*hearing listening*', real listening, motivated out of real love for the person. That kind of attitude will also guard against self-righteous anger by having your focus on others instead of yourself. By truly hearing their perspective, not just thinking that you know, you will be more focused on them, less obsessed with you, far more likely to deal justly.

'Slow to speak' is not only about listening to other people and their concerns, but it is about being still and listening carefully to the Father, hearing His heartbeat, doing the things that are on His heart for us to do.

Note that the call in verse 19 is 'be slow to get angry' rather than 'do not get angry'. There is a place for anger – the gospels record Jesus getting angry on more than one occasion. Jesus' anger was not because He had been put out, it was a correct and balanced response to injustice to others – either to other people or to God. Nevertheless, verse 20 says that our anger does not help to produce the righteousness that God wants in us. Understanding that God wants us to be righteous, we need to have some idea of what it is. The Complete WordStudy Dictionary has this to say:

In both the OT and NT, righteousness is the state commanded by God and standing the test of His judgment. It is conformity to all that He commands or appoints. Since God Himself is the standard of the believers, the righteousness of God means the righteousness which belongs to God or to oneself from God, or God-like righteousness. Thus righteousness, in general, is God's uprightness or standard, without reference to any particular form of its embodiment, to which man is expected to conform.¹

So then, Righteousness, is us setting aside what we think is best and doing what God has shown us to do. The same Greek word used here, *dikaiosúnē*, is able also to be translated as 'justice'. When I do my block, my sense and balance go out the window. How then can I effectively hear someone when I'm immersed in my own self-righteous anger? If I'm not hearing clearly, how can I deal with them justly? That kind of behaviour will help neither myself, nor the person to whom

¹ The Complete WordStudy Dictionary, G1343

my anger is directed, to better demonstrate God's uprightness or standards. 'Hearing Listening' and effective control of anger are both required to be genuinely teachable, to allow God to grow His Righteousness in you.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul refers to 'the harvest of your righteousness'. It is a crop that grows – it is not something achieved in an instant. In the parable of the sower, Jesus refers to God's Word as a seed that is planted. God wants to grow Christ's righteousness in you, but good seed can't grow in bad soil. Anger is not the only thing which stunts the growth of Righteousness. In order for God to achieve His desire for your Righteousness, you need to cast off moral filth and all the depravity that you have accumulated. Then you will be able to allow the seed of God's Word germinate in you – that seed which when fully grown, will save your very self. His Word cannot grow and produce fruit in you when these other ungodly attitudes remain.

I don't think that I need to detail what anger, moral filth and depravity are. However, there are some rather comprehensive lists in 1Cor 6:9-10 and Gal 5:19-21 that you can look at later if you are in anyway unclear. So we need to get rid of this kind of behaviour in order for the Holy Spirit to do His work in us, yet it is only when we submit to Him that anything can change. But there is also God's reputation to consider. All of these 'old self' actions bring dishonour to the One we represent. What kind of love is it that shows no concern for the other person's reputation? While love for God should be what drives us, the fact is that we have an *obligation* to the One who has rescued us at such cost:

Rom 6:1-4 NLT Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of His wonderful grace? (2) Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? (3) Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined Him in His death? (4) For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

As Paul points out here in Romans, even though we are saved by God's grace and not by the work of our own hands, *we do not have license to keep living the same old lifestyle*. These three things that James brings up – anger, filth and depravity – do not bring about what the Father wants to see come to fruit in you; they do not produce that same kind of attitude that Christ had; they do not give evidence of the Holy Spirit's ability to produce new life.

1:22-25

There's some good stuff there. Knowing what God has to say is foundational to following Christ. That's why it is important to spend time reading the Bible yourself, and talking with other followers of Jesus about what they have learned. However, knowledge in itself is not enough. Knowing that my face is dirty and unshaven will not get it clean. When my face is dirty and unshaven and I look in the mirror, I see what I have become throughout the day but I do not see the true "me". Yet if I just walk away and do nothing about what I see, then it won't result in any change. I might feel the stubble, but I'll forget what I look like – especially if I'm painted up with camouflage cream. There have been times when I have been so filthy for so long, that I can no longer even smell how bad I stink. That's when I need someone to remind me. That remains true in a moral sense as well as the physical sense.

Mirrors in the first century were not as we know them today. Most would have been polished metal or stone. While there may have been glass mirrors similar to modern ones, it is unlikely that they would have given as clear a reflection as we are used to. They would have certainly been available only to the very wealthy. James gives us an analogy of a quick look into an imperfect reflection. You wouldn't have opportunity to see any but the most significant blemish. There is no dwelling on what can be fixed, or how to fix it.

Rather than glancing at a piece of polished metal or stone at an imperfect reflection, we have a perfect mirror to gaze into. The 'perfect law that sets you free' will show up even the faintest blemish. Not only that, but it will show us how to deal with each one. Nevertheless, if we fail to

take the time to really look, then we will still not observe what we need to do. And of course, if you see what needs doing and do nothing, that will produce no change.

Yet we are no longer tied down to following a set of rules. Instead we are free to act as The Spirit directs the conscience. It is under His guidance and direction that we are able to throw off these things and free up His Word to grow in us. There is always determined action required on our part, even though it is He who enables us to grow.

1:26-27

Anger, Filth and Evil are expressed in various ways, but one of the most obvious is *speech*. Paul urges Timothy in the fourth chapter of his first letter to set an example in 'speech, conduct, love, faith and purity'. I believe that the order these have been listed here is significant. What we say is often what forms that all-important first impression that is backed up, or not, by our conduct. The motivation of our actions must be Love produced by Faith in God, which also produces purity – that is, the absence of the moral filth and superabundant depravity that James urges us to abandon. Ultimately, what you say and do, come out of what you are (Luke 6:43-45) therefore what you say, especially in times of stress when no one is around, give an accurate indication of quality of your worship.

'Controlling your tongue' also relates back to being 'slow to speak' in verse 19. In the same way that being slow to anger will help avoid inappropriate action, controlling your tongue and being slow to speak give you time to weigh your words and say what is necessary rather than the first hurtful thing that comes to mind

Over and over this passage seems to me to be about hearing and doing. We all know the hymn, 'Trust and Obey' – faith produces action, yet faith comes from hearing what God says. We hear Him, we trust what He says, and we act on it. Have you ever noticed how easy it is to hear what you want to hear or expect to hear? I'm sure that many marital disputes have their origins in this phenomenon. Perhaps just as seriously, many aircraft accidents over the years that have been through caused by pilots or controllers hearing what was expected instead of what was actually said. There is a danger for us if we act on what we want to hear or think we hear instead of what God has actually said. What God says specifically to any one of us, will not ever contradict what He has said through Scripture. Yet with my own desires, the rush of each day and the many voices of media clamoring for attention, there is the real risk that I will fail to hear God's still, small voice above the noise.

What is it that we need to be doing? What is the fruit that this Righteousness that God is cultivating in us should be producing? Whatever it is, it needs to be a genuine response born out of a radically regenerated life and not something that is forced out of a sense of duty. There are two things that James reckons demonstrate the genuine Metamorphosis which comes from a genuine Relationship with our Rescuer: Caring for those who are vulnerable or in distress and maintaining single-mindedness that refuses to allow the World's standards corrupt Christ's world-view.

True Worship will honour God in all areas – 'speech, conduct, love, faith and purity'. *What we say is important, but what we do is vital.* Our worship needs to be far much more than Sunday morning and a mid-week Bible study. Not that we ought to neglect those things, by any means, but at the very heart of our worship needs to be action that produces something lasting. We need to stand out from the world around us in the same way and for the same reasons that Jesus did, even if that leads us to the same end as Jesus had.

Finally:

We need to truly listen in order to hear both our fellow man and God. There needs to be a change in thinking and behaviour in us that frees up the Holy Spirit to shape us to the Father's standard. True Worship is something we *do* daily, that meets the needs of people we are connected to and produces a lasting change.

2:1-13 Faith That Shows Mercy (Grace)

1Co 1:26 CEV My dear friends, remember what you were when God chose you. The people of this world didn't think that many of you were wise. Only a few of you were in places of power, and not many of you came from important families.

Paul's observation is that not *many* matched this description, though it is likely that *some* were. Indeed The Body needs a variety of people with a variety of backgrounds and gifts to function properly. Christ wants all to be saved (1Tim 2:4), but the fact remains that following Christ demands much from those who are wise or wealthy by the standards of the World, yet offers much to those who are not. Perhaps that is why those who trust in their own wealth and wisdom are reluctant to come to the True Source of both. These days, in the 'West' at least, it seems that Christianity is the religion of the self-sufficient middle class, though perhaps my perception is skewed. We need a clear vision of what was required to be a first century follower of The Way. There are many who follow Jesus today who know poverty and persecution because of their Stand for Jesus, just not in Australia.

2:1-4

Are some people less valuable than others because they have less influence? Do we cast aside those who have no status in the world in favour of those we think can advance our cause? James does not regard that kind of behaviour as Faith. If Faith is hearing what God says and acting on it, then James is right to condemn such attitudes. God's heart has always been for those who are vulnerable, those who are powerless, those who cannot help themselves – the poor, the widows, the orphans, the oppressed.

Part of God's character is His impartiality – 'Everyone who calls upon the Name of the Lord will be saved' (Col 3:11, Acts 15:9, Rom 3:22, Rom 10:12-13). In Malachi 2:9 the priests are condemned for showing favouritism or partiality in the way carry out God's instructions. 'Are we not all children of the same Father? Are we not all created by the same God?' asks His prophet. God does not differentiate between race, sex or status and neither should we. Each person is valuable because they are a person created in the image of God, no matter how marred that image is. Sure we will get along with some better than others, but we are not to pre-judge people on the basis of who they are or are not.

In 'My Fair Lady', Alfred P Doolittle recognises that he does not deserve any help in his poverty – "But my needs is as great as the most deserving widows that ever got money out of six different charities in one week for the death of the same 'usband." While no one would withhold help from one in trouble through no fault of their own, what is our attitude like when people are poor through their own stupidity or wilfulness? This is Mercy. This requires Grace of the same calibre shown by God to all of us. Jesus did not qualify His requirement to give to whoever asks or to love our enemies. The way God has dealt with all of us is the way He expects us to deal with others. The Father sent His Son out to Rescue us while we were still His enemies, He requires us to love others *before* they are our friends.

2:5-7

Those who are poor in spirit receive an eternal inheritance in God's Kingdom. They receive the dignity that the Good News brings. They are indeed rich in faith. Those who have no lack in this life do not have their faith tested to the same degree. We have access to all of the Father's infinite resources, yet so often fail to exercise the faith to receive them.

At the time this letter was written, it was common practice to be jailed for unpaid debt – no bankruptcy protection, no chance to negotiate a repayment plan. You could be grabbed by the collar, dragged into court and thrown into gaol until the debt was paid. The very people who were doing this were those getting such preferential treatment in the meeting. No wonder James was angry! Those who should have been under the protection of the Church were being further oppressed while those tormenting them were being coddled!

We bear Christ's name in the same way that a wife bears her husband's name or a son his father's name. Therefore all that we do, we do "in His name". Whether we realise it or not, we are a role model to the world around us. Regardless of what accusations are flung at us, we need to behave in a way that brings honour to the Name.

1Pe 3:15-17 NASB ...but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; (16) and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. (17) For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

Our behaviour should mirror the concerns of God's heart in all areas. I know I have a long way to go in this, don't think that I'm preaching only to you!

2:8-13

There may be a whole bunch of 'Rules', but there is only one 'Law'. Jesus came to give full-on life, so the New Commandment He gave (John 13:34-35) is the law that will free us up to have the kind of Life He wants us to have. But wait, there's more. Jesus had some very radical ideas. I don't mean radical in the distorted sense of the aggressive extremist that we often take it. Rather I mean radical in the sense of the word's Latin origin – it means 'root'. In fact the radical is the first root, it is the foundation of the plant. Being radical is about the foundational or fundamental teaching that all of the rest of doctrine is built on. Jesus is a Fundamentalist, just not in the way that we may imagine or particularly want Him to be. Luke 6:27-38 explains in Jesus' own words what I mean:

Luk 6:27-38 NLT "But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. (28) Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. (29) If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. (30) Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don't try to get them back. (31) Do to others as you would like them to do to you. (32) "If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them! (33) And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much! (34) And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, why should you get credit? Even sinners will lend to other sinners for a full return. (35) "Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for He is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked. (36) You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate. (37) "Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. (38) Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back. "

Here then is the standard that Jesus requires from us. This is no less than the standard that He demonstrated throughout His life here with us. It is the same kind of Love and Grace that the Father shows all of us. Did Jesus set any caveats or conditions to His requirement to love? Did He recommend that we only give to those who deserve it? No. We are to extend Grace to others as generously as the Father has to us.

The word 'love' Jesus used here is *agapáō* not *philéō*. It is a determined direction of the will and finding joy in that person or thing. You don't have to like them, but you do have to be determined to love them. (Even that neighbour with the manky teeth and tattoos who plays his music too loud too often).

There is a prevailing way of thinking that doing a good thing can balance the scales up for a bad thing that we may have done. It's not a new idea, but has been around for millennia. We tend to think, often with a certain smug self-satisfaction, "Well at least I haven't done *that!*" when seeing other people's shortfalls. However James points out that you only need to break one small part of the Law to be a lawbreaker. Thus while you may not have committed adultery, what about

coveting what someone else has? Just because you haven't murdered anyone, what about putting other stuff ahead of the stuff God wants you to do? You cannot even up the balance sheet, many have tried, many will continue to try – it just won't happen. That is why God needed to extend such extraordinary Grace and Mercy to us all.

Our attitude to others, regardless of race, religion, intellect, or influence must be the same kind of attitude that Christ showed. It must reflect the same kind of Mercy and Grace that He has shown us. The underlying motivation for all of our actions must be Love.

2:14-26 Faith That Loves

Earlier in chapter 2 we looked at faith that shows mercy. It is a condition of receiving mercy to show mercy to others (v13). Faith is linked to mercy by showing that it requires faith to demonstrate mercy. Although, it is an example of what not to do that James gives us in verses 15 and 16.

2:14

This letter of James' is primarily about practical Faith – Paul includes faith in a list of the three enduring things. Faith, Hope, Love - these three remain. After all else has failed, Love continues to Hope, Love continues to have faith. All the talent and giftedness in the world are void if Love is not driving them. Faith without love is nothing. Good works that are not produced from Love are empty. All the Gifts will pass away – prophecy, tongues, knowledge as well as those of service, administration and even mercy. The things that remain are the things that we really ought to pursue – Faith, Hope and Love.

You all know the passage I'm alluding to here – Paul's famous dissertation on Love in 1 Corinthians 13. The church in Corinth was in a bit of a state. Coming out of a background of such depravity that was Corinth in the first century would not have been easy, yet there was more than just gross immorality to deal with. The church was divided into cliques or parties that attached themselves to various leaders or teachers. They were more intent in pursuing man's wisdom and knowledge than the Grace of God. It is also very likely that people were striving for the influence and honour of what may be described as "the greater gifts" at the expense of "the greater good". In chapter 13 Paul pares away the optional extras until all that remains are the *fundamentals* – Faith, Hope and Love.

Paul describes love as the greatest of the three and I would have to agree, because Love underpins all things. Hope built on love will always believe the best. Faith built on love will always produce the best. This is the kind of faith that James calls for – Faith growing out of love that produces good things from good motives.

Faith without Love is nothing; Paul explicitly states this in 1Cor13:2. James' point in verse 17 is Faith that does not produce Good Work is dead. Clearly Faith cannot be split from love any more than good deeds can be separated from faith. It seems reasonable to combine these two very similar thoughts – this Good Work that James says goes hand in glove with faith *must* be driven by Love.

vv 14-17

The Stoics of ancient Greece aimed for a complete absence of emotion, so as not to disturb their own serenity. We can look at those in distress, those going through hard times and remain unmoved as the Greek Stoics did, but I don't think that is what we usually observe either in others or ourselves.

The next level up is perhaps what James is referring to here – where a need is observed and there is a movement of emotion that *may* even be quite genuine. The thing is we tend not to go any further with it, lest it disturb our own comfort. Acknowledging the need and giving words of comfort does not even begin to bring us to the point where Faith meets Love.

"Can that kind of faith save anyone?" James asks. It requires a genuine, living faith in order to follow Jesus' example. Only when faith is truly alive and active can it accept the Grace that has provided the means for our Rescue and in turn extend that Grace to others.

On kind words without kind actions he says, "What good does that do?" We are here to bring honour to the Father by reflecting His character. That means that we reflect God's goodness by doing 'the good things He planned for us long ago'. Those good things provide an example of God's Grace to world around. They demonstrate the Faith that God has given us to believe Him; they provide evidence of its substance and reality.

Yet it is not comfortable or easy to step beyond what is safe and familiar; it puts you at risk of the Unknown. But if you never step beyond the familiar, daily tasks to the untravelled paths, how can

you ever fully test Jesus' Faithfulness? Only those who act in faith can ever truly experience this and share in the joy that blessing others brings.

All of this incites me to ask the question of myself: Am I merely drifting along familiar and safe paths? Is there an unfamiliar path that my Father in Heaven is calling me to follow that I am scared to start out on? More and more I am convinced there is, but I am not clear on exactly which path it is.

vv 18-20

Evidence. What proof do I have that you are alive? Obviously, if you are breathing, moving, speaking, or working you demonstrate conclusively that you are alive, active and useful. It doesn't matter what someone says, it matters what you do in order to show that you are alive. Remember Monte Python's "Dead Parrot Sketch"?

"Look matey (*picks up parrot*) this parrot wouldn't vroom if I put four thousand volts through it. It's bleeding demised."

"It's not, it's pining."

"It's not pining, it's passed on. This parrot is no more. It has ceased to be. It's expired and gone to meet its maker. This is a late parrot. It's a stiff. Bereft of life, it rests in peace. If you hadn't nailed it to the perch, it would be pushing up the daisies. It's rung down the curtain and joined the choir invisible. This is an ex-parrot."

What the shopkeeper said was irrelevant. What mattered was the evidence of Parrot's actions, or rather lack of action. 'Weekend at Bernie's' was a similar kind of deception. The blokes in that movie went to great lengths to fool others into thinking that Bernie was still alive and well in order to protect themselves. Their success did not lessen the fact that Bernie was not. Faith that does nothing is not really alive and it does not have the strength to hold onto Hope nor to produce Love.

Faith is far more than just believing something true. I have a basic understanding of the physics that enable an aeroplane to fly, yet if that belief still doesn't get me on to travel as a passenger it isn't very useful. Not that you need to know the physics at all – you just have to know that the science of flight *works*. Having an intellectual understanding of a truth is not much use unless it gets you to do something about it.

Demons have that kind of belief in God. They know that He exists, they have a better understanding of the 'how' of that than we do, I expect, but that belief cannot translate into action. They tremble in terror because they know that what He has said regarding their end is true. There is no Grace or Mercy for them.

Faith is substance; it is 'what really exists under any appearance'². It is not blind because it sees what truly is, rather than what can be identified with mere senses. What evidence is there that your faith is real and alive?

There is a need to recognise that both Good Doctrine *and* Good Deeds are required. Trying to reach people with one and not the other is not effective – it is a "two-handed Gospel" approach that is required. That is one that cares for people on one hand *and* teaches the truth on the other. If we are going to be "Fundamentalists" we need to remember: "the fundamental things apply as time goes by". And what is the greatest thing that remains throughout time? *Love*.

Good works are as much an expression of *love* as they are of *faith*. John wrote in his first letter:

1 John 4:7a-8 NLT Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. **(8)** But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

To really *know* God is to love Him, yet as we see in Hebrews 11:6, we need God-given faith to come to God in order to get to know Him. You have to trust God; you have to believe that He will empower you to step out and to meet a need, whether or not you have the right resources or correct words at hand. Love drives us to act in faith, giving hope to those in need.

² The Complete WordStudy Dictionary

Action without thought can get you into trouble, but thought without action is useless – it benefits no one! Think things through by all means; pray things through to ensure that what you are hearing is God’s idea and not just your own wishful thinking. But in the end there must be action if anything is to get done. A garden is not made by sitting down and imagining how beautiful it could be; rather a garden is made by taking that vision and then putting in some hard slog in order to make it real. Wisdom and knowledge are still required even when acting in faith, just as knowing what plants will thrive in your location is part of planning any garden.

Going on from those two verses in 1 John, he writes:

1Jn 4:9-11 NLT God showed how much He loved us by sending His one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through Him. (10) This is real love—not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. (11) Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.

God showed His love by His actions and so must we. Our love for God and others, expressed in action, makes God seen, makes Him known. The evidence of God’s love for us is seen in the course of action He has taken to rescue us.

vv 21-26

Faith is substance, what we do in response to that faith breathes life into it. Good work without faith is just breath – it passes quickly without eternal benefit. However, when those good works are the result of hearing and obeying God, then the benefits and blessings will continue. Abraham’s faith based obedience continues to bless millions of people millennia after the fact. No wonder he is held up as the prime example of faith.

It is not Faith that breathes life into Good Works – Good Works breathe life into Faith. Without Good Works, Faith has no life, it cannot be passed on and there is no evidence that it exists. Good Works without Faith are just vapour – they have no substance, no lasting value because they have no eternal quality. The two are as inseparable as your body and spirit.

All of this prompts me to ask myself, “Can people see my faith as clearly as they can see my body?”

3:1-18 Faith That Speaks Wisdom

We find three distinct thoughts in this chapter, which at first glance appear to be unrelated. In fact much of James' letter appears to be somewhat disjointed, and to a degree is. Yet looking into it, they actually flow quite logically and can, maybe even ought, to be considered as a whole.

1. There is a great responsibility and accountability in teaching the truths of the faith that should not be taken on lightly;
2. What a person speaks is that which wells up out of the very core of their being and should be reflected in their behaviour;
3. There is a wisdom that is honourable, good and humble that is sourced from God that we all need.

Motivation 3:1

Why is it that people teach? What is it that drives a person into that kind of work? It's a difficult and demanding thing to do. There needs to be a passion and calling for it in order for someone to be truly effective. The best teachers I had through school were the ones who really loved what they did. The worst teacher I had really wanted to be working as a geologist instead of teaching high school science. James' warning about not many teaching can be looked at from many perspectives, but it is likely that it has much to do with making sure that those responsible for passing on foundational truths are doing so with the right motivation.

All of us are responsible for what we say and do, not just those who are responsible for teaching others. Like it or not we are all an example to those we live and work with. It's just a question of what kind of example you are. Yet those who *do* teach have a far greater responsibility and therefore accountability because of the greater influence they have. Rather than teaching from a desire to set people on the right path, some desire to have influence over others in order to advance their own ideas. Theirs is not a wisdom that originates not from the True Source, but from fallen man.

Consistency 3:2-5a

Teachers primarily teach by words, in both verbal and written form, sharing wisdom. The first question we need to ask is – do the words match the behaviour?

Rom 2:20-24 NLT You think you can instruct the ignorant and teach children the ways of God. For you are certain that God's law gives you complete knowledge and truth. (21) Well then, if you teach others, why don't you teach yourself? You tell others not to steal, but do you steal? (22) You say it is wrong to commit adultery, but do you commit adultery? You condemn idolatry, but do you use items stolen from pagan temples? (23) You are so proud of knowing the law, but you dishonour God by breaking it. (24) No wonder the Scriptures say, "The Gentiles blaspheme the name of God because of you."

"We all make many mistakes," James says and includes himself in this statement. What we say must align with what we do. In that regard, those appointed to the task of teaching must be held to the highest possible standard. They have such a great influence on those that are under their instruction and therefore must be doubly careful that what they say and do truly reflect what Christ taught. Even so, speech is a major stumbling block to *all* of us, so we need to take that into account while holding others to account. It's very much a Grace thing. Yet if you could prove yourself able to master this hardest of disciplines – that is control of what you say – then you would have demonstrated that you are able to master them all. **What then is the key to achieving that?**

The tongue, maker of Grand Speeches, defines direction with those words. Not only the direction of the speaker, but also of those who come under their teaching; hence the greater accountability which comes with that responsibility.

So often those speeches that seem so great are not what they seem. Either the words are

deceptive, and the people are drawn into error, or the words are true, but the speaker's life is not. Sometimes it's a bit of both. We are all inconsistent, even as all have sinned. James says that the key to perfect consistency is a Spirit-controlled tongue. Well, it's implied, if not expressed in so many words – "No *man* can tame the tongue..." Never the less, "What is impossible for people *is* possible with God."

Bushfire 3:5b-8

The tongue may seem insignificant, yet its effect and influence are great, just like a ship's rudder or a spark. Even a tiny spark can set a large forest on fire, yet the tongue is more than just a spark – it is a flame and thus far more likely to set an out of control fire. The tongue has such a great potential for evil, yet a sanctified tongue in a gifted teacher can do much good and can steer many away from danger. This is why the tongue needs to be tamed. A wild animal can be dangerous but a trained animal can be put to useful work. The damage that wild dogs can do to livestock and even people is potentially enormous. Yet tamed and trained dogs can be used to herd and protect those same animals. Even fire can be used to benefit life – the provision of warmth, cooking food and even back burning to control bushfires. The common denominator is *effective control*. The tongue, it seems to those of us who have tried, is beyond such control. It is 'a world of wickedness', yet in reality it speaks only that which comes from a person's inner being:

Mar 7:18-23 NLT "Don't you understand either?" He asked. "Can't you see that the food you put into your body cannot defile you? (19) Food doesn't go into your heart, but only passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer." (By saying this, He declared that every kind of food is acceptable in God's eyes.) (20) And then He added, "It is what comes from inside that defiles you. (21) For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, (22) adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. (23) All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you."

We see here that the heart of the problem with the tongue is, in actual fact, the heart. The source of all speech is what a person *is*, what we may call 'character' or the 'heart'. This is what needs to be transformed by the Holy Spirit so that what wells up in conversation and exclamations reflect *His* character. Like a rudder, the tongue is part of a system; it does not work in isolation or of its own volition. The rudder of a ship is connected via a series of linkages to the wheel (or these days it is probably steer-by-wire). The wheel in turn is under the command of the ship's Captain.

This then begs the question – who is the captain of your heart? That's kind of an old idea; one that was in vogue when I was young but these days doesn't seem to get much airplay. What is it that drives you? Or better, *Who* is it that drives you? Jesus *still* needs to be "captain of your life" whether we use those actual words or not. The captain of a ship or aircraft has the final say in where the vessel goes, and if it goes at all. He is responsible for the decisions made, for the well being of the passengers and crew. That's a responsibility that ought to be entrusted to the one most qualified for the job.

In thinking about whether or not someone ought to be teaching, each one of us ought to be looking at our own 'log' first. I need to be asking myself the question, "Is my life *really* under Christ's control, or is it my own selfish ambition driving me?" **What attitude is truly at the core of all that you do?**

Refreshing Water 3:9-12

'You can't draw fresh water from a salty spring'. Here we are again at the heart of the matter. What bubbles up from a spring depends entirely on what is at the heart of the spring. There must be a fundamental change in the spring for it to issue forth drinkable water. There are limits to this analogy for it is really the same kind of struggle we see Paul wrestling with in Romans 7:

Rom 7:21 NLT I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong.

All of us struggle with this kind of dichotomy. However, while we may be incapable of aligning our words and actions, there is relief and rescue from such a position:

Rom 7:25 NLT Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.

In the same way that God transformed the bitter water of the Oasis of Marah for Israel, He can transform us so that the words that well up into speech give life to others. Only God can make a change like that happen and it is through Christ Jesus that we can be eligible for such regeneration. A warning though: even a well of sweet water can become poison if it is polluted.

Jesus used a different illustration to say the same thing as James:

Luk 6:43-45 NLT "A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. (44) A tree is identified by its fruit. Figs are never gathered from thornbushes, and grapes are not picked from bramble bushes. (45) A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart.

This is why we need to have Christ's life-giving strength flowing through us. All of my fruit trees are grafted onto rootstock that makes the tree better able to survive and produce fruit. It's the sap from the rootstock that enables the tree to be fruitful and thrive when it might not otherwise, but the grafts do not grow on their own:

Joh 15:1-8 NLT "I am the true grapevine, and My Father is the gardener. (2) He cuts off every branch of Mine that doesn't produce fruit, and He prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. (3) You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. (4) Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in Me. (5) "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in Me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from Me you can do nothing. (6) Anyone who does not remain in Me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. (7) But if you remain in Me and My words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! (8) When you produce much fruit, you are My true disciples. This brings great glory to My Father.

Here then is the key. This is the Rescue that Paul cried out for at the end of Romans 7. Christ Himself has told us where we need to be at in order for our lives to produce the Good Fruit that we have been created to grow. Only in Christ is a change at such a fundamental level possible. Only with Christ at the helm is it possible to steer the tongue in such a way as to consistently bring honour to our Lord and Father and to bless those made in His image.

The Source of Wisdom 3:13-18

'If you are wise...' Here is the second thing we need to examine in a teacher – the source of their wisdom. It would appear that the recipients of this letter thought that they *were* wise and that they *did* understand God's ways. James thinks otherwise. The lives they led did not produce any evidence that proved it to be true. Underlying their desire to teach was jealousy and selfish ambition, yet they covered this over with boasting and lies – bluffing their way into people's confidence in order to exert the influence of their own 'wisdom'.

Yet the very nature of that wisdom conclusively proved its origin – that it was from them and not the True Source. Consider the differences in what the two produce: What people concoct as being wise, that which originates from selfishness and jealousy, produces disruption and all sorts of bad behaviour. On the other hand, the Pure Wisdom, which comes from God, produces order, co-operation, consideration and good works from good motives.

If this contrast between the two attitudes is familiar, it should be:

Gal 5:16-25 NLT So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. (17) The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. (18) But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses. (19) When you follow the desires of your sinful nature,

the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, (20) idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, (21) envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God. (22) But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! (24) Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to His cross and crucified them there. (25) Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.

As I mentioned before, this is not something that we are capable generating ourselves. Walking in the Spirit, Abiding in the Vine, whatever you want to call it is not about living this life under your own steam. We need to tap into the Source and rely on His energy. We need to trust His directions, even if they don't make sense. You will not be led up a train track or inaccessible path if you follow Christ, unlike what may happen when following a GPS.

"... good works with humility that comes from wisdom"

A long time ago, God formed a plan. That plan included you and a whole bunch of good to stuff for you to do. Good, in the sense of benefitting others as well as benefitting you. We like to boast about what we have done. When I road up Blacktop Road, I wanted to make sure that people knew about it. (I mean, I'm mentioning it now as well...) However, this is one reason that salvation is not dependant on doing good works.

Eph 2:9 NLT Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

Those who are wise already know this and happily do those tasks assigned without bragging about how great a job they are doing or how difficult a task it is. Besides, not only does God give us a job to do, He gives us all the training, strength and other resources we need to see it through.

Wisdom and understanding; loveliness of behaviour; deeds done in gentleness – these are the marks of a truly wise teacher. Pure, peaceful, loving, considerate, willing to yield to others, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere are the characteristics of those who are wise with *God's* wisdom. These are the people who initiate peace in the midst of conflict. These are the ones who produce righteousness – not just in their own lives, but in the lives of others as well.

4:1-17 Faith That is Humble

In chapter three we looked at speech and the need to keep it in check, to train it for good so as not to allow your words to bring about evil, but rather good. Here in chapter 4 it is pride, and the desires that it causes to well up, that need to be dealt with.

It is pride that is at the root of wanting 'stuff' that keeps us up with the Jones' (vv 1-3). It is pride that boasts by criticism and judging (vv 11-12). It is pride that seeks to control it's own destiny and boasts of future plans (vv 13-16)

John in his first letter mentions 'The lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the boastful pride of life' (1 John 2:15-16). It is this boastful pride which fuels the lust – wanting more in order to boast, or to be honoured with acceptance by the world and accolades from the world. The act of spiritual warfare required to counter this attitude is humility:

1Pe 5:5-6 NLT In the same way, you younger men must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you, serve each other in humility, for "God opposes the proud but favours the humble." (6) So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time He will lift you up in honour.

Bringing yourself under authority requires humility and our natural tendency towards pride makes that difficult. Yet it is when we come under another's authority that we have protection and are not as exposed to the dangers of temptation.

James 4 is about humility – the kind of genuine humility that sets aside what you want and submits to what God requires. It means recognising that His way is best, that He has your best interest in mind and that you need His Grace to empower you to follow that way. That kind of attitude then affects what you long for; it changes how you view others and how you anticipate the future. Most importantly, it changes how you respond to temptation.

4:1-5 Justice.

The Peacemakers in chapter 3 have both wisdom and humility. This is in direct contrast to the behaviour shown here in chapter 4. The same jealousy and selfish ambition mentioned in 3:16 is at the root of the fights and quarrels that come out in chapter 4.

All of this conflict arose because they wanted stuff that they did not have. "You don't have it because you haven't asked," says James. So why didn't they just ask? Well you don't ask if you expect the answer to be "No" and you don't normally ask a stranger for help either. But the lack of quality communication is a symptom of a deeper problem with their relationship with God. When we don't want to accept Christ's authority over us, we tend to pull away and stop trying to find out what He requires of us. Naturally that leads to us asking for things that don't line up with His plans and wasting time and energy on things that have little or no benefit to the Kingdom. So even when they did ask they had no real understanding of what was on the Father's heart because their relationship with Him was so neglected. The relationship was neglected because they were so intent on getting their own way.

They sought to be friends with the World at the expense of their friendship with God. James is not saying to cut yourself off from people who do not follow Jesus; rather he is calling us live in the opposite attitude. Consider Mat 6:31-33. Those who don't seek after the things of God's Kingdom are obsessed with pursuing the things that give comfort to this short, physical life. Those of us who follow Christ have been filled with His Spirit and that Spirit in you jealously wants to keep you for Christ. Fair enough too – God went to a lot of trouble to make us His friends and He wants to keep that friendship. We are called out of that kind of life to be something fundamentally different, to stand out. Yet you clothe yourself in the same colours that surround you so that you are barely noticeable even when you move. Moving against that kind of behaviour by living out something diametrically opposite to it is bound to be at best uncomfortable, at worst fatal. Yet this is both the attitude and end that Christ had (Phi 2).

4:6-10 Humility

So how do we do it? The kind of behaviour that following Christ requires is completely foreign to our natural desires. "...but God gives more grace..." more than enough to counter the natural desires which fight against His will. The key to making use of that Grace is swallowing your pride and submitting to God. Note what comes first – it is the submission to God that comes before resisting the Devil. I'm sure you've heard this mentioned before, but it bears repeating: It's no good wrestling with your sinful, natural desires if you haven't first put God's desires ahead of your own. Unless you are abiding in the Vine and allowing His life and strength to flow through you, unless He is in command of your life, you cannot resist the Devil or even your own desires.

We need to move in the opposite spirit from the world – that is what Spiritual Warfare is. Humility is the obvious antidote for pride. That involves accepting Christ's authority and submitting to it. This *should* result in a radical change in values, but I'm pretty sure that we don't always allow it to.

This then is the key to utilizing God's Amazing Grace – submitting to God. That means admitting that what He wants for you really *is* the best. This counters pride and unbelief and puts you into a position where resisting your own desires and the devil's temptation is actually possible.

From this point, having set aside your own thing you are now in a position to pursue the One Thing that matters – friendship with God. It is in drawing near to God that we have a much better idea about what He cares about. Our attitude to people and things must be vastly different from the negative examples shown in this chapter and that can only happen when we walk in close friendship with Jesus.

It is sin that keeps us out of the Father's presence. Jesus points out that we cannot serve more than one master. We need to have undivided loyalty, with our hearts set on one thing, because no one can be stretched that thin. Any impurity in a precious metal changes its properties and reduces its value.

There is a genuine need to mourn mistakes, to seek Grace to overcome. This is not about continuously beating yourself up over your shortfalls; it is about taking repentance seriously. Once you have got to that place of forgiveness, cleansing and renewal, then the joy will come. However, while there is still sin to be cut out, we have need to be sorrowful for the pain that it has caused. Pain to those we have sinned against and pain for He who has done away with sin and death.

4:11-12 Kindness

What is James writing about here regarding us judging others? Are we to have no discernment regarding the actions of others? James' words here reflect Jesus' as recorded in Matthew 7:1-5: "Judge not, lest you be judged". Whatever standard you apply to others will be applied to you. That plank in your eye is *your* attitude and behaviour – you must make sure that *you* have the right attitude and that you are doing what God requires of you. But what if you see a Brother or Sister in Christ sin? Is it judging him (or her) if you point it out to them? Have a look at what Paul wrote to the Corinthian church:

1Co 5:12-13 NLT It isn't my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your responsibility to judge those inside the church who are sinning. (13) God will judge those on the outside; but as the Scriptures say, "You must remove the evil person from among you."

Those who make no claim to follow Jesus are not accountable to us with regard to their behaviour. So, if someone with nothing to do with Christ is involved in immorality, or some other inappropriate behaviour that is legal, it is not up to us to try to get them to change. However, if it involves someone who is part of the Body of Believers, that *is* something that *must* be dealt with. We are supposed to be dead to the old way of life and are under obligation to live in a new way:

Rom 6:1-2 NLT Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of His wonderful grace? (2) Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?

And...

Rom 8:12-13 NAS77 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – (13) for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

There are plenty of passages in scripture that detail the kind of behaviour that we should and should not have. Often though we rationalise it away to suit what we want – I'm guilty of that as well, but that doesn't lessen the requirement for obedience:

Joh 14:15 NLT *If you love Me, obey My commandments.*

God demonstrated His love for us by rescuing us while we were still rebelling against Him and we demonstrate our love for Him by obedience. Right at the very foundation of this Relationship we call "Faith" is the requirement to Love:

Joh 13:34-35 NLT *So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. (35) Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are My disciples."*

A Christian "*fundamentalist*" who does not love is neither obeying nor following Christ. Is it loving to allow someone to continue on a destructive path, without at least trying to help them to see what they are doing? This is the very last thing James leaves us with at the end of his letter:

Jas 5:19-20 NLT My dear brothers and sisters, if someone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back, (20) you can be sure that whoever brings the sinner back will save that person from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.

So then it comes down to whether or not *you* have the right attitude. Are you speaking about them behind their back? Are you criticising them without offering any solution, or out of spite – judging their motivation without knowing all the facts? That is being the attitude that James speaks against here. Jesus' mission when coming into the world was not to condemn it but to save it (John 3:17). If you are motivated by love for the person's well being, if you genuinely desire to see them restored to their right place in God's Family then it is not judging them to gently and lovingly point out their error. Mind you, sometimes there is a need to be tough, but always it is restoration, not condemnation, that we must work for. That after all is what Jesus is about.

4:13-16 Trust for the Future

Many of the recipients of this letter, those whom James addresses as "Twelve Tribes of the Dispersion" were likely, as were many Jews in that time, involved in trade. Nothing much has changed over the centuries – Jews have always been famous for finding ways to make money. The problem stems from the attitude that is focused on material gain, rather than relationships or spiritual things. Mind you, what James condemns in these verses is not the trade, or even making plans to get rich. What is condemned is the making plans without any reference to God's plans.

No one has any guarantees in this life except that we know that it *will* end. It is only the when and what of that varies. We can make whatever plans we choose, but that does not mean they will happen as we expect. It makes sense then to submit what we desire to do to the One who *does* know the beginning and end of all things. It also makes sense to pursue things that last – things that are of eternal significance, rather than things that corrode and are lost.

Now there is nothing wrong with making plans. Even though we don't know if tomorrow will come, neither do we know for sure that it will not. On more than one occasion I have set out to achieve something and circumstances have prevented it. Hindsight and experience have later proven that there was a better plan to follow, yet if I had doggedly pushed ahead with my own ideas instead of seeking and submitting to God's I would have missed the blessing that followed.

Jer 29:11 NLT For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

The Arabs have a phrase, "Insh' Allah" – if it be God's will. One old pastor that I knew always added, "If the Lord wills" when he was discussing any future plans. Now there is nothing wrong with saying the words, but it needs to be more than just words. We need to have an attitude that willingly submits all plans, hopes, dreams, goals and desire for the future to the One who knows what the future holds and who knows what is best – both for you and His Kingdom. Anything less is arrogant boasting.

4:17

James finishes this chapter with a stern warning. Ignorance of the law has never been an excuse, however knowledge of what is required places you under an even greater obligation to carry it out. So often though we make excuses for our behaviour, "I can't help it" or "That's just the way I am". No, that is simply not good enough! Back in verse six we read, "But He gives us more Grace" – grace to stand against our natural, rebellious desires. Not only that, He finishes what He starts. He is both the initiator and perfecter of this faith in which we stand (**Heb 12:2**):

Php 1:6 NLT And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

He does not want to leave you in the incomplete state that you are and we should not be satisfied to remain as babies in Christ. It is up to us to do what we need to do in order to mature in Christ. It is up to us to do Justice, to love Kindness and to walk in Humility along side of Christ (**Micah 6:8**). It is up to us to trust Him for the future and everything else that is beyond our control.

5:1-12 Condemnation and Comfort

We had a look at what we ought to be doing in the last chapter – to do Justice, to love Kindness, to walk in Humility along side of Christ and trust Him for the future. The first section of chapter five (vv 1-6) examines the Justice and Kindness issues a little deeper. These verses are a dire warning to the oppressor that their present comfort and luxury is heading for distress and destruction. The second section addresses the Trusting for the Future thing that came up in chapter four. Verses 7-12 are a call for patience to those who are oppressed, a quiet reminder that their distress is temporary, and their reward certain. These two sections are a massive contrast in both target and tone, yet both have to do with Faith and Trust.

5:1-6 Faith That Gives

Here is an example of what we are not to be. Faith gives, because of the assurance that God is faithful. Generosity does not start with merely giving what is due. Matthew records a parable in chapter 20 that gives us an inkling into the generosity of the Father. Even though those that only worked an hour were not due a full day's wage, the vineyard's owner gave it to them anyway. The opposite spirit is shown here in James, where the workers were not even given what was their right.

This mindset creates sweatshops with oppressive conditions for the workers, strips farmers of their land and fails to pay a fair market price for their produce. At the bottom of this is the consumer driven market that you and I are very much a part of.

Some points to note about the Rich, addressed here: Even though they have comfort and security now, the time is coming when they will be stripped away because all they have poured themselves into is destined for destruction. The very foundation of their lives is going to be washed away. None of what they have strived so hard for will last.

We are told by the media and advertising that the only important person to consider is yourself. We are told that the only way to have certainty and security is to invest and insure so that we need to rely on no one else. We are told to spend and to buy because it's good for the economy. This is the World's Economy, this is not how the Kingdom functions. God's Economy is radically different. In fact all of Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom points to it working in exactly the opposite direction to that of the World.

A number of times in Matthew 5 (20-48), Jesus says, "You have heard... but *I* say..." Each one of these statements take the accepted cultural standards and stretch the boundaries. Jesus sets attitudes and motivation as the standard that is judged, rather than mere behaviour. It's as much about your attitude to what you have, as it is about what you do with it. The shame of the wealthy is not in their wealth, but in their failure to extend justice to the poor.

Wealth is amoral. That is to say that in and of itself it is neither good nor bad. Instead, it takes on the attitudes and motivation of the one handling it. Fifty dollars can give a person a new start in life, or destroy life depending on whether someone possesses the money or the money possesses them.

As those who would follow Jesus' example, what are the fundamental things that apply to us regarding finances? I believe that we find the answer in Matthew 6:

Mat 6:19-34 NLT "Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. (20) Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. (21) Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. (22) "Your eye is a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is good, your whole body is filled with light. (23) But when your eye is bad, your whole body is filled with darkness. And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is! (24) "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and

money. (25) "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? (26) Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to Him than they are? (27) Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? (28) "And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, (29) yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. (30) And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, He will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? (31) "So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' (32) These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. (33) Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need. (34) "So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.

All of that boils down to two essentials:

1. Security is found in trusting God, not your bank balance and
2. We need to be working to benefit of the Kingdom, not to benefit the chequebook.

Wealth was, and really still is, measured by three things - the food they had stored, their collection of clothes and the precious items. All that was considered to be an indicator of wealth and position is shown here to be stinking, useless rubbish. The food rots, the clothes are eaten by moths and even things that seem to last forever rust away. All that is around us is temporary and investing in things that are short lived is not wise. The security that riches give is false and fragile, it fades. We see with our limited range of sight – our finite field of vision makes our short lives seem long. There is as much a need for us to see time with God's perspective, as there is for us to see people from God's point of view.

Regardless of whether we see ourselves as rich or not, these verses are a warning to not become comfortable with what we have. Our trust needs to be in God, not in our possessions and we need to make sure that we use what we do have to benefit others.

5:7-12 Faith That Waits

James changes his focus from the oppressor to the oppressed at this point. Trials have a destabilising effect, they can shake faith, but they don't have to. James tells us to steady, strengthen, establish our hearts in spite of the difficulties. Going back to the opening verses of chapter one, we can see that difficult times can be a good thing, if we have the right attitude and hang in there.

We might wonder whether a farmer's wait for rain is in vain. The way the climate seems to be changing give many cause to be concerned. Yet the rain does come, maybe not exactly in the time or way we might hope or expect. The coming of the Lord *will* occur but in his timing, not when or how it suits you. This means that we must be ready and conducting ourselves in His way not our own. There is work to be done to prepare the paddocks before the rains come and we have work to do before the Lord returns.

There are signs that rain is on its way – change in wind, clouds forming, ants' activity. So we can prepare for what is coming and get things out the weather or prepare the ground for planting even if the exact time is not certain. Even so, there are signs that indicate the coming of the Lord is coming is close – wars, natural disasters etc, so we need to act accordingly. Consider what Jesus says in Matthew 24:4-8.

Mat 24:4-8 NLT Jesus told them, "Don't let anyone mislead you, (5) for many will come in My name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah.' They will deceive many. (6) And you will hear of wars and threats of wars, but don't panic. Yes, these things must take place, but the end won't follow immediately. (7) Nation will go to war against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in many parts of the world. (8) But all this is only the first of the birth pains, with more to come.

We are seeing the beginning of the birth pains more so now than ever before, so we need to be more diligent than ever before to make sure that we have our stuff sorted. We need to "be patient" because we know that Christ's coming is certain. We need to be patient to reap the reward of our work in due time rather than looking for instant gratification.

It's easy to grumble when things are not going the way we'd like them to. It's easy to complain about what others are doing to annoy us. The fact remains that you can only change your own attitude, you cannot change anyone else's. Mind you, there are some circumstances where I found that I had to get help from the Father to get my mindset into the right frame! Still, we need to examine our own attitude and motivation without judging anyone else's.

The kind of steadfast endurance that we need to have can be seen in Job. He did not sit passively while trial after trial threatened to overwhelm him. He had questions; he didn't understand what was going on, or why. His friends were telling him that he'd done something wrong, but Job couldn't find anything. Yet through it all he hung on to the fact that his Redeemer lives. He didn't whinge, or grumble, or curse God because he knew that God knew that he had done nothing and he knew that God would vindicate him.

Many prophets have been persecuted in ages past and many of Jesus' Disciples are persecuted today. The thing they all have in common is the resolute way they hold onto their faith.

Heb 11:33-39 NLT By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions, (34) quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight. (35) Women received their loved ones back again from death. But others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection. (36) Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons. (37) Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, [*some were tested,*] and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. (38) They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves

and holes in the ground. (39) All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised.

Even though the fulfillment of the promise did not occur in their lifetime, they all held onto their faith. They did not waver in unbelief.

So we come to verse 12, which seems as if it's just been thrown in wherever. This chapter has been about character – character that is selfish and greedy, character that is steadfast. This odd little verse about oath taking actually fits in with that. Maybe I'm manipulating things a bit, but I don't think so. The call to refrain from oath taking comes right on the heels of the call for enduring difficulties without grumbling. William Barclay in his Daily Study Notes wrote:

The great Greeks held that the best guarantee of any statement was not an oath but the character of the man who made it; and that the ideal was to make ourselves such that no one would ever think of demanding an oath from us because he would be certain that we would always speak the truth.

Here we have an extension of the same kind of qualities which enable some one to hang in there though difficult times without wavering in their faith. This kind of consistency carries over into all facets of a person's life – not just what they do, and more than what they say. This is the kind of person who says that they will do something and does it as a matter of course. This is the kind of consistency that I would like to see in my own life. It's far too easy to make a promise and forget.

Faith is generous because it trusts in the Father's provision. Faith waits because it trusts in the Father's promise. Faith produces a character that is consistent and reliable in all circumstances.

5:13-20 Faith That Restores

At first glance, this last stretch of James' letter is about prayer. Yes, it is about prayer, but I would contend that is more than just that – it's also about restoration. The Father loves to make stuff, stuff that is very good. He likes to do good stuff and to give good stuff as well. Not surprising really, as He *is* Good. So when good stuff breaks down what happens then? Is He content to leave things in a broken down state? Hardly! He went to an awful lot of trouble to fix the busted relationship caused by Adam and Eve's unbelief.

One of the most satisfying aspects of my old trade of vehicle painting was doing "resto jobs". You'd have an old piece of rusted, dented, broken car and restore it to as new, or sometimes better than new. Even now, I find there is nothing quite like the satisfaction of fixing a damaged aircraft. Although, I have to say that manufacturing a new piece of aeronautical product from scratch is probably even more satisfying than fixing something that is broken.

God loves resto jobs too. He delights in taking what sin has broken and restoring it to as new condition. The truly remarkable thing is not that a Good God likes to make Broken things Good again, but that He likes to use ordinary Clay Pots to help make it happen. When us ordinary clay pots make an appeal to the extraordinary God, He releases power to restore things to the way they should be.

5:13-14 Three Different Times for Prayer.

The first couple of verses look at three different times for prayer. The first is in times of hardship. Difficult times and persecution are to be expected and it's during times like these that you especially need to pray. I'm *not* saying don't accept help from people, I'm *not* saying don't let anyone else pray for you. What I *am* saying is that you need to keep the lines of communication open, that you need to keep your friendship with God tight during times like these. Trials are tremendously effective at shaking faith; they test all relationships. Some people have let difficult times destroy their faith, but having a secure hold onto God will stabilise all of your other relationships.

There is a flip side to tough times – that is good times. But how do we react when things are going well? Some wise words are relevant here:

Pro 30:7-9 NLT O God, I beg two favors from You; let me have them before I die. (8) First, help me never to tell a lie. Second, give me neither poverty nor riches! Give me just enough to satisfy my needs. (9) For if I grow rich, I may deny You and say, "Who is the LORD?" And if I am too poor, I may steal and thus insult God's holy name.

There is always the danger of self-reliance when our needs are met and our plans are coming together. It's in good times that it is so easy to forget that the Father allows good things too (James 1:17). Sometimes it's for a period of respite, an easing up or removal of troubles for a time. We are always expected to use what God has blessed us with, whether money or time or talent, to bless others. Here then is the reason for Praise, especially during good times – it is to focus on the source of Good Things rather than on the good things themselves.

Even during the tough times, there is good stuff to praise God for. We can give thanks through all circumstances when we learn the secret of being content in any and every circumstance (Philippians 4:11-13). Why is that? Because we know that even hard times will be woven into something that is good (Romans 8:28).

The final episode in this trilogy of prayer is that of those who are sick. Why are the sick specifically urged to call the Elders to pray for them? I need to explain this in a round-a-bout kind of way, so bear with me and it should become clear.

We are made in the image of God. That is to say that we are not gods, but the way we are made reflects the make up of God. The Father, Son and Spirit are different but One, and in the same

way your mind, body and soul are different but one. If something affects the mind, it can affect the body as well. If something is not right with the soul, it can affect both the mind and body. The point I am trying to make here is that being sick can affect us spiritually. While this is not inevitable, it is common – especially for serious or chronic cases. I have experienced this myself to a degree and have also observed it in others. It is for this reason that I believe James calls for those who are sick to ask those who are spiritually strong to plead their case, to intercede for them.

There is more to it than this of course, but there is a definite link between the physical and the spiritual. James indicates here that there is a spiritual element to physical healing. The confession of errors and their forgiveness is absolutely crucial to spiritual health, which in turn has an effect on physical health.

I want to point out that I do not subscribe to the system of belief that all suffering and sickness is a result of an individual's sin. This was certainly the general understanding in Job's time:

Job 4:1-9 NLT Then Eliphaz the Temanite replied to Job: (2) "Will you be patient and let me say a word? For who could keep from speaking out? (3) "In the past you have encouraged many people; you have strengthened those who were weak. (4) Your words have supported those who were falling; you encouraged those with shaky knees. (5) But now when trouble strikes, you lose heart. You are terrified when it touches you. (6) Doesn't your reverence for God give you confidence? Doesn't your life of integrity give you hope? (7) "Stop and think! Do the innocent die? When have the upright been destroyed? (8) My experience shows that those who plant trouble and cultivate evil will harvest the same. (9) A breath from God destroys them. They vanish in a blast of His anger.

Job's friend, Eliphaz is basically saying to Job, "Mate, you've messed up – go and get yourself sorted out with God and all this will go away!" We know from what God reveals to Job later that this was not the case and all of Job's friends had some humble pie to eat. Yet even with this account, the belief in Jesus' day was still pretty much the same:

Joh 9:1-3 NLT As Jesus was walking along, He saw a man who had been blind from birth. (2) "Rabbi," His disciples asked Him, "why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?" (3) "It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "This happened so the power of God could be seen in him.

This is the same answer that would have been given in Job's case and we can expect that the answer to our "Why?" when trouble hits us will be the same. Difficulties, sickness and the like may well be the consequences of our choices – like riding in the rain may result in falling over and getting injured – but I do not believe that they are judgement or punishment, not to those of us who claim the Name of Christ. While God certainly allows these consequences, they ought to grab our attention and drive us deeper into the Father's strong arms.

The Ordinariness of Elijah.

With confession comes healing – spiritual healing first and physical healing in God's time. We cannot have a fully transparent and open friendship with anybody if there are unresolved issues, how much less so with a perfectly Holy God! It is this kind of closeness, or "abiding" as Jesus described it which enables us to tap into the vast resources of our Heavenly Dad. It's not about being "super spiritual", as we will see.

So often we read about the "heroes of faith" and think, "I could never be like them." Yet it is quite clear from James' comments here that there was nothing special about Elijah. He was just an ordinary bloke with the same kind of desires, concerns, joys and difficulties that any ordinary person has. In the accounts we have of King David we the story of a man who was "after God's own heart", yet had many very serious failings which would get him thrown out of most respectable churches. This should encourage those of us who don't expect to be used by God

because of our limitations and failures. Even as sickness and trials can be an opportunity for God to display His power, so too is our ordinariness. The apostle Paul knew this very well:

2Co 12:6-10 NLT If I wanted to boast, I would be no fool in doing so, because I would be telling the truth. But I won't do it, because I don't want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message, (7) even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud. (8) Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. (9) Each time He said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. (10) That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

The fact is that God takes the ordinary and channels His strength and power through it to do extraordinary things. In this way "the power of God can be seen" – and that is after all what we are about. It's not the prayer that is powerful, so much as what it is able to unlock.

The key to answered prayer is in the "abiding" which as indicated earlier is affected by the health of the relationship and is tied to owning up to and turning away from doing our own thing in our own way. John 15 records some very important info on abiding and answered prayer in Jesus' own words. I suppose I could do a whole series just on prayer, though I think that I would get a little out of my depth if I tried. Suffice to say here that "abiding" or having nothing getting in the way of your friendship with Jesus and asking in line with what God wants to do are pre-requisites to answered prayer. If you aren't getting the answer that you want when you ask there are a couple of possible reasons:

1. There is an unresolved problem in your relationship with God or
2. You're not asking for the same thing that God wants.

Sure there's much to it than that, but that's the Reader's Digest version.

The fact remains that when we hang out with God and our desires line up with His then amazing things can happen. But this passage is not so much about miracles as it is about transforming lives.

Not only do we have an obligation to sort out our own mistakes, but also we have an obligation to firmly but lovingly help others to get back on track. It's what known as "vicarious responsibility". If you see someone doing something dangerous and you know how it should be done safely and fail to tell them and they injure themselves you have some responsibility for that. Ezekiel 33 describes this role as that of a watchman. It's a tricky balancing act because we need to do it without judging but with love. We need to be careful not to be legalistic, but at the same time not compromising the standards of righteousness required from those who claim the name of Christ.

However, you can't force someone to change. You can point out the problem; you can pray for them and you can love them. That love generally needs to be tough to be effective because allowing someone to go on down a path of destruction is not loving. Still, it comes down to the individual's choice and they can choose to do their own thing regardless – that's why the battle needs to be fought primarily on your knees before God. The only way to secure a lasting change is through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and God requires us ordinary clay pots to ask Him to act.