

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – The Epistle of James

(SB_James_Lsn2)

Outline

SALUTATION (1:1)

PROLOGUE – RESPOND PROPERLY TO TRIALS (1:2-18)

- Embrace trials (1:2-11)
- Do not blame God (1:12-18)

THEME – BE SWIFT TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK AND SLOW TO WRATH (1:19-20)

BODY OF THE LETTER: CULTIVATING THE BEHAVIOR (1:21-5:6)

- Be Swift to Hear (1:21-2:26)
 - Involves more than listening; involves good works (1:21-27)
 - Demonstrated by impartiality in treatment of others (2:1-13)
 - Demonstrated by the combination of faith and good works (2:14-26)
- Be Slow to Speak (3:1-18)
 - Control the tongue (3:1-12)
 - Conduct demonstrates wisdom (3:13-18)
- Be Slow to Wrath (4:1-5:6)
 - Wrath is created by worldliness (4:1-5)
 - Wrath is cured by humility (4:6-5:6)
 - Humility is demonstrated by repentance from sin (4:6-10)
 - Humility is demonstrated by restraint in speech (4:11-12)
 - Humility is demonstrated by reluctance to boast (4:13-5:6)

EPILOGUE: PERSEVERE IN TRIALS (5:7-20)

- Perseverance will be properly rewarded (5:7-11)
- Perseverance is empowered through prayer (5:12-20)

**The sections highlighted in yellow are the sections covered in previous lessons. The sections highlighted in blue are the sections to be addressed in this lesson.

James 1:1-18 – Two Translations With Interpretative Comments in { }¹

James, a bonds slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes, those in the dispersion {*the departure from Jerusalem and subsequent dispersion by believing Jews in association with the murder of Stephen in Acts 8*}. Be constantly rejoicing {*consistent with the concept of sharing the happiness and contentment of God which is component #8 of the divine power sphere*}. Consider it a matter for unadulterated joy [without any admixture of sorrow] whenever you fall into the midst of variegated {*from all directions at once*} trials which surround you, knowing experientially that the approving of your faith, that faith having been put to the test

¹ I have placed interpretative comments in this translation based upon information presented in prior sessions. {*My comments are bracketed and italicized*}. The comments in [standard brackets] are part of *The Expanded Translation* and were inserted by Kenneth Wuest.

for the purpose of being approved, and having met the test, has been approved {*similar to gold which has passed through the fire so that all impurities are removed*}, [that this approving process] produces a patience {*hupomonē – a continuance in the divine power sphere motivated by love of God*} - which bears up and does not lose heart or courage under trials {*the concept of momentum in the face of adversities and tests – a concept emphasized in the exhortations of Paul and Peter*}. But be allowing the aforementioned patience to be having its complete work in order that you may be spiritually mature and complete in every detail, lacking in nothing {*not sinless perfection, but any recurring sin patterns have been eliminated and the believer is constantly motivated by love for God and is solidly grounded in the faith*}.² (1:1-4) – [Kenneth Wuest's *New Testament Expanded Translation*]

I, James, am a slave of God and the Master Jesus, writing to the twelve tribes scattered to Kingdom Come: Hello! Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way.³ (1:1-4) – [Eugene Peterson's *The Message*]

And if, as is the case, anyone of you [when undergoing these trials] is deficient in wisdom {*understanding of the proper, God-honoring path to take amidst tests of a dynamic and multi-directional nature*}, let him keep on presenting his request in the presence of the giving God who gives to all with simplicity and without reserve [a pure, simple giving of good without admixture of evil or bitterness], and who does not [with the giving of the gift] reproach [the recipient with any manifestation of displeasure or regret], and it shall be given him. But let him be presenting his request in a trusting attitude, not in an expression of that hesitation which vacillates {*dipsuchos – double minded or split personality*} [between faith and unbelief and inclines toward unbelief], for the person who vacillates [between faith and unbelief] is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for let not that individual be supposing that he shall receive anything from the presence of the Lord, [being] a dubious, undecided man, vacillating {*shifting between trust and blaming God – inconsistency and lack of humility, thus demonstrating a split personality*} in all his ways.⁴ (1:5-8) – [Kenneth Wuest's *New Testament Expanded Translation*]

If you don't know what you're doing, pray to the Father, He loves to help. You'll get his help, and won't be condescended to when you ask for it. Ask boldly, believingly, without a second thought. People who "worry their prayers" are like windwhipped waves. Don't think you're going to get anything from the Master that way, adrift at sea, keeping all your options open.⁵ (1:5-8) – [Eugene Peterson's *The Message*]

Moreover, let the brother who is in lowly circumstances [poor and afflicted] be glorying in his exalted position [namely, in the midst of trials which teach him patience {*Christ-like character which will result in the crown of life in eternity*}]}. But the one who is wealthy {*in the material things of this world*}, let him be glorying in his being reduced {*the concept of humility which is essential to the development of Christ-like character*} to the level of the man who is poor and afflicted], because as the flower of the grass he shall come to an end; for the sun arises with its scorching

² Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament, An Expanded Translation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), 539-40. Kenneth Wuest was teacher emeritus of New Testament Greek at The Moody Bible Institute at the time of this publication.

³ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message – The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 2002), 1649.

⁴ Wuest, *The New Testament, An Expanded Translation*.

⁵ Peterson, *The Message*.

heat and the grass withers and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed. So shall also the wealthy person fade away together with his undertakings. (1:9-11) – [Kenneth Wuest's *New Testament Expanded Translation*]

When down-and-outers get a break, cheer! And when the arrogant rich are brought down to size, cheer! Prosperity is as short-lived as a wildflower, so don't ever count on it. You know that as soon as the sun rises, pouring down its scorching heat, the flower withers. Its petals wilt and, before you know it, that beautiful face is a barren stem. Well, that's a picture of the "prosperous life." At the very moment everyone is looking on in admiration, it fades away to nothing.⁶ (1:9-11) – [Eugene Peterson's *The Message*]

Spiritually prosperous is the man who remains steadfast under trial, because after he has met the test and has been approved, he shall receive the crown, namely, that crown which has to do with the life [eternal life], which [crown] He promised to those who love Him {*those who have maintained momentum in the face of testing and trials so as to have constancy in the divine sphere of empowerment*}.⁷ (1:12) – [Wuest, *The New Testament – An Expanded Translation*]

Anyone who meets a testing challenge head-on and manages to stick it out is mighty fortunate. For such persons loyally in love with God, the reward is life and more life.⁸ (1:12) – [Eugene Peterson's *The Message*]

Let no man be saying when he is being solicited to sin, By God I am being solicited to sin {*a demonstration of lack of trust of God – blaming God for the tests and trials*}, for God is incapable of being solicited to sin, the source of the solicitations being evils, [such as soliciting man to sin], and He himself solicits no one to sin. But each one is being solicited to sin when he is taken in tow and enticed by his own craving {*our lusts incline us toward a self-sufficient mindset and action path*}. Then when the aforementioned craving has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and this sin when it is full grown brings forth death {*could be a reference to the sin unto death or temporal loss of fellowship with God on the part of the believer – similar to the thought in James 5:20*}.⁹ (1:13-15) – [Wuest, *The New Testament, An Expanded Translation*]

Don't let anyone under pressure to give in to evil say, "God is trying to trip me up." God is impervious to evil, and puts evil in no one's way. The temptation to give in to evil comes from us and only us. We have no one to blame but the leering, seducing flare-up of our own lust. Lust gets pregnant, and has a baby: sin! Sin grows up to adulthood, and becomes a real killer.¹⁰ (1:13-15) - [Eugene Peterson's *The Message*]

Stop being deceived, my brethren, beloved ones. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the lights [the heavenly luminaries], with whom there can be no variableness nor shadow which is cast by the motion of turning [such as that cast by the movements of the heavenly bodies]. In accordance with His deliberate purpose He brought us into being by means of the word of truth, resulting in our being a kind of first fruits of His creatures {*we are a foreshadow of what God is going to do with the whole of creation, i.e. restore*

⁶ Peterson, *The Message*.

⁷ Wuest, *The New Testament, An Expanded Translation*.

⁸ Peterson, *The Message*.

⁹ Wuest, *The New Testament, An Expanded Translation*.

¹⁰ Peterson, *The Message*

and reverse the impact of sin).¹¹ (1:16-18) – [Wuest, *The New Testament, An Expanded Translation*]

So, my very dear friends, don't get thrown off course. Every desirable and beneficial gift comes out of heaven. The gifts are rivers of light cascading down from the Father of Light. There is nothing deceitful in God, nothing two-faced, nothing fickle. He brought us to life using the true Word, showing us off as the crown of all his creatures.¹² (1:16-18) – [Eugene Peterson's *The Message*]

Recap of Prior Sessions in Study of James

In our previous lesson, we examined chapter 1, verses 2-18. Those verses deal with the question of how we should respond to trials that are effectively attacks upon our trust in God. The Jewish believers in the years immediately following our Lord's death and resurrection were undergoing various trials or tests in life. No doubt, many of those tests or trials were the result of unbelievers who raised questions and doubts regarding their new found faith. Paul had not yet been raised up to provide greater structure to their understanding of the new era into which they were entering. It is unlikely that Peter had gone to the Gentiles via Cornelius' conversion (Acts 10) yet. Finally, there were the normal trials of day-to-day living under Roman occupation.

James deals with the question from two angles in these verses. First, in verses 2-11, James instructs his readers how they should view the trials – what their attitude toward the trials should be. The attitude, whether rich or poor, should be to count it a privilege to be tested since it is through testing that Christ-like character in us is developed and revealed. Second, in verses 12-18, James instructs his readers in regard to their attitude toward God in the midst of the trials. They should not blame God. The test is an opportunity to evaluate one's love of God.

All of this information was also related to the eight components of the divine power sphere that has been taught in a separate series. James' instruction dovetails perfectly with our study of the divine power sphere. Verses 2-11 of chapter 1 embrace the concepts of yieldedness, humility, objectivity, momentum, momentum testing and sharing the happiness of God. Verses 12-18 embrace those same concepts, but in addition, emphasis is placed upon one's personal love toward God. (See the addendum to this lesson for a recap of the series of lessons dealing with the concept of the divine power sphere).

As we examine the instruction James provides and compare it to the instruction provided by Paul and Peter in their letters, we see an amazing parallel in emphasis by each of these men upon endurance [*hupomonē* in James] in testing. If I can paraphrase and offer an encapsulated interpretation of the meaning and significance of this word and James' teaching in these verses, James is saying that we believers must continue to reside within the divine sphere of empowerment while being motivated by our love for the Lord.¹³ If we do not see testing as the opportunity to develop Christ-like character and/or if we blame God for the tests that come our way, we should view it as a wake-up call that we have lost our focus and our love for God has been compromised.

Theme – Be Swift to Hear; Slow to Speak and Slow to Wrath (1:19-20)

¹¹ Wuest, *The New Testament, An Expanded Translation*.

¹² Peterson, *The Message*.

¹³ James does not offer direct instruction regarding the believer's relationship to the Holy Spirit. However, the other components of the divine power sphere are definitely present, e.g. humility, objectivity, momentum, momentum testing, personal love for God, etc. Eventually, James will deal with practical examples of the concept of impersonal or unconditional love for man.

19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. (Jas 1:19-20)

James' advice in these verses are applicable to all situations in life – prosperity, adversity, testing, trials, marital relations, employee-employer relations, parent-child relations, etc. Given the context, however, James is focusing upon the believer's attitude and viewpoint towards testing and trials in life.

Be quick to hear – when we are undergoing testing and trials in life, it is especially important that we be sensitive to wise counsel from God in the form of His Word, the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the wise counsel received from other believers – particularly those who have demonstrated the proper “endurance” or “patience” {*hupomonē –a continuance in the divine power sphere motivated by love of God*} under testing in their own lives. The only way that those believers who have demonstrated “endurance” or “patience” in testing that is honoring to the Lord is if they have found their identity (synonymous with “source of empowerment”) in Christ rather than in the positions and titles of the world. Interestingly, enough, it is through testing that we believers learn that we are insufficient in and of ourselves and in and of the titles we may possess in the world. When a believer is undergoing testing, it is a very encouraging thing to be surrounded by another believer or believers who too have passed through the flames and have their own “story” to tell about how God transformed their attitudes through the trial. Of course, such transformation will not occur in the life of the believer who has not incorporated some of the more foundational components of the divine power sphere into their thinking and lives – at least to a certain degree, e.g. component #1 (yieldedness), component #2 (objectivity), and component #3 (teachability). For the believer who rebels or chaffs against these principles from God's Word, then that believer will not be looking for what the Lord is trying to do in his or her life (“quick to hear”) and that believer will ultimately (perhaps even secretly) demonstrate a thought pattern that is characterized by the cynicism of unbelief. This is exactly James' point in the preceding verses (vv. 12-18).

Be slow to speak – I have had discussions with fellow believers who are undergoing testing and after listening to them explain the situation, I was unable to get a word in edgewise as they continued to talk and talk or interrupt just as I (or someone else) was beginning to respond. How can you possibly avail yourself to wise counsel if you are constantly talking? It is my observation that those who are so quick to continue speaking are also those who have not been silent before the Lord, His Word and the wise counsel of pastors and others long enough to allow the emotions of the soul to be calmed. It is my opinion that there are two primary categories of believers who, when undergoing testing, exhibit a pattern of excessive talking. First, if the testing is occurring separate and apart from bad decisions the individual has made, then the individual is still in a state of emotional shock and/or has not yet had developed in their life the aforementioned components of yieldedness, objectivity and teachability. Second, if the testing is due to some sin or sin pattern, then it is in effect discipline from the Lord and the emotional reaction manifested in excessive talking is really just a manifestation of emotional revolt of the soul. I realize that that analysis may be a bit too simplistic for some situations, but as a general observation, it does cover a significant portion of the population. I believe that James is more focused upon testing that is not necessarily related to bad decisions; rather, he is focused upon the testing in life that is common to man – particularly believers because of their faith.

Be slow to anger – this trait is what separates the believer who is glorifying the Lord in trials from the rest of humanity. It is only natural to become angry when injustice occurs in life. Sometimes, that anger is a sin pattern that is honed early in life as a defense mechanism – generally for the purpose of controlling others. Almost always, anger is just the natural response to trials and suffering and the anger is vented towards other people (they are blamed even if not the cause of the suffering or they are a convenient outlet) and many times the anger gets directed to God.

However, God wants us to demonstrate righteousness in our lives. What does that mean? Well, how did Jesus handle the extreme trials He endured with patience? He prayed fervently. He sought solace and counsel from God. He even desired the comfort of his friends in His darkest hours. He did not place blame upon his persecutors or God, but asked “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” He submitted Himself to the will of the Father after asking that if it be the Father’s will, the cup of suffering be passed on from Him. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done.” Based upon these statements, did Jesus possess yieldedness? Did He possess objectivity (and not blame others or God)? Did He possess humility? Did He demonstrate God’s own righteousness as He refused to question God’s essence and integrity – a thing so easy to do when God allows suffering in life that is a part of the greater purpose of human history. Satan introduced suffering into the equation, but as is so typical of so many aspects of the panoramic epic, God turns the plans of Satan into blessing for His Own.

9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. (Heb 12:9-11)

Obviously, the wrath of man is counterproductive in relationship to the goal of testing – an experiential righteousness that promotes inward and outward peace. Obviously, in the believer to whom the world looks for inspiration, example and pattern, anger is hypocritical (thus counterproductive). James recognizes this principle and it is embedded in his teaching. In fact, this threefold exhortation is the theme and forms the outline of his letter (see outline above).

17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, **without hypocrisy**. 18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (Jas 3:17-18)

Be Swift to Hear – Involves More Than Listening; It Involves Good Works (1:21-27)

21 Therefore putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. 22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does. 26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his *own* heart, this man’s religion is worthless. 27 This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world. (Jas 1:21-27)

James uses figurative language (much like Paul and Peter) to describe the process that the believer must follow as the transition from a mode of thinking that focuses upon one’s relative righteousness to the appropriation of God’s righteousness occurs. James uses a word that is only used here in the New Testament – “filthiness” which figuratively portrays a dirty garment.

The phrase “putting aside” carries the idea of removing clothing. Observe the similarities with Paul and Peter.

5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. **6** For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come, **7** and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. **8** But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth. **9** Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, **10** and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him. (Col 3:5-10)

12 And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; **13** bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. **14** And beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. (Col 3:12-14)

2:1 THEREFORE, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, **2** like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, **3** if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. (1 Pet 2:1-3)

These men, teachers of the Word of Truth, knew that the Word could only have full effect in believer’s lives when believers had acknowledged and set aside sin patterns (thought and behavior) in their lives. As long as sin patterns (addictive behavior of any type, rationalization and self-justification of wrong behavior and defense mechanisms) are present and have not been addressed, then the believer does not possess the traits necessary to appropriate experiential righteousness. Rivers of life-giving water will not flow from a cesspool that has not been cleansed with that life-giving water itself. The first step toward spiritual recovery is one’s own acknowledgement before the Lord that there is a sin pattern that needs to be abandoned. Then, the Lord can begin to work with that first seed of humility.

Next, James emphasizes the necessity to receive instruction from the Word in “meekness” which has deep significance – both secularly and Scripturally.

This word means “mild and gentle friendliness.” The Greeks value this virtue highly so long as there is compensating strength. Thus rulers should be gentle with their own people and stern with others. Laws should be severe but judges should show leniency. Gentleness is a mark of culture and wisdom if it does not degenerate into self-abasement. It is especially a virtue in women and characterizes female deities. For Aristotle it is a mean between bad temper and spineless incompetence, between extreme anger and indifference.¹⁴

In its use in Scripture, in which it has a fuller, deeper significance than in non-scriptural Greek writings, it consists not in a person’s “outward behaviour only; nor yet in his relations to his fellow-men; as little in his mere natural disposition. Rather it is an inwrought grace of the soul; and the exercises of it are first and

¹⁴ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, Editors, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: 1985), electronic version.

chiefly towards God. It is that temper of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting.¹⁵

James recognizes the principle that to the humble believer, the Word of God, once received and once the believer has meditated upon its applicability, there will be a change in behavior. If not, then humility is not present in that believer. You can be sure that where there is a consistent sin pattern in the life and behavior of a believer, there is no humility toward God. There is only rebellion in the soul – a soul filled with unbelief, lack of trust and cynicism. Instead of realizing one's identity in Christ as a result of the new birth, one reaches back into the closet and puts on the filthy garments of one's identity in the flesh. We have the liberty in Christ to actualize our identity in Him. We have the liberty to allow ourselves to be defined by Him – not the world, not our flesh, and not Satan. It is the Truth of God's Word in our lives that unshackles the bonds of a false identity and slavery to the lies of Satan and gives us freedom to become what God desires us to be – experientially righteous.

What does this look like in our lives? James tells us what it doesn't look like and what it does look like in verses 26 and 27. First, if we are constantly bad-mouthing others, then we have not listened to James' threefold exhortation – slow to speak, quick to hear and slow to anger. Saying bad things about other people is most often a mask for blaming others for our own problems or looking for someone towards whom we can vent our anger. On the other hand, if we have been transformed by God's testing in our lives, then it will be manifest in self-sacrificial service towards others. Furthermore, our identity (our sense of worth) will not be sought through the world's mechanisms. The life that has been transformed through humility in testing is a life not characterized by selfishness, greed, indifference or apathy.

¹⁵ W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1981), electronic version.