

# *Off the Shelf*

## *Sunday School Lesson*

### *James 1*

#### **Introduction (1:1)**

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

1. This epistle does not clearly identify the author, but most Bible scholars believe it was written by James, the half-brother of Jesus. James was a leader in the first Christian Church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13-21; 21:17-19). The Jewish historian Josephus records that James was stoned for teaching that Jesus was the Messiah in 62 AD. This book was probably written earlier than most of the epistles. Most Bible scholars think it was written between 45-50 AD based on its being addressed to Jewish Christians and there is no mention of the Jerusalem Council (48-49AD). Also, there are no references to other epistles or apostles. The main theme is practical Christian living. It contains many ideas found in the teachings of Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew Chapters 5-7).
2. James does not claim any special title such as apostle, elder, or the brother of Jesus. This is probably because he was well known as a leader and had no need for credentials. It also illustrates his humility in that he makes no claims other than being a servant of God and of Jesus Christ. By doing this, he is teaching that Jesus and God are equal.

#### **Faith Brings Trials (1:2-12)**

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault., and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wildflower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business. Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*

1. James says that trials and troubles of various kinds are to be viewed as opportunities to grow in faith. In fact, James says that trials and troubles should be

- considered as joyful! This is clearly contrary to human nature. Common human responses to trials and troubles include:
- A. Feeling sorry for yourself—Why me attitude.
  - B. Becoming angry—This isn't fair attitude.
  - C. Give up and give in—Compromise or surrender.
  - D. Becoming defiant—I will conquer this in my strength.
  - E. Question the wisdom, love and presence of God.
2. Perseverance in faith is the path to spiritual growth and maturity. James says that by it Christians will be made complete and holy (or lacking in nothing). This requires endurance, commitment, dependence and trust in the presence of God to help us. Through perseverance Christians discover and submit to God's will. Jesus modeled perseverance in his life:
- A. He was committed to do only what the Father told him to do. (Jn 5:19)
  - B. He was tempted but he remained committed to the painful path of the cross as the mission of his life. (Mt 4:8-10; Lk 22:42)
  - C. He was a man of sorrows and well acquainted with grief. (Isa 53:3)
  - D. He taught submission of personal will to God is needed every day. (Lk 9:23)
  - E. Jesus taught that his followers would be persecuted and that he would be with them always. (Mt 24:9, 28:20; Mk 10:29-30)
3. There can be great joy in suffering. There can be the vision or promise of future joy as in the anticipation a woman has in childbirth. The Bible says that Jesus had joy in his future vision of glory and the redemption of many people before he was crucified. (Heb 12:2) There also can be the joy of sensing the presence of God and his approval while suffering persecution. *Have you experienced joy in suffering?*
4. Trials and temptations lead to questions about what God is trying to show or teach us. James says that, when this happens, we need to acknowledge our lack of understanding and pray for God to teach us. We must be humble and flexible to submit to God's will and ways. (Ps 25:4-5; 23:7-8; Prov 15:33; 22:4) *Why is it necessary to trust God and not focus on finding fault to explain difficulties?*
5. If a person doubts the goodness, purposes or power of God in times of trouble, he is unstable. The focus of prayers is not on glorifying God, growing spiritually, submitting to God's will or seeking wisdom. The focus is on removing the difficulty. When this does not happen quickly enough or to the satisfaction of the person, the person may turn from God and receives nothing. Such a person looks to himself or others for help when there is a loss of patience (and belief) in God.
6. People can become resentful and envious of others who have more money, beauty, talents, knowledge or other desirable things. James teaches that those in such "humble circumstances" should take pride in themselves. Christians are to accept how, when and where God has placed us. (1 Cor 15:10) We are God's workmanship. We are destined for a glorious future. Likewise, those who are rich, beautiful, talented, etc. need to see these blessings as temporary things that are not

to be a source of pride. The Bible teaches that coveting what others have is a sin. (Ex 20:17)

7. Those who endure trials and troubles based on their faith in Jesus are blessed. They demonstrate their love and dependence upon God by accepting whatever happens. They depend upon God to give them strength to endure while deepening their devotion and trust in his sovereign plan for them. Their faith and the grace of God enable them. God will provide them a crown of eternal life because they know and love him.

### **The Sources of Good and Evil (1:13-18)**

***When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.***

1. James says that "God cannot be tempted by evil." This is because God does not have any evil desires. It is his nature to be holy and he absolutely despises and rejects anything that is contrary. Because he is omniscient, he can't be tricked into failing to recognize evil. *How then was Jesus tempted since he is God?* The devil tempted Jesus with food when he was hungry. (Mt 4:1-4) The key to understanding this is that the word tempt means to test and to entice to do evil. The devil presented Jesus with a test which was to satisfy his hunger and break his fast. Jesus rejected this because his human desire to eat was subject to the will of his Father. (Jn 5:19) As God in human flesh, Jesus was in perfect unity with the Father and there was no inclination to do anything contrary to this unity. (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 Jn 3:5) Therefore, the temptations of the devil were external and so can be thought of as tests. When presented with such tests, we are tempted internally by our selfish desires to do what pleases us and minimizes suffering.
2. God does not tempt anyone. God allows evil to exist but he is not the author of it. Evil became a possibility when God created creatures with free-will. This was necessary because God wants a love relationship with his creatures. Without free-will, his creatures would be robots. Free-will is the ability to choose between God's will and another way. Some of his creatures chose another way. The knowledge of good and evil comes to those who rebel against God.
3. Evil thoughts come from evil sources such as the world, the flesh and the devil. If these thoughts are not rejected, they will result in sin and separation from God (death). *What are some examples of evil from the world, the flesh and the devil?*
4. Do not be deceived to think that God is to blame for evil or to blame God for making us subject to it. Only good things come from God. God is the source of pure light that does not change. His will, wisdom and truth do not shift and there is no imperfection.
5. James reminds them that God has provided perfection to those who believe in the

gospel of Jesus, the word of truth. (Rom 6:22; 1 Cor 1:2; 1 Pet 1:2) This spiritual birth is the beginning of a glorious future.

6. The Jewish Christians were the first to believe in Jesus and so are a type of first fruits of his redemptive work. Those who are born again through faith in Jesus become members of his kingdom and are like a harvest of wheat. (Mt 13:24-30) Make no mistake. Jesus will separate his children from those of the devil at the final judgment. Creation will be perfected in holiness, unity and adoration to the glory of God. (Rom 8:18-23; Eph 5:8-9; 1 Th 5:5-9)

## **Christian Conduct (1:19-27)**

***My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.***

1. Being quick or eager to listen demonstrates a teachable spirit which is a sign of humility. The Bible teaches that we must learn humility before we gain the honor of holiness through Jesus Christ. (Prov 15:33; 22:4)
2. When you are talking, you are expressing thoughts that you have previously learned. In contrast, you learn best through listening and observing. Therefore, if you want to gain wisdom and knowledge, you must practice listening. I must confess that there are times when I listened up to the point when I became angry. At this point, I would say or do something that I later regretted because I acted without gaining the perspective and wisdom that comes from listening to the end.
3. *What are some examples of the righteousness that God desires that can be blocked by angry responses?*
4. James says that we must accept and allow the Holy Spirit to change us much like a seed that germinates and forms a plant which is different from the seed.
5. Our identity, hope and total being are being conformed to the image of Christ. We must never forget who we are and that we have a Lord that commands us. To listen to God through the teaching of his word and not to act upon it is sin. Such a person sees his own will rather than that of Jesus as paramount. (Php 1:6; Gal 2:20)
6. Self-control grows in Christians who are obedient to the Holy Spirit. (Gal 5:22) Religious people can be quick to speak and become angry. This can lead to behavior that is condemning, unloving and full of pride. *Why is this?*
7. James says that good works that please God are characterized by being gracious

to those who are needy and being committed to obeying the leading of the Holy Spirit. James says that the ways of the world pollute Christians. *What are some ways that the world pressures Christians to compromise and otherwise fail to follow the Bible?*

## ***Off the Shelf***

### ***Sunday School Lesson***

### ***James 2***

#### **Warnings (2:1-13)**

*My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there," or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? If you really keep the royal law found in the Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder," If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!*

1. Discrimination is contrary to Christian faith. Believers are instructed not to show favoritism of any kind. James uses the appearance of wealth as an example. Most forms of discrimination are based on external appearances such as race, sex, age, religion and ethnic differences. However, discrimination also happens based on internal qualities such as faith, intelligence and character traits. The Bible teaches that believers in Christ have the identity of Jesus. (Gal 3:26-28) This fact supersedes all other distinctions. We are collectively called his bride and body.
2. James says that discrimination breaks the royal law to "love your neighbor as yourself." (Lev 19:18; Lk 10:26-27) Most Christian churches consist of people of the same race, religious beliefs and social status. People who appear different or have different customs and beliefs do not feel welcome. This is a testimony to our failure to love others as ourselves and it is a sin rooted in pride and our egos.

3. Adultery and murder are more obvious examples of breaking the laws of God. Some people think that they are going to make it to heaven based on living a moral life. They think that their good actions will outweigh the bad. This type of thinking is comparative such that the person believes that they are better than others and this will have influence with God. James says that those who break one law, one time are equally condemned as lawbreakers. This also applies to hidden sins of the mind like lust and subtle ways of mistreating others. (Mt 5:28) *What are some subtle ways that people hurt others by their speech or actions that show favoritism or exclusion?*
4. James says that Christians will be judged according to “the law that gives freedom.” Christians are not condemned by the law because we are covered by the grace and mercy of Jesus. *What is the law that gives freedom?* (Rom 6:11-18; 7:6)
5. While Christians will not be condemned as lawbreakers, they are subject to judgment based on their actions. Therefore, James teaches that we are to love and forgive others as we have been forgiven. (Mt 6:9-12; 1 Cor 3:13-15) Forgiving others or being merciful should be a regular part of daily life for Christians. This reminds us of our sinful condition. When we recognize that the sins of others also are present in us, it helps us to forgive others when they sin against us.
6. God must judge every sin because it offends his will and holiness. Death is required as payment. Praise be to Jesus for paying the death penalty so that forgiveness (mercy) can triumph over judgment for those who put their faith in him! (Rom 8:1-4)

### **Faith and Works (2:14-26)**

*What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? (In) the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. (You) foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. In the same manner, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so is faith without deeds is dead.*

1. Some people claim to have faith and they may claim to belong to a certain

denomination, but they rarely go to church. They may watch Sunday services on television but they do not look or act different from non-believers. James says that such chameleon Christians who blend into their culture are not born again. Their claim to faith is based on family tradition, convenience or to deflect religious discussions from those of different denominations or religions. *Do you know some people like this? What are some ways to try to reach people like this?*

2. When a person is born again by faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes and changes the mind such that a person acts differently than non-believers. (Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 3:16) It is impossible for a genuine Christian to live a life without actions that show the work of the Holy Spirit within. The evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit is called fruit that expresses itself in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Gal 5:22)
3. A person who claims to be a Christian but acts differently is like a duck that never quacks or swims. Ducks have a nature that drives them to act accordingly. This is the same for a person who has the Holy Spirit and is a born-again Christian. *Is it possible for a person who is not a Christian to think he is by doing good works?* (Mt 7:21-23)
4. James says that demons believe in God and this causes them fear of future judgment. However, such knowledge will not change their evil behavior. Likewise, there are people who believe in God and fear future punishment for their sins. These people do not have a saving faith in Jesus that gives them peace and the assurance of God's mercy.
5. James uses Abraham and Rahab as examples of people who had faith that drove them to action. The Bible teaches that Abraham's faith was the basis of his friendship and righteousness with God. (Gen 15:6) Abraham's faith drove him to obey God in leaving his home for an unknown promised land, being circumcised and offering his son as an offering to God. *What about these actions proves the sincerity of his faith?*
6. Rahab feared the God of the Jews. Her faith caused her to help the Jews conquer her town of Jericho. She betrayed her people to obey God. She left her people and joined the Jews. Rahab's faith drove her to leave her family, gods and friends. *What are some difficult things that have happened to you because of your faith?* Rahab's story is in Joshua Chapter 2.
7. James summarizes by saying that faith and deeds are like the spirit and the body. Without the faith, deeds are worthless, like a body without a spirit. *How has your life changed because of your faith?*

# *Off the Shelf*

## *Sunday School Lesson*

### *James 3*

#### **Self-control is Evidence of Faith (3:1-12)**

*Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grape vine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.*

1. James continues to stress the importance of using the tongue to speak truth. Teachers will be judged if they do not practice what they preach. Also, they will be judged if they teach ideas that are false. The errors and failures of teachers are magnified in the students who follow them. Because everyone sins or stumbles, teachers must be wary of saying or doing anything that causes others to sin. Everyone is a teacher, mentor or example to someone. *Who are some teachers in your life (such as parents) that have influenced your thinking and behavior?*
2. Although the tongue is a small part of the body, it has great influence over the other parts. It can direct the actions of the total person much like the bridle of a horse or the rudder of a ship. *How have the things you have heard or said changed the course of your life for good or evil?*
3. The tongue has great power comparable to a spark that grows into a raging forest fire. *What are some examples of how great evil and destruction grow from small lies or other statements?*
4. James says that the tongue is a source of evil that is like deadly poison. The tongue is worse than wild animals because it can't be tamed or controlled. *Why is*

*this?*

5. The Holy Spirit works within Christians to increase self-control which is a fruit of the Spirit. (Phil 1:3-6) This is the way that evil uses of the tongue will be reduced. The tongue reflects or reacts to our thinking which is being changed to conform to that of Christ. (Rom 15:5; 1 Cor 2:16)
6. James encourages Christians to live according to their new nature in the Holy Spirit and not the flesh. The new nature causes the tongue to praise God while the human nature brings forth curses. James uses the analogies of fresh and salt water as well as consistent fruit bearing to illustrate the war between the two natures. Christians are commanded to be holy but our human nature causes us to fail. We are being perfected or sanctified and one day we will be holy and speak what is pure and loving. Until death or the Lord takes us, a war wages within us for control of our tongue. (Rom 7:21-25)

### **Wisdom (3:13-18)**

***Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.***

1. Wisdom is the proper application of knowledge. Therefore, the wise person takes what he has learned and lives his life accordingly. The wise person discovers that the more he learns, the more he knows that he will never know everything he should. This realization builds a spirit of humility. *How does this contrast with the attitude of an unwise man?*
2. When a person is born again by faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes and changes the mind such that a person acts differently than non-believers. (Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 3:16) It is impossible for a genuine Christian to live a life without actions that show the work of the Holy Spirit within. The evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit is called fruit that expresses itself in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Gal 5:22)
3. A person who claims to be a Christian but acts differently is like a duck that neverquacks or swims. Ducks have a nature that drives them to act accordingly. This is the same for a person who has the Holy Spirit and is a born-again Christian. *Is it possible for a person who is not a Christian to think he is by doing good works?* (Mt 7:21-23)

4. James says that demons believe in God and this causes them fear of future judgment. However, such knowledge will not change their evil behavior. Likewise, there are people who believe in God and fear future punishment for their sins. These people do not have a saving faith in Jesus that gives them peace and the assurance of God's mercy.
5. James uses Abraham and Rahab as examples of people who had faith that drove them to action. The Bible teaches that Abraham's faith was the basis of his friendship and righteousness with God. (Gen 15:6) Abraham's faith drove him to obey God in leaving his home for an unknown promised land, being circumcised and offering his son as an offering to God. *What about these actions proves the sincerity of his faith?*
6. Rahab feared the God of the Jews. Her faith caused her to help the Jews conquer her town of Jericho. She betrayed her people to obey God. She left her people and joined the Jews. Rahab('s) faith drove her to leave her family, false gods and friends. *What are some difficult things that have happened to you because of your faith?* Rahab's story is in Joshua Chapter 2.
7. James summarizes by saying that faith and deeds are like the spirit and the body. Without the faith, deeds are worthless like a body without a spirit. *How has your life changed because of your faith?*

## ***Off the Shelf***

### ***Sunday School Lesson***

### ***James 4***

#### **Reject Worldly Behavior (4:1-10)**

***What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners and***

***purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.***

1. *Why are there so many unhappy people living in unhappy homes and going to work and church where divisions and conflicts abound?* James says that these things are the result of evil desires within. Humans kill and steal, quarrel and fight to get what they want. The lust for prestige, power, fame, sex and other pleasures are the root causes of evil behaviors.
2. Those who become rich, powerful and famous should be the most satisfied and happy people. However, many times these people turn to drugs and commit suicide because they are disillusioned and unhappy. *Why is this?* (1 Tim 6:6-10)
3. Prayers that come from our desires are many times not answered. *Why is this?* Some people become disillusioned with prayer and think that it is a waste of time because they don't get what they pray for. The purpose of prayer is for God to be glorified, his will and not ours to be done, and for us to live in humble dependence upon him. (Mt 6:9-13)
4. James says that to live in friendship or according to the ways of the world is to be at odds with God. James uses the word adulterous living and being an enemy of God. The world tries to absorb our time, talents and energy in pursuits that diminish our time with God and his importance. *What are some examples of worldly things that can become the focus of our lives?*
5. Scholars have debated the meaning of the reference to the Scripture that speaks of envy and the Holy Spirit. To me, this verse recalls the zealous nature of God demanding absolute devotion to himself and not other gods or idolatrous pursuits. (Ex 20:4-6)
6. It is when we humble ourselves in dependence upon God and seek his will that he provides the grace that is needed. Repentance (which is changing your mind about sin), submission and obedience to God are required for us to overcome evil. It is through the process of recognizing sin, realizing our helpless condition and asking for God's grace to change us that we overcome evil. (Prov 15:33; 22:4) *How does pride prevent us from getting the help we need from God?*
7. We need the armor of God to help us resist the devil who attacks us through evil physical, mental and spiritual desires. The armor of God is discussed in Ephesians 6: 12-17. *How do the different types of armor enable us to defeat evil?*

### **More Admonitions (4:11-17)**

***Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor? Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow, we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you do not even know what will happen***

***tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.***

1. There is a wise saying from the Disney movie Bambi that goes like this: “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.” James warns against saying anything evil about someone else. Slander is destructive because it damages the reputation of others.
2. The person who speaks against another has judged him as being guilty of something evil. Generally, the person being accused is not present so there is no defense or appeal possible. God is the law giver and judge. Only God sees everything clearly and can pass righteous judgment. The person who speaks slanderously has set themselves in a place reserved for God. *How does this differ from human judges and juries who sit in positions of authority and pass judgment on others accused of doing evil?*
3. *What are some reasons that people slander others?* Sometimes this happens because the accuser feels better about themselves by pointing out real or imagined faults with others. Slander has its roots in the evil human nature. (Gal 5:19-21)
4. James warns against living without thinking about God. He uses the example of businessmen who are consumed with their work and travel. They make plans and assume that they will be able to accomplish their goals. They do not take into account that their lives could end at any moment or that something could happen to upset their plans. There is a popular belief that you can accomplish anything that you set your mind to do. This is the same willful thinking of the devil who set his mind on becoming like God. (Is 14:13-14) This does not mean that we should not set goals and try to achieve them. What it means is that we should seek God’s will in setting goals and ask him to help us achieve them.
5. *How do people who live without God react when something goes wrong? How does this differ from the reaction of those who live with God in their thoughts and prayers?*
6. James says that Christians should view their lives as fleeting and temporary. He says Christians should acknowledge their dependence on God by saying “God willing” in making future plans. Christians are to live with eternity and God in view. This is different from those whose focus is only on themselves in making money and being successful.
7. Sin has separated us from God. Those who live without God and believe in themselves alone to accomplish their goals are full of pride, boasting and arrogance. The Bible teaches that the order and complexities of creation bear witness that there is a God such that there is no excuse for denial. (Rom 1 :20)
8. James concludes that we commit sins whenever we live without taking God and his will into account. *How do sins of commission differ from those of omission?*

# *Off the Shelf*

## *Sunday School Lesson*

### *James 5*

#### **Warnings to the Wealthy (5:1-6)**

*Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.*

1. There is a fundamental problem with the management of wealth. Those who are rich tend not to give more than small percentages of their money to help the poor. Therefore, government has stepped into areas that should be managed by churches and private organizations. If those who are rich would be more charitable, many government welfare and social programs could be eliminated.
2. James condemns wealthy people who are obsessed with amassing wealth. This is caused by selfish ambitions and pride. Jesus said that more is expected of those who are given more. (Lk 19:12-26)
3. When death happens, there will be people who will be punished for hoarding their wealth. They had great opportunities to do good with it but instead chose to waste it on themselves or just accumulated it without doing anything with it. Jesus called such people fools. (Lk 12:16-21)
4. James warns that the riches that are hoarded will fill their owners with remorse when they die and are judged by God. These rich people will see the error of their ways. The riches of the world decay and are temporary. (Mt 6:19-21)
5. *How much money should a person give to avoid punishment?* There is no absolute rule. The idea is to be loving towards those in need and give generously and consistently to advance the kingdom of God. (Mk 12:41-43) Many Christians target ten percent based on tithing. (Gen 14:20; 28:20-22; Lev 27:30; Mal 3:10; Mt 23:23) I believe this should be a minimum not a maximum amount.
6. Rich people have power and influence over others. They may be business owners or corporate officers. James says that severe punishment will come to rich people who cheat and abuse others. Living for money, power, pleasure and self-

indulgence are symptoms of selfishness. *Do you have an eternal view of the use of money? Are there needs in your community that you are ignoring? Do you trust in God or your money for future security?* (Mt 16:26)

## **Patience and Perseverance (5:7-12)**

*Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.*

1. James counsels Christians to be patient because they will soon be with the Lord. They will meet him in death or when he returns to the earth. Christians are like a farmer who sows seed (the gospel) and then waits for God to provide rain (grace) to cause plants to grow (born to spiritual life).
2. When trials and troubles come, it is natural to complain. *We ask why did this happen to me?* This thinking many times leads to finding fault with others instead of accepting fault or making the best of it. James again warns against finding fault with others as God is the only righteous judge.
3. The prophets of the Old Testament are examples of those who suffered patiently because they delivered messages from God that were not popular. *Who were some of the Old Testament prophets and why were their messages rejected?*
4. James uses Job as an example of someone who suffered patiently enduring calamities and trials without blaming God. Job was attacked by the devil. *Why?* (Job 1) *What happened to Job and his family?* James says that God eventually brought a happy ending to Job's story. *What happened and what did Job learn from his suffering?* (Job 40-42)
5. Christians should be people who have integrity and are faithful in fulfilling their obligations. Therefore, when they say "Yes" or "No," there is no need to add anything more. James says that those who swear sin. This swearing is invoking the power or person of God or something else over which we have no authority. *How does this differ from taking an oath in a court of law?*

## **The Power of Prayer (5:13-20)**

***Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover a multitude of sins.***

1. Christians are to be joyful and pray continuously regardless of whether the circumstances in life are good or bad. (1 Th 5:16-17) This requires a dependency upon God and holding him in view throughout our lives. We may not understand the reasons for the troubles we have but we know that God loves us and does what is best for us. (Heb 12:5-11)
2. James uses the example of Elijah to show that the prayers of the saints (righteous people) are powerful over sickness and evil attacks. The collective prayers of the elders can bring about healing based on the faith of the elders and God's will. Christians cannot command healing from God based on using oil or some prayer formulas. Sometimes God chooses not to bring healing despite fervent prayers. (2 Cor 12:7-10; 2 Tim 4:20) *Have you experienced (or know of) miraculous healing following prayers of faith?*
3. Repentance is changing one's mind and actions to turn from sin. Repentance and confession are required for sins to be forgiven and for healing. Depending on the sin, confession may be public or private. (1 Jn 1:9)
4. Christians are to express love for each other by helping each other through prayers and actions. (Eph 4:32; 1 Jn 3:21-23)
5. If a Christian departs from the truth of the gospel in doctrine or practice, fellow believers should approach this person with truth in love. Many errors and sins will be avoided in the life of the errant Christian and those who are influenced by this person if the errant Christian repents and is restored. *Who are some people who have departed from the Christian faith and have led many others into false doctrines and practices?*

