

JAMES



Day 321

“A Book For Life”

November 17 - James 1: 1-27

Sometimes life can become very confusing. You may have a decision to make and it is not clear what you should do. You probably want to do the right thing, but what that is isn't clear. Frustration sets in and you either make the decision too quickly, based on the first thing that comes to your mind, or you defer the decision to a future time and just try and ignore it in the meantime.

What do you do when you don't know what to do? Do you make rash decisions or no decisions at all? I tend toward indecisiveness when the rubber meets the road. I figure if I don't make a decision then I'll be safe. Can you relate?

Well, don't look any further because here is a book full of one-stop shopping for spiritual advice. James offers so much in just a few short chapters. It is the New Testament version of the book of Proverbs. It gives us very practical insight into how the Christian should relate to God and others.

Let me warn you that James is very blunt. He doesn't pull any punches when he talks about behavior. James believes that Christians act differently because of their “glorious Lord.” He tells us to live above and beyond the status quo. We are to live godly lives and reflect the kind of spirit that Jesus walked in. This attitude will affect our lives at every turn. We are to be consistent in church and out. We cannot afford spiritually to be one way in church and another way when we walk with others outside the church.

James is writing to believers who were Jewish and had been scattered about. They had been, like the

Hebrews, persecuted by those who were anti-Jesus. James says that the troubles they have encountered for the sake of Jesus are being used by God to produce Christian character or fruit in their lives. There is a purpose to their trials. Because of this they could endure the hardships.

But life, for them and for us today, sometimes feels like it is throwing us into stormy seas that rock our boat. James says that we should simply ask God sincerely and with confidence for the answers to our dilemma. James calls it “wisdom.” Wisdom is the ability to know how to apply the truth of the Word to our situations, and especially our struggles. God gives wisdom in abundance when we ask for it. In particular, He will respond to your request for help when you are stumped about what to do next.

Let's be careful not to go ahead on something until we have sincerely prayed about it. It just makes spiritual sense to acknowledge God when we are in the decision-making process.

Let's not allow others to pressure us when we need to consider some direction or another. I have found that all too often people will say “yes” without giving the matter much thought. I think it is because they want to please others that they just can't say “no” to anyone.

James parallels Hebrews, reminding us that you must live by faith and pray in faith if you want the Lord to hear you. Remember from Hebrews that “without faith it is impossible to please God.” Faith must be genuine. It is based on your confidence in the

risen Jesus.

Make your faith sincere by telling God how you truly feel about Him, and then praising Him. A good relationship with God will always translate into proper behavior with others.

Have faith in God.

God's blessings proceed from God's liberal wisdom,
Pastor Steve



"A Prayer"

November 18 - James 2: 1-26

I had a teacher in seminary named Neil Anderson. Dr. Anderson wrote several books dealing with the importance of knowing and experiencing freedom in and through Christ. I very much appreciated his insight into the Word and his ability to apply it to the general Christian population.

One element in his books is the importance of praying through the words of Scripture. For example, he'll take a person through the steps of forgiveness while they are praying. Or, if a person has been harassed by the devil, he'll pray with them "warfare prayers" so that they can realize the victory that Jesus has already won on the cross.

I'd like to take a break from the ordinary way I write you each day and follow the example of my former teacher. Here are a couple of model prayers to pray in order to encourage your own prayer life and help you hone in on praying for the things that matter most.

Dear God,

Thank you for your grace that has been poured out into my life. I know that you are at work in my life, and even though sometimes I am not aware of it, I believe you work in me day by day, making me like you.

Thank you for your leadership in my life. Thank you for the sacrifice that you made so that I could experience Eternal Life and know you through the Lord Jesus.

God, I need your wisdom today so that I can make

the choices that will align me most squarely with your will. Thank you that the Bible promises wisdom for those who ask with faith. I need and I want to experience your wisdom today in every decision I make. Give me your wisdom, Lord, so that I can fulfill your purposes for me.

Fill me, too, with your love so that I can treat others as I would like to be treated. Help me to lay aside any prejudices that would exclude others whom you have made in your image. Today I want to act toward others the way you would act toward the same people. Give me your Spirit in measure so that I can love as you love.

I pray too, today, for my family and friends, that they would experience your grace in their lives. Give them the tools necessary to make the decisions that would best glorify your name. And help all of us to do as Paul asked us in his letters—to do all things in the name of Jesus so that His name might be glorified.

Lord, hide me in you. Work through me. Energize my faith so that I will do what I do today for you, and not in the selfishness of my own heart. God, today I am your servant, so let me lift up others and be an encouragement for them.

God, one last word about my words. Work with me to control my tongue. I want your ability to think before I speak. Remind me through the day to speak words that will build up and not tear down.

Thank you Jesus, for your victory over the evil

one; keep me from him and his devices. I forgive others who have injured me and commit them to you, because I do not want to hold on to a grudge or allow the taste of bitterness to invade my heart.

God, Ezekiel reminds me to pray for your strength to resist temptation that would come my way. None of us are immune from the desires of the flesh, which can lead us down a road of destruction. I want to learn from the evil practices of the Israelites so I won't fall into the same pit of idolatry or immorality.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

God's blessings make us prayerful,
Pastor Steve

P.S. How do we harmonize James 2 with Romans 4? In James it says that a man is not justified by faith alone but by works; in Romans 4 Paul says that a man

is justified without working for it. What is going on here? Simply put, Paul is talking about saving faith in the Lord Jesus and His cross. James, on the other hand, is talking about a person who says he has faith but is devoid of true faith.

So the focus in both chapters is on the nature of true faith. True faith saves the soul and it also produces good fruit or works. Good works do not justify the soul, but they do qualify the kind of faith a person has. Anyone can say he has faith, but only true saving faith will produce fruit that will glorify God. That is why James brings up the demons who believe; they believe in Jesus, but do not have saving faith in Him. Phony faith will not save anyone. True faith will justify a person before God and produce holy works (see John 15 as a parallel to this short discussion).



"Small, but Powerful"

November 19 - James 3:1-18

Are you a builder or a destroyer?

"A destroyer?" you ask. "That sounds like a rude question; how could you imply that I'm someone who tears others down?"

No, you heard me right. We are either builders or destroyers and there really isn't much middle ground.

Each and every day we may be contributing to others or we may be taking away, but we are always having an influence. That influence may be small, yet we will impact someone today. You are an influencer whether you like it or not. All of us are. God made us that way.

"OK, I hear your point, but I'm not sure what you mean; in what ways am I having an impact on others?"

This is an important question because the more we consider the truth of this, the more sensitive we will be to the way we treat people. Those who build

give others a positive example to follow. They use their energy for constructive purposes, and point others to the source of eternal life and life itself, Jesus; they give of what they have for the common good, they embrace the hurting and lonely, and they speak the words of God in a loving way.

Those who tear down, work for their own selfish ends. Their life encourages others to live selfish lives as well. It is an "If he can do it, so can I" attitude. Those around a person like this are looking out for themselves so that they do not get burned. Destroyers do not point others to Jesus because they are not Jesus people themselves and do not see the benefit for them of following Him. Instead of giving, they hoard and sometimes even expect others to take care of their needs. They only embrace themselves and their own ideas, and they speak disparagingly of the Word

of God because they are only interested in the words that proceed from the space between their ears.

In Chapter 2, James talks about the importance of having a working faith. True faith, he says, produces actions that reflect the high quality of that faith. This is the kind of faith that reaches out and loves others in Jesus' Name. This is the kind of faith that takes action against the destructive behaviors of the evil one, the devil. This kind of faith captures God's will and gives it to those who are needy for God. Is it any wonder then that after James's frank discussion about real faith that he goes into the power of the tongue?

Jesus said, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart," (Luke 6:45). It is in the secret places of the heart that a man's true life resides. If genuine faith in Christ is in those rooms of the heart then the result will be Christ-likeness. If Self is on the throne, then selfishness and pseudo-faith will result. The mouth speaks what is in the heart. I believe a person can, for a time, mask the true inner person and feign being someone else. You may even appear to be a very spiritual person, but eventually the mouth will catch up with the heart and the true intentions will come out.

Look at the deadliness of the tongue again in James 3:6. The tongue can create more destruction than you might think. It is fueled by the most evil of forces. It is like a fire fed by the hordes of hell. The devil and his helpers are able to ignite a person's tongue and cause untold havoc. Jesus said that the devil was a liar and the father of lies. He works over-time lying to you about all sorts of things, especially the truths of the Word of God.

If the devil can get us to contradict or water down the Word of God, he knows that he can lead us off track. Just one little doubt can work on our souls,

cause us to be overly sensitive to our own failures and send us off course. So don't believe the lies for even one moment. Instead, set your mind firmly on the truth of God's Word and let the Lord be the one to lead you.

Why is the tongue so deadly? James says it is driven by a three-fold force: the earthly (that which is driven by selfish ambition); the unspiritual (that which is driven by the natural man who is self-centered); and the demonic (that spirit which opposes all of God's glory). Envy and selfish ambition are the gasoline on the fire that keep it raging against all that is good. The tongue merely facilitates the boiling caldron underneath the surface.

Some people may say that they live neutrally. They speak neither encouragingly or disparagingly about anyone. They live in their own little world and don't bug anyone. The problem with that approach is that the people who are closest to you do not know how to read you; chances are that they will read from you that you do not care about them. If you do not encourage others, then they will think that you feel negatively about them. That may not matter to the guy on the street who has no clue who you are, but it will matter to your kids and grandkids, or the people you work with, or your closest neighbors. Neutrality is really not a virtue at all.

In contrast to this is the behavior of the wise man. His life is characterized by fruits that reflect the work of the Holy Spirit. He has the Spirit inside, driving him to do good. He is more interested in helping his neighbor than taking from him. He is a builder rather than a destroyer. His tongue moves in praise of God and in the edification of man, who, as James reminds us, was made in the image of God.

God's blessings give wisdom from above,
Pastor Steve



"Do This"

November 20 - James 4:1-17

Enjoy The Day,
I love games. I especially love to watch professional sports. I grew up attending Los Angeles Dodger ball games; I have also been to pro basketball, football, and hockey games. There is something magical about watching these games and witnessing the athleticism of the athletes.

Life is not a game. Some people act as if the people they know are the opposition in the big game. And so they struggle for superiority and domination. They are more concerned about winning than loving. I think this is the result of a humanistic and Darwinistic mindset that has pervaded our modern culture. But life is not a game and those who treat it as such will only increase their frustration. the older they get. God did not design us for gamesmanship, but for love and community.

The more we treat our fellow man with contempt and try and win our own way in life, the more we will be like the proverbial square peg in a round hole. It just does not fit. God made all of us in His image and His image is primarily expressed through love. When we seek to promote ourselves at the expense of others we do what we were not designed to do. I may love games, but I must be careful not to play them with the people in my life.

James is concerned about the same thing in this chapter. He indicates that the people were spiritually backwards. They were fighting and arguing and hurting one another. They were acting carnal and selfish. They were grieving the Spirit of the Lord, but apparently they didn't feeling bad about this. They were treating lightly the things that were nothing to be laughed at. They were playing games with their faith.

James has some very harsh words for them. He tells them to stop laughing and weep instead. They needed to face their sins and turn from them so that they could be made right with the Lord.

James gives them a very simple yet profound way

to take care of this problem. He tells them to seek the Lord and shut the devil out. Obviously, they had been giving the devil free reign and he was wreaking havoc in their midst. If you give that liar an inch he will take a mile. He will enter where he is welcome and take advantage of anyone who will not stand against him in the name of Jesus.

If you change your spiritual tone and pursue God, you will find a oneness with God that will also bring harmony back into the fellowship of the church. James says that God will be near you when you seek Him. It's you and God only; the devil is not invited. He must run because you have made the Lord your Lord, your Leader, the only one one you adore.

There is no mixing God with the devil. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot love God and hate your brother. You cannot love sin and push the devil away at the same time. Sin is his vehicle and he will ride it all the way into your life if you let him. But if you come to God and embrace Him, you will be rid of the enemy's nuisances.

Has your spiritual life lost its edge? Is spiritual fervor a distant memory? Have you lost the motivation to be in the Word with enthusiasm every day? James says that if you draw near to God, you will be back on track. OK, so what does it mean to "draw near to God?" Well, first come to Him honestly in prayer and let Him know your intentions. Let Him know that you want to be near Him. Next, when you talk to Him, mourn the allowances you have given to the devil. This includes the sins that came along with the enemy's involvement in your life. Then, celebrate the forgiveness that is yours in Jesus. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sins. Then, make sure to keep God's Words at hand so that you will have daily ammunition to resist the devil. Remember what Jesus did when He was confronted by that evil guy. We ought to do likewise.

God's blessings come after tears,

Pastor Steve

**“Be Sensitive”**

November 21 - James 5: 1-20

Hearty Greetings,

Are you sensitive to the needs of others? When you see someone in need, do you consider what would be the best thing for them? Do you see a need and barge in too fast because you want the credit for meeting the need? Or, are you tempted to pass by because it would be a big inconvenience for you to get involved?

It takes some wisdom and discernment to know what to do when a need is presented to you. What is your approach?

When the Good Samaritan saw the bloodied and bruised man on the side of the road he reached out to take care of his immediate problems. In his case that meant bandaging wounds and carrying him to a place where he could recoup. Remember, there were others who passed the injured man by for a variety of reasons.

Everyone acts differently when under stress. During stressful times it is so hard not to focus on our own problems and ignore those around us. We may be on edge, a bit testy and unable to even see what is happening with others. When we are stressed out, people who are happy and carefree annoy us. Stress can accumulate over time and then create such pressure that a person just explodes.

We all have our limits. A car has a red zone on the tachometer for a reason. It is a warning: if you run in this zone too long your motor may seize up. Have you ever felt like your life was running at 8,000 RPMs? It may be an adrenaline rush for a while, but before long you'll start to sputter and slow down.

Psychologically, I think it's a good idea to simply be aware of where you are on the stress scale. Have you had a number of major events in your life lately? Chances are you will be a bit on edge. You will be looking for ways to relieve the stress. Being aware of our own stress load and the limits of our own minds

and bodies will help us to decide where to go from there. People under a great amount of stress need to eat properly, get a good night's sleep and have a good network of friendly support. Remember, Ecclesiastes says that if you have friends, they can help you up when you fall. On the other hand, if you feel all alone when there is a major incident in your life, you will feel so much more pressure. Truly, “two are better than one.”

James has some things to say about reaching people, and he puts his counsel in broad language so that we can have a guideline to work from. Here's what God says:

“Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray.” Let's be the first to pray with someone about their trouble. When we bring our burdens to God, we're relieved, knowing that He will somehow take care of us. When a friend tells you about his problems, listen carefully and then suggest that the two of you pray about the things that are weighing him down. Pray specifically for the things that he has brought up and commit him and the problems to the Lord's grace. Remember Philippians 4:6-7.

“Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.” Proverbs says that the worst thing you can do is sing happy songs to a sad heart. But if a person is experiencing a happy time in his life, then by all means encourage him to give God the credit through a happy song. This can be a hard thing to do if you do not feel happy yourself. But I trust that you have been praying about your troubles and now you can reach out and rejoice with someone who is happy. By the way, if you are happy, don't assume that everyone is. We will sometimes project our mood, good or bad, on the rest of the world. In the story of the Good Samaritan we are not told what the mood of the Samaritan was, only that he was empathetic and reached out to the man in trouble.

“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.” When you are feeling horribly and cannot even get up out of bed, and feel good for nothing, you are the one that needs special attention. James says to bring the leaders of the church together to pray for the sick. The promise then is left up to God to do a healing work. Is this verse a carte blanche promise that every time the elders pray over people they will be healed? Of course not, because there is a day of death for everyone. If it was a person's time to die, he would die no matter how much oil you poured on him. The promise is still valid, though, and we should believe when we pray that God will raise the sick up. Of course, God knows what He is doing in a person's life and the outcome is in His hands. James simply

states that the “Lord will raise him up.” I think we should pray accordingly.

Whether you are in trouble, happy or sick, or you come into contact with others in one of these states, the key is sensitivity. Let's be sensitive to the needs of those God has placed around us. Let's ask ourselves the question: “How can I best help this person?” Sometimes the best thing you can do is stay out of it. Other times you will have to make a trip to the hospital. Whatever it is, as you walk by the Spirit, you will be led by Him too.

I hope you are happy today. If so, sing out loud.
If you have troubles, spend a bit of time praying.
If you are sick, give me a call and I'll pour oil on you.

God's blessings keep us sensitive to others,
Pastor Steve