

## Welcome and Reminders

Welcome to any visitors and welcome back to the group members. It is important to remember that everything said and done in this group is confidential. The expectation is that there will not be discussion about our conversations to anyone outside of the group that is represented here and now. We understand that sometimes personal insights or information may be shared by someone who feels comfortable doing so in this group and not around others. Let's be respectful of that and carry our commitment to confidentiality as we leave this group. *(Pass out the confidentiality reminder to anyone who has not yet received one).*

## Prayer and Praises

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## Introduction

Last session we began sifting through the Book of James by identifying the author, intended recipients, and context of the time it was written. Jesus' brother, James, was a new believer who had likely fought against the idea of Jesus being the messiah most of his life. Now, however, he was rising to prominence in the church and was one of Jesus' most enthusiastic supporters. The church was displaced and in the midst of extreme persecution. James was writing to the oppressed that were determined to press on.

The first part of James is, in essence, a portrait that James is painting of faith. In the first 21 verses of James we explored the growth of faith – specifically that faith grows through trials and testing by enduring hardship and resisting temptation.

- *At the end of last session you were encouraged to put it into practice by identifying and considering various trials and temptations in your life while seeking Godly understanding and wisdom to grow through them. How did you do? Did you experience any revelations as you made this part of your focus?*

## Faith Shows in What We Say and Do

Read 1:22 – 2:26

<sup>22</sup> *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.* <sup>23</sup> *Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his or her face in a mirror <sup>24</sup> and, after looking, goes away and immediately forgets what he or*

she looks like. <sup>25</sup> But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

<sup>26</sup> Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> Religion that God 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.

2 My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. <sup>2</sup> Suppose someone comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor person in filthy old clothes also comes in. <sup>3</sup> If you show special attention to the one wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor one, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” <sup>4</sup> have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

<sup>5</sup> Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: 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 God? <sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? <sup>7</sup> Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

<sup>8</sup> If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. <sup>9</sup> But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. <sup>11</sup> For Christ, who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

<sup>12</sup> Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, <sup>13</sup> because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? <sup>15</sup> Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

<sup>18</sup> But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. <sup>19</sup> You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

<sup>20</sup> You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. <sup>23</sup> 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.* <sup>24</sup> *You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.*

<sup>25</sup> *In the same way, 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?* <sup>26</sup> *As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.*

- *Discuss anything that stood out to you in these verses. Share your first impressions. Was there anything that struck you as profoundly inspiring or difficult?*

## ***Faith Shows in Our Action***

What a powerful imagery in understanding the Word of God to be a mirror. To look in the mirror and not have a clue what you look like is like reading the Bible and not being changed in the way you live life. The Bible is the standard that tells us what we are supposed to look like and how we are supposed to act. The action of listening is not enough. True faith requires acting on what we've heard.

Look in the mirror of God's word to see how to treat others. Look in the mirror of God's word to determine what and what not to say. Look in the mirror of God's word to control your temper, defeat your pride, and respond to persecution. If we look in the word of God and our actions and attitudes don't match what the Word expects of us we are hearers only. Some things seem relatively obvious to us but if we look closely - and continue to look – the Word of God will be transformative in our lives.

- *Give an example of how the Word of God has acted as a standard for one area of your life once you "looked in the mirror"?*

As stated last session, many had issue with the book of James because they thought it was so "works based." But James was not espousing that works save us, he was stating that our works are evidence of our salvation. What Christ has done is our salvation; what we have done is prove of it.

- *Discuss your perspectives on faith in speech alone and faith in action?*

We often sing the Christian praise song made popular by Philips, Craig and Dean, Friend of God. When I first heard this song the concept of not just considering God as my friend, but God considering me to be a friend was mind-blowing. And yet we see here, in vs. 23, that Abraham was considered a friend of God for a particular reason. He believed God. Because this follows James' dissertation on action being evidence of belief I think we can further render vs. 23 to read "Abraham believed God and acted on that belief – and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God's friend."

- *How does it resonate with you to consider yourself as a friend of God?*

## Faith Shows in our Words

Read James 3:1-18

<sup>1</sup>Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. <sup>2</sup>We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

<sup>3</sup>When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. <sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

<sup>7</sup>All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, <sup>8</sup>but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

<sup>9</sup>With the tongue we praise our Lord and Abba God, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. <sup>10</sup>Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. <sup>11</sup>Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? <sup>12</sup>My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

<sup>13</sup>Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. <sup>14</sup>But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. <sup>15</sup>Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. <sup>16</sup>For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

<sup>17</sup>But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

<sup>18</sup>Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

- Discuss anything that stood out to you in these verses. Share your first impressions. Was there anything that struck you as inspiring or difficult?

James uses some profoundly simple yet powerful illustrations here to demonstrate the power of the tongue. Think of the power of a raging wild horse or a ship without guidance traveling toward rocky seashores. These are not just powerful but they are dangerously powerful. It is not only that part of a horse or part of a ship is out of control – but the entire object is unrestrained. Likewise, if our tongue is out of control our entire Spiritual being is headed for the rocks. Worse yet, others will possibly, and even probably, get hurt as we carelessly proceed.

I think it is important to note that control of our tongue is not just the absence of gossip, slander, profanity or negativity. Control of our tongue will likely be filled with praise, encouragement, and wisdom as well. Consider these few scriptures.

*In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but the one who restrains his or her lips is wise. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the heart of the wicked is worth little. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of wisdom. (Proverbs 10:19-21)*

*Anxiety in the heart of person causes depression, but a good word makes it glad. (Proverbs 12:25)*

*Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones. (Proverbs 16:24)*

*Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit. (Proverbs 18:21)*

➤ *Share any insight you may have on showing faith through your words.*

## Putting it into Practice

Just a reminder that throughout this series each session will end with a few practical focuses and the Scripture for next session’s study. Your group is encouraged to add to the list if any discussion prompted other focus or actions.

- Look in the mirror
  - Take time this week to evaluate your actions throughout the day then search the scriptures to compare how you acted. Be honest with yourself as you search.
  - Begin reading Proverbs (because it has 31 chapters it is a great book to read every day of a month). As you read Proverbs identify the different attitudes and actions listed for both the wise and the foolish. Identify where, in each particular verse, you most consistently find yourself.
- Control the tongue
  - Be intentional about the things you do and do not say

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