

James

WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT? Walking the talk. Doing the things we say we believe.

WHO WROTE IT? James, the brother of Jesus.

WHEN DID IT HAPPEN? James wrote in the mid- to late 40s A.D.

WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT? Early in the development of the church.

THE BREAKDOWN

- Chapter 1: Faith tested
- Chapter 2: Faith and good deeds
- Chapter 3: Talk that pleases God
- Chapter 4: Spiritual dangers
- Chapter 5: Instructions for the rich, the impatient, and the sick

KEY CONCEPTS

- Wisdom
- Sin
- Words
- Faith and action
- Suffering

SCORECARD

- James:** The writer
- Abraham:** An example of someone who showed his faith by his actions
- Rahab:** Another example of faith in action
- Elijah:** An example of someone who prayed effectively

READING TIME

IN HOURS

1:30 | 1:30 | 1:30 | 2:00 | 2:30

WORTH MEMORIZING

- 1:2-3 Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.
- 1:17 Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow.
- 2:17 Faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.
- 3:17 The wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere.
- 5:16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE

- **ORGANIZATION AND PLANNING.** James 4:1-3-16 is good advice for business planners—or any other planners, for that matter. It's easy to think we're really in charge, assuming that we can determine what will happen. James reminds us that God is sovereign. We must be humble enough to admit that our plans will come true only if God allows it.

THE EPISTLE OF

JAMES

WHAT'S THE POINT OF

James?
+++
Real
Christians
don't just
stand around.

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS CANNOT BE called faith. "Faith without works is dead" (2:26), and a dead faith is worse than no faith at all. Faith must work; it must produce; it must be visible. Verbal faith is not enough; mental faith is insufficient. Faith must be there, but it must be more. It must inspire action. Throughout his epistle to Jewish believers, James integrates true faith and everyday practical experience by stressing that true faith must manifest itself in works of faith.

Faith endures trials. Trials come and go, but a strong faith will face them head-on and develop endurance. Faith understands temptations. It will not allow us to consent to our lust and slide into sin. Faith obeys the Word. It will not merely hear and not do. Faith produces doers. Faith harbors no prejudice. For James, faith and favoritism cannot coexist. Faith displays itself in works. Faith is more than mere words; it is more than knowledge; it is demonstrated by obedience; and it overtly responds to the promises of God. Faith controls the tongue. This small but immensely powerful part of the body must be held in check. Faith can do it. Faith acts wisely. It gives us the ability to choose wisdom that is heavenly and to shun wisdom that is earthly. Faith produces separation from the world and submission to God. It provides us with the ability to resist the Devil and humbly draw near to God. Finally, faith waits patiently for the coming of the Lord. Through trouble and trial it stifles complaining.

The name *Iakobos* (James) in 1:1 is the basis for the early title *Iakobou Epistole*, "Epistle of James." *Iakobos* is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Jacob, a Jewish name common in the first century.

WATCH WORDS

- **partiality** (favoring one person over another)—2:1
- **similitude** (the exact likeness)—3:9
- **anoint** (dab or smear a substance, usually oil, on a person)—5:14



Most of us know the value of a wise pastor to whom we can go for advice and counsel, someone whose biblical messages give us daily nourishment and practical guidance, who cares for us and speaks wisdom to our circumstances.

Well, all of us have a pastor like that whenever we read the book of James.

As the half-brother of the Lord Jesus, James was a respected leader in the early Church; and he became the head of the church in Jerusalem. In that role he wrote these five chapters to fellow Jewish Christians outside Jerusalem, to those scattered abroad. James spoke to them as though he were their pastor, giving commands, warnings, wisdom, and instruction.

As we study this epistle, we become equal recipients of its message. In some ways, the book of James resembles Proverbs. It's pithy, practical, and full of everyday wisdom, and it's advice we need. "The wisdom that is from above," James said, "is first pure, then peaceable; gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17). True faith, he wrote, is wise and translates into daily action.

If you need a regular dose of wisdom from a beloved pastor, read the book of James and listen to his instructions about dealing with trials, caring for widows and orphans, taming your tongue, and managing your money. The more we know of this little letter, the more the wisdom of our ways and the integrity of our walk will increase.



KEY THOUGHT:

The wisdom from above—God's wisdom—teaches us how to deal with trials, care for the needy, control our temper and tongues, and glorify God by the integrity of our daily lives.



KEY VERSE:

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."
James 1:22



KEY ACTION:

"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."
James 1:27



KEY PRAYER:

Lord, I ask You for wisdom and integrity, and the grace with which to demonstrate it.

BASIC SURVEY

JAMIES

AUTHOR: James (1:1), probably a brother of Jesus (see Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3).
DATE: Approximately AD 60.

IN TEN WORDS OR LESS

Real Christian faith is shown by one's good works.

DETAILS, PLEASE

Though the apostle Paul clearly taught that salvation is by faith alone and not by good works (see Romans 3:28), James clarifies that good works will *follow* true faith: "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?" (2:14 NIV). James encourages Christians, in everyday life, to view trials as opportunities for spiritual growth, to control their tongues, to make peace, to avoid favoritism, and to help the needy. The bottom line? "Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it" (4:17 NLT).

QUOTABLE

> Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (4:8 NKJV).

> The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective (5:16 NIV).

UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL

For those who think it's enough just to believe in God, James says, "The devils also believe, and tremble" (2:19 KJV). Life-changing faith in Jesus is the key.

SO WHAT?

Want practical wisdom for living the Christian life? You'll find it all through the book of James.

READ JAMES 1-2.

- One-Month Course: your next reading is on page 264. →
- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 264. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 262. →

INTRODUCTION TO
JAMIES

BACKGROUND

The apostle John briefly recorded the relationship between Jesus and his brothers: "For neither did his brethren believe in him" (Jn 7:5). Yet after Jesus' death and resurrection, a change occurred: James and Jude became believers. James became a bishop of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:13; see also Gal 2:9) and is believed to be the writer of the Epistle of James, identified in 1:1. This epistle has been called "the Proverbs of the New Testament" because of its pithy style and pragmatic teaching. It does not have the personal tone of Paul's letters. It discusses the practical aspects of Christian conduct rather than doctrinal issues.

MESSAGE

James informs readers of Jewish de-

OUTLINE

I. Encouragement for Believers

A. Greeting

B. Rejoice in trials

II. Advice for Believers

A. Avoid class distinctions

B. Relationship of faith and works

C. Control the tongue

D. Wisdom from heaven

E. Resist the devil

F. Problems with wealth

G. Patience and prayer

scant about faith as it relates to trials, temptations, tests, the truth of God's word, the tongue, wisdom, separation from the world, and submission to God. The letter echoes themes found in Matthew's extensive account of the Sermon on the Mount. For the spiritual life to work, faith must work. It is not enough to verbally say one has faith or intellectually claim to have faith; faith must be practically expressed every day in word and deed. Faith without works is dead, and a dead faith is worse than no faith at all.

TIME

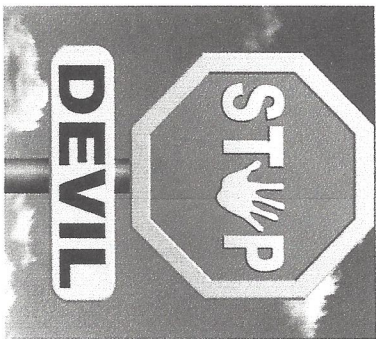
The Epistle of James was likely among the first books written in the New Testament. Scholars have proposed a date between A.D. 46 and 60; James, according to the Jewish historian Josephus, was martyred in A.D. 62.

1:1	1:1
1:2-27	1:2-27
2:1-13	2:1-13
2:14-26	2:14-26
3:1-12	3:1-12
3:13-18	3:13-18
4:1-17	4:1-17
5:1-6	5:1-6
5:7-20	5:7-20

CLOSER LOOK

RESISTING THE DEVIL

Many Christians don't understand what's happening when they come under spiritual attack. They assume that all those dark thoughts originate in their



James wrote that we should resist the devil and trust that God will give us the strength we need to stand strong.

enough. We must usually take a stand and steadfastly, repeatedly reject his dark thoughts.

James shares a key thought: "Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:7-8 NKJV). Christians are promised that if they resist the devil, he will flee. Psalm 91:1 (NASB) also promises, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty." To be sheltered by God, to enjoy His protection, we must draw close to Him and submit to Him. We can't expect His full protection if we're running around outside His will, not yielding to Him.

But if we *do* yield, "the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one" (2 Thessalonians 3:3 NIV).

READ JAMES 4 AND PSALMS 29-30.

● Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 264. →

HIDDEN TREASURE

TEMPTATIONS VERSUS TESTS

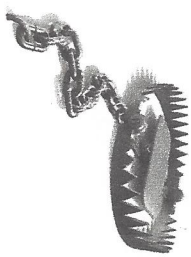
There's a *big* difference between being tempted and being tested. James writes, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God.' . . . But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin" (James 1:13-15 NKJV). Some people, however, quote Genesis 22:1 (KJV), which says, "And it came to pass. . . that God did tempt Abraham." But the NKJV, NIV, and NASB translate this more accurately as "God tested Abraham." God often *does* test His people to make it plain what's in their hearts (see Deuteronomy 8:2)—and to demonstrate their weaknesses to *them* so that they can take necessary steps to change in that area.

READ JAMES 5 AND ISAIAH 35.

HIDDEN TREASURE

THE TONGUE

James gives a clear warning about thoughtless, foolish speech, saying, "See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. . . and sets on fire the course of our life" (James 3:5-6 NASB).



James' writing reminds us that we must be careful about the things we say so that our speech reflects our faith in God. Our words can trap us.

Solomon agreed, saying, "A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul" (Proverbs 18:7 KJV). What we say betrays what's lurking in our hearts, for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34 NKJV). And as James says, our tongue often reveals our hypocrisy: "With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men" (James 3:9 NASB). But if we yield our hearts to God's cleansing Spirit, our words will change.

READ JAMES 3 AND PROVERBS 18.

James

BOOK INTRODUCTION

Although James, the most likely author of this epistle, was a half-brother of Jesus, he initially did not follow Him. "Even His brothers did not believe in Him" (John 7:5).

What changed for James? His wholehearted transformation into a devoted disciple was almost certainly triggered by Jesus' resurrection from the dead. According to 1 Corinthians 15:7, James was one of the first people to whom Jesus appeared after His resurrection.

When the apostle Paul met him (Gal. 1:19), James was a respected leader in the church in Jerusalem. Years later, Paul referred to James, Peter, and John as "pillars" of the church (Gal. 2:9). And later still, when Paul arrived in Jerusalem after his third missionary journey, James seems to have been the pastor, or leader, of the Jerusalem church, for he alone is named among "all the elders" (Acts 21:17, 18).

It is likely James wrote his letter in the mid- to late 40s (AD), just 15 years or so after Christ's ascension. His letter is different from most NT epistles. Like Hebrews and Galatians (though it addresses different issues), it deals with themes that concerned Jewish Christians, reflecting the demographic of the early church, especially in Jerusalem.

WHAT IT SAVS | *Make Good on Your Words*

James calls "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" to make good on their confession of faith (1:1). The "twelve tribes" refers to Jews scattered outside the land of Israel in Gentile countries. These scattered Jews were seldom accepted by their countrymen, often abused by the Gentiles, and had less standing than a slave in some places (Acts 5:41; 12:17). The technical term James uses for those scattered abroad is *Diaspora*, which describes Jews living outside of Judea among the Gentiles.

This dispersed group of Jewish believers very likely included some who were once members of his church in Jerusalem. The apostle sounds very much like "Pastor James" as he encourages readers in the various trials and hardships they were experiencing.

James' epistle cannot be called personal—that is, it does not address specific issues or questions rising out of one locale. Instead it becomes more of a collection of wisdom instructions (like those in the wisdom literature of the OT), along with references to the teachings of his brother Jesus. James' instructions deal with the kinds of difficulties his readers will face. The central thread tying the multiple

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sections together is that these believers must allow their difficult circumstances to prove their fidelity to the Lord.

James employs numerous metaphors and illustrations to make his points (a teaching style picked up, no doubt, from his brother Jesus—the master teacher). But he does not paint word pictures just for the sake of eloquence alone. There are 50 imperative (command) verbs and clauses in the letter's 108 verses. James does not say, "I recommend that you do," but, "You must do."

James writes with the heart of a pastor-leader wanting those he cares for to demonstrate actions that will prove—to themselves and to a watching world—that their faith is genuine, especially in the face of trials, troubles, and temptation.

WHAT IT MEANS | *Walking the Tightrope between Faith and Works*

At the opening of his letter, James introduces a concept his Jewish readers could well understand and appreciate: wisdom, or living skillfully. In the midst of "various trials," Christians need the skills necessary to persevere with patience. Just as Solomon advised his readers to cry out to God for discernment (Prov. 2:1-9), James says Christians should "ask of God" (1:5).

Rich and Poor: Like the OT prophets, James greatly criticizes favoritism, partiality, and the oppression of the poor. He demands that believers love everyone equally—especially the poor—just as God does. And he counsels wealthy believers not to place confidence in their own wealth or to ignore the plight of poorly paid laborers, whose cries ascend to the very ears of God (2:1-13; 5:1-6).

The Tongue: Evidently careless, malicious gossip was doing great harm to the church. The same tongue that praises God must not be used to curse another person (3:1-12).

Faith and Works: James is perhaps best known for his desire to balance faith and works. Although his emphasis is distinct and pointed, everything he says is consistent with Paul's teaching that we are saved not by works but for works (Eph. 2:8-10). In stating his case for a faith that is proven by works, he makes an appeal to father Abraham himself (1:19-27; 2:14-26).

Patience and Prayer: James highlights the themes of patience, endurance, and waiting throughout his letter. He urges believers to submit to God (4:1-12) and declares the power of prayer (5:13-18), especially in difficult times.

Wisdom: For James, wisdom is not mere knowledge but the ability to live skillfully in light of that knowledge in any situation. Such wisdom can only come from God (1:5).

WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU | *Walk It, Don't Just Talk It*

James gives strong pastoral counsel to a flock scattered throughout the Roman world, by persecution: beliefs must translate into life. It is not enough to tuck away a private, intellectual faith in order to blend in with everyone else. If our faith in Christ really means anything, we will stand out. People will notice a difference.

On the other hand, those who show very little concern for people in need, make no effort to control their tongue, and are overly preoccupied with getting ahead should check to see if their faith is real. To claim to belong to Jesus but mirror the attitudes and actions of the world may be a sign that they are only fooling themselves.

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“Walk the talk.” It’s a simple statement that basically means you should live in a way that backs up what you say you believe. If your actions don’t measure up to what you say you believe, then people will conclude that what you say you believe really isn’t that important to you. If you really believe something to be true, you will live in a way that shows it.

James was Jesus’ half-brother. (This is not the same person as the disciple James who followed Jesus. The disciple James was martyred by Herod in Acts 12:2.) James had grown up with Jesus and, at first, did not believe in Him (Jn 7:5). After His resurrection, however, Jesus appeared personally to James, and James believed in Him (1 Co 15:7). James went on to become the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Ac 15:13).

In the book of James, Jesus’ half-brother wrote to first-century Christians about “pure and undefiled religion” (1:27). In a sense, James used the same argument that we cited above: If you call yourself a Christ follower, then you must behave in a way that shows what you believe. James then laid out several arguments for what Christians should believe and do.

In the first chapter, James talked about one of the most difficult aspects of the Christian life: doing what the Word says, not just listening to it. This is surely a struggle for all. We know what Christ teaches, and we are eager to proclaim it. However, sometimes it’s difficult to make our actions follow our words.

James wrote, “Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (1:22). Then James gave an example of someone who failed to do this. It’s like someone who looks at himself in the mirror and then forgets what he looks like as soon as he walks away. James calls us to be true—from the inside out.

James continued on in that theme in chapter 2, where he wrote, “In the same way faith, if it doesn’t have works,

is dead by itself” (2:17). He challenged his readers to make themselves wholly committed to Christ. Don’t just talk the talk, but walk the talk as well.

James was compiling a fairly good instruction manual for the Christian faith—but he was not finished yet! In chapter 3, he concentrated on taming the tongue. The power of the tongue, even though it’s only a small part of our bodies, is considerable. It can build someone up or tear him or her down. James warns us to use our words carefully.

In chapter 4, James offered advice on how believers ought to treat one another. It’s bad enough to face persecution from the outside world, but it’s really bad when believers can’t seem to get along. We need to be united in order to have maximum impact.

In chapter 5, James tackled the issue of wealth, warning on the Lord, and effective praying.

Clearly, James wrote an important and needed manual for the Christian faith. While James encourages us to live out our faith with actions, it’s important to remember that we can only do this when we humble ourselves before God (4:10). God will empower us to live rightily. Have you *personally* humbled yourself before God?

Author: James, the half-brother of Jesus, and the leader of the church in Jerusalem

Date: Written before the Jewish council on circumcision in Jerusalem (A.D. 49)

What in the world is going on?

- A.D. 6 Twelve-year-old Jesus visits the temple in Jerusalem
- A.D. 8 The Julian calendar, established by Julius Caesar, is finally in use
- A.D. 18–36 Caiaphas is the high priest in Jerusalem
- A.D. 23 Roman scholar Pliny the Elder is born
- A.D. 26–30 Years of Jesus’ ministry
- A.D. 37–44 Herod Agrippa I is king of Judea and Peraea
- A.D. 41–54 Claudius is the emperor of the Roman Empire; he marries his niece Agrippina in A.D. 48
- A.D. 43 The Romans begin to invade Britain
- ca. A.D. 44–46 Jewish rebel Theudas claims to be the Messiah and leads a revolt against Rome
- ca. A.D. 45 James, Jesus’ half-brother, writes the book of James
- A.D. 49 Council at Jerusalem
- A.D. 49 The Roman emperor, Claudius, forces the Jews out of Rome; Priscilla and Aquila leave Rome and wind up in Corinth where they meet Paul
- A.D. 54–68 Nero rules the Roman Empire
- ca. A.D. 62 According to historian Josephus, the Sanhedrin orders James (Jesus’ half-brother) to be stoned to death

JAMES

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

THE BIG PICTURE

Often we label as hypocrites those who live lives that are overtly inconsistent with their words. Yet in one way or another we are all hypocrites, whether in the church community or in the community at large. We have all said we believe in something, only to prove by our actions that we really don't!

James—the half brother of Jesus and one of the leaders of the Jerusalem church—wrote bluntly about this kind of hypocrisy. He recognized that as humans we often hear God's Word without putting it into practice. James's goal was simple: to get his audience, and all believers, to recognize that their confession of faith and conduct did not agree and to motivate them to start acting on what they claimed they believed.

James challenged his readers to be full of wisdom, faith, forgiveness, self-control and generosity to others. He encouraged them to simply do what they knew they needed to do. Their spiritual progress would only start if they admitted their responsibility to obey God. Only then could James's readers conquer hypocrisy and forge ahead with the activities and attitudes that reflected God's will for them. A spiritual growth plan may sound good in principle, but we may never take those steps necessary for progress. James reminds us that our words are not enough. We need to do more than just say we believe God can help us. We need to show our faith and commitment by taking real steps of obedience toward spiritual growth, or we will never move forward toward lives that agree with God's will for us.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL THEMES

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTION

If faith can be alive, it can also be dead. Dead faith is a belief that does not prove itself in action. Dead faith claims to be something when it is nothing. Seeking God and surrendering to him always involve action. If we simply say that we have surrendered our lives to God but do not confess our sins, accept responsibility for our lives, repent and make restitution to those we have hurt and follow God's will, then we are only fooling ourselves. Effective spiritual growth involves following through on our professions of faith. We must also preserve whatever spiritual gains we make by remaining in relationships with others who are also subjects of God's kingdom and who hold us accountable to live according to his plan.

- A. WISDOM: THE FOUNDATION OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH (1:1–27)
- B. FAITH: THE SUBSTANCE OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH (2:1–26)
- C. SELF-CONTROL: SETTING BOUNDARIES TO PROMOTE SPIRITUAL GROWTH (3:1–18)
- D. HUMILITY: THE ATTITUDE OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH (4:1–17)
- E. GIVING OF OURSELVES: THE EVIDENCE OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH (5:1–20)

Essential Facts

PURPOSE:
To show God's people how to live.

AUTHOR:
James, the half brother of Jesus.

AUDIENCE:
Primarily the Jewish believers living in Gentile communities outside of Palestine.

DATE WRITTEN:

This short letter was probably written between AD 44 and 49, before the Jerusalem Council held in AD 50 (see Acts 15:1–35).

SETTING:
James wrote to encourage the persecuted believers who were once a part of the church in Jerusalem to live out their faith in everyday life.

KEY VERSE:
"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (5:16).

KEY PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS:
James with his audience.

FOR REFLECTION Slow to Speak • 1:19

It is said that on one occasion, a young man came to a great orator to be trained in oratory. In his first meeting with his famous teacher, the potential student began to talk without stopping. When the orator could finally get a word in, he said, "Young man, I will have to charge you a double fee."

"A double fee? Why is that?"
"I will have to teach you two subjects. First, how to hold your tongue, and then how to use it."

GAINING STRENGTH FROM DIFFICULT TRIALS

As we patiently face life's problems we will find our character strengthened. We can welcome trials and problems as opportunities to pray for wisdom, to ask God to give us patience and to learn to depend on God. When we turn to God in times of trial, he will teach us the lessons necessary for us to persevere and grow.

TRUE SPIRITUAL RENEWAL LEADS TO WISE SPEECH

One of the hardest things for us to control is our tongue—the words we say (see James 1:26). James gives us very practical advice about handling our tongues. We should ask God for wisdom, be slow to speak in anger and listen more than we talk. Since our speech is a reflection of what is going on inside us, we can check our speech for clues to our strengths and weaknesses. As we reflect honestly on our lives and confess our wrongs to God, he will begin to change us on the inside. These inner changes will be reflected in our words.

Kneeling in the Shadows

HE WAS ONE OF THE "LITTLE KIDS" in Joseph and Mary's house, the brood that came along after the firstborn, Jesus. We wish we knew more about James's early years. Did he get along with his older brother? What did he think about the getting-lost-at-the-Temple escapade? How old was he when Jesus moved out on his own?

(Some have speculated, by the way, that James and the others weren't really brothers of Jesus but rather cousins, or perhaps stepbrothers from an earlier marriage of Joseph's. This makes it possible then to defend the idea that Mary had one and only one pregnancy in her lifetime. Granted, the range of the Greek word *adelphos* is wide enough to cover everything from "relative" to "good friend."

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.

JAMES 4:10

But there is nothing in the New Testament that suggests that James was anything other than a natural-born son of Mary just like Jesus.)

What we do know for sure is that James and the rest of his brothers weren't too keen on Jesus' mission once he got rolling. They came to see him once (Mark 3:31) and hung around the edges of the crowd. But they "didn't believe in him" (John 7:5). In fact, they sarcastically egged him on to go make a spectacle of himself (John 7:3).

All that changed, however, when Jesus rose from the dead. He apparently had a "list" of people to see following the Resurrection, and James was on it (see 1 Corinthians 15:7). James became convinced that this brother he had grown up with, done chores with, gone to school with . . . was the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

Within a few years, James rose to become the presiding leader of the Jerusalem congregation, moderating a tough church council that debated whether Gentile Christians should be required to conform to Jewish law (see Acts 15). James, a devout Jew, said he thought Gentiles should *not* have to go through endless Jewish rituals in order to be accepted, and his diplomacy won the day. It was a watershed moment in the development of the young church.

Eventually, James wrote a letter to the churches across the Roman Empire: we call it the Epistle of James. It was succinct, clear, and practical, with a call for faith to be backed up by action in our lives.

James was a quiet, brave man known for his integrity and devotion. This eventually got him killed: the Jewish high priest had him stoned in A.D. 61 or 62. A poignant picture has been passed down from Hegesippus, a second-century historian, that reveals something personal about James: "He was in the habit of entering alone into the temple, and was frequently found upon his knees begging forgiveness for the people, so that his knees became hard like those of a camel, in consequence of his constantly bending them in his worship of God."

THE POINT: Not every godly man has to be flamboyant.

Someone you should know

James, the Lord's Brother

Sheryl Christians Be Tolerant?

Jonathan Murray

It is commonly said that Christians are intolerant, bigoted, and close-minded, with the chief of these sins being intolerance. Is this true? Should Christians be more tolerant? That depends on what is meant by tolerance. There's a lot of confusion today because "tolerance" is being defined in two different ways.

The traditional understanding of tolerance means that you (1) extend to others the right to disagree with your opinions, (2) treat others with respect, fairness, and dignity even though you disagree with them, and (3) recognize that all ideas and beliefs are not equal (that is, some are better than others). Philosopher Paul Copan sums it up well: "If disagreement didn't exist, then tolerance would be unnecessary. It is because real differences exist between people that tolerance becomes necessary and virtuous" (from *True for You, But Not True for Me*).

In contrast to this, the new definition of tolerance is a mood held by most people on the street and in the classroom which says expressing a difference of opinion is itself an act of intolerance. Today, you can be labeled intolerant simply by arguing for an unpopular viewpoint even if you do so respectfully. This is especially true when it comes to ethics and religion; the default assumption in our society is that everyone's deeply held beliefs are valid, no matter how irrational they may be.

Tolerance is defined this new way because society now places less emphasis on truth. This is largely due to the widespread belief that truth is unknowable and thus not worth arguing about. If truth doesn't matter, you can believe whatever you want. All views can be accepted equally, because no view describes anything real. Our "truths" do not correspond with the way things actually are. It is important to note that this belief is actually self-refuting. After all, we must ask, "Is it true that truth is impossible to know?"

In any case, how does Christianity fit with the new definition of tolerance and the de-emphasis on truth? The Bible says Jesus is the only way to God (Jn 14:6). Judaism and Islam disagree with this. As Christians, we should tolerate Jews and Muslims by representing their views fairly and treating them with respect. Nevertheless, it remains the case that either Jesus was not the Messiah (Judaism), was the Messiah (Christianity), or was merely a great prophet (Islam). All three positions cannot be true, and we must point this out to non-Christians.

This kind of conversation is unpopular today. It's seen as the height of intolerance. Unfortunately, this response may be unavoidable if we are faithful to what the Bible teaches. Christians will inevitably be seen as intolerant as long as intolerance is defined as holding our beliefs to be true and contrary views to be false. We must love our neighbors by telling them things they don't want to hear (Lk 10:27). In doing so, we must not come off as arrogant, condemning, or mean. We need to give answers for our hope, yet always with gentleness and respect (1Pt 3:13-15; cp. Col 4:6;

♦♦♦
Jms 2.
♦♦♦

Some people argue that since Allah is simply the Arabic word for God, Muslims worship the same God as Christians. But God is not God's name. In the Bible God's personal name is Yahweh, whereas the Islamic Scriptures (Qur'an) gives God's name as Allah. The generic word God is more like the title of a position than the name of an individual. The position is a *what*, but the one filling the position is a *who*. Think of it this way: in a political campaign, each candidate (the *who*) vies for a single office (the *what*). Though multiple people compete for the same general position, only one person will eventually fill the role.

In much the same way, Christians and Muslims seek to honor God while believing that a different person occupies that office. They believe in the same *what*—a deity who created the universe, administered history, and judges human actions and motivations—but they believe a different *who* fills those roles. For example, Christians worship Jesus as divine Savior of the world because the Bible teaches that He is God's divine Son who became a man. The disciples worshiped Him after He walked on water and calmed the storm (Mt 14:33), and they worshiped Him after His resurrection (Mt 28:9, 17). Even angels were commanded to worship Jesus (Heb 1:6).

Muslims, on the other hand, regard Jesus as a mere man who happened to be a beloved prophet. They believe equating Jesus with God is to commit Islam's most serious crime, the sin of *shirk*—to worship someone other than Allah. What Christians regard as the greatest good (worship of Jesus), Muslims consider the unpardonable sin. If Christians by definition worship Jesus as God, while Muslims condemn to hell any who worship Him (Surah 5:72-73), clearly Muslims and Christians do not worship the same God. The Bible and the Qur'an (a.k.a. Koran) offer conflicting descriptions of God, thus showing the error of the claim that Christians and Muslims worship the same God.

There is another important point that must be addressed. Worshiping the *right* God is only part of the story; worshiping the *right* God the *right way* is the rest. Paul noted that though the Jews worshiped God with sincerity, they did not pursue him "according to knowledge" of Christ (1m 10:2). Jesus told the Samaritan woman that "true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:23). His mention of "true worshipers" presupposes there are false worshipers, even among those who acknowledge the God revealed in the OT. James notes that even demons believe in the one, true God, but it does them little good (Jms 2:19).

The important thing is not that we worship God our *own* way, but that we worship God *His* way, and believe of Him the things He says of Himself. Since the first century, God's way has only been through Jesus. This is what Jesus and His disciples taught. Access to God comes only through His appointed Messiah: Jesus the Son of God.

... This is completely incompatible with any form of Islam.

THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES : REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION

CONFESSING TO ONE ANOTHER

James 5:16

in hides in darkness and silence, gathering energy for its work. Confession brings sin into the open where its power is broken. James, the half brother of Jesus and a leader in the early church, recognized this and exhorted his readers to practice the discipline of confession.

What are we supposed to confess? We are to confess to one another when we have sinned against each other. Unconfessed sin erects barriers in relationships. Confession and forgiveness break down these walls and allow God's love and power to flow freely among us.

There are also times when we should confess to one another sins from which we are struggling to break free. However, we do not confess to one another as a condition for forgiveness. We are forgiven solely by the grace that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. But others can provide the support, accountability, assurance and perspective that can help us move forward. Opening our hearts to a pastor, counselor or wise spiritual friend can be a step toward experiencing the freedom of forgiveness.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Are you harboring any sins that need to be confessed to someone? Are there areas of sin that could be overcome by having someone share your struggle and support you? As you choose such a person, carefully consider this person's own spiritual maturity and commitment to you. Ask whether the person understands the goals of the process of confession. Obtain their agreement to confidentiality and support before you share your heart.

For more on repentance and confession, turn to 1 John 1.

The most deeply important question asked in Christian circles also divides many believers. It is simply, How are we saved? Is it by faith alone? Or must we live in a way that glorifies God if we are to spend eternity with Him?

That is an appropriate discussion when it comes to salvation. The NT clearly says that we are saved "by grace . . . through faith" and that "[salvation] is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9). Yet the apostle Paul's very next words are that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph. 2:10). So we are not saved by good works, but we are saved for good works.

This relationship between faith and works is the focus of the apostle James' letter. He suggests that faith and works are dual sides of the same coin of salvation, that faith and works are not mutually exclusive, and that true inner faith manifests good works: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (2:26).

Interestingly, Paul beautifully links faith and good works when discussing the ministries of apostles: "Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). Jesus also ties the same two ideas together (Luke 12:42). The works that God approves in a Christian's life are those motivated by faith (obedience). A Christian does them not to earn salvation but to fulfill the goal of salvation—being a steward of God on earth, using His gifts and resources to accomplish His will.

Everything we consider a "good work" for God is best understood as an expression of stewardship. A steward is, in modern terms, a manager or administrator—someone who is responsible for doing what the owner would do if he or she was present. Scripture gives us examples of stewardship in Joseph's life in Egypt (Gen. 39:1-6) and Jesus' parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30).

Humans have been responsible for good works in God's kingdom from the very beginning. When God created Adam and Eve, He gave them dominion over "every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen. 1:28). But the Lord cares about more than just good works; He looks for *enduring* good works built on the foundation of faith in Him (1 Cor. 3:10, 11).

At the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10), Christ will judge each Christian's works: "Each one's work will become clear; . . . the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work . . . endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss" (1 Cor. 3:13-15; italics added). This naturally leads us to ask how we may know if our works qualify as the works of a steward of God's grace?

Paul tells us to do whatever we do in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Col. 3:17). Our words and deeds should bring glory to God. In other words, everything a godly steward does that displays the *glory of the Lord* is considered a good work in God's sight.

Faith and good works are so interconnected that James concludes: if we say we have been saved by faith but have no good works that show our faith, we do not differ from the person who neither claims to have faith nor does good works.

The father of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther—who rediscovered the doctrine of salvation by faith alone when reading Romans 1:17—said that a person is saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. When God's stewards have true saving faith, their faith does good works for the glory of God.

For Further Reading: Gen. 1:5-6; Matt. 23:23; Rom. 1:17; 3:28; Gal. 5:25; Heb. 11:1 John 2:4

THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES : SILENCE

TONGUE TIED

James 3:1-12

he discipline of silence applies not only to our relationship with God but also to our interaction with others. Paul asserted that the love of money was at the root of all evil. But James was convinced that the tongue is every bit as lethal as the love of money. When we think about the damage caused by our careless words, sarcasm, hurtful comments and bitter arguments, we will heartily agree with James. While the schoolyard quip "sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me" is often recited as a quick retort against name-callers, the reality of the injury inflicted by harsh words cannot be avoided. Bones heal, but wounded spirits can feel the pain for years.

Paul exhorted his readers, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Ephesians 4:29). In light of this command and because of the immense power of words both to hurt and heal, we ought to guard our tongues carefully. From refusing to answer back when baited into an argument, to resisting the temptation to spread gossip, to foregoing a sarcastic remark that would have resulted in a laugh at someone else's expense, we can practice the discipline of silence in our relationships and conversations. This discipline is not intended to silence our conversation, but rather to help us fulfill Paul's exhortation to encourage each other with our words.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Reflect for a moment upon your most recent conversations. Was your tongue under the Holy Spirit's control? How might silence have been an asset? Even a few moments of silence can prevent us from saying something we might regret later. Use your next conversation as an opportunity to practice the discipline of silence through verbal self-control.

For more on silence, turn to Job 42.

SEE THE TRUTH

Looking in the Mirror

James 1:21–25

How many times do we look into a mirror each day? Some of us check our appearance quite frequently. If we notice, for example, that we have somehow smeared something on ourselves, we will immediately wipe ourselves off and clear up the problem. In the same way, we need to routinely look at ourselves in a spiritual mirror, reflecting honestly on our spiritual condition as compared to God's Word. Then we need to make any necessary changes as God directs us to.

James says that God's Word is like a spiritual mirror. He writes,

Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 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 (James 1:23–25).

We need to regularly examine our lives by looking into God's Word. If we see that we have fallen short of something God requires, we need to take responsibility for it and take immediate action to correct it. Recognizing the truth about our behavior is necessary for our spiritual renewal and transformation.

Turn to Revelation 3.

SEEK GOD AND SURRENDER TO HIM

Single-Minded Devotion

James 4:7–10

We may already have chosen to seek God and surrender to him, following his path for our lives. Even so, many of us still choose to take the occasional detour. We keep options open to do certain things that are contrary to God's will. But living such double lives fills us with guilt, shame and instability and only squelches our attempts at spiritual renewal.

In order to help believers guard against this kind of behavior, James wrote, "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" (James 4:7–9).

Even those who are mature in the faith face new moments of decision every day. We must ask God to help us follow him with single-minded devotion, for "the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind" (James 1:6). As we surrender to God and follow him faithfully, he will draw near to us and grant us the spiritual renewal we desire.

Move on to Key 2 and turn to Mark 14.

JAMES IN REVIEW

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

1. What does James say everyone should be quick to do?

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

2. What does James say doesn't produce the righteousness God desires?

Q WHO SAID IT?

3. "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." Who originally said this?

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

4. What does James say "believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not" do?

- A. Show favoritism
- B. Deceive children
- C. Speak falsely
- D. Gossip

Q TIME TRAVELER

5. You are what James says triumphs over judgment. What are you?

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

6. According to James, what should we show by our good life?

- A. Integrity and honesty
- B. Good works that outweigh our evil deeds
- C. Wisdom and understanding
- D. Mastery of speech

🔥 HOT SEAT

7. James uses the rudder of a ship as an example of me. What am I?

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

8. What does James say the peacemakers, who sow peace, reap?

Q TIME TRAVELER

9. You are what James compares life to. What are you?

- A. Grass
- B. Fire
- C. Mist
- D. Smoke

AUTHOR! AUTHOR!

Most scholars agree that the author is James the brother of Jesus, since the apostle James would have died before it was written. James may not have been a believer until after the resurrection and eventually became a leader in the church.

BY THE NUMBERS

5 CHAPTERS
108 VERSES
2,316 WORDS

In the Word

Believers are called to put their faith into action. The word faith appears 14 times; the words do, deeds or action appear 31 times.

DID YOU KNOW

JAMES

► This book is addressed to the 12 tribes of Israel scattered among the nations.

LOOKING BACK

Even though this book has only five chapters, it contains seven direct quotes from the Old Testament.

KEY PASSAGE

"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 someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 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" (1:22-25).

LIFE LESSONS: Your words reflect your character to others (3:10). Submit your plans for your life to God (4:13-15).

LIFE LESSONS: Every good thing comes from God (1:17). Active faith dictates the way Christians live (2:14-19).

ANSWERS:

1. listen (1:17) (2) (2) (2)
2. human anger (4:6)
3. 1:20
4. A. (2:1) B. mercy (2:13) C. (3:13)
5. tongue (4:11)
6. C (3:13)
7. righteousness (3:18)
8. righteousness (3:18)
9. C. C (1:1)