

TWENTY-ONE DAYS IN JAMES

STUDY ONE: DAYS FOUR THROUGH SEVEN

James 1:1-25

(Note: Use Days One, Two and Three to study the three accompanying documents that go with this study. They are “James the Man,” “James the Epistle,” and “James the Outline.”)

Day Four 1:1-5

- 1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.
- 2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,
- 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.
- 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.
- 5 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.

V. 1 – James was clear about who his audience was. Since he stated that this epistle was to the Jews, I would assume there were also Gentile believers at this time. It’s good to know where your ministry is most effective and stay focused there. James perhaps expected that this letter would be circulated around the known world. Be careful to always do your best, for you never know how God will use what you do.

If James is Jesus’ brother, he certainly did not use that relationship in identifying himself. He introduced himself as a servant of God and Jesus. How do you identify yourself? Through your family connections in the body of Christ? Your denomination or church movement? Your title or ministry function? James was a servant, nothing more, nothing less.

V. 2 – I would assume that the Jews were facing hardships everywhere. James’ admonition is simple and straightforward: he commanded them to consider trials as pure joy. Not partial joy, but **pure** joy. How are you doing with the trials in your life right now? Do you consider them pure joy?

V. 3 – James alluded to why trials come: to test your faith in order to develop perseverance. The test here is not an examination of sorts, but rather the testing of metals. Metals were “tested” by fire to prove their purity and worth. This is not the kind of test you pass or fail; this “test” reveals the level of reality, the reality of what God has done in your life is revealed and proved. Think of a trial in your life right now. How would you have responded to this trial five years ago? If today you are standing firm in the midst of this trial, then God is using the trial to “test” and prove the reality of His work in your life. You can rejoice that God’s work in you is real!

You need faith for long-term investments in God. Much of what God has for you will require that you trust Him and wait. That is why the trials produce perseverance, so you can be present when God finally provides what He has promised.

V. 4 – You are a work in progress. God isn’t finished with you yet. Therefore you need to persevere so that you may be mature and complete. It seems that faith isn’t required here to get

something from God, but for God to make something of you. Does that make sense? Too often I use my faith as a means to get something from God and there isn't anything wrong with that. Indeed faith is the currency with which we make "godly" transactions. But my faith must also focus on becoming the person God intends for me to be.

V. 5 – James quickly transitions into a discussion of prayer. If anyone lacks wisdom, that person should ask and expect to receive the wisdom. Wisdom for what? I think it is wisdom to understand your situation, so you don't run from or wiggle out of your trials. You need wisdom so you can comprehend what your trials are producing in your life.

Are you asking for wisdom? Then you must assume that God is giving it to you, for that is the promise made here. If you are praying for the mind of Christ concerning a matter, why are you surprised that you have it? And how do you think the wisdom will arrive? With thunder or bells? It will come in a natural manner or even through the still, small voice of God. If you are asking for wisdom, how carefully are you listening?

Read Hebrews 5:8

Read 1 Peter 4:1

Read Acts 14:22

Day Five

1:6-11

6 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.

7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord;

8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

9 The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position.

10 But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower.

11 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.

V. 6 – If you doubt, you can get "seasick" from all your wavering! If you doubt, you will be subject to the changing circumstances of life. Think of Peter when he stepped out of the boat to walk to Jesus! He had faith, but then he looked at the waves and wind, and began to sink. Are you sinking or being blown about by the winds of daily pressures? Or are you asking for wisdom and having the faith to receive it? Are you acting on what you *think* God is saying to you in response to your prayers?

V. 7 – If you doubt God's ability to give you wisdom, then you won't receive any. It's that simple. I had recently been praying for wisdom concerning my business and I was desperate for some expertise that I lacked. Sure enough, God sent a man to help me. But others had told that this man was irresponsible and not of much help to anyone. I received him in faith as an answer to my prayers and he was just what and who I needed! I am convinced that sometimes God disguises His answers to my prayers to see if I will get past how things look on the outside and trust Him.

V. 8 – A double mind, where you vacillate between two opinions or values systems, causes you to be unstable in everything you do. Over the years I have made many commitments to things

that I was going to do, and then lacked the faith or discipline to follow through. So recently I have tried to be single-minded and stable in my commitments and service to God and others. If being double-minded and unstable is unacceptable to God, then being single-minded and stable must be good! Where are you being double-minded? Can people count on you? Can God count on you? Or are you unstable? The answer seems to be in praying for wisdom, believing that you are receiving it and then walking in it.

Vs. 9&10 – James addressed class distinctions throughout his letter. Here he urged those in low position to rejoice in their exaltation in Christ. Paul wrote: **“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6)**. The rich and poor are of equal stature in God’s sight. This was a different mindset for the Jews, who felt that the rich were somehow more spiritual and favored than the poor. When Jesus said, **“Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”** His Jewish followers were amazed. Matthew reported: **“When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, ‘Who then can be saved?’” (Matthew 19:24-25)**.

It is easy to think that you earned what you have. While you may have worked hard, what you have is a gift of God. There is no reason to be proud. And the rich must remember that they will die and be judged in the same manner as the poor.

Notice that James wrote that the rich pass away “like a wild flower.” James had the ability to draw metaphors from nature, just like his brother Jesus. Jesus’ family must have been in touch with nature and all of life around them, for they drew much of their teaching from every day situations that could easily have been taken for granted. How about you? Do you notice things around you and draw spiritual lessons from what you see? Or are you so busy and self-absorbed that you don’t take time to stop and smell the flowers along life’s path? When’s the last time you stopped to watch a sunset or took time to attend a sporting event or visit a museum?

Also, Jesus’ family was not rich. God used their circumstances to develop values that directed their ministry. Jesus and James were not preaching a prosperity gospel, but urging everyone to be grateful to God for their life status and not be proud. As I was writing this, I ran across this passage in a book by M Scott Peck entitled ***In Search of Stones***:

If I regard my talent for writing as the result of a good private school education (nurture) or a good gene (nature), I am likely to think of it as an accidental self-possession. “It’s my talent,” I will feel. “I got it through the luck of the draw. There’s no deeper meaning to it, and it’s entirely my business what I do with it.” If I think of it as a gift that is from God, however, then I am more likely to believe that my talent is not entirely my own, that it has been given into my stewardship and I have an obligation to use it insofar as I can for the greater glory of the giver.

There is a worse trap than thinking of our gifts as accidental self-possession, and that is to believe that we have earned them. This is a temptation to which the rich, famous, or powerful are particularly prone—for making money, for investing. But they are likely to think, “I earned this money (or power or fame). It is my money. It is mine, all mine.” It is because of this temptation that the majority of the very rich hoard their wealth. It is a relatively small minority who realize their talent for making a vast fortune is a gift that has been given to them and conclude: “This is my money on paper, but that is in name only. In reality, it was given to me; it is God’s money. I am here to steward it and, as best I can, to give it back.

V. 11 – Funerals always have a way of bringing me back to reality. No matter how hard I work or what I am doing, I will die one day. I can get busy and think that is the chief purpose of my life. But I was born to die, to be united with God in Christ. That is what life is all about. Life is not

about my investments or even my ministry. It's about becoming like Him so when I meet Him face to face, we will have something in common. Are you stressed out? Trying to climb the corporate ladder? Get a bigger and better house or job? There is nothing wrong with those things. Just remember that your life doesn't consist of those things. Jesus taught:

Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." ' "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:15-21)

I want to be rich toward God. How about you?

Read Psalm 146

Day Six
1:12-18

12 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.

13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;

14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.

17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

V. 12 – It is sometimes hard to imagine that someone who perseveres under trial, who goes through a hard situation that has no definitive end, is blessed. It seems more like a curse. But the ways of God are not the ways of men. Jesus said, **“All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Mark 13:13)**. Jesus did not promise that this hatred would be removed; He promised that those who endured the hatred would receive a blessing, or as James put it, “a crown of life.”

V. 13 – The concept that the trials James was referring to were actually temptations is now clearly introduced. God does not tempt, but God does allow temptation. This sometimes surprises people. And sometimes people equate temptation with sin. An evil thought is *not* sin until you act on or continue to entertain that thought. But God does allow temptation to once again prove the reality of what is inside you. His objective is two-fold: to either help you face the reality of what you *don't* have or to prove the reality of what you *do* have.

Take Joseph in the Old Testament. Potiphar's wife continually tried to seduce him. That was temptation. But Joseph steadfastly resisted. He was proved to be righteous not because he had no temptation, but because he knew how to deal with temptation. Paul wrote: **"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:13)**

V. 14 – My problem with temptation is that it may find something in my life, in my being, that is ready to welcome the possibilities that the temptation represents. As soon as I do that, James described the process as being "dragged away and enticed." When the thought of evil against my brother comes, I nourish and cherish that thought. Then maybe I say something to someone else. I keep that thought as in internal pet, cleaning, grooming and feeding it. Now I am in sin and it wasn't the temptation's fault. The temptation simply showed me the reality of my heart.

Paul listed some of the sins that come from temptation: **"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21)**. I can understand the first part of the list, for those sins are "terrible." But how did things like envy, anger and selfishness get there? Because those are sins too, along with the sin of unbelief. You and I may never be tempted with idolatry, but we may face a daily struggle with pride. And it is no less serious than any of the other more "public" sins.

V. 15 – The process of temptation, entertainment, and action now leads to death. The end of sin is always death, but there is a period of some measure of enjoyment during this death process. The writer of Hebrews referred to it as the enjoying of **"the pleasures of sin for a short time" (Hebrews 11:25)**. But Paul wrote: **"The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23)**.

V. 16 – I heard a pastor say once, "The thing about being deceived is that you don't know you're being deceived. It's the very nature of deception for you not to be aware that you have it." So how can you avoid it? James commanded his readers not to be deceived, so it is possible to avoid deception. But we must work to avoid it before it ever comes, for once we open ourselves to it, it is almost impossible to break free. I pray regularly, "Lord, keep me from deception, from doctrinal weirdness. Help me to see the truth about myself and my motives." I try to be open to criticism, both constructive and destructive. Are you working to stay out of deception?

V. 17 – James was reiterating that only perfect and good things come from above. Temptation is not one of those things. Don't blame God for your problems. If you think God is the source, however, hiding your feelings won't help. You must face those feelings or face being deceived about what is in your heart. God is consistent; there is no shifting shadow in Him. He is light and truth. He is for you and not against you but you must face the reality not only of who He is, but of who you are.

V. 18 – We have been "born again" in truth and are firstfruits of God's creation. The firstfruits were presented to the priests in the Old Testament, symbolic that all the harvest belonged to God. We are representative of God's legal claim to all creatures, though many of those creatures are currently objects of God's wrath. But they still belong to Him as Creator.

Day Seven 1:19-25

- 19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,
20 for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.
21 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.
22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.
23 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
24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.
25 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.

V. 19 – When the Holy Spirit has directed me to read James in times past, it is usually because God has a specific word for me about some character flaw or deficiency. This verse describes one of my major weaknesses. I am supposed to be quick to hear, slow to speak and anger. I am the opposite. I am slow to hear, quick to speak and, unfortunately, quicker to anger. I recognize this, however, and have asked God to change me. It has been a slow process. But the Spirit can instruct you to listen and teach you to be quiet. How good a listener are you?

V. 20 – I have written an article entitled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry Leader.” The major temptation for many is to get angry when things are done not to their liking. Anger isn’t of itself a sin; but unrighteous actions stemming from anger are the problem. If I think I “own” or am entitled to something, I will react in anger when that right is violated. But that kind of anger never produces good fruit, no matter how we try to dress it up. Are you angry? About what? What are you prepared to do about that anger?

V. 21 – Wow! James goes from talking about listening, speaking and anger to “moral filth.” That’s quite a jump. Or is it? Are the unrighteous actions stemming from man’s anger that serious in the sight of God? I think they are. The antidote for my anger when my rights are violated is to humbly receive the word and let it with patience bear fruit in me. Fruit takes time.

V. 22 – James once again mentioned deception. This time it is the deception of hearing the word and somehow thinking I’ve done something by hearing and giving it mental assent. We must learn to **do** what we hear and not just shout “amen” when the word is spoken.

Vs. 23&24 – James again used a descriptive metaphor to describe a person who is deceived about doing what the word of God requires. Can you imagine looking at your picture and not recognizing yourself? That is so ludicrous, but that is how ludicrous it is to hear and not do the word of God.

V. 25 – I study and listen to the Word not to judge the word or figure out its secret meaning. I “get into” the Word so it can change me. The writer of Hebrews wrote: **“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).** This is remarkable. Something written four thousand years ago can judge my thoughts and attitudes today. The Word is not here to educate me; it’s here to make me more like God in the power of the Spirit. And I will become more like God not when I read, teach, or study the Word, but when I do what the Word instructs me to do.