

TWENTY-ONE DAYS IN JAMES
STUDY TWO: DAYS EIGHT THROUGH FOURTEEN
James 1:26-3:18

Day Eight
1:26-2:4

26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

1 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.

2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in.

3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet,"

4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

V. 26 – This is the only place in the Bible where the word “religion” is used. When I am being religious, I am usually talkative, judging one or telling another my opinions about God and His work. But the true sign of a “religious” person, according to James, is silence. But look at this. James said that the religious person can deceive *himself!* You would think that only another person could deceive you, but you can deceive yourself! And it all comes from talking too much, which renders your “religion” worthless. Do you have a tight rein on your tongue or are you in deception by talking too much?

V. 27 – James defined religion and it isn't believing correct doctrine, which is a tremendous source of intellectual pride for many people. Pure religion is practical; it is helping widows and orphans, and keeping from the pollution of the world. How much do you give (time or money) to widows and orphans? That is the measure of your true “religion.” What are you willing to do about your lack of “religion” in this sense of the word?

V. 1 – James ordered the believing Jews not to show favoritism to one person over another. It is hard not to honor the rich above the poor, but James was very sensitive to class distinctions and their existence in the body of believers.

Vs. 2,3,4 – I think it interesting that it was possible at the time of James' epistle that the rich and poor would attend the same assembly. I would imagine there were only a few meetings for believers in any one area. But today, most believers avoid this issue by congregating with other people from their own racial and socioeconomic level. But shouldn't the church in any one place represent a cross-section of the people from that area? If you have money, how many people do you know who don't? If you are poor, do you feel comfortable fellowshiping with the rich?

Day Nine

1:1-5

5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

6 But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?

7 Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?

8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.

9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,

13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

V. 5 – Let's get back to the question: Do you have any significant relationships with those who are below you economically? If not, why not? James was trying to tell us that the poor are rich in faith. Poor people are less hung up on possessions and investments, on pretense and power. They have something the rich need. God must like the poor, for He chose them to be rich in faith and to inherit the Kingdom. I attend a church in the heart of my urban area that is cross-cultural. I teach at an urban college so that I can be around students who don't look or think like me. What are you prepared to do to "rub elbows" and fellowship with the poor?

V. 6 – James was upset about how the poor were being treated by the believers to whom he was writing. And what he says is true. The poor don't have the money or power to pursue or harass someone. But the rich do make life tough for many, because they have the time, money and connections to get what they want. Yet it is easy to treat the rich better, even though they haven't earned that privilege by their actions.

V. 7 – It is all too easy to respect what someone has instead of what they are. James was urging the Church to look past the outward trappings and look at the heart. Isn't that what his brother Jesus urged His followers to do as well? Think of some of Jesus' lessons about the rich and poor. Do you think James ever heard his brother teaching these lessons? **"Jesus replied, 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the**

deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me” (Matthew 11:4-6).

Read Matthew 19:23-24

Read Mark 10:23-25 and 12:41

Read Luke 1:53, 6:24-25, 12:16-21 and 18:24-25

Vs. 8&9 – James spent a lot of time teaching on this issue of favoritism. Do you think he experienced this prejudice firsthand as a poor child growing up with Mary, Joseph, Jesus and the family? That is often how God teaches us—by putting us through something so that we can experience it and then work to change it. What about your own past? What seemingly negative experiences have served to make you the person that God is using today? Have you made peace with those experiences? Given thanks to God for them?

Often we learn how to treat others by how others treat us. If they don't treat you properly, then you of all people should treat others the way you would want to be treated. But if you pass on bad behavior because “no one did it for me,” then you are guilty of breaking the royal law.

Vs 10&11 – James was addressing a self-righteous attitude in some that may have said, “ I keep **most** of the law, therefore, I am righteous.” He made the point that if you break one part of the law, then you are guilty of breaking all of it. This seems like a harsh judgment. What is your first reaction to this statement?

Vs. 12&13 – Here we see that James was appealing for believers to have a certain attitude—an attitude of mercy and grace, of humility and meekness. There is a hardness to someone who is judgmental to which is hard to relate. James heard his brother Jesus teach on mercy and perhaps saw Jesus extend mercy to those who the law said were not worthy. James was asking believers to go beyond the law to grace and mercy. James was asking the reader to imitate James' brother Jesus.

When you read the Old Testament, however, you see that mercy and grace were requirements there too! But the law somehow obscured that truth and became rigid and unforgiving. Where are you on the mercy scale? Do you want mercy? Do you need mercy? Then you must give mercy!!

James again reveals a familiarity with his brother Jesus' teachings. Perhaps James heard from Jesus on more than one occasion: “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matthew 5:7). I can imagine, but I cannot prove, that James heard Jesus preach in public on more than one occasion. While Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him at first, I would imagine that they were at least intrigued by what He was doing.

Day Ten **2:14-19**

14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?

15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.

16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder.

V. 14 – James began to discuss with his target audience the real meaning of faith. Faith isn't relevant until something is done with what is believed. Do you agree or disagree? If you believe in the resurrection of Jesus, you do well. But what are doing with that faith in the resurrection? Are you applying resurrection power to your daily life? Do you trust that the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead will move mountains, change lives and even alter the course of human history?

If you don't have this kind of "faith in action," James wondered whether this kind of faith can save you or anyone. Can it?

Vs. 15,16,17 – James was not making an appeal to care for the poor here (although he does later), but rather he was using an example to show how silly faith without action is. If someone was starving and you wished him or her well without feeding them, that would be inconsistent with what you had said. Wishing that person well would be incomplete without giving them some food.

The same is true for faith. To claim to have faith in the power of Almighty God and not act like that power is real and available is silly. Yet many of us live in a silly world. We sing that **all things** are possible and act like **nothing** is possible. We wait on God to do what He expects us to do and then try to do what only God can do.

Faith **always** requires action. For instance, if God is going to provide you a vehicle, you should at least search for the vehicle He is going to provide. If God wants you to take a missions trip, you should announce it and begin to raise money. There is always something you can do with and because of faith. What do you need to do? Write a letter? Write a book? Make a phone call? Give some money? Make a trip? Remember, faith without action is dead in the water.

V. 18 – Someone may claim that deeds are not their gifting or purpose. But your actions reveal your faith. No action reveals no faith. Little action reveals little faith. Great action reveals great faith.

Don't be confused that your actions or deeds can save you or bring you into right standing with God. Only faith in Christ can do that. But your actions prove your salvation. Your actions flow out of salvation and faith; they don't lead you to it.

V. 19 – I have always liked this verse. If you have a correct doctrine about God, you are not alone. Even the demonic world probably has the same "doctrine" as you do. But their actions weren't affected by their doctrine and they were actually expelled from heaven! They beheld the certainty of God's glory and presence but rebelled.

Remember that James grew up around Pharisees who certainly had correct doctrine. They tithed down to the weeds in their garden, fasted, and memorized Scripture. Yet

these same men condemned James' brother to death. They were so in favor of God's system that they had to kill God to preserve it. So James had seen firsthand the critical connection between right belief and right action!

Day Eleven

1:1-5

20 You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

21 Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

23 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.

24 You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

25 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?

26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

V. 20 – James spent a lot of time on the faith-and-action issue, so it must have been a relevant issue at this point of development in the Jewish believer. James was willing to provide a biblical example for what he was teaching, just like his brother did. He called faith without action “dead” and “useless.” So that means it is possible to have dead or useless faith. Lack of action isn't “unfaith,” it's just useless, like a limb that doesn't function properly. It is there, but it is useless.

V. 21 – James appealed to his Jewish readers with an example from Jewish history. And he used an especially strong example from **Genesis 22**. Abraham was considered righteous due to his sacrifice of Isaac. Someone else would consider him insane or fanatical, but James put Abraham forth as a model of active faith. Someone looking at actions resulting from faith, who doesn't have faith would see those actions as foolish. God looks at someone **not** acting on their faith as foolish. Which would you rather be: foolish in man's or God's eyes?

V. 22 – Faith is made mature or complete through actions. Examine your life. Where is your faith dead, useless or incomplete? What can you do to correct that situation quickly?

V. 23 – What Abraham did was considered righteousness. The word righteousness comes from the old English word “right-wise-ness.” To be wise in what is right, you must do something out of your faith. I tend to think of righteousness as staying away from sin or being holy. But James defined it as active faith. According to James' definition, how righteous are you at this point in your life?

James implied that Abraham was God's friend because of his righteous deed—a deed that was a result of his faith in God. I want to be God's friend. I also want Him to be mine.

V. 24 – Here James used another biblical word: justified. Someone once explained justified as meaning “just-as-if-I’d-never-sinned.” We are considered righteous, become God's friend and are justified in His sight when we act on our faith. Wow! That is strong! Are you now convinced of the need for faith action?

V. 25 – At this point, James used another Bible story to solidify his case. The previous one was from the life of Abraham, who was held in the highest regard by all Jews. Now he used Rahab the prostitute (**see Joshua 2**). This woman hid the spies, lied to those who were searching for them and then asked that the spies spare her and her family when they inhabited the land that God had promised them. Her faith in God was strong! She risked her life to walk out what she believed.

It has always intrigued me how Rahab knew who the spies were. There is only one possible way: God revealed it to her. And He revealed it while she was **still** employed as a prostitute (this was probably a role she carried out in some pagan temple). Rahab is also mentioned in Hebrews 11, the chapter that honors faith heroes. This is a most remarkable reference and story. This woman was a person of faith even though she was less than perfect in her “theology.” Reflect on that story. What are your thoughts on Rahab?

V. 26 – James made one last analogy of what faith is like without works: it is like a dead body without a spirit! I think he made a strong case. Do you agree? Faith without action is dead.

Check out **The Faith Files** on my website at <http://www.purposequest.com/faithfiles.htm>. They are a commentary on every verse in the New Testament that mentions the words faith, believe, believes, unbelief or any other faith-related word.

Day Twelve

1:1-5

1 Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

2 We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

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

4 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.

5 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.

V. 1 - James now moved on to his next major theme: the tongue. And this is why I am always “in trouble” with the Lord when He directs me to read James. Usually I have not been using my mouth in an appropriate manner.

First, he addressed the issue of teachers. Obviously, teaching was an important part of Judaism and this importance would have been carried over to Christianity. But James warned that teachers incur a stricter judgment. Teachers must be careful what they say and teach. People open their hearts to teachers, so teachers have great influence. I have been guilty of teaching my opinions as “fact” or “God’s word.” I try very hard to present my opinions and interpretations as just that: my own.

I have also had to go back and apologize on occasion for something I said publicly. A teacher must be willing to do that.

Check out my articles entitled “Teaching as a Path to Servant Leadership” on my website at <http://www.purposequest.com/articles.htm>.

V. 2 – James makes a connection between what I say and my ability to discipline my body in other ways. Do you see the connection? He called the person who can rule the tongue a “perfect” man. This word means complete or mature, not someone who has achieved moral perfection. We will never be perfected this side of heaven. Do you agree with that?

Vs. 3,4,5 – James used two graphic examples of how something small in size can control something much bigger: a bit in the mouth of a horse and the rudder of a ship. What simple examples, yet how powerful was the message. You don’t have to be complicated to be a good teacher; in fact, good teachers reduce complex things to something that can be grasped. James watched his brother Jesus teach and emulated his style.

As I write, I am convicted of how unruly my tongue is. How many things I say that I should not. James used one final example of the power of the tongue and that is a small spark setting a forest on fire. (They had forest fires in Jesus’ times!) I’ve burned down my share of trees in my lifetime! Why would James have made the tongue such a major issue? Because His brother Jesus did! Jesus had something to say about the tongue.

See Matthew 12:34, 15:18

See Luke 6:45

See John 12:49

Is God saying something to you about your tongue? What is it? What are you prepared to do about it?

Day Thirteen

3:6-11

6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

- 7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man,
8 but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.
9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.
10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.
11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?
12 My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

V. 6 – This is so true. The mouth is a source of trouble, suffering, pain and regret. The tongue has tremendous power for good and evil.

Use a concordance and look up the word “tongue” in the book of Proverbs. In case you don't have a concordance, I'll provide a few verses: 6:17, 10:19-20, 12:18-19, 18:21. What lessons are in these verses for you?

Vs. 7,8,9,10,11,12 – Man has tamed wild animals, but the human tongue seems to have a life and mind of its own. We use our tongues to praise God and curse men. **“Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Psalm 141:3)**. We need God's help if we are to ever overcome the “mouth problem” that afflicts the human race. And this mouth problem has the help of hell itself. This is a strong indication that our enemy knows how important spoken words are, so he concentrates great effort there.

It is possible to put people under curses by what we say. So be careful! Don't put anyone under a curse and if you have, then use your words to remove it.

Day Fourteen **3:13-18**

- 13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.
14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.
15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.
16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.
17 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.
18 Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

V. 13 – James returned to his faith-and-deeds theme by urging the wise and understanding to show it by deeds done in humility. I have found that pride is one sin

that catches God's attention and reaction the quickest: **"He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble" (Proverbs 3:34)**. I have found that humility is a choice. Choose humility or God may humiliate you.

V. 14 – This is the second theme (the first being the tongue) that God was usually confronting in my life whenever I read James: envy and ambition. There were times when I boasted about those two things, calling them aggressiveness, following someone's example or trying to get ahead. But God always wanted me to call them what they were: jealousy and pride.

Yet ambition is a hard thing to overcome, especially in ministry. Look at what Paul wrote:

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me (Philippians 2:19-23).

Paul wasn't writing about unbelievers when he made the observation that everyone looks out for his own interests. If Paul only saw one man who overcame selfish ambition and interests, how many will you and I ever see? But the real question is: Can you and I be that one person? Can we overcome envy and ambition?

V. 15 – Envy and ambition are earthly and demonic, inspired by the evil one. That means that a believer can be a "secret agent" for the evil one by having ambition and then denying it or covering it up. If you are ambitious for ministry or anything else, admit it! God can't change you into the person He wants you to be if you are pretending to be that person already.

V. 16 – These are the keys to know that selfish ambition is at work: There is disorder, confusion and an ongoing string of problems and evil. When I consult with churches or businesses, I know that ambition is at work when I find mass confusion. Those two (disorder and ambition) don't seem to be connected, but they are.

V. 17 – The most amazing thing about this verse is that wisdom is "submissive." That word is translated "willing to yield" in the margin of the New American Standard Bible. This is amazing! Godly wisdom doesn't insist on its own way. It yields when it is confronted or resisted. It is like the story of Paul when he set sail for Rome after his appeal to Caesar (**see Acts 27:10**). Paul urged them not to set sail, but they did. Later they all regretted their decision. Where was Paul? He was on the ship! Now he didn't have much choice, since he was a prisoner. But his wisdom was rejected yet he was submissive. Godly wisdom is, well, it's godly. It behaves like God!

V. 18 – God loves peace, but ambition and envy bring strife. There is a special blessing for those who are peacemakers. At the same time, peacemakers don't ignore reality. But they sow in hope that there will be a harvest of righteousness. Jesus was called "The Prince of Peace." Is there peace around you? In you? Why or why not? Are you

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argumentative? Opinionated? Combative? Then you lack godly wisdom. But there's good news. You can get it if you want it badly enough.

Proverbs instructs us: **“My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones”**(Proverbs 2:1-8).

If you want wisdom badly enough and are willing to pay the price, you will find it. How badly do you want it?