

# FAITH BY DESIGN pt.3

design thinking  
for your faith



**CRSWLK**

## **FAITH BY DESIGN PT.3**

design thinking for your faith

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### **CROSSWALK Church**

10421 Corporate Dr,

Redlands, CA 92374

### **Ordering Information:**

Quantity sales. Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations, and others. For details, contact the publisher at the address above.

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# WEEK 09

Day 57-63

## **Faith by Design** | James 4:13-17

Roots and Recession: Arrogance of the Age

Foolish Presumptions (4:13)

Foolish Perspectives (4:14)

Forgotten Perspectives (4:14)

Forsaken Priorities (4:15-17)

Recession! Those words send chills up the businessman's back. In this paragraph of his letter, James is less interested in economic recession than in the spiritual recession plaguing many homes and hearts. Application Point: The roots of spiritual recession are the same as the roots of economic recession. According to James 4:13-17, the roots of recession are three-fold: foolish presumptions, forgotten perspectives, and forsaken priorities. When it comes to accepting all people in Christ?

# WEEK 10

Day 64-70

## **Faith by Design** | James 5:1-6

What does your money say?

How we get it (5:1,4,6)

How we guard it (5:1-3)

How we give it (5:5)

“Now listen, you rich people” (James 5:1). With these five words, James begins the next paragraph of his letter. There are basically two reactions to this paragraph. Those who are without money somehow feel they are more spiritual than those who have money. Well, they are not. On the other hand, those who have money somehow feel as if they have to be defensive. Well, they do not. These verses apply to everyone, for being “rich” is relative. Compared to the rest of the world, almost everyone reading this theological journal is very rich. No matter how much we have, someone else has more. No matter how little we have, someone else has less. The words in James 5:1-6 are for each of us.

Application Point: Our money talks. In fact, it says volumes about what we really think is important. How we deal with our money is a reflection of our spiritual health. Thus, James deals with how we get it, how we guard it, and how we give it.

# WEEK 11

Day 71-77

**Faith by Design | James 5:7-12**

Apocalypse Now

Look Up... Be Calm (5:7)

Look In...Be Clean (5:8-9)

Look Back...Be Challenged. (5:10-11)

Look Forward...Be Consistent. (5:12)

“Be patient ...until the Lord’s coming” (James 5:7). Instead of being patient, there are many today who are presumptuous. There are always those who try to forecast or pinpoint the Lord’s parousia. Every major world event brings a new wave of preachers crying that the sky is falling. This is one reason preachers lose so much credibility in the eyes of the world. James 5:7-12 deals with what we are to do until the Lord’s coming. Application Point: Christian Patience.

# WEEK 13

Day 85-91

**Faith by Design | James 5:19-20**

The Restoration

The possibility of our falling. (5:19)

The responsibility of our calling. (5:19-20)

God is in the restoration business too. The remarkable thing about him is that he uses us to help bring restoration to people who have been placed in the barn, beaten up by life’s circumstances,

# WEEK 12

Day 78-84

**Faith by Design | James 5:13-18**

The Church in a Hurting World

The Situation (5:13-15)

The Solution (5:16)

The Secret (5:16-18)

It is amazing in the way that James’ letter is as relevant today as it was to a first-century world. He addresses all the major issues the church is facing now. In the previous paragraph he calls on the church to be in touch with a hurting world. We live in a world where people are hurting. We must go into the world with a message of hope. As the church touches a hurting world, James addresses the issue of its situation, its solution, and its secret. Application Point: Hope is always relevant

knocked around, and finally put over to the side.

Application Point: James closes his letter with the recurring theme of the second chance. He reminds us of the possibility of our falling and the responsibility of our calling.

## Introduction

Today is the day! We are going to begin to look at our faith, our life, and what God would have us be and do. We will do this through a study in the book of James, and we will also spend 14 weeks breaking down who we are, and what we want our faith and our religion to be. Without doing this, we will always stay in the beginning stages of our faith, and we will never be able to get that higher level of thinking and living and believing. We call this higher level “faith maturity” and we can all get there.

Have you ever held a really well designed spoon. I know that seems silly, but seriously, have you? I have a friend who loves making spoons by hand, and I love him for it. When my father died, he sent me a spoon through a mutual friend, as he lives in Australia. This spoon is amazing. The balance is perfect, it is big enough to be efficient, and it looks cool. Leighton, I will always treasure that gift you made with your own hands.

When things are designed well, they have a tendency to work well and be the most effective things in our lives. They become useful and help us be the people we need to be. I've spent a lot of time looking at design thinking, experience design, and innovation, and I have always felt these principles would go well in a faith setting. So today it begins, we begin to redesign our lives of faith.

I believe God is the author of good design. He put thought into us before he created us. He didn't slap-dash us together, rather, he built into us everything we would need to be not only amazing, but compassionate and merciful. The greater qualities he gave us are not the most forceful all the time, so sometimes we have to create infrastructures in our lives for them to shine through.

That is what we are trying to do. Thanks for coming on this journey with us. I hope it changes you, I know it is changing me.

Pastor Timothy Gillespie

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Gillespie', with a stylized flourish at the end.

# WEEK 9

## JAMES 4:13-17 (NLT)

Warning about Self-Confidence

**13** Look here, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit.” **14** How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it’s here a little while, then it’s gone. **15** What you ought to say is, “If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that.” **16** Otherwise you are boasting about your own pretentious plans, and all such boasting is evil.

**17** Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.

**13 Look here, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit.”**

**T**his week, we will be talking about “recessions.” No one likes the idea of a recession, and most of us have lived through one or two over the years. They are never fun, people lose much, and recessions are something that should concern you. However, James is not so much speaking of an economic recession; rather, he is addressing a recession that takes place in our spiritual lives and in our hearts. James moves to a conversational tone that he hasn’t taken before. He begins with “look here,” which makes it seem like he is jumping into a conversation with a friend with whom he can be pretty serious.

What James is talking about here is the arrogance of planning how things are going to go. There is this sense of “we will go, we will stay, we will do business, we will make a profit.” These things are what astute business people do to plan for the future. Why would this be any sort of problem for the author of this book? Why can’t we plan to do what is best for our life, family, and even business? It almost seems that James has some sort of bone to pick with someone planning to make money. Can this be true?

Probably not. The language that is being used is “going to a certain town. .

.” which is the language of the hypothetical. He is setting up a construct in order to make a broader point. It’s like saying “yada yada yada” in some respects. (The older of us here will get the Seinfeld reference.) So he is not speaking of anyone in particular, but to the hypothetical construct about how people sometimes plan without giving due to the Great Planner, who can help us make changes when things don’t necessarily go our way.

It would be easy to misinterpret these texts as James somehow being against a system of capitalism, or the ability to make profit. However, that is not necessarily the case, although some commentators have said this. Rather, James is pushing back on the “Myth of Competency.” What do I mean by the Myth of Competency? I mean the idea that we have created our own competency, and that God did not have a part in it. As believers, at the very base of our understanding is that God created us, in His image, and that image has imbued us with a few gifts and traits that help us become the people that we have become. As well, through the nurturing process of our skills and our competencies, God has been deeply involved, both

guiding the process and by enhancing our gifts. Without God, these things may well lay dormant in our hearts and minds and not help us move to our full potential.

James wants us to remember to think about the God who got us where we are in order to be even more prepared for what may lay ahead, as we can't really know what is coming next in our lives.

**1— Have you ever succumbed to the Myth of Competency in a way that made you arrogant or prideful?**

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**2— When have you made plans without consulting God? How did that go?**

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**3 — What could you give God credit for in your life today? (Perhaps this is a good spiritual exercise in order to help keep you humble.)**

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## 14 How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone.

A few days ago, my sons and I went down to the beach to do some surfing. The waves were small, as they often are in the summer, but we just wanted to get wet, learn a little more, and have some fun. It is always good to get away from the heat of the Inland Empire and get down to the beach. As we drove over the 241 into Orange County, we were struck with the marine layer that often sits over the coastal cities in Southern California. My youngest asked, "Hey, what's that? Is it fog?" I told him it is the marine layer, and we had a nice discussion about it. He, as I, was struck by the fact that when we left the house it was almost 80 degrees (this was before 6 a.m.) and the weather was significantly different by the time we got to the beach.

In the same way, we cannot know what tomorrow will bring, but we can know who is in charge of tomorrow, just like he is in charge of today. However, this conversation comes at us like an accusation in some respects. The author is seriously asking this question: "How can you possibly know what tomorrow will be like tomorrow?" And these words are particularly poignant in the times we are

living in. Covid surges, civil unrest, partisan politics and general anxiety, how can we know what tomorrow holds for us? It seems there is a new report, a new regulation, or a new plan each and every day for how our lives are going to be from here on out. It is disconcerting, and sometimes even frightening.

However, we are to be a people who are not so worried about tomorrow, because we are spending our time focusing on our God and the mission He gives to us. When we begin to focus on Him, rather than on what the future holds, we begin to find that peace that passes understanding.

There is a sense that our lives are so temporal that they literally take a second seat to the work of God in the world. Our lives are the fog that fades, but the life of Christ is the everlasting Gospel that gives peace and hope to the world, especially in times of crisis and concern. How are we connecting with that grace, with that love and with those who might need a portion of that love today? You can be the light that the world needs right now, simply by being what God has called you to be: Open to His direction.



## 15 What you ought to say is, “If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that.”

**T**his phrase connects to verse 13 rather than verse 14. And what we have here is what has become known as the “Jacobean Condition.” It is not enough for us to just realize that we are transitory and temporal. We have to connect with the idea that we are actually completely dependent on God for all that we have and all that we are. Our contingency on God should inform our way of thinking. Rather than planning everything out, we need to prepare for whatever way God is going to be sending us.

This idea of preparing, rather than specifically planning allows for the movement of the Holy Spirit and the ability for us to remain agile and flexible, knowing that God sometimes allows us to navigate through twists and turns in our lives and the lives of people around us. I have often thought that life was a bit like a car ride. I can drive pretty well and get you there safe. God, however, when He is in the driver’s seat, may take you on a much more wild ride and yet you will get there just as safely as you would have if I were driving the car. God, in his infinite knowledge and love, will take a very different road, but one that will get you where He wants you to be, regardless of how treacherous the road

you are on really is.

By giving the power over to God, rather than holding it for ourselves, we allow God, who ultimately knows much more than we do, to be the one who takes charge of our lives. Our jobs, then, become deeply focused on listening for and hearing the direction that God gives us. When we become more and more used to hearing the voice and direction of God, then things begin to make more sense.

Now, I know this is hard. I struggle with knowing the voice of God in my life at times. I sometimes think that the plans I have made are the ones that God ordains. I am foolish enough to believe that I know how to do this work that God has given me. I plan, strategize, work hard to make sure things get done, and then something inevitably happens that slows the timelines, that changes the directions, or even drops the whole thing completely. This is incredibly frustrating.

However, every time this has happened, we have ended up in a much better spot than we were in when we began, and better than we could have planned for! I can tell you story after story of not getting what I wanted, only to be given that which I didn’t even know that I needed. Whenever this happens,

I have received more than I could have dreamed of. God is like that; He works in abundance.

So let us remind ourselves that our attitude needs to be “Thy will be done”

rather than “Make my plan work out.” With this in mind, we can move forward knowing that God is with us, and not against us.

**1— Have you ever had your plans thwarted by God?**

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**2— What was the end result?**

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**3 — If you had a money-back guarantee on your life, would you ask for your money back?**

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## 16 Otherwise you are boasting about your own pretentious plans, and all such boasting is evil.

**A**rrogance. That is what James is speaking about in this text. He believes that it is arrogance that leads people to create plans that don't include God. In our arrogance, we often think that our answers are the best answers anyone can come up with. Arrogance has a tendency to lead us to boast about what we have achieved. Actually, it leads us to think that only our ideas, our worldview, or our understanding makes sense, and that others' are somehow less than ours. Unfortunately, the arrogance that leads to boasting is what directs us to evil.

All this seems pretty serious to say about someone who is just wanting to create a life for themselves and has a plan to execute so that the people around them might benefit from their labor. But again, let us not confuse this hypothetical construct with the point that is trying to be made. James is admonishing those who believe to make sure they are submitting their wills to God, and therefore, have the humility to change their plans according to His will in their lives. It is a call to make sure in their process of life they are leaning first and foremost into the will of God. There is a humility that it takes to believe that someone else might have a better plan. Even when we are

talking about God, it does take humility to start there rather than to begin with our own ideas and plans.

James has been working hard to help us understand that there are bigger issues at play than simply what we do, but how we think about what we do makes a big difference as well. While preparing for the future, it takes a great deal of humility to submit our preparations to God.

Have you ever thought you were heading in the right direction, then you prayed that God's will be done in your life, and then the situation changed? Every time this happens to me, I wonder if praying the Jacobean condition is a good idea. "Your will be done" is a dangerous prayer to pray. However, if you have prepared to move in whatever direction God is calling you to move, it might be less traumatic than it would otherwise be. You don't have to scrap your plans when you are prepared for what God has for you.

In your life, are you proud of your accomplishments or are you waiting to see what God is creating for you in the next iteration of your life? The harder of the two is to consult with God and wait for clear guidance on next steps. This is an exercise in humility, patience, and self-deprecation. But it is worth the wait!

**1— Have you found yourself boasting about what you are about to do? Did those things work out well?**

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**2— If boasting is evil, have you acted in evil ways by being too arrogant?**

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**3 – How can humility become the first move you make each and every day?**

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## 17 Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.

**T**his is considered a sin of omission. Do you know what that is? It is when we know what we should do, but we decide not to do it. I remember when I was little not telling my parents about a vase I had broken when they were away. When they discovered the mistake, I was told that this was a sin of omission, and I should have simply told them what happened. Honestly, I thought calling what I did a “sin” was a little bit strong, but later I realized that this had become a bit of an idiom, as well as a biblical truth.

And in this text, the tone has changed from more personal to more formal. There are indications that this may have been a popular idiom of the time. The reason for James to use this kind of idiom may have to do with what is coming next (Ch. 5), or it could have to do with what came before. However, it feels as if it might be a little disconnected to the previous verses.

A better translation might be, “When we don’t do what is right (good), we have sinned.”

This is tough, because there have always been things that we have not done, that we probably should have done. In particular, I have felt this twinge of guilt when I pass someone on the freeway

with a blown-out tire. I have stopped on a few occasions to help, but more often I have passed them by. I have this bit of guilt, remembering the words of Jesus in Matthew 25, “the least of these...” I wonder if I have committed sins by driving past.

Perhaps that is a silly illustration of a sin of omission. I suppose that we have all felt this way at times. Sins of omission are sometimes accidental, but they are at times deliberate, as well. We have to gauge our hearts, our intentions, and our actions when it comes to these kinds of sins. The fact that James is throwing it in at the end of his thought is an interesting point. Perhaps he wanted to make a more general statement to those who were listening. This statement could be expanded to most of what he was speaking of previously. When we know what is right and we choose not to do it, we are in the same sort of danger we find ourselves in as when we move headlong into behavior and attitude that is not of God.

**1— Have you ever found yourself guilty of knowingly not doing what was right?**

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**2— Have you ever simply ignored the prompting of the Spirit when you knew it to be right?**

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**3 — How can you direct your heart in a direction that doesn't allow for sins of omission?**

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## 17 Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.

**N**ow we have seen the whole pericope, it moves from concern over planning without taking into account what God wants, to the arrogance of boasting about our own plans, to the final step of omitting the good we should be doing with our lives. These are pretty serious concerns, and they are wrapped in the idea that one can make plans without God, but there is an arrogance to it.

In one of my earlier iterations of ministry, I was looking to strategize a new name and plan for the ministry to which I had been called. It was a ministry that had stalled out, and was looking for some infusion of excitement and a new way forward. I remember sitting in a staff meeting, the kind that are interminably long, and sketching on a piece of paper what this ministry might look like. There is nothing I love more than dreaming and brainstorming about a new ministry, so this was time well-spent. I came up with what I thought was a brilliant plan, as I often think my plans are! But I couldn't seem to get any traction from the people around me. The name was too obtuse, there was no ability to scale, the way I was trying to make a logo didn't make any sense, and no one thought it was as brilliant as I hoped it would be.

I stayed with my idea for much too long. I just kept trying to workshop it and find a way for other people to "get it."

A few weeks later, I was meeting with my leadership team, and they asked me if I had submitted the name and idea to God? I had to be honest that I had not done anything like that. I was too proud of the fact that I came up with it to give God any of the credit or any ability to vet my idea. It was a moment of humility for me, as I needed to be reminded that God is in control of all this, not me. So at that very moment we gave the whole process to God. While we weren't hit with any great ideas at that moment, over the next few weeks, with lots of prayer and collaboration, we came up with something that not only made sense, but had the ability to work into a system of ministry that is still used to this day.

The point is, I should have trusted God's process, not my own. Every time I fail to submit my plans to God, the result is less than stellar. And conversely, when I do give them to God, He has a way of blessing things to a much greater degree than I could have imagined. I don't know why I forget to give things to God first!



**T**he texts this week took us all over the place; however, there is a common thread. That common thread is that God is in charge and wants to be with us. We often forget to think about our faith lives as partnerships with God, rather than as us trying to make God happy with our results. If that were the case, we would have a seriously disappointed God!

But the truth is that we need to be willing to really practice what we preach when it comes to what we submit to God, and how we are planning on obeying the will of God in our lives. To say we are Christians means that we are taking on the mantle of God being the first and foremost priority in our lives, and that should mean something. That should mean that we take our cares, plans, preparations, and desires to Him first and foremost. While we should consider competency important, we don't consider it the measure of our actions; rather, it is the result of our partnership with God. His direction and will in our lives, working in concert with some great abilities that he has granted us, means that we can more directly see His work in our lives, and ultimately, the outcomes will be greater than we could have imagined.

Can you remember a time when you were willing to submit your plans

and preparations to God before they became realities? What was the outcome? While, of course, there is not a one-to-one outcome expected from these kinds of practices, the willingness to submit becomes the important point. It is sort of the same way that giving to God works. When we make the decision to give to God first, there is a peace in our hearts that works its way into other decisions that we make. I am not sure there is a miracle to the idea of tithe, but I do think that when we return the first fruits of our labor to God, there is a deep peace that allows our desires and wants to be quelled for a while. When this happens, we make better decisions. This is true, too, of giving your plans to God before they happen. Perhaps it just makes us more available to be flexible knowing that God's plan, while it may be a bit bumpier, is ultimately just as safe.



## Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.



# WEEK 10

## JAMES 5:1-6 (NLT)

Warning to the Rich

**1** Look here, you rich people: Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. **2** Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. **3** Your gold and silver are corroded. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fire. This corroded treasure you have hoarded will testify against you on the day of judgment. **4** For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The cries of those who harvest your fields have reached the ears of the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

**5** You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every desire. You have fattened yourselves for the day of slaughter. **6** You have condemned and killed innocent people,<sup>[a]</sup> who do not resist you.

## 1 Look here, you rich people: Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you.

**U**h-Oh! Not a great way to start the week, especially if you are “rich people!” Don’t shoot the messenger; I didn’t write this. But he starts out with a phrase we have heard before, from James 4:13—“Look here!” That sounds like a rebuke. If I hear someone say “look here,” it means that we are probably not having the greatest of conversations. And James arrests the readers’ attention by using this phrase. There is a focus on the wealthy that perhaps he hasn’t had before, or perhaps he did but did not call them out with the same laser-like focus.

Now, there is some disagreement as to whom exactly James is speaking. Of course, it is the wealthy, but is it the wealthy Christians or the wealthy non-believers? While there is no consensus as to whether these are influential believers or non-believers, the rebuke is the same. In fact, when he uses the term “weep,” it is actually an onomatopoeia. That means, the word for weep (or wail) actually sounds like a weep or a wail. For example, the word “swish” is an onomatopoeia. It sounds like what it is describing! Can you come up with one of these that you use often in speech?

His warning sounds very Old Testament. Very often, the OT prophets would

call out the wealthy for their lack of care for the poor and the marginalized. We see this in Psalm 94 very profoundly. We also see it in almost every single one of the OT prophets. This is a pretty clearly enunciated critique found in scripture. As we know, we look at scripture as a whole to pick out themes and ideas, and taking care of the poor and marginalized is deeply ingrained into the psyche and theology of both the OT and the NT. If you are not sure about this, look into the book of Luke, as it is clear that the idea of advocacy for the poor and oppressed is deeply rooted in the ministry and teaching of Jesus Christ.

God’s concern for the poor is seen in so many of the Mosaic laws that give direction to the people of Israel as they live out a relationship with God. However, in Israel’s later history, these laws were often ignored, as they are today. The poor were often oppressed by the wealthy, the powerful, the officeholders and even the landholders. Because of this, the wealthy rarely get good coverage in the OT and the NT. While this is an indictment, it does not mean that wealth is inherently evil; rather, that wealth that leads to lack of care for the poor is a problem.

**1— Do you consider yourself wealthy?**

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**2— What do you do with the wealth that God has given you?**

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**3 – Has this wealth come to you by oppressing others?**

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**4 – What can you do with your wealth?**

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## 2 Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags.

**T**his is shaping up to be a pretty tough week, that's for sure. James continues his diatribe against the wealthy by using a rapid-fire approach that we will look at today and tomorrow. He uses a shortened and abbreviated language here to bring home his point. He also uses items that would have been connected with the wealth.

We all like to have nice clothes, and we all like to show what we own. When I moved to Loma Linda, California, I was struck by the wealth that was on display. Now, it was not that most people in the community were trying to show people how wealthy they were. There was just a different level of income than I had been used to seeing in my previous pastorate. And I will tell you, it was a source of anxiety for me. To see young people with cars and items much nicer than I was afforded was quickly becoming a bothersome notion for me. I wasn't sure how to handle it. To be clear, this was an issue for me, not really for anyone else.

I came across a book that was super helpful for me to process some of my feelings. It was called "The Millionaire Next Door" and it was an epiphany for me. It related the difference between wealthy and hyper-consumerism. These

were concepts that I hadn't delineated in my head before. What I began to notice was that while there were many people with a great many things, there were far fewer truly wealthy people in the community. Hyper-consumerism was a bit of a scourge to many families. I found that some people I thought were truly wealthy actually had far fewer dollars in their savings accounts than I did.

While this was not something I mentioned to many people, I began to realize that wealth and having "things" were not the same thing. The accoutrements of having money makes others think you are wealthy, but it does not mean you absolutely are.

The reason I relay this to you is that you may be feeling bad that you don't have what others have, but what we see in the text here is that those trappings of wealth are fleeting, and actually rot away at a pace that is pretty surprising. The things we own often own us, and if we are not careful, we live our lives in pursuit of those things rather than in the pursuit of righteousness. While wealth and righteousness are not mutually exclusive, one can hurt the cause of the other, which is what James is speaking to in these texts.



**3 Your gold and silver are corroded. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fire. This corroded treasure you have hoarded will testify against you on the day of judgment.**

**W**e are continuing the discussion of wealth and the upcoming judgment. And this text starts with something sort of strange. The author says that your “gold and silver are corroded.” Any idea what is strange here? Could it be that both gold and silver don’t corrode? Now, a few different explanations have been given as to why the author says this. One explanation is that he was from a lower class of people in society, and therefore didn’t understand the properties of gold and silver. Or perhaps it is more of a metaphor for what is happening in their hearts.

Regardless of the author’s understanding of these precious metals, the point is well made. When he continues that the wealth you were counting on will essentially cause you pain, he is letting us know that to put your faith in the wealth of the world is probably a fool’s errand. In fact, beyond a fool’s errand, it might be what is leading to your demise. These are hard words, and of course, they are leading us up to the day of judgment, to which any good OT prophet would call us.

So wealth will not only bring no lasting benefit, it will also stand as a witness against us in the coming day of judgment. How can it testify against us? While James does not make a clear distinction in this text, we can perhaps infer from other texts that to pursue and manage such wealth may have made us ignorant or indifferent to the needs of others. (Ezek.7:19; Matthew 6:19-20) The pursuit of wealth and its trappings, often, can mean our focus on how we help the most marginalized in society is not a true concern of ours.

If you have ever heard the phrase “follow the money,” you probably understand that where people place their money is also often where their focus is. If our focus is on acquisition, then we will make decisions that allow us to acquire that which we desire. If our focus is on power (a possession of sorts), then we will move our lives in a direction that will help us gain the power we desire, as well.

While we can do much with wealth and power, unfortunately it is often the story that when those things have been acquired, there is very little “giving

back” to be seen. Of course, this is not always the case. There are wonderful and powerful exceptions that can be seen, but this can be the case. Perhaps those

who have forgotten to give back to the least of these is who James is speaking to in this indictment of a verse we have today.

**1— Is the acquisition of wealth and power important to you?**

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**2— What do you believe to be enough?**

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**3 — If you became powerful and wealthy, what would you do with it?**

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**4 For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The cries of those who harvest your fields have reached the ears of the Lord of Heaven's Armies.**

**S**cripture actually has a great deal to say about the workers in the fields. In fact, there are regulations that are protecting their rights all over the OT. (Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:14,15) Even in the NT we see a parable of the workers in the vineyard that is set against this kind of backdrop. (Matthew 20:1-16) The reason for these regulations is that the very nature of humanity at times is willing to exploit the less fortunate in order to gain more wealth. Without these regulations, it would have been impossible for the day laborer to take care of his family.

Not much has changed over the years, has it? One difference is that these day laborers were paid at the end of each day, and in this way, there would be no question about whether they were compensated for their work. Without this immediate response from the landowner, it was much easier for the day laborer to be taken advantage of. Deuteronomy 24:14-15 says as much: "Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise he may

cry to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty of sin."

The cry of the workers has made it to the ears of God, and in turn, to the ears of his armies. It seems that this was not only a rebuke, but a sort of threat. It is very much in the vein of the Deuteronomic text we have just read. James often sounds like an OT prophet, trying to right the wrongs of the people of Israel.

Have you ever been taken advantage of? What did that feel like? Were you helpless as it happened, or was there some recourse you had to recover what had been taken or held back from you? Often, when this happens, there seems to be little recourse for recovery of lost wages or of that which was taken from you. As much as you have disliked being on the receiving end of injustice, what must it be like for those around you with much less? It is easy for those of us with much to forget the plight of those with little. Subsistence living is difficult on a good day, and when those with little are taken advantage of, it can often mean disastrous results.

**1— Is there a place in your life where you might be taking advantage of people?**

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**2— What can you do to eradicate that situation in your life?**

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**3 — Have you been treated unfairly? Is there any recompense that can be sought? How can you approach rectifying this situation?**

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**5 You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every desire. You have fattened yourselves for the day of slaughter.**

**D**id you know that Yale Medicine has said that the average weight gained during the Covid Quarantine is about 15 lbs? While this statistic varies across the country, we have all been afraid of the “Covid Curves,” as they are being called now. While weight gain has been a bit of a problem, it is not the problem that James is speaking of here. James, much like the prophets of the OT, decided to go after the root of the problem. There is a selfishness that has been years in the making by those who have seen fit to seek after a life of luxury, making sure that their needs were taken care of first. It is poignant that James says they do this, even on the day of slaughter.

What is the day of slaughter? That is something that is a bit of a quandary. There is some thinking that this just means any day in which the poor are taken advantage of. However, there is probably some eschatological thought behind this phrase. Many have connected it to the “day of the Lord” or day of judgment. It would seem this verse does have those “end times” connotations attached to it, to which we could say that there is no stopping these people who have been fattening themselves, even

when it seems like the end is coming.

These texts seem really tough, and truly they are. But James isn’t finished yet. It seems that he is speaking to those who can’t seem to find an anchor point in their faith, and they have been overwhelmed by the pursuit and trappings of the things of this world. This is something that we all probably deal with at some point in our lives. As we get older, and as we progress in our careers and our lives and even in our ability to make more money to match our growing competencies, it is easy to think that we might deserve more than we currently have. While this could be true, it is not always the best thing we can do for ourselves, and especially for our spiritual lives.

When you begin to believe that you deserve the very best that can be afforded, we begin to see our spending habits and our identities change. Let me give you an example that those of us from California probably understand very well: Our cars often give us a bit of an identity. Californians often spend a great deal of time in their cars, and so they have begun to define us a bit. The kind of car you drive often speaks to your status, your wealth, and even what you want people to think of you. However,

is this really true? Probably not, but we function this way.

While money is not condemned, the use of money to simply fulfill our needs and especially the willingness to

do this on the backs of those less fortunate than us is at center stage in the chapter.

**1— Why is money such a big deal? Should it be?**

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**2— When do you have enough money to satisfy your desires? Can you ever?**

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**3 — What place does money and luxury hold in your life? Should it change?**

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## 6 You have condemned and killed innocent people, who do not resist you.

**T**his is perhaps the most damning statement of all. Is James implying that they were killing innocent people for sport? No, no one seems to think that. Rather, this text could be seen in two different ways; 1) By not paying decent wages, the people were dying. 2) By using the justice system to their advantage. The use of the word “condemned,” a legal term, seems to indicate they were able to use a system that disadvantages the poor in a way that would benefit the wealthy, leading to deaths with the marginalized community.

Now, this may seem a lot like what is still happening in today’s world. It has often been said that the justice system works differently for those with a great deal of wealth than for those with nothing. While I am not here to argue this from a legal standpoint, it is probably worth one’s time to see if our systems benefit those with much rather than those with little. As Christians, are we okay with systems that advantage some people over others? I know this can be a volatile topic in today’s overly-politicized world, but asking the question should probably be a part of our practice.

What were the values of Jesus, and did he work for equality and equity for those who were marginalized? There are

many who think that he didn’t, and in fact, would say that if this was his point, he failed quite profoundly at bringing about justice. However, I think this is a deeply misguided thought and actually a pretty misguided theology to live by. It means that the words Jesus spoke in Luke 4: 14-28 were not serious, and that his mission was something less than what he stated by reading the Isaiah scroll. If this is the case, stories like the one about the Good Samaritan were simply an exercise in story-telling, rather than a directive to the people of God to be compassionate and merciful.

Should we, as individuals who follow Jesus, continue to look for ways in which to help the most marginalized in society? Or should we be okay with the way things are? Should we be working to make the phrase “on earth as in heaven” a reality, or should we understand that in this sinful world it can never happen, and therefore it is a fool’s errand to try? Didn’t Jesus say, “The poor will always be with us”? What do you think he meant by that phrase? (Matthew 26:6-13)

Well, that is only half a sentence, not to mention the fact that it is also a quote from Deuteronomy 15:11, which actually states: There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore, I command you to be

openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.” So the biblical response to poverty and the marginalized is openhandedness.

When one group can use a system to oppress another group, we need to take a hard look at those systems, see what is good about them, and see what needs to be changed. By the way, this is not a

quick fix. Systems take years to develop, and the change that is needed takes a while, too. But being cognizant of what needs to change is part of the process. Never close your eyes to abusive systems, and always work for their change. That is what Jesus did, and what he commanded us to do by simply calling us to love one another as a fulfillment of the law.

**1— What systems are you a part of that might treat others poorly?**

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**2—How can you help bring about change?**

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**3 – Do you believe that we should work for an “on earth as it is in heaven” type of society?**

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**M**an, that was a tough week. We went from people not paying wages to their workers to ending with the idea that they had used the judicial system to actually kill other people. This is a hard week for those of us who have wealth. However, James is not speaking to everyone who is wealthy, but rather to those who have gained their wealth on the backs of others, by cheating, by using systems of oppression, and by not being honest in their dealings with their subordinates.

Have you ever worked for someone who was less than forthright, or someone who was a downright scoundrel when it came to the truth, to recompense, and to making sure their subordinates were treated fairly? We have all had bad bosses; that is nothing new. But there is something particularly bad when a boss or CEO has little or no care for his workers. It is hard to believe that any business can be successful with that kind of treatment of its employees, but we all know it can happen.

The takeaway from this week is clearly that some have become wealthy by taking advantage of others, and James finds no place for it in God's world. His language is prophetic in the vein of the OT prophets, calling out to those who decidedly did not protect

those most vulnerable among us. It is clear that James not only has no time for this, but his language is an indictment. Whether he is speaking to believers or to those who don't believe, there is a clear understanding laid forth that we are not to treat others unfairly, and we are especially not to profit from it. In fact, if we do, that mammon we might gain from this treatment is rusting already. No good will come from it.

As well, there is a notion that these people had done nothing with their lives but fulfill their desires and had become fat through all this misappropriation. In following their pursuits and desires they were unable to bring about the world that God wants to see. A world that reflects the values of heaven. A world where people will be paid an honest day's wage for an honest day's work, and where they don't have to worry about making ends meet because of the usury of others.

Does this world seem too utopic for the world we actually live in? I suppose it does. But aren't we supposed to aspire to something greater, to a different kind of living, to a different kind of economy, a different kind of world? If Christians are simply supposed to parrot the world that is already around us, then why are we working so hard to understand who God is in this world? God, and Jesus,





## Notes

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# WEEK 11

## JAMES 5:7-12 (NLT)

Patience and Endurance

**7** Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen. **8** You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near.

**9** Don't grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. For look—the Judge is standing at the door!

**10** For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. **11** We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy.

**12** But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned.

**1 Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen.**

**H**ow many of us are farmers? I have a friend who is a farmer. He lives in Michigan and he is one of the most patient people I know. I suppose he has to be patient, as you can't microwave the process of development and growth of a planted seed. No matter how fast we want it to go, we simply can't thwart the process that God has set in place. As I watch my friend wait for the harvest, I have realized that his waiting is never passive. He is actively awaiting harvest, and that means he is constantly preparing for that day when the plants are ready, the crop is ripe, and it is time to start the work of harvest in earnest.

Here, James is speaking of the coming of the Lord, which was assumed to be quite quick in its coming. He has changed his tone from the previous texts, which were indictments of the rich, to be using the terms "brother and sisters" again. This means he is speaking to his primary audience, his congregation, friends, and family in Christ.

His admonishment is for them to wait patiently, like a farmer waits for his harvest. There is this phrase where he

points to the rains in the fall and in the spring. This acknowledges that God is still working, no matter the state of the crops. God is still in charge, providing, sustaining, and planning. When the harvest comes, the farmer, who has been eagerly waiting, is ready and prepared to bring in the fruit of his labor, and of his partnership with God, who brings the rain.

The admonition given to us by James is that we should be patient, but it doesn't say that we should be idle.

If you have ever been to Disneyland as a child, you know that there is nothing more painful than waiting for the day to come when you jump in the car with your parents and head down the various freeways it takes to get to Anaheim. Those days when we are anxiously awaiting the date to finally go are interminable, and as a child, they rank up there with torture. So what do your parents say? Get busy, go play, do homework, find something else to do in order to be able to make the time go faster.

The same is true for those of us who wait on the Lord's return. We can wait idly by, simply staring up at the sky,

or we can busy ourselves with the Mission Dei, or the mission of God, in order to help make the world a bit more like the heaven we all long for. Doing the work of the kingdom prepares us for

the kingdom more than anything else we could put our minds toward. So the question becomes, what is God asking you to do in the meantime?

**1— What do you think God has specifically gifted you for in His work?**

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**2— Have you ever waited a long time for a reward you were anticipating?**

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**3 — How can you know what you should be doing in the interim between His resurrection and His second coming?**

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## 8 You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near.

**W**e, as Adventists, have heard phrases like this for our whole lives. We must be patient, because the time of the Lord's coming is near. In fact, sometimes it feels like we have heard these sentences so often they have lost their power. How can "soon" mean close to 2,000 years, and still it has not happened yet? Each generation thinks they are the ones who will see Jesus come in their lifetime, and then they are disappointed when they begin to wax and wane and realize that Jesus may not come before they see their own demise.

Okay, I'm sorry for being so dramatic and blunt. But doesn't it ever frustrate you that we have been saying this for years and yet Jesus hasn't come? I remember speaking to my grandmother and her telling me she never thought she would graduate from high school because she always assumed that Jesus would come before the end of her senior year. She's now been gone for over 20 years, and yet we still don't have an inkling of when Jesus will come.

James is speaking to a particular group of Christians here, and you must remember that they were being exploited and they were suffering, as well. We are certainly living in strange times,

but we need to have the same forbearance as these early Christians did in the face of suffering. Wars, rumors of wars, plagues, famines, disasters; Christians have lived through all of these things and have kept the faith and have had patience in waiting for the return of Christ. Why should we be any different? Is our suffering more than theirs? Is our inconvenience more than those who have died for the gospel? Perhaps our suffering, when compared to that of other generations of Christians, is really not so much.

So what do we do?

Perhaps we should hold on to the second part of the text, "Take Courage." A few years ago, I began to end my emails with this phrase: "Have courage, and be courageous." I'm not sure why I began to end my emails this way; it just made sense at the time. I don't always put that tagline at the end, but there are times I still do. James is encouraging those early Christians, and in turn us, to be hanging on for the timing of Christ, as it is still in the offing.

**We can learn a few things from this text:**

- 1** — That there is work that we have to do that takes courage.
- 2** — Jesus is still coming.

There has never been a question about his ultimate return. While people over the years have questioned timeline and processes, the question of his return has never been up for grabs. While we may feel like the wait is interminable, we can know that it is just an interim period in which we are living. The end will come, and our job is to hope and take courage in the promises of God. Does that make us a foolish people? Only if he never comes. And there are promises upon promises that Jesus

will ultimately return.

The promise I am most reminded of is this one, found in Romans 5: 3 We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. 4 And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. 5 And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

**1— Have you ever been frustrated that Jesus hasn't returned yet?**

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**2— What do you think he is waiting for?**

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**3 — If you were the only one left who believed in his second coming, would you still stake your life on it?**

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## 9 Don't grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. For look—the Judge is standing at the door!

**H**ave you ever been on a long road trip with your family? When you are waiting to get to a destination, you will definitely have to deal with grumbling about one another. It is in our natures to be a bit unhappy when we have to be patient. We just went on a 3,500 mile road trip to the Pacific Northwest. The time in the car was mostly uneventful, but I can tell you, there were moments of deep frustration and grumbling coming from the back seats. Even though our kids are in the early, middle and upper teens, there were moments that harkened back to when they were all still toddlers or preschoolers, and their communication was much the same.

We can, at times, become frustrated by the idea that we aren't able to really exercise our deep desire to be with Jesus in a more perfect way, and so we may take up our time finding reasons to grumble about one another.

What is interesting in this text is that James takes on the idea of grumbling as the idea that we are judging one another. By complaining and grumbling, we are actually creating a state of judgment in our relationships. James reminds us that if we are doing this, then we will be judged as well, and

it seems in Scripture that we never want to be judged for being judgmental. In so many of the different texts that relate to judging, we are told not to, lest we will be judged. (Matthew 7:1-5, Luke 6:37-42; James 4:11-12; Romans 2:1-3; Romans 14:1-13—to name a few)

So what do we do in the interim? How are we to occupy our time when we are waiting for Christ's return? Here are a few ideas:

- 1** — Get involved in ministries of mercy and compassion. See what you can do to help our world become a better and more loving and caring place.
- 2** — Study scripture in new ways and with new people. Perhaps your study of scripture needs some work; perhaps it is time to take it a bit more seriously. I find that the more I learn from scripture, the more humble I become, as I learn how much I don't really know.
- 3** — Tell someone about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are always admonished to go and tell the world about who Jesus is. (Matthew 28:19-20) Remember, this is not the great commission, but rather the great Co-Mission. It is God partnering with us to tell the world about Jesus.

**1— Have you ever found yourself grumbling about someone and realized that it was actually you judging them?**

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**2— What can you do to keep yourself busy so as not to focus on the foibles of others?**

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**3 — How does it change your attitude, knowing that the Judge is standing at the door?**

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## 10 For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

**W**hen was the last time you needed an example of patience in suffering? This phrasing may seem strange, but it is important. Prophets were not people who told the future, as we sometimes think. Prophets primarily are spokesmen for God and interpreters of God's will. They were also seen as someone who speaks God's message to the people. In doing so, many of the prophets experienced suffering and hardship. (See Hosea for a great example of suffering for God's word).

Prophets have always fascinated me. Not because they were so connected with God, while that was amazing, but rather, because they seemed to be pretty interesting people. From Elijah to Elisha, to Hosea, even to Jonah, we see a cast of characters that were not exactly normal, but were completely committed to making sure that others knew the word that was coming from God.

So let me ask you this question:

How undignified would you become for God? (2nd Samuel 6:22). Seriously, how many strange and unexpected things would you do if God asked you to do those things? What would you suffer? What would you endure?

What sort of hardship and uncomfortable situation would you be willing to suffer through in order to bring a word from God to someone? Is God even asking you to do anything like this?

I know that the point of this text is to learn patience from the prophets, but I believe we can also learn many other things from the prophets. We can learn not to worry too much about what other people think of us. We can learn to really hear the word of God and recognize His voice in our lives. We can learn to spend our time in the presence of God first, and then go find those who would listen to the word that God gives us. There is a great deal we can learn from the prophets.

When we think of the prophets as primarily fortune tellers, we actually have a tendency to miss the most important part of the things they did, that is, live a life that was fully committed to God in every way possible. From the way they dressed, to what they ate, to the way they depended on God in times of trouble and strife, all of these things teach us what it means to be a follower of God. While most of us probably don't feel that we were created to be that kind of mouthpiece for God, we can all be committed to spending our

time in the interim between resurrection and the second coming to give our all to

His cause, to share His words, and to be committed to compassion and mercy for all.

**1— Have you ever thought of yourself as a prophet?**

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**2— What role have prophets played in your life?**

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**3 – Is there such a thing as a modern-day prophet? Who would that be in your life?**

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**11 We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy.**

James begins this text in a very traditional way by honoring those who have endured the suffering of which he speaks. He then uses the example of Job as someone the ancient Christians should look to in order to see an example of great patience. If you remember the story of Job, then you remember that Job lost pretty much everything, but in the end, it was restored to him. While there are many different ideas about the book of Job and its historicity, we can certainly learn a powerful lesson of what it means to have patience in the midst of suffering.

What has always taken me aback about Job is that even though he finally breaks down and complains to God (and is met with a pretty serious rebuke from God), Job hangs in there and still believes that God is good. Job is a good man, and goes through some terrible times, but is able to keep his faith and his hope that God is still good in the midst of all the turmoil he sees in his life. In the end, things are restored to him in abundance, but the sting of the struggle is still there in his life.

James seems to be making the case that no matter how hard things

get, there is still the belief that God is really good and really full of compassion and mercy for his children. With this in mind, there seems to be the implication that we can trust in the promises and in the character of God, no matter what.

So what are you going through that seems worse than anything you have gone through before? Can you keep your faith in God?

We are living in the strangest of times. With the turmoil over racial injustice, the Coronavirus, and even the social distancing and regulations, it seems as if we are living a surreal life that we could not have imagined. What does this do to our faith? Does it make us lean into faith as Job did, or do we falter as his friends did in the narrative we are given? In the darkest of times, is this when your faith grows or shrinks? Are things hopeless for you, or do you believe that God may just be doing something new through this time?

These are tough questions, but tough times lead to tough questions. Faith is rarely built in comfort, but it is often grown and developed in the patience of waiting through difficulty.

**1— How is what is happening in the world affecting your faith?**

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**2— Does Job give you a sense of patience and strength? Perhaps it is time to read it again.**

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**3 — How can we give great honor to those who are suffering and yet enduring in their faith everyday?**

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**12 But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned.**

**S**o this is a strange way to end the week. Why would James make a point about oaths at the end of a diatribe on patience and faith? Some scholars have found it hard to connect this last text in this section to the previous texts we have studied. However, the beginning phrase “but most of all,” means that even in considering everything that was said before, this is an important saying. However, it is okay to think of this as the beginning of a new thought as well. James is beginning to bring his letter to a close, and he has a few things he wants to say, that we will study next week.

But the reason he wants us not to make oaths, or even contracts, as some commentators say, is that we are to be people of integrity. We are to be the ones for whom our words are trusted, and our truth is unassailable. We are not always those people, but we should be.

This has an implication for our witness. If you are someone who likes to fudge the numbers, or doesn't have too much problem with hyperbole, the people around you begin to take your word less seriously. In fact, they begin to become a bit wary of your stories. If you

always have to one-up someone, and you are pretty loose with the truth, your witness for Christ will be taken with a big ole grain of salt.

Can you just continue to under-sell, rather than oversell? Is it possible for you to not be the biggest storyteller there is? Can you be less of the life of the party, and rather, be someone who is deeply pleasant and truthful to talk to?

Jesus has given us so much, we don't have to “gild the Lilly” as they say. All we have to do is tell the truth about God in our lives. Let our yes be yes and our no be no.

**1 — Have you ever increased the story to be better for your audience?**

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**2 — Can people trust your words?**

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**3 — Can you put in place something that will remind you to “talk less, and say more?”**

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**T**oday, we need to focus on patience and endurance. It is easy to have faith when things are normal, but it is much harder when things are difficult and when trials and tribulations abound around us. So let me ask you this, what gives you a sense of peace and patience in the midst of a storm? What are the things that can calm your heart and give you a steadfastness that will defy any winds and rain that may be thrown out at you? Today, Hurricane Hanna has made landfall this week in Texas, and they understand what it means to be in the time of a storm. With Coronavirus surges and now a hurricane, things are difficult in that part of the US. Hurricanes, earthquakes (for us in CA) and more can't shake the faith of the people of God. At least it shouldn't!

In this text, James seems to be speaking of the simplistic way that Christians are supposed to live. Simply, by having our yeses be "yes" and our

noes be "no." There is something beautiful in living a simple life. Sometimes it seems we complicate our lives and our transactions, when the word of a Christian should be his or her bond. We can be people of the truth, proclaiming the truth of Christ, while at the same being people who proclaim a simple truth in our own lives, that we will be people of integrity, not afraid to live behind our words. Sometimes, it makes sense to keep things simple.

Our lives are to be full of patience, fortitude, grace, compassion and mercy. We are to be prophets in the way we give a word of God to the world, and in how we recognize the voice of God in our lives. All of this we do in the interim between the resurrection of Jesus and his return to the earth. While it is not on our timeline, it is still something that we look forward to everyday. And one day, we will not be disappointed because our hope will be concluded in his coming.



## Notes

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## Notes

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# WEEK 12

## JAMES 5:13-18 (NLT)

The Power of Prayer

**13** Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. **14** Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. **15** Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven.

**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. **17** Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! **18** Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.

### 13 Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises.

**J**ames finishes this chapter with a call to prayer. It is a major theme that will play out this week. Prayer is necessary for the Christian for a great many reasons.

**1** — Prayer is important because it is a form of obedience. We are called to pray; God designed prayer for us. It is truly built into our very ability to exist. We were created in His image, and we are to behave in ways that were modeled by Christ, who was in constant prayer. Here are some examples. “Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray” (Mark 1:35). “My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you” (John 17:1). “They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary, the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus” (Acts 1:14). “All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). “Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word” (Acts 6:4).

**2** — Prayer is an act of service. We often pray for others, not just ourselves. Intercessory prayer does not change God’s mind, but it reminds us as to what we

are to focus on and how we can help. Philippians 2:3-4 is such a great example of this. “Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interest of others” (Philippians 2:3-4). “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

**3** — Prayer is a solution. It is an avenue to resolution, the path to finding an answer to a problem, and is deeply important to the design process we have been talking about. “Ask me and I will tell you remarkable secrets you do not know about things to come” (Jeremiah 33:3). “Then, if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land. My eyes will be open and my ears attentive to every prayer made in this place” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

**4** — Prayer is communicating with God. Since the beginning of time God has been talking to us. We’re just not always in a place or state where we can hear Him. Adam and Eve enjoyed chats with Father, as have prophets, and of course,

Jesus spent much time with Him. Some examples: “Then God blessed them and said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply’” (Genesis 1:28). “Then the Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’” (Genesis 3:9). “‘Who told you that you were naked?’ the Lord God asked. ‘Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?’” (Genesis 3:11). “Have the people of Israel build me a holy sanctuary so I can live among them” (Exodus 25:8). “I am the one who brought them

out of the land of Egypt so that I could live among them” (Exodus 29:46).

There are many reasons to pray, both from our pain and our joy. Never stop communicating with God. And for sure, when our joy overflows, it sounds a great deal like praise and worship!

The thing that I miss the most about not gathering is our worship time together. To hear the people of God singing praises is a special joy in my life. I miss that greatly.

**1— When do you feel is the best time to pray?**

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**2— In crisis, do you find yourself praying more or less?**

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**3 —How can you praise God in song today?**

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## 8 You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near.

**A**fter mentioning the first two reasons to pray--suffering and happiness--he mentions a third circumstance needing prayer, namely sickness. Sickness is seen as a different kind of suffering or hardship, one that has an attachment to the prayers prayed by the elders. A few things are happening here.

**1** — The elders are a group of people in the church who can be called upon to come and deliver prayer and healing. They are delineated and clearly defined. They have “status” in the church, not for political gain, but as wisdom and prayer for the larger church community.

**2** — Their function in this instance is to anoint and to pray “over” the sick.

Often, what we see as elders in the church is more an administrative function, but the ability to pray over those in the church is very important for this group as well. When I was first in ministry, our elders would meet in between the study time and church every single week. They would pray over the pastors who were preaching, and they would handle short administrative issues that the pastoral staff would bring to them. However, their primary function, each week, was to pray over the pastors for wisdom and to pray over church members who were

dealing with tough situations and who were hurting or in need of healing. It was a beautiful time each week, and I came to really appreciate those short, usually ten-minute meetings.

While that has not been incorporated in our current situation, as we usually don't have time between services, and the three services offered at Redlands preclude everyone being in the same place at the same time, our Leadership team prays earnestly, and our prayer team is available for prayer at any time (email; [prayer@crosswalkvillage.com](mailto:prayer@crosswalkvillage.com)). We take prayer seriously, and while we don't always know exactly how it works, we know that God has asked us to communicate with Him, to pray for others, and to anoint the sick when appropriate.

My first anointing was quite an experience. An older colleague in an organization I was working in had taken ill, and he was well into his 90's. As the illness progressed, he asked that I and another pastoral colleague come and anoint him. I had never done this before, so I felt I was along for the ride. My colleague, being much older and experienced than I was, took the lead. When it came time to anoint our dear friend and mentor, my colleague took out a bottle of oil, and not a small one. I had always heard we were

to put a small bit in our hand and put in on the forehead of the one being anointed. Well, he poured quite a bit of oil into his hand, it was running over, and then put it all over the head of our friend. I was a bit in shock, but we fulfilled our purpose, and our friend died a few days later, however, with much more peace than he had before we came and anointed him.

I tell you this to remind you that it is not always the process that is import-

ant; it is the meaning imbued into the tradition. While I found it a bit strange, the amount of oil used, I remember the prayer my colleague prayed, and it was amazing. When you are asked to pray over someone for healing or for peace (which is a beautiful form of healing), do it however it works best for you and for them. It is the connection with God that we seek!

**1— Have you ever anointed someone? Have you been anointed?**

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**2— What can you do to pray for someone today?**

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**3 — Have you ever needed prayer for healing?**

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**15 Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven.**

**T**his is quite a promise. There are a few things we need to discuss. When it comes to healing prayer in scripture, and in this text in particular, it seems that we have been promised healing without real qualifications. However, sometimes when we talk about a prayer of faith, we have a tendency to either think it won't work, which undermines the faith, or we have a tendency to blame the person for not having enough faith, which often exacerbates a difficult situation. Does this mean that if healing doesn't happen, we don't have faith, or those that pray the prayers for us don't have enough faith? Both of these ideas can be unbiblical.

The first rule of thumb in prayer is simply this: "Thy will be done." It is a prayer that Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, and a prayer that is deeply appropriate for us to pray, every time we pray. That does not mean that if healing doesn't happen, that God did not want it to happen. It means that we submit, as contingent creatures, to the will and the timing and the power of God. It is easy to find ourselves in a situation that becomes manipulative to our faith if we don't understand this.

Prayer for healing will always be a situation fraught with misunderstanding, disappointments, and frustrations. While some find this kind of theology simple, it truly is not. But by keeping in mind the previous concept, that it is God's will and His timing and power that we submit to, we can keep our wits about us.

One way that this text has been interpreted is that it is a prayer for salvation, rather than physical healing, which doesn't seem to be the case here. While resurrection is expected at the end of time, this text seems to be specific to the healing of the person physically as well as spiritually, which we see in the final phrase about forgiveness.

So what do you do when you pray for healing and yet it does not come to you? Does it mean that you lack faith or that those praying for you lack faith? By no means! It means that there are other things at play in the world, and we don't always get to know those things. To submit to God's will is to have faith in the midst of the suffering, not just when things go the way we want them to!

However, does this mean that God WANTS us to be sick and to suffer, especially seen if we are not healed? Again,

by no means is this the case! Rather, we have to be willing to allow God to be God and make the kind of moves He needs to make to work toward His ends. When we submit to this, outcomes become

God's department, and our department becomes the continuous prayers, seeking His will and wisdom and peace. It is not always the most comfortable, but it is the most obedient.

**1— Have you ever prayed for healing, or had someone pray over you? What was the result?**

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**2— Were you frustrated with the outcome?**

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**3 — What did it do to your faith in God?**

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**4 — How can you be at peace with the answers that God gives to your prayers? What part does trust play in your faith life?**

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**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.**

**T**his is an interesting text for today. There is this idea of confession and that confession should happen in community. However, is this text saying that we should get in front of each other in church and commit our sins to a public hearing? I would say no, that is probably not what we are talking about. The Ecclesia, or the gather, the church, is to be a place of confession, but is public confession what we are talking about?

I think that one of the greatest aspects of church is that it is where you can find some pretty amazing friendships. Friendships among believers can be incredibly deep, honest, accountable and relatable. But within each congregation there are friendships that are deeper with certain people than with everyone. Perhaps in a small church this is less the case; however, in a large church, there are congregations within congregations, deep friendships among wider friendships.

I think this text is best understood in our context that we should have people to which we can confess without the fear of judgment and without the fear of gossip. This is why we are always encouraging people to come together in

smaller groups in order to build those accountable relationships that allow for some confession in safe and secure places. If you have some of these relationships in your life already, then those people are part of your Ecclesia, or your community/congregation.

Now, the last part of the text seems to assume that if you are righteous, there will be great power and wonderful results. This is a great promise. Remember, the righteousness that we have comes from God, and it originates in God, as well. We are subject to His grace and His mercy all the time. So our prayers, given in earnest, without selfishness or wish for personal gain, become the amazing conduits for the power, the peace, and the grace of God. Remember, we are not praying so that we can manipulate God or the situations we find ourselves in. We pray for peace, for wisdom, for strength, for courage, and for a sense of God's presence in our lives. Those are powerful things.

When we think of prayer as a "power" that we yield, we are missing the point. Prayer is not a tool to manipulate God or any sort of power; rather it is a conduit for a better and more profound relationship with God.



## 17 Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years!

**A**gain, James goes to the use of examples to show the power of prayer. He uses Elijah, and the first phrase is interesting. It says that Elijah was “as human as we are.” What in the world does that mean? It means that he had the same limitations as us, or that he had the same feelings that we have, or similar suffering as we do. The same word is used in Acts 14:15, when Paul and Barnabas told the crowds, “Don’t think of us as Gods.” In other words, we are just like you, but we have the gospel.

So if Elijah, one of the greatest prophets, is just like us, what does that mean for the way we interact with God not only in prayer, but in everything? It means that we have access to the same kind of power, the same kind of grace and the same kind of wisdom that Elijah, and even Jesus had. That same power that was present in Elijah’s life is present in our lives today.

Why was he so connected to that power? Perhaps it was because he decided to focus on that power; he decided to focus on the relationship that he had with God above all else. Perhaps it was because he was willing to listen to God’s voice in ways that we don’t always decide to listen. There are a myriad of

things that Elijah did that we don’t. So how do we become more like Elijah?

**1** — Listen. There is a famous line from Aaron Burr in the musical “Hamilton.” Burr tells Hamilton and his friends to “Talk less, smile more. . .” He says this in the context of not wanting people to know where he stands all the time. Hamilton has some obvious issues with this. But in our context, listening to God is sometimes the greatest way that we can pray. Getting to know the voice of the Father is incredibly important in our faith lives. We have left it to later on in the conversation because James did this, as well. However, listening cannot be underestimated in your faith journey.

**2** — Go. When God calls, GO! Be ready, in season and out of season, to say the words that God gives you. Remember, when the drought happened because of the God hearing the prayers of Elijah, he did not have the greatest life. He was fed by birds during that time! Are we willing to follow through on the calling that God has put on our lives? Remember, you won’t hear His call unless you listen first.

**3** — Prepare. Prepare for whatever God will call you to. Exercising preparation means that you are prepared to take the direction of God seriously, and go where He calls you to go.

**1— Do you feel like those heroes in scripture were “like you”?**

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**2— What does it mean to “pray earnestly”?**

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**3 — How can you learn to listen like Elijah?**

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## 18 Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.

**T**his shouldn't be taken as if Elijah didn't pray for the last 3.5 years. Truly, he must have if God was the one sustaining him through this time. However, it was a focused prayer that was tied to the first prayer. Our prayers are to be continuous and are to be deeply committed to finding the will of God in our lives. Elijah would have most certainly prayed prayers that kept him in contact with God all throughout the three and a half years.

How often do you pray? Maybe this sounds like a silly question, but it speaks to how you think of prayer. Is it something you visit, a conversation you come to and go out from? Or is prayer a constant conversation with God, one that you rarely "go out of" but are constantly "staying in"?

I have a tendency to look at prayer as the one conversation that never ends, never loses focus, never forgets prior conversations, and is a constant companion in my life. I am not a "prayer warrior," as some are called. I am more of a "prayer continuer. . ." (which might not be a word, sorry). I find myself constantly in the midst of prayer without any interruption other than the regular interruptions of life, but still, prayer is there constantly.

Even when I find myself sinning, prayer is my constant companion. Does this seem strange? It is in those moments when I find my prayer life most acute and important. Does prayer keep me from sin? Often! But does it solve every problem? No. However, it brings into focus the constant companionship I have with God. I am blessed to have the privilege of having a God who is my "ride or die," as the kids say! Without my constant connection to God, I feel a bit like a lost child, trying to find his parents.

Without the deep connection that prayer allows us, we are disconnected from God. Have you ever been in a place where your cell phone doesn't work? It is disconcerting to think that if something happened to you, you would be all alone. This is how I feel when I am not in constant conversation with God. I feel like I am in the middle of nowhere looking for a bar or two on my phone. When we come back into a service area, there is a sense of relief. Well, with prayer, you are never out of service.

**1 — How can you have a constant conversation with God? Will that seem too invasive?**

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**2 — What is the thing you hate praying about? Do you think God is bothered by it?**

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**3 — What keeps you from praying?**

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**12 But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned.**

**A**s we are coming close to the end of this series, we have to take a look at how we design our lives of faith. While James left the idea of prayer until the very end, mostly, it is something that we cannot ignore. We need to make sure that we have a robust prayer life, and I have suggested that this means we pray without ceasing, meaning we are in a constant conversation with God. Without this connection, we often feel as if we are lost in the midst of a storm. The good news is that we are never disconnected from God.

James again used examples from the prophets, namely Elijah, so that we could see that not only were prophets much like us, but the connection with God helped them to do amazing things. We can also do amazing things when our connection with God is strong and constant. It also helps us to understand the sound of God's voice in our lives. Without the conversation, how are we to know when God speaks into our lives?

We have dealt with healing, anointing, and with the function of the elders of the church. Each one of these issues

is worthy of a week's worth of study, but we don't have time right now. The truth is that James has ended his letter by emphasizing something that just might take them through their hardships and focus them on God, rather than themselves. This is something that prayer does profoundly. It allows us to listen to the voice of God rather than those internal voices that are constantly struggling for attention in our heads and our hearts, those voices that often are not always positive, and often are pushing us toward negative feelings about ourselves and others.

How does prayer factor into the design of our faith lives? It is ubiquitous. What I mean by that is it is pervasive, and it layers itself above, beneath, and in between anything else. Our first and last instinct should be the connection that prayer gives us with God. As we design our faith lives, prayer does not just have a place; rather, it begins with prayer, ends with prayer and is saturated by prayer through the whole of the experience. Without it, we will never get to where we want to go, and progression toward the goal will be difficult, as well.





## Notes

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# WEEK 13

## JAMES 5:13-18 (NLT)

Restore Wandering Believers

**19** My dear brothers and sisters, if someone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back, **20** you can be sure that whoever brings the sinner back from wandering will save that person from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.

**W**hy are we talking about the fall today? For a few reasons; 1) We are almost to the end of the 5th chapter of James, and therefore at the end of the series. 2) There is an assumption that someone can fall or wander away from the truth of the gospel. So for these reasons, we are going to take a look at the fall story found in Genesis 3, at least in a general way, so that we can take a look at how people can fall away from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the narrative found in Genesis 3, we see Adam and Eve taking the apple after having a conversation with the snake. The snake uses the falsehood that God doesn't want Adam and Eve to be more like him. This is patently false, when we take a look at Genesis 1:26-28 where God has a conversation with himself (the trinity) and says "let us make man in our likeness. . ." God has always wanted us to be "like" him, that is why he made us in his image.

However, since the beginning of time we have been susceptible to lies that come from Satan that try to get us off track of the gospel. Lies about who we are, lies about who God is, and lies about how God cares about us. Sometimes it is difficult to sort through all of these lies to find out what is true. There is so much in this world that is grappling

for our attention, and much of it has lies built in as to what God is really about. If you look at most television shows that depict God, they are often skewed in a direction that most Christians wouldn't recognize. How do we find out who God is in the midst of such confusion?

One thing we can do is surround ourselves by those who are seeking God. This is what James will suggest, but from the communities perspective. He will tell those of us in the community to go and find someone who has wandered away from the truth and bring them back. This is the commitment that we make to one another while we are in community together. It is, of course, not so easy when communities become large, and people don't necessarily know one another. This is why we must create micro-communities via small groups to stay close to those God has placed in our paths. We can't expect a church with 2000 in attendance to function in the same way a small group functions.

So, as we look at these final verses, I want you to think about who is in your immediate community and how you are holding one another together in the truth of Jesus Christ.

**1— Who is your small group? (even if it is not formal, who do you hang out with that you assume you are spiritually accountable to?)**

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**2— How can you cultivate a culture of accountability amongst your immediate peers?**

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**3 —Would you allow yourself to be accountable to someone? If so, what are the requirements of that in the relationship?**

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**19 My dear brothers and sisters, if someone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back, 20 you can be sure that whoever brings the sinner back from wandering will save that person from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.**

**T**hese 2 verses are the way that James has decided to end this missive he has been using to guide the early church. And there is a great deal of compassion and mercy toward those who may have moved away from the faith. This is important to note that he did not see them as people who were lost forever, rather, he saw them as people who needed to be loved back into the community in order that they might experience the grace and love of Jesus once again.

Have you ever left the faith? Do you know of someone who has left the faith at any point? Were you sought after once you left? Often, there are stories of people who leave and are never spoken to again by those who have stayed. I had a very interesting conversation with a friend of mine who decided to de-convert from his faith upbringing. He mentioned to me that I was the only one who still spoke to him about faith. (I am not telling you this to get kudos, I simply kept my relationship the same with him, and faith would always come up). He asked my why I thought his former church family didn't reach out to him. My first question

was: "do you want them to?" To which he replied; "not to reconvert me. . ." I think that is the problem. We break relationships when it feels like they will not come back to faith anymore.

Perhaps what we should be doing is staying in relationship with those who have left, hoping and praying and believing that God will open their hearts, and we will be available with the right words when we are called to give them. I have not tried to reconvert my friend, but we are still on great terms and if the time ever comes to fruition that he wants to engage this conversation, I am hopeful he will come to me.

At the end of this verse there is a strong affirmation that this work is really important, as the person who brings back the one who has wandered off will help save that person from death. There is nothing better than when someone you are working and sharing with begins to understand the power and depth of the gospel. If you are ever in that position, you will understand. The eyes of someone when they finally understand the grace of God in their lives are brighter than the brightest star.



**15 Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven.**

**H**aving dealt with the previous text, we want to spend a little time on the 5 phases of design for your faith life that we spoke of a few weeks ago in the on James 3:13-18.

The first phase of the design process begins with empathy. Empathy is a powerful connection that humans have toward one another, and it allows us to help see the issues that others are dealing with. Human Centered Design and Faith Design both have to begin here. Even if you are designing for your own life of faith, to have empathy is the ability to allow us to see what is really happening and to have not only an emotional response, but a response of compassion as well. This allows us to begin to clarify our thinking between how we approach the problem and what the problem really is. The importance of empathy cannot be overstated.

One way we can empathize is to first spend some time in prayer over your faith life. Ask God to help you understand the issue you are dealing with and to help show you what things could look like as you work your way through these issues. Sometimes, using something like an empathy map is helpful. If you google an empathy map, you can

get an idea of what it is, but basically it is a grid that helps us see what we think, feel, say, and do when it comes to our life of faith. See link in the footnote for a great explanation of empathy maps.

To be really good at empathy, we have to begin to set our assumptions aside and immerse ourselves in the context of the problem we are attempting to work on. This is sometimes hard when it comes to the internal conversation we are having about our lives of faith. However, as we become a bit more objective about the ideas we are dealing with, we begin to become better at even empathizing with ourselves and our own problems as we seek solutions.

One thing that is important is to know you are not going about this journey alone. You have friends and family that would be very interested in working through this process with you, and it is possible that your conversations with God may be very clarifying as well. As well, speaking with a pastor or trusted mentor can help provide perspective that might lend itself to benefiting the conversation.



**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.**

**T**his is sometimes the hardest part of the process, because finding a clear and succinct language from which to work is difficult. However, after having made lists, done empathy mapping, and working toward a better understanding of some of the issues you wish to tackle, you now take a human-centered approach to defining the problem. Since you and your faith life is not a business, it may be difficult to find a language that can capture the metrics you wish to see in order to know if you are making a difference in your approach to your life of faith.

Because you can't simply say something like: "I want to increase my grace by 5%," you will have to come up with words that make a bit more sense to what you are trying to accomplish. Phrases like, I want my faith life to take a more central role in my decision making process. (This could be accomplished by the following 3 spiritual exercises—1. Prayer. 2. Study. 3. Prioritize.) This is just an example, however, you can see there are tangible exercises that are attached to the stated goal. In each of these exercises, you can assign a frequency, a time frame, and a consistency to help you keep track of how

you are doing. While faith and spirituality are not simple to connect metrics to, you certainly can connect metrics and aspirations to your practices that will help you become more aware of where you are trying to go.

Maybe some of you are not so great at creating language that will help define the work you need to do. This is when you need to consult someone who is better at it than you are. Find a partner, a friend, a spouse, a pastor, or a mentor who can walk with you through the process.

Attaching metrics to spirituality is always a tricky thing, so I suggest you don't do that. But what you can create metrics around is the practices, exercises, and disciplines that help us create opportunities for spiritual growth in our lives. As we define the problem with clarity, we can begin to seek solutions that make more sense.

Too often, when we think of our spiritual lives, we don't break them down to parts, but we feel bad about the whole experience not living up to what we hoped it would be. Its time to change that language and narrative and create intentional steps to making our lives of faith more robust, challeng-

ing, important and seeking to move the dial on an often much too neglected part of our lives. Remember, your spiri-

tual life and your actual life are so interwoven, it is sometimes difficult to speak of one without relating to the other.

**1— What have you defined as problem areas you would like to tackle with this process? Be specific.**

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**2— How can you create some metrics around these problem areas?**

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**3 – Who can you enlist to help you process all of this?**

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**T**o me, this phase is one of the most fun phases we can employ in this whole process. The reason why it is fun to ideate is that ideation takes the shape of brainstorming. This is when you find a white board and begin to dream. You have a goal in mind, but now, you get to play around with ideas that may get you to this goal. It is a time to explore solutions without judgment, a chance to get to know your thought processes and what might or might not work, and a chance to collaborate with people you trust to help build a roadmap that you can then begin to implement.

When you ideate, don't get fixated on one idea. This is a time to go wide with your ideas, not so deep. It is easy to get in the weeds of "how" something will work. But right now, you are still in the "what" phase. At this stage in the game, there are no bad ideas! Just get them out as quickly as you can, make a list, use sticky notes, create a mind map, or have someone write down every seemingly crazy idea.

A few of the things that help in this process are having some creative tools around. For instance, I have often done ideation meetings with lego's, play-doh, and kinetic sand on the table. While these things don't necessarily make new ideas show up, they keep

your hands busy and keep engaging the more creative side of your brain. When you keep every area of your mind and body engaged, you think differently. Also, you never know when a crazy idea of yours might spark a really great idea for someone else.

Once you have a myriad of ideas, begin to sort and eliminate those ideas that are simply not feasible, not affordable, and perhaps not beneficial. But make sure you don't do this until later. Sometimes, a second, third, or fourth ideation session is needed in order to create the right list and then edit that list in a way that makes sense for your process. Remember, while there are no bad ideas, some will rise to the top. After you have identified these ideas, you will better be able to formulate a plan and preparation for bringing them into action.

Ideation is really fun, really creative, and can be the best part of this process. However, we don't ideate alone. We always ask God into the process, as he knows you better than everyone else, he is also the most creative being in the universe, so to have him on your side is not a bad thing!



**W**e are now into the stage where we are asked to begin to build what we have ideated. Since not every idea will be feasible, we begin with the ones that are the most simple and we build our schedules, our locations, our attitudes and our behaviors accordingly. We start simple for two reasons: 1) We'd love to have some early success stories. 2) We can get them out of the way and begin to focus on some more difficult issues that will take more time to process and prototype.

While I understand that this may be a difficult thing to conceptualize, we are basically taking what we have worked on in the ideation process, and begin to shape our lives around the solutions we think might work. This part is hard, because we don't always know what will work. Let me give you an example.

Some of you will want to tackle the idea of a more robust study life when it comes to faith. You know this is an issue, you have defined the problem and ideated some solutions. One solution is that you want to get up earlier to study Scripture. (By the way, this is a super common issue and solution). However, you know yourself, and so you worry that getting up early is difficult for you.

You have ideated solutions to this problem as well. The first one is to buy

a new alarm clock. (Okay, let's face it, you are just changing the alarm on your phone. . .) You set the alarm for 4AM to study; but when that alarm goes off, you take your phone and throw across the room! Well, your first prototype is done! Congratulations. You probably won't recognize this until you wake up at 7:30AM and wonder where your phone is. But you have completed your first prototype, and it was a miserable failure. Now, you can choose another alarm and try again, or you can realize that this might not work, so it is time to find a different timeframe from which to study. Maybe the evening is better.

Regardless of the next prototype, you have begun the process of adjusting your first model to better fit who you are, your schedule, and your ability to make a prototype work. Remember, you can't hate your solution, or it is not a solution. It is easy to be too aspirational in our problem solving, and in that way it might disconnect from your real life, leaving you frustrated that you have again failed in a solution.

The beauty of prototyping is that we are not making value judgements, we are working on processes and models that we assume will fail until we get it right. Remember, most of us eat Heinz 57 ketchup, not Heinz 1. It takes trial and error. It is said that Thomas Edison took

over 20,000 tries to make the light bulb. Why would your prototypes work the first time.

I actually believe that God blesses failure. It is how we learn. And in fact, I'll go so far as to say it is not a failure if you learned something through the process! By the way, the way we learn

through this is to make sure we are keeping copious notes on how things are going. We are trying to bring intentional practices into our prototyping, so take notes, check off what doesn't work, keep what does, and create a model that successful for you!

**1 — Did you pray before you began the prototyping process?**

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**2 — How many times have you failed before you succeeded? Are you okay with failure if it is leading to something?**

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**3 — How far are you willing to go until you get it right? How can you find encouragement when something doesn't work? What have you done that has worked, and can you define your failure to success process?**

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**12 But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned.**

**O**kay, we have prototyped and found some great solutions, and now it is time to test. We test by making these attitudes and behaviors incorporated into our own lives. While the models may be successful, this is time when you will probably have to make small adjustments to your new models. Remember, when you buy a new car, the car works, but you still have to adjust your seat to fit you just right. Don't be alarmed by little changes. This is a long process, and the ultimate goal is not perfection, but a greater effectiveness in your faith life.

You will begin to know if your testing is working when it is confirmed in community. I know this sounds weird, but I truly believe that calling is confirmed in community. As well, when you are becoming the person that God has made you to be, in all its nuances, the people around you will recognize that something is different. This becomes a powerful part of your witness, as they will notice the change, the peace, the wisdom that has come to you through this process and beyond. They may not know what has changed, but they will know that something has changed.

Also, they will want to know how this happened, and this becomes your opportunity to share some great things about the gospel and about working with God through all of this.

The good news about this whole process is that it is non-linear. This means you can go back at anytime and begin to ideate around ideas that you had in the past, begin to rework what is working but could be more effective, and generally just continue to engage in the process.

But I want to finish this series by going back to the first chapter in James and looking at one phrase one more time:

**James 1:2 Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. 3 For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. 4 So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.**

This is an encouragement to continue in the process. We might suffer, we might be tested, we might have a chance for our endurance to grow.

But James says simply “let it grow!” Throughout this process we have tried to be intentional about what James is telling us. Issues of compassion have been brought up, justice and mercy, love and grace, intention and motivation. Throughout all of this James has encouraged us to keep the faith, and even finishes his letter by telling people to go and get those who have wandered from the faith.

It is my hope for you that you will incorporate design principles into your faith not as a gimmick, but as a means of progress and growth in your spiritual life. God did not create us to be static

creatures, rather, he created us to be growing and moving toward a greater expression of the Gospel in the world today. By taking care to be intentional about your life, you will grow that endurance of which he speaks.

It is a great joy to continue the journey with you.

Grace to you, and Peace.

Pastor Timothy Gillespie.



## Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.