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LIVING WHAT YOU BELIEVE

WISDOM FROM THE BOOK OF JAMES

KENNETH
BOA &
WILLIAM
KRUIDENIER

NAVPRESS 

BRINGING TRUTH TO LIFE

P.O. Box 35001, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80935



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	6
TO THE SPIRITUAL TRAVELER	7
AS YOU STUDY	8
GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR STUDY	8
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK	9
INTRODUCTION—LIVING WHAT YOU BELIEVE	10
INTRODUCTION TO UNIT 1: WISDOM IN TROUBLES AND TEMPTATION (JAMES 1)	11
Day 1: Overview of James	14
Day 2: The Old Testament Roots of Wisdom	18
Day 3: How to Handle Trials	22
Day 4: Understanding Temptations	26
Day 5: Becoming Real Religious	30
INTRODUCTION TO UNIT 2: WISDOM IN FRIENDSHIPS AND FAITH (JAMES 2)	37
Day 1: How to Be a Good Friend to Everyone	40
Day 2: Why to Avoid Playing Favorites	44
Day 3: Prepare to Be Judged Mercifully	48
Day 4: Does Your Faith Have a Pulse?	52
Day 5: How to Know If Your Faith Is Alive	56
INTRODUCTION TO UNIT 3: WISDOM IN TAMING THE TONGUE (JAMES 3)	63
Day 1: Why Talking Is a Dangerous Practice	66
Day 2: Why the Tongue Is a Dangerous Organ	70
Day 3: The Source of Speech	74
Day 4: The Foolishness of Earthly “Wisdom”	78
Day 5: The Gentleness of Heavenly Wisdom	82
INTRODUCTION TO UNIT 4: WISDOM FOR THE HUMBLE AND THE HOPEFUL (JAMES 4)	89
Day 1: Why We Quarrel and Fight	92
Day 2: What God Gives the Humble	96
Day 3: Ten Ways to Humble Yourself	100
Day 4: How to Know You Are Not Humble	104
Day 5: How to Hope with Humility	108
INTRODUCTION TO UNIT 5: WISDOM IN PROSPERITY, PATIENCE, AND PRAYER (JAMES 5)	115
Day 1: Lifestyles of the Rich and Foolish	118
Day 2: How to Wait Like a Farmer	122
Day 3: How to Endure Like Job and the Prophets	126
Day 4: Why You Should Pray No Matter What	130
Day 5: The Wisest Thing You Could Ever Do	134
APPENDIX A—SCRIPTURE READINGS	141
APPENDIX B—GOD’S PLAN OF SALVATION	157

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The first time I, William, taught the book of James was a quarter-century ago in John and Mary Love Eysters' basement. A rookie teacher trying to hold the attention of squirming junior highers could have been a recipe for disaster, and might have been had the Eysters not prayed us through that summer. I have remained grateful since for their encouragement and the example of faith and works in their lives.

TO THE SPIRITUAL TRAVELER

There are lots of ways to get from one place to another when you're traveling. A trip to a local bookstore will reveal a wide variety of resources, and the one you choose will probably be based on the kind of trip you are planning.

For instance, if you are driving to a nearby town, all you need is a fold-out road map, available at any convenience store or gas station. Millions of these soda-stained, misfolded, marked-up lifesavers fill the glove boxes of automobiles around the world. Road maps are the simplest set of instructions for getting from point A to point B. They contain no pictures, no historical anecdotes, no restaurant guides, no suggestions for entertainment or recreation. They simply tell you what you need to know: turn here, go there, stay on course. Patiently follow the squiggly red and blue lines and soon your destination appears miraculously through your windshield.

But what if you want to make a survey of a historically rich corner of your state, an area loaded with out-of-the way spots where you could spend an hour or a day? Not to worry: There are resources available for this kind of travel as well. They contain the instructions for how to get there (the road map part) and much more: side trips, photographs, drawings, guides for walking tours, and interviews with local residents. These guides are often written by natives who have grown up in the region and are passionate about it; and they want you to share their passion.

Then there are resources for people who like to do their traveling from the comfort and security of an easy chair, sitting in front of a crackling fire. With hot chocolate and a cookie or two, they settle in with an oversized pictorial panorama and spend an evening thumbing through the full-color

pictures of their "destination." These trips-in-a-book are designed to stimulate the imagination and make you marvel at the possibilities that await your actual visit. Now you can also purchase video travelogues that replace a plane ticket with the TV remote—one click and you're on your way. And the Internet, with its digital destinations, is another story!

Road maps, area guides, and picture books are just a few examples of what's available to the geographical traveler. But what about the spiritual traveler, the person whose destination is Christlikeness via study of the Bible? The GUIDEBOOK you hold in your hands is written to help make your spiritual journey interesting, understandable, and enjoyable—and most of all, life-changing. While God has provided the basic road map, the Bible, you'll find the GUIDEBOOKS to be much like the travelers' guides that offer insights, side trips, vignettes, and pictures to illuminate and expand your understanding while on the way.

As you study the New Testament book of James, you'll discover some of the richest and most practical—and at times controversial—points that you will visit on your journey to Christlikeness. I pray that *Living What You Believe: Wisdom from the Book of James* will provide just what you need to make your journey a successful one. As a fellow traveler, let me encourage you to take all the side trips, work carefully through all the exercises, and avail yourself of every opportunity to make your journey through James a life-changing one. After all, the road to Christlikeness is the trip of a lifetime!

—Ken Boa

AS YOU STUDY

The path to spiritual maturity is lined by many essentials. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, the counsel and fellowship of other believers, disciplines and practices that lead to godliness, trials and tribulations—all make their distinct contributions to our growth. But perhaps most essential is the Spirit-led study of the Word of God. It is in the pages of the Bible that we learn of God's plan for the human race and develop a worldview—beliefs and practices—that will conform our life to His plan, ensuring our ultimate spiritual maturity.

The Bible becomes a taut line stretched between immaturity and maturity that keeps us from losing our way. The Bible introduces us to that great cloud of witnesses who have traversed the narrow way before us—stumbling, falling, getting up, and pressing on—helping us to see that others with clay feet have made it, and that we can too. And the Bible teaches, exposes, corrects, and trains us in that very thing toward which we are journeying: the righteousness of God made our own. Like a recipe for a prize-winning pie, every ingredient is essential. But there is a sense in which the Bible is the recipe itself—the *sine qua non* (“without which not,” as the scholars like to say)—of the Christian experience.

The GUIDEBOOK series is designed to help you get the most out of the Bible. We have written this book because we, like you, are on the path toward maturity. If what we have learned along the way can encourage and help you—point out a beautiful view, offer an insight, or extend a helping hand over a rough spot in the road—then our goal will have been met. Because the paths of all Christian believers will converge at the gates of God's kingdom, we look forward to joining you there in that great day when Christ is revealed in us all.

—William Kruidenier

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR STUDY

1. **Begin with prayer.** You can gain information on your own, but only God can reveal truth.
2. **Do not read commentaries on James until you have finished the entire study.** Self-discovery of biblical truth is exciting. It makes the Word of God come alive, and it also helps you retain what you've learned.
3. **Make sure you understand the structure of this GUIDEBOOK before you begin.** Explanations are found on page 9.
4. **Do not skip over directions to read the referenced Scriptures.** The text that follows may not make sense if you have not first read the Scripture passage(s).
5. **Be sure to write your answers to the study questions in the space provided.** Repetition and space for content interaction have been included to help you retain the material. Your answers will be confirmed in subsequent readings. These answers are intended to reinforce what you've already read and written.
6. **Work on this study every day of the week.** Begin the first day of your study week by reading the “unit introduction.” Work through the Daily Excursions over the next five days. Then end your week with review and Scripture memory. You may want to preview “Sharing the Journey” if you are using this study with a group.
7. **Read the articles and suggested Daily Readings in the optional Side Tours, even if you don't have time to do the activities.** The articles and readings are important, and they can be read in a few minutes.
8. **During your day, meditate on what you've learned.** Most Daily Excursions can be completed in less than twenty minutes, but they are tightly packed. Reflecting on your observations allows biblical truths to expand your understanding and to take shape in your life.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN[®]

GUIDEBOOKS are self-contained, interactive Bible studies. These studies are primarily inductive; that is, they lead the reader to related Scriptures throughout the Bible so that he or she might experience the joy of self-discovery as revealed by the Master Himself. Therefore, in addition to Scripture references from the key texts, topics are supported by the whole counsel of God. Other outside material and additional Scripture references are included in “For further study.”

Each GUIDEBOOK includes five study units divided into five **Daily Excursions**. Most Excursions take about twenty minutes to complete. No additional reference materials are needed. To complete the optional Side Tours, a Bible and a concordance are sometimes needed.

PAGE DESCRIPTION

GUIDEBOOKS are designed for open, two-page viewing. Each page is divided into two columns—a wide inside column and a narrow outside column, as shown below. Daily Excursions include Bible teaching, related questions, life application (Bringing It Home), and Bible reading. The outside columns contain related Road Map and Side Tour options. At the end of each unit, it is suggested that the reader select one verse from the weekly reading to memorize.

The **Road Map** includes all Bible verses referred to in the Daily Excursions, except for

lengthy study texts. (These are provided in appendix A.) Scriptures in the Road Map are linked to reference numbers in the Daily Excursions and numbered consecutively throughout the GUIDEBOOK. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture passages are from the *New American Standard Bible*, Updated Edition.

Within quoted Scriptures, ellipses (. . .) indicate where portions of text have been omitted (due to space constraints) without compromising the meaning. The verses provided include the essential information for your study; however, you will benefit from reading the full text from your Bible.

The **Side Tours** contain optional reading and Scripture references related to Language & Literature, History & Culture, Bible Study Techniques, Cross References, Scripture Meditation, and Points of Interest (including life illustrations). All Side Tours are referenced in the text and numbered consecutively (preceded by “T”) throughout the GUIDEBOOK. For example, the notation ^{T1} will follow the appropriate text in the Daily Excursion, and this same notation will appear in the adjacent Side Tour column. Because the Scriptures listed in Side Tours are not printed in this GUIDEBOOK, they must be looked up in a Bible.

Personal experiences of the authors are differentiated by their names in parentheses.

ROAD MAP	DAILY EXCURSION
<p>PROVERBS 1 1 The proverbs (mashal) of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: 2 To know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding, 3 To receive instruction in . . .</p>	<p>DAY 1 EXAMINING PROVERBS AS LITERATURE</p> <p>What defines a proverb? The Hebrew word for “proverb” is transliterated¹ <i>mashal</i>, which means “a discourse or a parable.” <i>Mashal</i> comes from a root word that means “to be similar or parallel; to represent, to be like or be compared to.” The book of Proverbs uses comparisons as</p>

DAILY EXCURSION	SIDE TOURS
<p>BRINGING IT HOME . . . 1. Look back at your life—as a child, a teen, and a young adult. Also look at your life now. At what point, if any, did you make a choice to reject being naive and foolish and to embrace wisdom? In what ways does that choice still impact you? Life today?</p>	<p>HISTORY & CULTURE¹² AUTHORSHIP—King Solomon son of David, did not write all of the proverbs, but his work makes up the greater part of the book. Solomon was an observer and a writer of knowledge. Not only was Solomon’s knowledge encyclopedic, his understanding and discernment were such that his</p>

INTRODUCTION — LIVING WHAT YOU BELIEVE

PROVERBS 1

20-33 Wisdom shouts in the street, she lifts her voice in the square; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the gates in the city, she utters her sayings: “How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing and fools hate knowledge? Turn to my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you. Because I called, and you refused; I stretched out my hand, and no one paid attention; and you neglected all my counsel and did not want my reproof; I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes, when your dread comes like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but they will not find me, because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would not accept my counsel, they spurned all my reproof. So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way and be satiated with their own devices. For the waywardness of the naive will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them. But he who listens to me shall live securely and will be at ease from the dread of evil.”

James’ readers were among the “twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad” (James 1:1). The who? Answering that question will provide needed insight into the letter James wrote, the nature of what he said, and how we can profit from it today.

First, who was James? He was most likely the half brother of Jesus Christ (meaning he was the natural progeny of Joseph and Mary, born after Jesus). James was among the leaders of the fledgling church in Jerusalem that grew up after the ascension of Christ and the giving of the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Galatians 2:9,12). James, then, was a Jewish convert to Christianity who was among the leaders of the predominantly Jewish church in Jerusalem.

And the “twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad”? They were Jewish converts to Christianity who had fled Jerusalem and its environs under threat of persecution from the Jews. James’ letter was very possibly the first epistle written by an apostle to the early believers, most of whom were Jewish converts. As such, it reflects Old Testament characteristics. Like the Old Testament prophets, James was plainspoken about sin, emphasizing the necessity to live what you say you believe. Like the Old Testament wisdom books (specifically Proverbs), James focuses on living the spiritual life skillfully—being wise in the face of pressures to be otherwise. There is nothing theoretical and abstract about James; he is hands-on and concrete: “Don’t tell me about your faith. Show it to me!” Paul’s letters would later add the theological sophistication by which the Jewish-Gentile church developed. But in the pre-Pauline era, James used his hard-hitting, brother-of-a-carpenter Old Testament style to build up the early church. They would be together in belief and behavior if not in location.

Like James’ readers, the church today has no central geographical base or home church. We are dispersed throughout the world, facing the daily challenges of remaining faithful in many areas of life: trials, temptations, relationships, speech, finances, good works, prayer, planning. All the while we are trying to remain humble before the Lord. *Living What You Believe: Wisdom from the Book of James* has the same goal as James’ original “guidebook” did for first-century Christians: encouraging believers to validate their belief by their behavior.

INTRODUCTION TO UNIT 1

WISDOM IN TROUBLES AND TEMPTATION (JAMES 1)

Destination: To integrate the truth that God has promised to provide wisdom to handle the trials and temptations that confront us in life.

When an older member of my (William's) extended family was struck with a disabling physical condition, it fell to me to assume responsibility for her affairs when her husband died. While I had begun playing an assisting role in their lives during the husband's final months—coordinating legal and financial matters, looking after finances, hiring and managing in-home health care workers—I quickly became overwhelmed with the complexities of the situation after he died. Handling this type of situation long-distance (I lived in another state) required skills I did not possess. I remember asking God often for help—for wisdom and skill—in knowing how to meet this family member's needs.

That was more than a decade ago. Since then I have had to expand my skill set considerably in carrying out my responsibilities to this family member. Though she has continued to live, she exists in a totally disabled condition physically. While there are other family members to consult on important decisions, I have become responsible for her day-to-day welfare. Navigating the maze of medical and insurance details, overseeing her limited finances, looking out for the home where she still lives, managing the cadre of around-the-clock sitters who administer her medications—I now possess a measure of wisdom in an area of life with which I was totally unfamiliar a few years ago.

Job said, "Man is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). While sometimes trouble has malevolent or pernicious sources, more often than not the troubles and trials we experience come simply from living in a fallen world. Things rust and break. We get sick. We have conflicts with others. We are reviled for our faith. There is too much month for our money. And because of all that, we get personally tired and discouraged and wonder how we can go on.

Jewish sages had a word for the remedy for life's trouble—*hokmah*. We translate this word as "wisdom," but its basic meaning is "skill." Wisdom, therefore, is the skill of living. It's the ability to face an obstacle and figure out how to go over, around, or through it. It's the ability to persevere without giving up. It's the ability to navigate the dangerous shoals without shipwrecking our faith. James was a man with Jewish roots, and he wanted you to know that "when you encounter various trials," you should "ask of God," who will give the skill (wisdom) to make it through. You may never be baptized in the fire of long-term caregiver as I was, but you have experienced (and will experience) serious trials and troubles for which you feel totally unskilled, totally unprepared. What should you do? Ask God for the skills (the wisdom) to meet the challenge.

James' emphasis on acquiring wisdom has led many to refer to his letter as the New Testament's version of the book of Proverbs. Unit 1 of this GUIDEBOOK will help you explore the first chapter of James and discover why asking God for skill in living is the best way to face life's troubles and temptations. Acquiring wisdom is crucial for the journey to Christlikeness—becoming like the one who was Himself “the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24).



Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you
encounter various trials, knowing that the
testing of your faith produces endurance.

JAMES 1:2-3

DAY 1

OVERVIEW OF JAMES

¹MATTHEW 10; ACTS 12

Matthew 10:2 The names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother . . .

Acts 12:2 [Herod the king] had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.

²LUKE 6

16 . . . Judas the son of James . . .

³MATTHEW 10; ACTS 1

Matthew 10:3 . . . James the son of Alphaeus . . .

Acts 1:13 They went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James.

⁴MATTHEW 13; GALATIANS**1**

Matthew 13:55 Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?

Galatians 1:19 I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

⁵JAMES 1

1-3 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

JAMES AS LITERATURE

The book of James is a letter. And as such, it is not unique. Of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, all but five (the four Gospels plus Acts) were letters in their original form.^{T1}

AUTHOR, DATE, AND RECIPIENTS

Four different men named James are mentioned in the New Testament. Identify each one from the following verses:

- Matthew 10:2; Acts 12:2¹
- Luke 6:16²
- Matthew 10:3; Acts 1:13³
- Matthew 13:55; Galatians 1:19⁴

Tradition has recognized the last of these four, James the half brother of Jesus, as the author of the letter. This James played a leading role in the first church council held in Jerusalem around AD 49–50 (Acts 15), and the letter produced by that council, under James' leadership, is similar in tone and style to the book of James. In particular, the same distinctive word for "greeting" is used in both the book of James (James 1:1) and the letter from the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:23)—and in no other apostolic letter in the New Testament.

The prominent disciple named James (in the inner circle of James, Peter, and John; see Matthew 17:1) was killed around AD 44, and neither of the other two Jameses occupies a prominent place in the New Testament. James the half brother of Jesus is the most reasonable choice as author of this letter.

Historians place the death of James at around AD 62–66, but evidence suggests his letter may have been written much earlier—as early as AD 46–49. If so, it was likely the first apostolic letter written to the early church (that is, the first letter that has been preserved). Several factors point to an early date of composition:

1. Jewish-Gentile relations, prominent in later New Testament letters (Romans and Galatians), are absent from this letter. That suggests a setting in which the church was still predominantly Jewish.

2. James' emphasis is on behavior rather than theology. The pattern in Paul's letters was often theology first, practice second (see, for example, Romans and Ephesians). This suggests an early period when faith was conceived of simply as belief in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah.

3. In the Greek text, James calls the meeting place of the church a "synagogue," an indication of the early, transitional setting for the letter (James 2:2). His references to church leadership also reflect a Jewish heritage, as he refers only to "teachers" and "elders" (James 3:1; 5:1).

4. James does not mention the watershed results of the Jerusalem council, which may indicate the letter was written before the council took place.

To whom did James address his letter (see James 1:1)?⁵

Where did they reside?⁵

According to James 1:2-3, what were they apparently experiencing?⁵

Most Bible scholars believe that "twelve tribes" were Jewish converts to Christianity who were driven out of Jerusalem in the persecution that arose after the martyrdom of Stephen.¹²

Read the following verses and characterize the growth of the church in Jerusalem following the ascension of Christ:

- Acts 1:15⁶
- Acts 2:41⁷
- Acts 4:4⁸
- Acts 5:14⁹
- Acts 6:7¹⁰

When persecution began, where did the church flee (see Acts 8:1; 11:19)?¹¹

LANGUAGE & LIT:^{T1}

NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS—

In addition to letters, the other distinct forms of literature in the New Testament are historical biography (the four Gospels), history (Acts), and apocalypse (Revelation, a letter written to seven churches in Asia Minor containing an apocalyptic vision given to John, the author, by Christ). While letters were normally addressed to individuals or certain groups, the "General Epistles" of the New Testament (James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude) are so called because they were addressed to the church at large. The Old Testament makes occasional mention of letters (see 2 Samuel 11:14-15; 1 Kings 21:8-9; 2 Kings 5:5-7; 10:2-7; 19:14; Ezra 4:7-11; Nehemiah 2:8; 6:5), but none of the Old Testament books were written in that literary form.

The opening words of letters from this period of history followed a distinct pattern: "X (writer) to Y (recipient): Greetings (or a similar cordial greeting or blessing)."

James follows this pattern precisely (see James 1:1), as do all the letters of the New Testament except Hebrews, 1 John, and Revelation. See Acts 15:23 and 23:26 for examples of other letters following this form.

HISTORY & CULTURE:^{T2}

THE DIASPORA—When James referred to "the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad," he used the Greek word *diaspora*, which means "scattered." The Diaspora, in modern terms, refers to the dispersion of Jews out of their homeland, beginning with the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities of the Old Testament. The presence of Jews in Gentile lands provided havens for the Jews driven out of Jerusalem who had become believers in Jesus the Messiah (Acts 8:1). Peter addressed his first letter to this same group (1 Peter 1:1; see also John 7:35).

⁶ACTS 1

15 Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said . . .

⁷ACTS 2

41 Those who had received [Peter's] word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

⁸ACTS 4

4 Many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

⁹ACTS 5

14 All the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number.

¹⁰ACTS 6

7 The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

¹¹ACTS 8; 11

8:1 On that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

11:19 Those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch.

¹²JAMES 1

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

How does this situation fit with James' words in James 1:2-3?⁵

THEME

The father of the Protestant Reformation, the great theologian Martin Luther, called James a "right strawy epistle." He, and others of his day, felt James' letter placed too much emphasis on works and not enough on faith. This view is understandable in that Luther and other Reformers were battling to reinstate faith to its rightful, biblical position after salvation by works had become a dominate emphasis in church teaching.

But James' letter is not contradictory to the letters of Paul ("the righteous man shall live by faith"; Romans 1:17); it is complementary to them. James stresses the truth that genuine faith will manifest itself in righteous living and that "faith, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:17). The same criticisms leveled against James have been leveled against the teachings of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, and understandably so—both stress the righteous lifestyle that should be evident among citizens of the kingdom of God.¹³

The following two passages are perhaps the most central to James' message (for the verses, see appendix A). Summarize in your own words these primary themes of the letter.

- James 1:19-22

- James 2:14-17

BRINGING IT HOME

1. What areas of life can you identify—whether spiritual, practical, relational, or moral—in which you need greater wisdom (skill)?

2. What do you see in James 1:5¹² that indicates God would welcome your request for increased wisdom in any area of your life?

3. Self-deception is subtle. Name any behavior in your life that is evidence of deception (James 1:22). What must you do not to be deceived any longer?

CROSS REFERENCES:^{T3}

JESUS AND JAMES—To compare the influence of Jesus’ teaching on His half brother’s writing, compare the following verses in James with similar emphases in the Sermon on the Mount:

James	Matthew (Sermon on the Mount)
1:2	5:10-12
1:4	5:48
2:5	5:3
2:13	6:14-15
3:10-12	7:15-20
3:18	5:9
4:11	7:1-2
5:2-3	6:19-20
5:12	5:33-37

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DAILY READING

Read Proverbs 2:1-8 (see appendix A) and underline all the action words associated with gaining wisdom and understanding from God.

DAY 2

THE OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS OF WISDOM

Wisdom is one of those words used by many and defined by few. We think we know wisdom when we see it, but we have a hard time telling anyone else how to look for it. While James encourages us to ask God for wisdom (James 1:5), if we discover the roots of wisdom in the Old Testament, we'll know better what we are asking for, how to know when we have received it, and how to make it a characteristic of our life.

THE SKILL OF WISDOM

As mentioned in the introduction, the Hebrew word for wisdom is *hokmah*, meaning "skill." This word, in its various forms (the verb "be wise," the adjective "wise," and the noun "wisdom"), occurs more than three hundred times in the Old Testament.¹⁴

To see *hokmah* in its most practical, concrete settings, identify the "skill" that is referred to in each of the following verses:

- Exodus 28:3¹³
- Exodus 35:35¹⁴
- 2 Samuel 13:3¹⁵
- Psalm 58:5¹⁶
- Proverbs 30:24-28¹⁷
- Isaiah 40:20¹⁸
- Ezekiel 27:8¹⁹

Whether dexterity in engraving, shrewdness in negotiating, adroitness in navigating, passion in mourning, or discernment in speaking, skill was a valued characteristic in the Old Testament world. It is easy to see how the concept moved from the concrete realm of physical activity to the more abstract realm of words and ideas that today is most closely associated with *wisdom*. As examples of the more abstract expressions of wisdom in Hebrew thought, a wise person was one who was skilled in giving advice,

¹³ EXODUS 28

3 You shall speak to all the skillful persons whom I have endowed with the spirit of wisdom, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister as priest to Me.

¹⁴ EXODUS 35

35 [The LORD] has filled them with skill to perform every work of an engraver and of a designer and of an embroiderer, in blue and in purple and in scarlet material, and in fine linen, and of a weaver, as performers of every work and makers of designs.

¹⁵ 2 SAMUEL 13

3 Jonadab was a very shrewd man.

¹⁶ PSALM 58

5 . . . a skillful caster of spells.

¹⁷ PROVERBS 30

24-28 Four things are small on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise: the ants are not a strong people, but they prepare their food in the summer; the shephanim are not mighty people, yet they make their houses in the rocks; the locusts have no king, yet all of them go out in ranks; the lizard you may grasp with the hands, yet it is in kings' palaces.

¹⁸ ISAIAH 40

20 He seeks out for himself a skillful craftsman to prepare an idol that will not totter.

¹⁹ EZEKIEL 27

8 Your wise men, O Tyre, were aboard; they were your pilots.

interpreting dreams, settling disputes, or influencing and leading others.¹⁵

THE ONLY WISE GOD

What does a wise person do? He or she, in a manner of speaking, brings order out of chaos. Take the building of the tabernacle, for instance. It took a group of wise (skilled) craftsmen to transform a multitude of raw resources—leathers, fabrics, metals, stones, and wood—into a beautiful worship center in the Sinai desert. Where did people learn such skills (that is, acquire such wisdom)? Because men and women are created in the image of God the Creator,¹⁶ they too can become skilled at bringing order out of chaos.

God is the One who, in the beginning, transformed a lifeless chaos (Genesis 1:2) into a living cosmos (Isaiah 42:5), and wisdom was His instrument of creation. Wisdom is personified in Proverbs 8, where it is pictured as being present with God in the creation of the world. Using Proverbs 8:22-31 (see appendix A), list the parts of the earth and universe to which God brought order by the use of wisdom.

God brought physical order out of chaos at Creation by employing His wisdom. He wants us, by the use of His wisdom, to bring order into the moral and spiritual chaos that sin has produced in the world—beginning with our own lives. Draw lines connecting the following verses with the area of life where wisdom brings order out of chaos:

- Proverbs 2:9-10²⁰ The realm of personal peace
- Proverbs 2:12-15²¹ The realm of personal reputation
- Proverbs 2:16-17²² The realm of appropriate relationships
- Proverbs 3:4²³ The realm of intellect and knowledge
- Proverbs 3:13,17²⁴ The realm of sexual morality

STUDY TECHNIQUES:^{T4}

WORD STUDIES—In ancient biblical Hebrew (unlike New Testament Greek), families of words are often centered around a common “tri-radical root.” That’s a fancy name for a root word consisting of three “radicals” (letters) that are all consonants. (Vowels were not written in ancient Hebrew, though they were pronounced. Signs indicating vowels were added to the consonants much later in the development of the language.)

The three consonants representing the word for “wisdom” were *h-k-m*. Adding the signs for the vowels eventually produced a family of “wisdom” words: *hakam* was the verb “be wise”; *hakam* was the adjective “wise”; and *hokmah* was the noun “wisdom.” You can see the *h-k-m* root in each of these words.

The root of “wisdom” also appeared in some Hebrew names. A man named Hachmoni (or Hakmoni) was the father of Jehiel, who was the tutor of King David’s sons (1 Chronicles 27:32). Another son of Hachmoni was one of David’s mighty warriors, killing three hundred enemy soldiers with his spear at one time (1 Chronicles 11:11). Was Hachmoni the father of one son skilled in education and another in war? If so, finding the root of “wisdom” in his name (*h-k-m*) is not surprising.

A Bible study resource such as *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* will allow you to look up an English word such as *wisdom* and find discussions of the family of biblical words connected to it.

20 PROVERBS 2

9-10 You will discern righteousness and justice and equity and every good course. For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.

21 PROVERBS 2

12-15 To deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things; from those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness; who delight in doing evil and rejoice in the perversity of evil; whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways.

22 PROVERBS 2

16-17 To deliver you from the strange woman, from the adulteress who flatters with her words; that leaves the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God.

23 PROVERBS 3

4 You will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man.

24 PROVERBS 3

13,17 How blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding.

Her ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace.

25 PROVERBS 9

10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

26 PROVERBS 8

13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate.

WISDOM AND THE FEAR OF THE LORD

If wisdom belongs to God (Job 12:13; Daniel 2:20; Romans 16:27), how do we get it from Him? As mentioned previously, we have the potential for doing wise (skillful) things because we have been made in His image. But how do we know what is truly wise, and then how do we increase in wisdom?

One element in Scripture is consistently linked to the discovery and application of wisdom in life. To what is wisdom linked in Proverbs 9:10²⁵ (see also Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; 15:33; Isaiah 33:6)?

In Psalm 34:11 the psalmist suggested that the fear of the Lord¹⁷ can be learned or acquired. How did the author of Proverbs suggest that one acquire (come to understand) the fear of the Lord? Summarize in your own words what you believe to be the theme of Proverbs 2:1-5 (found in appendix A).

JAMES AND THE OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS OF WISDOM

One verse in the Old Testament says what the fear of the Lord is: Proverbs 8:13.²⁶ Define the fear of the Lord based on this verse.

We can conclude the following about the Old Testament roots of wisdom:

- Abstaining from evil is to fear the Lord.
- To fear the Lord is to gain wisdom (skill in living).
- Therefore, abstaining from evil is to gain wisdom (skill in living).

James revealed his Old Testament understanding of wisdom by contrasting true wisdom with false wisdom. List the characteristics of each as found in James 3:13-18 (see appendix A):

True, Heavenly Wisdom False, Earthly Wisdom

How does James' understanding of wisdom match that of the Old Testament?

BRINGING IT HOME

1. Obedience is at the heart of fearing God. Though James didn't per se mention the fear of the Lord in his letter, it is obvious that he wanted his readers to move beyond knowing God to obeying God. The letter you are about to study is filled with practical examples and exhortations to live in a manner that will cause you to gain wisdom. Perhaps now would be a good time to follow the admonition of Proverbs 2:3 ("Cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding") and compose your own prayer, asking God for wisdom as you study James.

LANGUAGE & LIT:^{T5}

AT THE HEART OF WISDOM— Acquiring wisdom takes diligence and discipline—doing what it takes to acquire the knowledge, practices, and perspectives that make one skillful.

What sets biblical wisdom apart from all other kinds (especially as seen in the book of Proverbs) is the desire to learn the skills for living according to God's principles and standards. Being biblically wise, therefore, is learning how to live in the kingdom of God as opposed to the realm of athletics, politics, or any other endeavor. While many verses in Proverbs seem unspiritual on the surface, they are designed to impart skills and wisdom that will bring success in the realm in which God is the judge.

CROSS REFERENCES:^{T6}

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON— All that humans are capable of doing reflects the image of God. We are able to become wise because God is wise, to love because God loves, to be creative because God is creative. We are even able to sin, not because God sins, but because God chooses—and God gave humans the ability to choose, even to choose between good and evil (Genesis 2:15-17; Joshua 24:15).

It is interesting to note that when Adam and Eve had their first child, Seth, the boy was said to have been created in the image of Adam, his father. Adam was made in the image of God (Genesis 5:1), Seth in the image of Adam (Genesis 5:3). The implication is that, while all human beings bear the image of God, we all also bear the sin-tarnished image of our forefather Adam.

DAILY READING

Read Proverbs 4 (see appendix A). Mark the benefits of wisdom you would like to acquire for your own life.

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DAY 3

HOW TO HANDLE TRIALS

27 MATTHEW 4

24 They brought to [Jesus] all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them.

28 TITUS 3

3 We also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

29 HEBREWS 2

4 God also testif[ied] . . . , both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

30 1 PETER 4

10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

31 JAMES 1

4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

32 JAMES 1

6-8 He must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

You may not be in the same situation that James' readers were—scattered from your hometown, living in unfamiliar surroundings, not sure if you will ever see familiar faces again—but one thing connects you to them: trials!

Suffering is a common thread that unites all humanity, but it takes on a special purpose for those who know God.

Before we discover James' insights on the “whys” and “hows” of trials, what is the largest trial looming on your horizon at the moment?

Keep that trial in mind as you study James' words, looking for insights and God's perspective on how you should handle it.

STEP ONE: PRAY FOR WISDOM

We are often tempted to think that the particular trial or stressful situation we are experiencing is too small or individualized for God's attention. James suggested otherwise when he referred to “various trials” (James 1:2). Before applying this phrase to your life, write down as many different trials as you can imagine that James' original audience might have been experiencing. (Remember, they had been uprooted from their homes in Jerusalem and scattered throughout Israel and the Roman provinces.)

The word for “many kinds”^{T8} is used to describe other things in Scripture. Note how Scripture uses this same word in the following verses. (Look for the word “various” or the word “manifold.”)

- Matthew 4:24²⁷
- Titus 3:3²⁸
- Hebrews 2:4²⁹
- 1 Peter 4:10³⁰

How do these examples help you understand the breadth of trials in your life?

One thing (among many!) that the non-Christian world finds strange about believers in Christ is our willingness to find joy in the midst of suffering. Why would anyone want to consider trials a joyful experience? James spelled it out clearly in verses 3⁵ and 4.³¹ Fill in the following phrases from these verses:

- Trials develop . . .
- Endurance develops . . .

Spiritually speaking, then, trials develop maturity in our lives, and for that reason are to be joyfully welcomed, not resisted. But there is also the practical matter of what to do in the midst of the trial. We can, after all, have a receptive attitude toward God’s plan for our life without necessarily knowing how to carry it out or how to respond to the trial we are in. In that case, James said we should ask God for wisdom (James 1:5).

What specific kind of wisdom do you need in the trial you mentioned previously?

What condition did James say must be met in order to receive wisdom from the Lord?³²

If we ask God in faith for resources to meet our family’s needs, do we sit at home waiting for the resources to come, or do we go off to our job and work hard to earn those

POINT OF INTEREST:^{T7}

FEAR OF THE LORD—It is understood that the fear of the Lord refers to awe, honor, submission, and respect. However, the Hebrew word for “fear” of the Lord is the same used for plain old fear—*yirah*. It is human nature that we honor those of whom we are ultimately afraid—afraid of their power to negatively impact our circumstances! Whether a wind-blown speeder in the presence of a policeman, or a guilt-ridden sinner in the hands of an angry God, a good dose of fear goes a long way toward producing awe and respect—and ultimately, wisdom.

STUDY TECHNIQUES:^{T8}

WORD USAGE COMPARISON—The Greek word translated “many kinds” is *poikilos*. A helpful occurrence of this term is in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) in Genesis 37:3. There it is used to describe the coat that Jacob made for his son Joseph. This famous “coat of many colors” serves as an object lesson for the trials of the believer. To the same infinite degree that one shade of color might vary from another in a hand-dyed, rainbow-hued garment, so is the potential variety of the trials facing the believer. Fortunately, our infinite God is capable of providing infinite wisdom for the unique needs of His children.

POINT OF INTEREST:^{T9}

ACTING IN FAITH—In the early weeks of the new church, the twelve apostles were distracted from their main priorities: prayer and the ministry of the Word of God (Acts 6:2,4). What was the “ministry of the Word” at the time that the New Testament didn’t exist? Apparently it was what they had been doing in Acts 1–5: preaching, baptizing, teaching, healing, being persecuted, overseeing the affairs of the church.

For the apostles, ministry was action. Like the apostles, we are to pray and then act, trusting God to meet us in our work for Him.

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³³ JAMES 1

9-11 The brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

³⁴ JAMES 4

6 [God] gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."

³⁵ JAMES 1

12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

resources? Hopefully, we do the latter. Our part is to pray (ask in faith) and believe God (act in faith),¹⁹ trusting that in the midst of our actions He will make His answers and wisdom known to us.

STEP TWO: TAKE PRIDE IN YOUR POSITION

In light of the truth that sinful pride is at the root of all rebellion against God,¹¹⁰ James catches our attention by saying that we should "glory in [that is, 'be proud of'] our high position."³³ Remember, he was originally talking to a dispossessed and dispersed people who were perhaps at the lowest point in their lives. What was he saying? How could trials and troubles be a cause for boasting, pride, or glory?

James cast his discussion in terms of the rich (the self-sufficient) and the poor (the dependent). James was making no statements here on the value of wealth over poverty, nor vice versa. He was talking about a "low position" versus a "high position" in life,³³ and how God loves to come to the aid of the needy, those who need wisdom and help in their time of trial.

Using James 4:6³⁴ as your guide, write in your own words why those in need (those who permanently or temporarily find themselves in a low or humble place in life) should take pride in their position.

STEP THREE: PREPARE TO RECEIVE A CROWN

Spiritual myopia is a common affliction among Christians. Myopia in the medical world is nearsightedness—the inability to focus on distant objects. Spiritual myopia is the inability to focus on the ultimate spiritual destiny of the believer and use it as a backdrop for present realities. The need to focus on the future is particularly important when we are undergoing trials.

³⁶ **JAMES 1**

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

³⁷ **JAMES 1**

14 Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

DAY 4**UNDERSTANDING TEMPTATIONS**

Let’s face it: Trials often lead to temptations. On a tour of a snack food company’s factory, the young daughter of a friend of mine (William) couldn’t take the tedium any longer. As we stood next to a conveyor belt that dumped fresh-baked pretzels into empty plastic bags, the tempted tyke reached out, grabbed a fresh pretzel, and took a big bite—and tossed the remainder back onto the conveyor belt! Within moments, that personalized portion of the conveyor’s cargo was sealed in a bag, destined for a shopper’s grocery cart.

What made the littlest member of the tour yield when the older members (who were feeling the same temptation) resisted? She was tired, hungry, and bored—a tour of a factory is certainly a trial for a child. For her, the trial led to the temptation. And often our adult-sized trials lead to temptations as well. James is going to tell us why we sometimes give in.

WHAT GOD DOES NOT DO

The main reason that trials often become temptations is because they are, grammatically at least, the same thing. Look at a comparison of James 1:2⁵ and 1:13³⁶:

verse 2: Consider it all joy . . . when you encounter various trials [*peirasmos*].

verse 13: Let no one say when he is tempted [*peirazo*] . . .

In these verses, both “trials” and “tempted” are from the same primitive root word in Greek, *peira*, which means a trial or experiment.^{T12} One is a verb form (“tempted”); the other is a noun (“trials”). Therefore, we could render verse 13 with a new word, “trialed”: “Let no one say when he is trialed, ‘I am being “trialed” by God’; for God cannot be trialed by evil, and He Himself does not trial anyone.”

Not only are trials and temptations similar grammatically, but practically speaking they are similar as well. That is, when we are enduring a trial, there is always a temptation for us to find a way of escape that God has not provided. Therefore, a trial almost inevitably leads to a temptation.^{T13} Take the Jews to whom James was writing—what might they have been tempted to do in light of the

trials they were experiencing? (Remember, they were probably poor, with limited resources, far from home, persecuted, and discouraged.)

What about the personal trial that you noted in day 3? What temptations does that particular trial present to you?

James wanted his readers to understand that, though trials are allowed by God,¹¹⁴ God does not tempt us to sin by allowing us to endure trials.^{5,36} Review James 1:3-4 and write a reminder of why God allows our faith to be tested.^{5,31}

If temptation doesn't come from the external situation we're in, where does it come from? Read verse 14 and write down the source of our temptations.³⁷

From the following two statements, circle the one best illustrating the truth that James was presenting:

1. "I am really tempted by that conveyor belt of pretzels."
2. "I am really tempted by my flesh (my sin nature) to grab a pretzel."

Hopefully, you circled number two (see 1 John 1:8). There is nothing sinful about pretzels, money, position in life, appearance, or material objects. These things have no moral power, no will of their own, by which they can tempt or entice us. Rather, we are tempted by our self-willed nature, the lusts of our flesh, to violate existing standards of thought, word, or deed.

THE PATHOLOGY OF SIN

Pathology is the study of the causes, development, and consequences of disease. If we substitute the word "sin" for

CROSS REFERENCES:^{T12}

THE ROOT OF TRIALS—The root word *peira* occurs only twice in the New Testament, both times in Hebrews (Hebrews 11:29,36). Helpfully, one use refers to an experiment (when the Egyptians tried to follow the Israelites through the Red Sea), and the other to painful trials endured by saints of old. In the latter use, the word is not translated in the English of modern versions. The Greek literally reads: "and others received a trial of mockings and scourgings."

CROSS REFERENCES:^{T13}

THE WAY OF ESCAPE—A key illustration of the "who" and "how" of temptations is the account of Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). God the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness "to be tempted [*peirazo*] by the devil." It is clear in this instance that God led Jesus into a situation where His moral will would be tested, but God did not do the tempting. Rather, Satan did (compare 1 Corinthians 7:5). In that test the Devil offered Jesus three opportunities to escape, but He refused each one, preferring rather the approval of God over the approval of the Devil (compare Galatians 1:10).

Jesus' situation was an exact parallel to that of the first Adam in the Garden of Eden, who was similarly tested but who yielded, throwing himself and his descendants into sin (Genesis 3:1-19). Jesus' resistance to temptation won back the approval of God that Adam had lost.

A key passage on escaping temptation is 1 Corinthians 10:13, where believers are promised that God will *always* provide a way of escape. The implication is that believers are never forced to sin regardless of the strength of the temptation. There is always a way out of it.

³⁸ JAMES 1

15 When lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

³⁹ PSALM 139

23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.

⁴⁰ JAMES 1

17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

⁴¹ 1 CORINTHIANS 10

13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

“disease,” we will discover a pathology of sin in James 1:15.³⁸ Fill in the following “pathology chart”:^{T15}

CAUSE: The conception of

DEVELOPMENT: The birth of

CONSEQUENCE: The resulting

Based on this pathology, it becomes clear that if we allow lust and desire to conceive within us, the resulting consequence will be spiritual death. Therefore, if we consider our ability to choose as a spiritual muscle, what beneficial role do tests and trials play in our lives?

How does this help us to understand the admonition to view trials with joy?^{5,35}

WHAT GOD DOES DO

There is a distinct possibility that, when undergoing trials, we may miss who God is and what He is doing. We may be so caught up in the pressures we are facing that we become deceived, blaming God for our temptation and even our sin. And here is the troubling fact: It’s hard for deceived people to know they are deceived. How could Psalm 139:23-24 protect us from deception during a time of testing?³⁹

James 1:17 tells us three things about God:⁴⁰

1. He gives good things and perfect gifts. What does this tell you about the possibility of Him being the source of temptation?

2. He is the Father of lights (that is, the Creator of the sun and moon and stars). How do these heavenly bodies alter the appearance of things on earth?

3. He is always the same. Unlike appearances changed by shadows and light, God never changes. What comfort does this provide you regarding tests and trials?

BRINGING IT HOME

1. What would you tell a married friend who said the following: “If God didn’t want me to fall in love with her, why did He bring us together at work”?
2. Write a short definition of “trials” and “temptations” based on what you have learned so far:
 Trials are . . .
 Temptations are . . .
3. The next time you are tempted to sin, what will be your focus?

CROSS REFERENCES:^{T14}

THE PURPOSE OF TESTING— Some of the clearest references to testing in the Bible come from the early days of Israel’s national relationship with the God who had plucked them out of slavery in Egypt. The instructions about gathering manna to eat were a test to see “whether or not they will walk in My instruction” (Exodus 16:4). The giving of the Ten Commandments amid the power and might of God was “to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin” (Exodus 20:20). Finally, the forty years of wandering in the wilderness was “that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not” (Deuteronomy 8:2). God tests us to confirm our willingness not to sin; He never tempts us to sin.

POINT OF INTEREST:^{T15}

NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN— The pathology of sin has not increased in sophistication even though the sins of humankind have. Lust (desire), leading to sin, leading to spiritual death, is what caused the sins of Eve (Genesis 3:6-22) and David, the king of Israel (2 Samuel 11:2-17). The apostle John captured the universality of lust and desire in 1 John 2:16: We sin through what we want, what we see, and who we want to be.

DAILY READING

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13⁴¹ and try to identify the way of escape God is providing in any current trial you are facing (including simply enduring it until it is over!).

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⁴² JAMES 1

19-20 Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

⁴³ JAMES 1

21 Putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

⁴⁴ ISAIAH 55

10-11 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

⁴⁵ HEBREWS 4

12 The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

⁴⁶ 2 TIMOTHY 3

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.

DAY 5**BECOMING REAL RELIGIOUS**

We often encounter “tough on the outside, gentle on the inside” people who instill confidence by their servant leadership. James was that kind of person. Fifteen times in his letter he lovingly referred to his readers as “brethren” while at the same time laying down no-frills principles for kingdom living. James was a lot like his half brother, Jesus, in that he was not afraid to be real religious. He understood the true meaning of the word “religious.”

HOW TO BE RIGHTEOUS

Literature and movies (and perhaps real life) sometimes present a distraught character at the end of her rope crying out, “God, what do You want from me?!” A good question, James would say, with a simple answer: a righteous life.⁴² What James did not want for his beloved brethren^{T16} was that they would become like the unrighteous people they had been thrown into the midst of in their dispersion from Jerusalem. The farther they got away from their home city and church, the deeper into pagan territory they went. Many were encountering personalities and practices they had never seen before.

And isn't that the way it is for us? Instead of being driven into the world by our persecutors, we have been sent into the world by our Lord—to represent Him to all nations (Matthew 28:18-20).^{T17} Therefore, we must be righteous as He is righteous (1 John 3:7). Write in your own words James' summary statement about what short-circuits the righteousness God desires for us:⁴²

James listed three things that characterize a person who is intent on manifesting the righteousness of God. What are they?^{42, T18}

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

James next said how to be righteous, and he did so in negative terms as well as positive terms. What are we to reject?⁴³

What are we to accept?⁴³

Not only were we brought to God by the word of truth, but also we are to manifest righteousness by bearing the fruit of the word. “In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures” (James 1:18). James’ image of the Word of God as a seed “implanted” is a beautiful one.⁴³ What is the ultimate purpose of a seed planted in the ground?^{T19}

HOW TO BE BLESSED

If we are to manifest righteousness by allowing the Word to bear fruit through us, how do we do that? And what are the results? And how are we to understand this concept of the Bible being “alive”—like a seed that brings forth fruit?

Record your observations on how the Word of God can change us through its “aliveness”:

- Isaiah 55:10-11⁴⁴
- Hebrews 4:12⁴⁵
- 2 Timothy 3:16⁴⁶

Most people would not rank looking in a mirror very high on their list of blessings! And that is exactly James’ point. He said, “If anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a

CROSS REFERENCES:^{T16}

BELOVED BRETHREN—James referred to his readers as his “brethren” fifteen times (1:2,16,19; 2:1,5,14; 3:1,10,12; 4:11; 5:7, 9-10,12,19). Three of the fifteen times he even referred to them as “beloved brethren” (1:16,19; 2:5). This display of James’ abundance of affection for his readers is surpassed in the New Testament only by Paul in 1 Corinthians (twenty-seven occurrences of “brethren”) and 1 Thessalonians (eighteen occurrences). Interestingly, the letter with the most correctives of any New Testament letter, 1 Corinthians, is the one where Paul referred to the errant church as his brothers most often. That tells us something about the need for affection in correction.

POINT OF INTEREST:^{T17}

AMBASSADORS—Even though a case could be argued that only Paul and the apostles were ambassadors, based on the two instances of the word in 2 Corinthians 5:20 and Ephesians 6:20, most feel that the role of ambassador applies to every Christian as we represent Christ in the world to others—the chief job of an ambassador. But it is easy to see that righteousness befits an ambassador, since the word for being an ambassador is *presbeuo*, the verb form of *presbuteros*, the word for “elder.” Paul certainly outlined the godly character of an elder in clear enough terms (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). Therefore, there can be little doubt that righteousness befits the role of those who represent Christ in the world.

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47 JAMES 1

25 One who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

48 JAMES 1

26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

49 MARK 7

20-23 [Jesus] was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

50 JAMES 1

27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

51 MARK 12

38-40 In His teaching [Jesus] was saying: "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation."

mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was (James 1:23-24). Looking in a mirror and seeing our own (un)righteousness is sort of like the blind leading the blind. But when we look "intently at the perfect law," we see freedom. What did James mean by "freedom"?⁴⁷

What is the condition for experiencing that freedom?⁴⁸

HOW TO BE REAL RELIGIOUS

Religion has taken more than its fair share of criticism through the centuries. But James was not one of its naysayers. He believed in being religious—as long as your religion is real! Don't forget, James was speaking out of a background of tremendous religious hypocrisy in Israel. The prophets of the Old Testament had railed against Jewish priests and leaders for being religious on the outside but defiled on the inside. More specifically, James knew that Jesus had sharply disagreed with the Pharisees about the nature of true religious expression.

James wanted to emphasize to his believing fellow Jews that the days of Pharisaism were over. No longer was it acceptable to be "clean" on the outside and "dirty" on the inside. Eventually, what is on the inside will come out and reveal whether a person is truly religious or not. James used speech as an example of what can negate a person's religious testimony. How do his words compare to Jesus' words in Mark 7:20-23?⁴⁹

Why did James use looking after orphans and widows as an example of true religion?⁵⁰

How does looking after the needy compare with being a public, recognized, adulated religious leader?

If a person claims to be religious but is “spotted by” (shares the same moral standards as) the world, what is his or her religion worth?⁴⁸

BRINGING IT HOME

1. A modern clothing manufacturer has popularized the slogan “Just do it!” James would have liked that direct approach. But instead of using a mirror to check our clothing, he would recommend using the mirror of the Bible to check our life. Which mirror do you think is getting the most attention from Christians today? Why?
2. How about your life? What have you been seeing in recent days as you have looked into the mirror of God’s Word? What are you learning about the value of your religion?
3. In our “afraid to offend” culture, how are you reacting to James—a leader who was willing to speak plainly about the value of one’s religion?

LANGUAGE & LIT:^{T18}

PLUTARCH SAYS—The Greek biographer and philosopher Plutarch (about AD 46–120) wrote that “nature has given to each of us two ears and one tongue, because we ought to do less talking than listening.” Not bad advice, though without counting body parts, we could deduce the same thing from Proverbs 12:16; 17:27–28; 18:13; and 29:20.

HISTORY & CULTURE:^{T19}

BEARING FRUIT—The agricultural environment of the first century AD gave rise to picturesque metaphors for describing the spiritual life. One of the most helpful is that of fruit bearing. Jesus not only used this metaphor in His teachings (Matthew 7:17–19; 12:33; 21:43) and His parables (Matthew 13:1–23), but Paul used it to refer to maturity in Christian living and in ministry (Romans 1:13; 7:4; 15:28; Galatians 5:22–23; Ephesians 5:9; Colossians 1:6,10). It is interesting to speculate on what might be used today, in our technological world, as a metaphor for maturity.

DAILY READING

Read Mark 12:38–40.⁵¹ Mark any verses that violate James’ teaching about true religion.

SHARING THE JOURNEY

To the leader: As an option, you may wish to seal the group members' written prayers for wisdom in separate envelopes with their names on them, so that you can give these back to their owners at the end of the study and let them see how God has answered their prayers.

1. The book of James is a letter written by a half brother of Jesus to Jewish Christians who had been driven out of their homeland by persecution. It stresses the truth that genuine faith manifests itself in righteous living.
 - How well would you say you already know the book of James? What are you hoping to get out of this study of the book?
 - What were the life situations of the writer and of his original readers? Given that background, what should we be looking out for as we proceed in our study of the letter?
 - Read aloud your summary of the primary themes in the book of James. How is your summary different from that of others in the group? How is it the same?
 2. In the Old Testament sense, wisdom is skill in living. Fundamentally, it involves being obedient to God.
 - What would the people closest to you identify as your top skills? Just for fun, demonstrate one of your more frivolous skills to the group—making a bird out of folded paper, patting your head with one hand while rubbing your tummy with the other, whatever.
 - Life at Minnie's house has been getting more and more out of control. Her three teenage children come and go at different times. Messages don't always get communicated and chores don't always get done. There's noise. There's mess. Minnie's ready to make some changes. What are some ways that Minnie could use her wisdom to bring order out of the chaos in her home?
- Do you obey God because you are wise, or do you become wise by obeying God? Explain your reasoning.
3. James' readers were undergoing suffering, and so James pointed to some of the good things that can result from trials.
 - As you look back, what examples from your own Christian life prove James' contention that tests of faith build endurance, leading to spiritual maturity?
 - Think of one specific test of your faith that you went through in the past. What kinds of wisdom did you need for that test? Is it your natural reaction, when a trial comes upon you, to ask God for wisdom to deal with it, believing implicitly that He will give it? If not, why not?
 - Not many of us are imprisoned or put to death for our faith, as the early Christians were. But in what other ways might it be our privilege to suffer for Christ?
 - (1) Christians are too focused on "pie in the sky," too heavenly minded to be of much earthly good. (2) Christians are too quick to demand God give them blessings in this life, not satisfied with God's promises of reward in the afterlife. Which statement (1 or 2) do you think is nearer the truth? When you're suffering, how is the thought of reward after death a comfort to you?
 4. Trials often serve as a breeding ground for temptations to sin. In such cases, we should not blame God for tempting us—indeed, He is the author only of good things—but instead we should blame ourselves if we give in to temptation.
 - Brandon thought he was marrying a Christian woman when he took Lynda to be his wife. But as it turned out, she wanted nothing to do with God and ridiculed Brandon for going to church and praying. After two and a half years of

a struggle to keep their marriage together, Lynda moved in with one of Brandon's friends. A divorce is now pending. What temptations is Brandon likely to face in the midst of this trial?

- Why is the reaction of many of us, when tempted, to blame God instead of to assume responsibility for our own actions? What sort of "death" will sin give birth to, if we have first allowed our lust to give birth to sin?
 - Time yourself: In sixty seconds, name out loud as many of the good things God has given you as you can think of.
5. A true Christian is someone who demonstrates faith by solid, practical actions, living a holy life and helping others.
- Have you ever known anyone (perhaps yourself) who got too comfortable with being a Christian—went to church, hung out with other believers, but stopped doing anything as a result of his or her faith? What can give such a believer the bump he or she needs to start acting like a Christian?
 - Together, brainstorm at least twenty *internal* acts of "doing the Word" (such as biting your tongue when you want to criticize someone) and at least twenty *external* acts of "doing the Word" (such as baby-sitting your neighbor's kids when she's sick).

Close in prayer asking God for wisdom in trials and in becoming more active Christians. Invite God's leading of the group throughout the rest of the journey you're sharing together.