

**The following is a series on James, first blogged in June, 2012 and then put together in the following booklet so wonderfully edited by my wife Tandy.**

## **Chapter 1: Count It All Joy**

James is a wisdom book, pithy and tart. It could appear works oriented, but wisdom often appears like that to the uninformed who do not know in the Spirit the difference between legalism and the disciplines of the Spirit. The disciplines come directly from the Spirit of God to the hearer and show what the Spirit wishes to do in the doer. James simply means that to hear is to receive, and to receive is to do.

The letter opens with the gritty exhortation to “count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials.” The assumption is that trials come our way, and they strike in a wide variety. No path exists to avoid them, and if one is dodged, fear not, another will pop up soon. So if there’s no escaping trials, what can one do?

James appeals to the will, not emotion and reason. The will is where a Christian’s spirit is joined to the Spirit of God, and God is always breathing His truth into the human spirit in a union whereby appearances look real but are not the crux. What we want doesn’t happen, how things look is disastrous, emotions fly everywhere, and reason says, “Yikes, nothing good can come from this.”

Every reason exists to stay negative, or so it seems. The faith person learns from experience, however, to go straight in the direction James says and move by faith to willed belief in the joy level. This looks and sounds crazy to the natural man but is the sanity of him who believes.

Believing means that the man in Spirit-to-spirit union with God is detached enough to see the storm of dislike on a soul/body level and assess it without taking identity or reality from that storm. In doing this, one may not understand what God is doing, but one knows that He is doing a work and that glory comes from suffering. Tribulations are suffering.

Naturally it would be nice if resolution were to manifest quickly, but that often does not happen, and therefore James says that this counting of joy is to remain

steadfast. That solidifies it and brings about the fruit of patience, which is the very fabric of God. No wonder Peter says that He has made us partakers of the divine nature. We get to drink deeply of it, and trials give the perfect setup for drinking.

James doesn't say though that understanding is impossible; it just might take a while. It is at God's discretion, and no one can know anything unless God knows it in him, and so reason is part of our humanity, but it is the *expresser of truth*, not the *origin of it*. So we wait.

Waiting sets up the perfect place of trusting for wisdom, and wisdom's first manifestation is the fear of the Lord. That is the beginning of wisdom. By this is not meant cowering fear, or shrinking away from the desire to see what God is doing. It simply means that we start at point zero and know that wisdom comes from God. Once again, divine properties are in view and not what the natural mind can figure out.

The one who steadfastly trusts for wisdom will enjoy that reward. Time is not of the essence, but waiting is—until God gives insight, and give it He will. It is always good exercise to affirm that God is making things known and getting things done in His perfect timing and unfolding. Dan Stone used to quote Psalm 103 “He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel” (7). Because Moses walked in the meekness of God, God made known to Moses His deep ways, whereas the nation walked according to the surface of what God did without catching onto the patterns in God's fabric.

James, like the Bible in general, calls to hearers to hear what is really said, not the surface interpretation. It is the wisdom of the Cross, and that never makes sense to the natural or carnal mind. The doorway to understanding is not saying, “Why does God allow trials?” It is saying, “God, what are You up to? I'll stick fast until You show me!”

## **Chapter 2: Sorting out the Temporal and its Trials**

James says that death is the equalizer. The poor man can glory in his high estate of heavenly hope in which he is an heir in the Father's house, and the rich man

can learn humility in watching everyone, including himself, fade like a flower in this mortal world. The overly busy person who doesn't stop to reflect will prove to have made a bad investment, and the poor man who doesn't stop to reflect will let depression rob him of his eternal hope.

The point isn't to indict wealth or extol poverty but to aim the hearer at what is eternal as a measure of reality. This gives grit in trials and temptations because as much as the present temporal life is appealing and God-created and intended for fruit bearing, all will fade away from the temporal and stand with naked eyes in eternity, so it's good to get used to seeing that way now. When I was in the navy and scheduled for a night watch, standard procedure was to walk around in a darkened room for a while before going onto the bridge of the ship, which was also darkened. The eyes adjust to night seeing before going onto the bridge watch where the safety of the ship is at stake. So too, it's good to get our eyes adjusted to eternity now, so that it won't be a rude shock when the temporal falls away.

James urges perseverance under trials, and that is part of eternal vision. Not only that, there's a crown of life for those who do. Crowns are for those who rule, and by the Spirit of God we learn to reign now while things are difficult, so that we will always know in eternity that we faced the worst and stood by faith in God's keeping.

Of course the New Testament writers have to occasionally warn against backwards and absurd interpretations, and so James adds that God is not the tempter. He means us to be tempted, and to respond in faith, but His nature has no evil in it and cannot generate anything but drawing to what is good.

This is knotty before we relax and accept that God doesn't tempt anyone, but neither does He protect us from being tempted. My old mentor, Norman Grubb, used to say, "We're in Satan's camp; he has a right to shoot at us." This sounds scary, and reason wants to say that God, as a loving parent, should protect His children from that, like an earthly parent would keep little children from harm. This is true except that God's ways are higher than ours, and God knows that only by overcoming the evil one will we be mature from children to young men to fathers, as John puts it in his first letter.

No wonder Adam was in a garden which was both paradise and also roamed by God's enemy. The new regent, man, had to face the enemy. He failed we know, but God's plan stood fast in that the last Adam, Jesus Christ, would defeat that same enemy and by living in us then, cause us to do the same. That is worth all that we have to face in this life.

### **Chapter 3: Lust**

After James has said that God cannot be tempted, he says that in temptation, a man is "carried away" (KJV). Taken literally, that sounds like a ship that finds itself being rocked on the water and pulled away from a quiet mooring place. The quiet mooring place is comfortable. But wait a minute, James says that this disturbance is from one's own lust, which means strong desire, even "enticement" he names it. Yet there is no sin because lust has not conceived, and this is why I always say that cravings are not sin. The word lust has so immediately been dubbed sin, despite what James says here, that many Christians mistake temptation for sin and live in a sin consciousness and condemnation because of the daily awareness of lust.

Let me add also that James has set the context as wealth and power so far. Is that surprising? He hasn't said a word about sex. This doesn't mean that all forms of lust are not included in his statement, but it does mean that he is looking at a context much more encompassing than sex. Now that I think of it, the three temptations of Jesus recorded in the Gospels are not about sex. Of course we know from Hebrews that Jesus was tempted in all points, so that includes sex, but the temptations recorded about Jesus and the context of James indicate livelihood and dominion issues that relate to control over who one is and control over the lives of others.

This is further supported in that James goes on to say that "every perfect gift is from above," which reminds me of children and their Father, and how children look around to see what everyone got and how the gifts compare. James then addresses anger, and so from all of this, we see a similarity to Paul's focus on covetousness in Romans 7. That is more near the point here in James than isolating sex when the word lust comes up. Even sex would not be a problem if seen as a gift of God that His Spirit controls in us, not meaning of course the

absence of what is powerfully erotic (evidence the “Song of Solomon”) but meaning the giving in to enticement to let sex be drawn all the way into covetousness where its expression becomes self-for-self.

Back to how things work though, the mere fact of cravings and enticement does not constitute sin. How about that. The first thing to do is not to accept a sin consciousness and fall into condemnation. Don’t panic and think the enticement has you already or that because of its unrelenting strength that you inevitably will give in anyway. If you are perfectly kept, you can hold out forever and even learn to laugh at the enticement.

This does not mean that the feelings are pleasant. Temptation is a form of suffering, and so even though the enticement may be pleasurable at first, it won’t remain that way but will threaten bondage and fear. It is not fun to have to say no to cravings. That is the Cross, and that is God’s very nature, yet the joy and glory swallow up the suffering, and eventually, as my old mentor Norman Grubb said, “Eventually soul will come to like what Spirit likes.”

It is also key when tempted to know yourself as a spirit person standing apart from your temptation and in union with Christ, Spirit to spirit. This is where we know the real self. My old friend Bill Bower from California says, “I *am* a spirit, I *have* a soul, and I *live in* a body.” That really puts things into perspective. We stand apart from our cravings and evaluate them from the standpoint of who we are. Otherwise, if you think that you are what you feel and what your reason says, then you have no way to stand apart from the enticement and make a faith decision.

This is how we get exercised and established and are “the first fruits among his creatures” as James says. It’s a good process even though it doesn’t feel good.

#### **Chapter 4: Us as God’s Offspring**

After talking about how temptation works, James says that God “brought us forth by the word of truth.” This is beautifully procreative and reminds me of how Norman used to say that God’s plan is to have a family of sons to manage His universe. These sons are not made sons by imitation but by birth: like Father, like

son. Much creation talk that I have heard over the years asserts that God spoke, and creation came out of nothing. But here, creation of the new man takes place by the living word, which we know means the word that was and is God because he says it's "the word implanted," which is not the implantation of a code or set of rules but the word as a person, to whom we are joined in a living union such that James even calls us "first fruits among His creatures." God is living and lives as His word, and that word joined to us produces us as fruit.

Immediately James says "be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger." What a refreshing exhortation in a noisy world full of entirely too much useless talk and too much talk in general. The devil's way of getting people to avoid hearing God's voice in the inner man is to keep up a lot of commotion and unnecessary talk and busyness that acts as an escape from simply listening and waiting out urges toward letting anger turn into a constant verbal focus on the negative.

The world thinks that solutions come from talking about everything and analysis by reason, whereas solutions come by waiting on God and dying to initial impulses. This is the work of the Cross and comes from knowing that Christ is at our center, and His way is not tit for tat and having to prove rightness in everything. When we know that Christ is our rightness, impulses to self-defense can go unexpressed, and much more gets overlooked. This might sound like an excuse to let others or even ourselves get away with things or even self, but really it is the call to let the living word of God keep us in peace; and when one is in peace, despite the barrage of impulses, the need to chatter dies down because anger doesn't go anywhere destructive but is left hanging without having to do anything with it unless quickened by the Spirit to do so.

When James says "the anger of man," he means anger taken on as if one is just a mere man trying to right things. The idea is the lie of independent self, and thus anger that seems justly expressed but is incited by hell, as James further explains in his discourse on the tongue a couple chapters later.

Unleashed without the restraining check of the Spirit that gives us the supernatural slowness he talks about, anger leads to "filthiness" arising from not seeing that the living word is implanted in us. He says that it is humility to

receive this implanted word. I give up my fear that God might not let me say anything or that He might not say anything through me to set aright certain situations. In fact, I'm astonished at how seldom God does prefer me to do that. Rest in the midst of maddening circumstances and slowness to speech is miraculous indeed and impossible apart from Christ in us.

James also says "putting aside filthiness," and my RSV study Bible notes describe this as putting off a filthy garment. A new thought comes to mind with this, as if James is saying that because we are supernaturally "brought forth," we are not filthy at the core but only wearing filthy garments when continuing not to tap the life of Christ to whom we're grafted. The idea is that one can throw off that filthy garment any time and walk in the Spirit.

The filthy garments can still seem like an identity after the new birth, but the text here makes plain that this is a lie, and that the thing to do is to remember who we are. Remembering does not go unchallenged by trials and temptations, but this is all the more important for the fixing of faith in the consciousness of the ways of God and how he matures His sons. When we inquire about who we are, he holds up the mirror of Christ in us, not in us as remote but as permeating all of one's being. we're not going around with Christ in our shirt pockets but in a total Christ in a total human. This is what the mirror shows, if anyone wishes to step up to the sink.

## **Chapter 5: the Mirror**

James says that hearing and doing are linked in such a way that to hear leads to doing. This implies the same thing as sap flowing from a vine into a branch. Only the will that hits a shut off valve changes this. You would think that everyone would want to know who he is, but good news isn't so readily received as the prophets have always found out.

Yet man has always wanted to look at himself, the only problem being looking on a flesh level and in a self-for-self way. No one can see who he is by looking directly at himself; he needs a mirror. This mirror is the Spirit of God, the fountain of liberty. All the mirror of the Spirit can reflect is liberty, and liberty is

embedded in the self-for-others life that only God is because of the Cross in His heart.

James has already said that we enter into this life by having the word en-grafted into us, so that we are joined in union to God through Jesus Christ. This is what the mirror shows, namely the new man who operates supernaturally. This man did not create himself, does not maintain himself, and does not keep himself. All comes from God. This is the manner of man that he is now. The en-grafted word quickens the inner man and easily leads to doing even when contrary thoughts and feelings protest. Pain on a soul/body level does not mean that hearing does not move easily into doing.

However, if hearing (which is really the same as receiving) does not move into doing, forgetfulness ensues, and a man forgets who he is. Yet he is who he is if he has been brought forth by God as James says. Imagine now that I am used to looking at my natural self in a mirror and I begin to ask when I see photos of myself, "Who is that?" Family members and friends think I'm joking or a bit nutty and say, "That's you Brian. Don't you recognize yourself?" We don't go around all the time thinking about what we look like (hopefully) but it is normal to recognize one's self when seeing an image of one's self. James brings up this ridiculous example because it is normal when once seeing one's own image to remember it when seeing it again.

But the real image of note is the image of the new man, the miracle man who is the first fruits of God's new creation. It is normal when seeing to do according to what one sees, unless shrinking back sets in, which leads to a forgetfulness. No wonder Peter says that he stirs up the righteous mind by way of reminder.

Seeing who we are is costly and the end of flesh level living, but it is the satisfying way and the way of contentment. The huge shock comes when suffering is still part of the experience and when others do not go along with the new man. They may like how we treat them, but they may not be ready to do likewise. This tempts the hearer into setting up a block at the place where hearing would spontaneously move into doing. This is the place where the knowing person says, "Not my will but thine, O Lord." That is liberty.

A primary place of temptation on this is the tongue, which James has already mentioned and will mention again. It feels so deliciously inviting to say certain things about others, but for the one who knows outcomes, it is like food that looks like it will taste good and does at first when putting it into the mouth but then turns vile in taste, causing the eater to spit it out with revulsion. As the new man gets used to his new tastes, revulsion becomes normal to unbridled speech.

Similarly, temptation pops up when called upon to help those in need, such as widows and orphans, or when daily life offers its usual allure back into its self-for-self ways of looking into the old mirror of merely the natural or carnal man. James says in essence what Paul says in Romans 8 — that we learn by faith to set our minds on the Spirit and go always with that mirror. This is liberty indeed, fresh all the time.

## **Chapter 6: Showing Partiality**

Because of the fall, we are born showing partiality. We can't help it since we are slaves to sin, and so everything is about me, me, me. Power and riches rule the day, and the needy stay needy, even getting needier as those of the world exploit them even more. In the modern Western world, we're used to democracy and the rights of man, but democracy in its best use isn't an independent political invention, but the spontaneous outflow of those who have seen the liberation of the Spirit through Christ's Cross and extended God's love to all out of the Holy Ghost shed abroad in their hearts. But where democracy is not an extension of the Spirit, it eventually becomes the selfish tool of a world destined to turn the world back to the satanic model of government, which is brute tyranny, military rule, and woe unto the weak and needy.

This was the world of James' day, and so there were no food stamps, welfare, employment programs, social insurance, and other means to help those in distress. In that day, if no one in the community of faith helped an orphan or a widow, those left without means were generally helpless since women weren't the salary producers and workers in the market place.

With James, the tone can sound legalistic, as if everyone should suddenly take on guilt and try to help others. But James is not legalistic or promoting independent

self, for he has plainly said that we live by the word grafted into us, and that it is the living word. He is simply saying that love does as love is. An old song by Jefferson Airplane has a line, “You better find somebody to love.” Of course the idea there is a romantic craving, but it does date from an era when social justice was a strong part of music, and many songs of that era cried out for a consciousness of equality and not leaving people at the mercies of power and money.

James makes the point that it was the rich who dragged people into court and exploited them. In our day, we see the opposite at times, with huge settlements against irresponsibility in high places. Poor people have more voice, but again, this stems from a democratic form of government rooted in the Bible. This is good, but without the Gospel, eventually the songs of social justice on the airways, and the settlements in court against the power blocks formed by money in high places will do no good because man seeks freedom, but freedom is only in Christ, despite what political and social theorists say to the contrary.

So then, putting aside political and social models, let’s look at the root like James does and start in the local gathering of Christians. There is always someone with more and someone with less when it comes to means and influence. James does not argue that people don’t acquire money and influence, but if the path to them is not self-for-others, then what good is it, and how can putting such people in power in the local assembly of believers do anything eventually but turn that fellowship into self-for self and the same religion that the prophets always cried out against and which crucified Jesus.

James is simply saying that love will not let itself fall prey to the same thing that Judaism did by becoming religion. Religion, as James puts it, is all form and all talk, but little or no love. How can that be right? So James brings up the royal law, which sees every person as a vessel, and all good as coming from Christ in you. This is his law of liberty, and he says that not to see that as the law of liberty, the royal law, is to go back to the same old law that has always only produced one thing—*independent seeing*, which comes from the devil and manifests the devil’s nature of self-for-self, which produces corporate life along the model of hell.

James is about love and the en-grafted word producing a new life in the individual believer and in the gatherings of those newly lit logs. That's the fellowship to which is calling his readers.

## **Chapter 7: faith and works**

The equalizer among us is that all have broken the law. If one aspires to live by the law, that means keeping all if it all of the time. Success isn't measured like statistics in sports. With the law, success is measured more like not having a ruptured aneurism. Under the law, all are terminal, and it's futile to compare scoring cards since no one will finish successfully under the law. Therefore, since all have transgressed, the law to jump to is the law of liberty where mercy is the saving grace when judgment would otherwise remove us from the sphere of God's life and keep us separated from Him.

God's love so moved Him to rescue us, not leaving us in the darkness and self-for-self misery of condemnation of others and ourselves, always comparing ourselves and others to a standard only found in God's nature. We have been united by faith to God, and God is self-for-others. This is not based on feeling but on "willed action for others" as William Law puts it. If love waits for a good feeling, love will not find itself sustained. Actually, the good feeling comes most often in the wake of willed action — not before it.

Since Christ's body is many members, no one member is tasked with taking care of everybody's needs. Worrying about that can lead to obsession and paralysis, even going back to law. James is simple here: he talks about the person right in front of me who needs something. The matter isn't a philosophical discourse on a needy world or even a discussion of the merits of the person in need. The situation is one obvious person in front of me, and the Spirit by me wants to help. Faith and works are of one fabric unless one resists the Spirit.

One characteristic of James' approach is that he scorns mere religion of making rules and doing a lot of talking about those rules and comparing people and showing preference to the ones who stir up a lot of talk but not much remedy. What happens is that religion sets in, and so much talk ensues about rules and "ought to" and who isn't doing enough, that pretty soon the atmosphere turns

into one heavy with guilt and beating up of the self and others, with more resolutions and shows of trying hard but not much to show for it.

It might sound like James is beating up the church he is writing to, but he is merely challenging the religious mindset in the same way that Jesus did when He was went to the temple and saw that it had become a den of thieves who took from others and gave back nothing but more burdens.

So what does James do? He does what Paul does. He brings up Abraham. Abraham was an ordinary man made extraordinary by one thing: he heard God's voice and pressed through to do the one thing in the moment that God asked of him, no matter what it was. That was the proof of his faith. This puts obedience in a different light from the often experienced shrinking away from the use of the word where obedience is taken as independent effort to keep a rule and be like what one is supposed to be like. Here, James brings up a case example of someone who was either delusional or who heard the voice of God and had to follow through or shrink back.

Implied also is that when one has faith, then one is quickened by the object of that faith. To put faith in God is to put faith in Him. He is a person, and He then is the faith of our faith and catches us up into what He is doing. We take Him, and He takes us. This is really the same thing as Paul's saying to the Philippians, "God is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (2:13).

Similarly, James brings up one thing that Rahab was tasked to do. Here, we don't have a Bible character glamorized like Abraham. It's more unvarnished to some ears to be confronted with the offense of a pagan harlot. Given the tendency to make people into heroes as if they were born heroes, one might think, "Abraham was a special case." With Rahab, she was no better or worse than Abraham since James has already said that one sin spoils the whole batch, but Rahab can appear worse than others.

How to the point James is by using such a Gospel flavor here and picking a character from of old who would have fit right into the Gospel accounts as one hated by the religious mindset. But now for the follow through: Rahab grabs onto the Lord and does the one thing he says to do in faith. How like the Gospels this

is. A sinner grabs hold of Jesus, he tells her something to do, she does it, and the miracle follows. How beautiful. This reminds me too of Naaman the leper in 2 Kings 5. Elisha told Naaman something to do; he was to wash seven times in the Jordan River. The miracle would only come through an action deemed by Naaman as absurd.

So why does James open up the door to such faith drama in order to suggest feeding and clothing a person standing in my presence. It might seem absurdly too much to do for some and too absurdly little for others. For one person who can barely take care of himself, it would be a stretch to give. For an person of means, it could be tempting to think, “How can this one little deed matter when there is so much need in the world?”

The point is our faith in the moment and the thing the Lord is pressing to do with one individual’s faith. That’s pretty simple, and James is pretty simple. Simple wins the day most of the time.

## **Chapter 8: teachers**

James is for thinning out the ranks of teaching aspirants, which sounds a little chilly and selective. What peril could engender this warning? First, he says that we all “stumble” (NASB), and the KJV uses the word “offend” (3:2). Since he continues with the illustration of a horse, let’s think about stumbling. Who wants to ride a horse that is always stumbling. That would be offensive.

A teacher is a horse in a way. Though the responsibility of teaching sounds lofty, to teach is to make one’s self a vessel of service like a horse, so that a rider may reach a destination. Teaching isn’t so much about being admired as it is helping others. James adds the illustration of a ship and its rudder, and imagine a ship with a crazy rudder at work making your ship reel first one way then another, leading you to wonder if you will ever disembark safely. In both illustrations, the tongue is in view, and James is frank that no one can control it, and the damage of the tongue is seen in the constant playing with matches by everyone until trained not to be reckless. If no one can control it, then what hope is there? Here again, we have to come back to the premise of the book that to be a Christian is to have been brought forth by the will of God and the word of God (1:18) and that

this word is “implanted” in us (1:21 RSV). Living is hearing, James says, which means receiving and letting word flow into deed. My old mentor, Norman Grubb, used to say that we move from thought level to word level to deed level.

The idea that James expresses is the same as “Christ in you” as Paul puts it, or Peter saying that we have been made “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). John, in his first letter, calls it having the “anointing” (2:20). In the various letters then by different writers, the emphasis is that no one can say and do rightly on his own but can only live the Christian life by the Spirit. All flows from the Spirit, and all we do is make ourselves the horse and ship of the Spirit so that we can point the way for others. This takes settling to the point that one sees trials as normal, as well as the impulses to throw matches on hay in the midst of daily problems. Only the miracle life of the Spirit can handle the ride.

James then isn’t doing anything more or less than a normal parent or the coach of an athletic team. Leadership is developed by learning to divide spirit truth from the constant pulls to falsely engage on a lesser level, which then only stirs turmoil until a calm hand takes the bridle or rudder.

Part of instability also comes from an appetite for adventure that God implanted into us. We’re made for exploits as Daniel calls them. But as we all know, most exploits are moments of notice rooted in the routines of the practice field that aren’t glamorous at all. Jesus said that to be faithful in a great thing is to have been faithful in small things. I was watching a show about astronauts and thought of all the assemblers piecing together every bolt and screw of the space capsule. When the rocket fires, the whole thing needs to be in place.

James is pretty practical, but he’s pretty mystical too because he knows that life has to be lived supernaturally in the moment and that care with words is the bridle and rudder of the Spirit.

## **Chapter 9: the two natures**

James now gets down to the source behind when the tongue is both a harmful fire and full of poison. It could appear at first that he sees the tongue independently, but we will see that he doesn’t; he just starts on the level of what is coming out of

a person, similar to Jesus when He said it's not what goes into a man that harms him but what comes out of the heart. Obviously if the tongue and the heart are evil of themselves, there can never be a right use, but there is a right use, and so the problem isn't the self but the operator behind the self.

This comes out fully developed now because most Christians do see independently first and then later come to see sources. What brings openness in people to the issue of sources is the inability to control the self. When being a Christian entails years of trying one plan after another to control the self and be like Christ, the concept of sources is limited to the human self as the operator in view. But when repeated failure and clearer assessment from the Spirit settle in, and when the results of trying show themselves as increasingly evil, the matter becomes desperate. One must scuttle the idea of being a Christian or discover another way other than all those resolutions and all that religion.

This is not a light matter, for one will either harden into a religion that increasingly is out of touch with the disparity between so called faith and what actually to all around is lacking love, or one will take an honest approach and say to God, "I can't do this thing." This is why James uses the tart image of man being able to tame the animals but not tame himself. Yet even this ability to tame the animals is illusory since the way men go about it is not the lion lying down with the lamb or the child putting his hand over the adder's den. The whole apparent mastery of man over animal is based on the separation caused by the fall that ruined the earth for now.

But since man does have an apparent mastery over animals, James uses that to mock his inability to master himself. Here is man, a son of God, given regency of the earth after Lucifer's fall, and the best he can do is tame animals but never himself. Not only that, man is a like a fire-breathing dragon and a poisonous snake, making him like the most dangerous creatures in the animal kingdom. What will make man a gentle regent again and one who can bring love back to the earth.

The key is wisdom. One might think the key is love, yet, the door to love is wisdom. The first part of wisdom is fear of the Lord, and no one will do that while thinking the self is God. Though it seems silly, man's problem is thinking that he

is God. That's a fatal distinction not to make. We get fear of the Lord as we know that we are not God but vessels. The tongue and the heart are vessels; what, or who rather, will they express? On the surface it appears that they express both good and evil, but this is also false. Nothing can ever be reliable that oscillates back and forth between good and evil. James has already said that a double minded man is unstable. Then too, bitter water makes sweet water bitter. The mix doesn't work. We are only one thing, so what is it? Fig trees don't bear olives or grapevines figs, so the quest is always for a match-up between identity and fruit. Nature doesn't have things confused on this level, just man.

James says that we need to figure out two things: that we are not in control and that we have one owner-operator. James is about getting to the point and eliminating the confusion over these two things since they cause the hurtful fires and poisonous results. We live from an operator and never from independence. Independence is a lie, and James makes that clear. There is a wisdom from below and a wisdom from above. That sets the two natures, and one is "earthly, sensual, and devilish." That's clear; it's from hell, and we know what that means. The other is from above and is of the Spirit.

They are so different that no discerning person can mistake them. Only the religious outlook gets confused on this point. When things are taken back to a spirit source, all becomes clear. I have to add that when I thought that the Spirit people were a bit nutty and threatening, I still had to admit that they were more attractive in their ways than the people (including myself) who were mad so much of the time over who was breaking the rules and trying to get ahead. The Spirit people were attractive though it looked fearful to encourage people to live by the Spirit and not rules.

The wisdom from above is the answer, and it is lovely and defenseless looking. But how healing it is and easy to walk in once the wisdom from beneath has beaten us up enough. The Lamb of God always wins.

## **Chapter 10: the cause of war**

"What causes wars..." What a statement. I know I quoted just the first part of the sentence and that the point James addresses is wars among the brethren, but

think of the implication. Here the poor, lost world must live with war as a given, though one would hope that the Gospel would swallow up war from among the brethren, but many have lived through horrendous wars among Christians over how to be a Christian.

That sounds holy, but it doesn't prove out that way when a Christian lives like a non-Christian. After all, the non-Christian does not have Christ living in him and does not have the Spirit and the Spirit's fruit. So what can the world do but war? But for Christians to war in the same way means an understanding of the faith that is head knowledge and not union living. Some call this living in one's head. I didn't know what this meant when the first psychiatrist I went to told me, "Brian, you live in your head." I didn't know what he meant because I had never known anything else. Sure, I had experienced anointing and many spiritual experiences, but I would still have fit in with the Corinthians who lived like "mere men." Doctrine plus experiences along the way will not get a person through. Only a settling into the real meaning of the new birth can do that.

What happens in the absence of a true knowing of the new birth is this: the passions at war in one's members get interpreted as the operating self, and a need consciousness dominates regularly. Awareness of the difference between flesh and Spirit isn't present, and so the sense of lack is never satisfied, and cravings only increase no matter what one obtains on an outer level. The thought of asking God to meet needs and accepting what He provides does not take root, and so the violence of covetousness comes forth in all its manifestations, including war that is justified in a fleshly way but set forth as a high cause. Faithfulness disappears, trumped by lack and need.

James calls this "friendship with the world," making one an "enemy of God." This hardly occurs to the religious mind steeped in Bible truth but void of the Spirit's fruit. Yet the text does not say that God makes Himself an enemy of those who walk in the flesh. "He yearns jealously over the spirit which He has made to dwell in us." What an amazing response on God's end. He wishes for flesh ways to be cut off so that spirit union may flourish and bear the beautiful fruit of wisdom, which is "pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits." God wishes for His own nature to be the satisfying and need fulfilling way for those who belong to Him.

God's response is also that "he gives more grace." That means that He continues to offer grace and not a return to law and judgment according to the law, for we have seen that judgment under the law condemns everyone unless one can keep every iota of it all the time. No one can and to think so indicates pride, which is the thing that God resists.

Therefore, when James says "submit" and "draw near to God" this does not mean trying to get together a list of "do good" resolutions. The idea is as simple as if one heard that free ice cream is being dished out in the park. If you want it, you get to the park and walk up to the booth and make a request.

The devil will intervene with opposition, and let no one say that he can't get to the park because the devil is blocking the way. God has given us His very own Spirit and therefore the means to move right on past the devil and on with God's Spirit and way. Because the devil is really a coward, he will run off in his rage and perpetual hurt over not being able to trump the Spirit of God.

Two actions also go along with God's offer of grace. First, the one who has been enslaved in flesh level living cleanses his hands. This is done by willingness for those hands to no longer be the hands of the wisdom from beneath, which means a cutting off from flesh level living. Second, there is the grief (not condemnation) over wrong use of the flesh. God made us wondrous beings to enjoy His bounty on every level: spirit, soul, and body. Where wrong use has taken its toll in warlike and covetous ways, one has to hate those ways enough to be done with them and wish never to return to them. True, flesh level temptations will always present their allure in this life, but the one who has grieved unto the discernment of the new birth knows where those flesh ways always lead.

James says that the key is humility, which does not mean of course a human quality practiced and obtained by human doing. Humility means giving up the quest for independence on every level and accepting with relief finally that only God is God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Double-mindedness about this can never work and produces the wars.

The warring stops one believer at a time. What James says can never work by saying, "Let's all get together and agree to what James says." No, one says rather, "No matter what anyone else does, this is the way I must go."

## **Chapter 11: judging a brother**

Everyone, Christian or non-Christian is sensitive to judgment and hates being on the receiving end of it, and though it might feel stimulating for a while to dish it out, the poison of doing so eventually extinguishes one's spark because of the hardening and harsh quality of judging.

But what is judging? James says not to "speak evil against a brother" and yet his tone is severe in his letter. Could it be that he is severe against evil and against tolerating evil but has a beautiful, clear picture of what it means to be a human being made by God for the purpose of God's indwelling? The point is that indictment of sin and unbelief is never to forget that to be human does not mean having a nature good or evil, but rather expressing one or the other. The problem is not the human self but the devil's misuse of the human self, most often through the deception that the human is independent, for the devil does not like to expose himself where he might be discovered as the problem.

James says that judging independently like that is a return to the law and puts the one judging in the position of being God, whereas there is only one God and judge of persons. Wrong judging actually leads to all the evils James has pointed out, for the grace of God in us, looking through our eyes never wishes anything else but healing and restoration for others. This is a huge fact because some of our worst hurts in life come from those we've fellowshiped with in the Lord.

How can evil take root in those with whom we've shared precious times? Somewhere hurt and anger look more advantageous than forbearance and endurance in seeing who that other person is if a Christian. If James hadn't believed in the fact that the human is not an evil entity, he wouldn't have written for the purpose of their restoration but would have dismissed them and thought, "Go on to hell and good riddance."

Of course there is such a thing as a wolf in sheep's clothing. The New Testament letters warn about those who are unregenerate yet move into a fellowship and eventually do what wolves do among sheep. But we give others every benefit of the doubt and don't walk in fear and suspicion. We all can act like wolves if not living under the Cross and walking in the Spirit. One who is truly a wolf will eventually get exposed by lack of love for the Shepherd, for that is what being a Christian finally is, love of the Shepherd and obedience by faith to His commands, which John says are not burdensome.

I have found that often when irritated with other Christians, it doesn't help much to focus on their blind spots if I lose the sense of seeing Christ in them. Love covers a multitude of sins, and when others don't know who they are yet, there may be a multitude of sins to cover. It's better to be on the covering side than to fall back into judging by law and taking on the accusing spirit of the devil. Love wins many battles in which it looks foolish, but the foolishness of Cross is our defense at all times.

## **Chapter 12: assessing the temporal**

I learned eighteen years ago when thinking about plans, to say to myself, "If the Lord lets me." The fact is that we make plans, but regularly see events turn in an unexpected direction. This is normal actually in this present life. To think differently is to presume, and little did I know how presuming I could be when talking in the past about *my life* or what I thought of as my life. Conceptually I knew this wasn't correct, but my old mentor, Norman Grubb, used to say that the transition from young man to father as a Christian centered on the last bit of independent self-believing one might have: *my things, my family, my life*. Of course he would say not to try and undo any independent seeing but to simply take it by faith that the Lord is doing a thing and will give the witness of the Spirit in His way and time.

We are created to be serious beings who plan and do exploits, yet James says, "What is your life? For you are a mist." Though appearing an unlikely coupling, we are to think seriously and do exploits of faith, all the while knowing that any time we have here on earth is by grace and meant for the humble ongoing of

whatever our commission is during our deployment here on earth. The word deployment fits well, for that's what our time here is.

James continues by implying that it's not hard to know the right thing to do next; he's already made daily life a matter of absurd looking faith in trusting God with those right around us needing our service as Christ in us. Life turns out to be a continual scenario of being for others, and the engine for that is God's very own life in us, joined to us in union. Faith makes things simple and the will of God not hard to know. Only the separated view point and veil of *my* anything makes God's will remote and difficult to ascertain. "My sheep hear my voice."

James again brings up material things, this time not so much talking about showing preference, but diagramming the mindset of slavery to money and things whereby people aren't seen as people but as objects used to increase wealth. Riches themselves are not evil; they are the gift of God. What is maligned here in James is the transitory obsession with riches that chokes out eternity like Jesus talked about in the parable of the sower with the thorns, and not seeing people as people is a thorny life. James calls it "miseries."

The indictment is against wanton disregard for paying the wages of one's workers. This is outright "fraud" and a mindset of using others with a promise of benefit to them as well and then leaving them empty handed and banking the money that others worked for and need for their daily subsistence. The extremes that this can go to include even a total abandonment to temporal values and the murder of those who get in the way and threaten to undo covert plans to prosper at others' expense.

This is the nature of the devil, and thankfully no one is doomed to remain the devil's instrument. The idea that one is trapped with no escape in a life of self-for-self is false and makes the idea of repentance and transformation too inaccessible in tone. Don't the Gospels show us that there are those like Matthew and Zaccheus secretly in their hearts just hoping they can break loose from their abuses and become those who live the life of love? They might even be in the church already, misusing it like the religious leaders that Jesus pronounced His woes to, and if we see the severity of Jesus' tone and that of James as redemptive

warning, we see the appeal of God to save those bent at present on hoarding and destructive lifestyles without any move yet toward union with Christ.

It's a great transformation to move by faith into a life of wanting others to succeed and helping them do that.

### **Chapter 13: handling mistreatment**

James has painted a brutal picture of taking the faith and turning it into the same old religion of greed and insensitivity to obvious need. In this he is right in line with the cry for social justice in the prophets of the Old Testament and in the Spirit and rhythms of Jesus in the Gospels who constantly merged situations of need and the exercise of faith.

Having written in a severe way to the abusers, James now speaks to those being taken advantage of. One might think that he would promote retaliation, perhaps a revolution, but his message goes way deeper than that. It's not that James might not favor collective action against mistreatment, but the fact is that no matter what corrective action the underdog takes, life presents so much abuse that the need is for a message that will work when the worst is happening, for the worst always comes in some form.

He says, "Be patient...until the coming of the Lord." That sounds so futuristic that it lacks present bite. After all, isn't Christ in you about living in the now? Yes, but part of living in the now is the assurance that the now isn't the last chapter of a story set in a world passing away like a mist. When one lives in the eternal, the coming of the Lord is so imminent that time is not what it seemed.

Think of how many movies we've watched where the hero rights everything at the end. It's worth the wait, and our expectation all through the movie is that such will happen, sending us home edified and assured once again that justice triumphs in the end. Yet in life, that means real waiting, and real waiting implies patience and endurance. In my worst trials, those were two solid Bible words that got me through a lot: wait and endure. And both those words are true to the warp and woof of all the Bible, for God is a God of long-suffering, and He initiates His sons into the same.

This does not imply self-pitying passivity that does nothing when the Spirit prompts action. But often, no action on our part relieves the suffering, and so our action is to believe and know that God is getting us through. That is the triumph of our present moment living. The now is a now of patience, and patience is a supernatural fruit—the fruit of the Spirit. When I began to see patience in my life, I knew that it wasn't me because I had tried my whole life up to that point without being able to hold on through my worst trials. Despair would always set in. So when patience arrived, I knew it was the Spirit, and I was the one willing to simply receive and wait. Many mornings, drinking my coffee and reading God's word, tears would come wrenching and flying from my eyes unexpectedly and suddenly. Some word from the Scripture quickened by God's Spirit brought that on as I let patience have her perfect work.

James compares going through these trials to Job, and what an astounding honor to see this comparison. Ordinarily, we move quickly to the part of Job's story where he is physically afflicted, but early on, God authorized the devil to attack him through neighboring enemy forces who plundered his goods and killed his family. He did not grumble, and that was a miracle.

James urges us not to grumble, and that word connotes a host of ill feelings and the giving vent to them verbally in such a way that unrest is stirred among brethren: "Why is this happening to me when I've done such and such, and my associate over there hasn't, etc?" James encourages us to simply see "the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful." This reminds me of a tragic story I heard in church once about a teen killed at a church camp. The woman testifying said that she grasped onto that "God is good, and He is good all the time." This baffles all we reason or think.

Our faith is tested in many ways all the time, and "we call those happy who were steadfast" and our happiness is found in the same way. Though the word happy might not seem a spiritual word, it is the translation in the RSV, and I think a worthy one. This does not mean happiness comes right away, but it does come. That is the point. The ending of a story for a man of faith is happiness. We're used to sitting through movies, and we are a movie being shot on location right now. We are the characters in the greatest story ever told.

## **Chapter 14: the prophet has super powers but**

James is just at the conclusion of his epistle and he says that Elijah prayed fervently that it might not rain, and you know what? It didn't rain for 42 months. But then when he prayed for rain, it did rain. Not only did it rain, but the earth's fruitfulness resumed. This links faith to physical manifestation, but not in a way without meaning. Herod wanted entertainment from Jesus with miracles, and Jesus was never about just the miracles without the insight behind them.

One thing about Elijah too is he was not outside the circle of effects from the miracle of withholding rain. As an Israelite, he enjoyed the blessings when his nation prospered and suffered the privation when it didn't. His personal needs were always met, even supernaturally at times by angels (1 Kings 19), but the fact remained that when his people were in apostasy, he suffered and wasn't someone detached apart from the miseries of life lived among those who never seem to see the light.

James makes the point that Elijah was "a man of like nature with ourselves." Miracle powers and a mind of insight do not make a man not a human; they make a man suffer when others do not yet know how to live supernaturally in a natural world. True, there is a detachment from the natural world; we are in it, but not of it. True also that when others suffer, we suffer, unless hardness of heart and isolationism have distanced us from the urge of God in us to point the way to others out of bondage and into the liberty of the sons of God. But the one pointing the way is one living among men, not just in the heavenlies. In one of his books, Norman says "with spirits in heaven and bodies on earth." That's the way it is for now, and so we are touched by what happens to others.

This does not mean unhealthy attachments, i.e. the addictive connection to others whereby we are enslaved to them or they to us; it means simply that we are not untouchable, we are touchable. To think that Elijah with all his power (which was the gift of God in him) did not feel what we feel is to misunderstand Elijah. He precisely was human. It is juvenile and satanic to elevate others to a place of specialness that exempts them from everything that any human goes through on any given day. Exempting others as if they are no longer human because of their

powers says that we get to be human in a self-pitying way when all along the real truth is that the body of Christ in its entirety is a miracle body.

James brings up Elijah not because Elijah was unique but because Elijah was the man of faith any man could be and can be. Even though God's gifts to his body vary on an individual level, they do not vary on the one new man that the body of Christ is as a single entity. This makes receptivity the point. Perhaps no other Israelite would have been like Elijah in Elijah's particular manifestation. But every Israelite could receive the power from the generator just like New York city blocks are powered by giant generators in a building somewhere close.

The main quality of the Christian is faith, and faith captures the lightning of the Spirit in some special way. Recognition of the Spirit releases a person to receive from the Spirit, so if forgiveness, for example, is needed, then that is the connection; and if a miserable situation had led to unbelief, then repentance is easily and gently possible. The Spirit's quickening then flows into spirit, soul, and body with the result of resurrection power.

This is James' conclusion to his epistle — that our means are not unto ourselves alone, which is what he has been saying all through his letter. What we have is not for us alone, but for the shepherding of the earth and its people back into the fruitfulness mirroring the beginning of man when God assigned his place as regent over creation to stir and call forth fruitfulness. Our job is not to avoid the suffering that comes from being among those still locked in self-perpetrated darkness.

Neither is our job to just endure it as those buffeted in a masochistic way. Our job is to suffer as long as it takes while basically doing one thing — pointing to the open door of Spirit living by faith that allows a man to be transformed into the regent God created him to be.

