



Book of James

Chapter 1

Theme: God tests faith by trials; God does not test with evil; God tests faith by the Word, not by man's words

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CHART: CHAPTER SUMMARY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES

James 1	Confident Stand	What a Christian has
James 2	Compassionate Service	What a Christian does
James 3	Careful Speech	What a Christian says
James 4	Contrite Submission	What a Christian feels
James 5	Concerned Sharing	What a Christian gives

An epistle written by *Jacob* to the descendants of Israel.

Jacobos in Greek;

Jacques in French;

Iago in Italian;

Diego in Spanish;

Ya'kov in Hebrew;

= the supplanter; heel-catcher; tripper-up (Hos 12:3).¹

James

James was not the one called the son of Zebedee ("Matthew 4:21, note) or the son of Alphaeus ("Luke 24:10, note), but the actual half-brother of Jesus Christ (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3; Galatians 1:19). See note, "Luke 8:19, for proof that Mary had other children after Jesus was born. Christ's brethren did not believe in Him until after the resurrection (John 7:5), but the other two men named James did. This James experienced a special appearance of Christ but is not classed as an apostle (1 Cor. 15:7). This verse alone proves that there were three James's, for the other two were apostles (Matthew 10:2-3). It is always clear in Scripture when the other two are meant. Mary, the sister of the virgin Mary, had only two sons and one daughter (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10). The fact that her sons had the same names as two sons of the virgin Mary proves nothing. The brethren of Jesus are distinguished from the two apostles called James (Acts 1:13-14). The virgin Mary had more sons and daughters than did her sister Mary (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). Jude was the brother of James of this book (Jude 1:1). It is safe to conclude that when James is referred to without any designation as "brother of John," "son of Zebedee," or "son of Alphaeus," that James the brother of our Lord is

¹ Chuck Missler, Notes on James, khouse.org

meant (Acts 12:2,17; Acts 15:13; Acts 21:18; 1 Cor. 15:7; Galatians 1:19; Galatians 2:9,12; James 1:1; Jude 1:1). James was martyred in A.D. 62.²

James wrote to Jewish Christians who were ‘scattered abroad’. The book of Acts tells us that the Christians in Jerusalem were compelled by persecution to scatter throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1) and even as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch (Acts 11:19). Fleeing did not always solve the problem, as many Christians also encountered persecution in their new homes.

The trials of life often shake our faith and cause us to let up in service. In other words, hardships and difficulties can diminish the reality of religion. James wrote to help his readers have such reality.

The Bible has quite a bit to say about Christians suffering. It tells us about the suffering of some of its greatest heroes. Job, Moses, Joseph, Paul and Peter are just a few who had to endure exceedingly difficult circumstances.³

McGee Introduction: The Epistle of James is a very practical book which deals with the ethics of Christianity rather than with doctrine. James will really bear down on some practical issues, but the theme of faith is also seen throughout his entire epistle. The emphasis in James is on the works which are produced by faith. In the first three chapters he is going to speak of the verification of genuine faith and give us some of the ways God tests faith.⁴

AUTHOR: James

James the half brother of Jesus is the likely author of the Book of James. The author of the epistle furnishes no other identification than the information presented in the opening verse. Three men of significance in the New Testament are called James (the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name “Jacob”), meaning “supplanter” (one who takes another’s place by crafty means): (1) James the son of Zebedee and brother of John was numbered among the apostles and was the first apostolic martyr, c. A.D. 44 (cf. Matt 4:21; 10:2; 17:1; Mark 1:19; Luke 5:10; Acts 12:1, 2); (2) James the son of Alphaeus was also one of the Twelve, although no other facts concerning him have survived (cf. Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13); (3) James the half brother of Jesus was one of several half brothers of Jesus (cf. Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3). This James, though slow to accept Christ (John 7:5), had been converted by an appearance of the risen Lord (1 Cor 15:7) and subsequently joined the followers of Christ (Acts 1:14). He quickly rose to a position of great authority in the early church (cf. Acts 12:17; 15:13-29; 21:17, 18; Gal 1:19; 2:9, 12; Jude 1). Tradition ascribes this letter to the Lord’s half brother. Internal evidence is consistent with this view. The most concrete evidences for this identification are the verbal similarities (especially apparent in the early Greek manuscripts) between this epistle and the speech of James at the Jerusalem Conference (cf. Acts 15:13-21). In addition, this letter, the most Jewish book in the entire New Testament, is indicative of an

² Dake Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

³ Ellsworth, R. (2009). *Opening up James* (18–19). Leominster: Day One Publications.

⁴ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Heb 13:25). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

author steeped in the Old Testament outlook and literature, as James is portrayed to be in Acts. Also the numerous references to nature are what one would expect of a man who had lived in a rural Galilean town like Nazareth (cf. James 1:6, 10, 11, 17; 3:3, 4, 7, 11, 12, 18; 5:4, 7, 17, 18).⁵

DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING: c. A.D. 48-50

The martyrdom of James in A.D. 62 provides the latest date for the epistle. Josephus mentions the martyrdom of James and in so doing supplies evidence of the prominence of James in the early Christian community. In addition, the lack of reference to the dispute occasioning the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15) in A.D. 49-50, the simple church organization revealed in the epistle, and the comparative absence of major doctrinal content strongly imply a date prior to the appearance of Paul's first writings, c. A.D. 48-50. Thus, James may well be the earliest book, in terms of authorship, in the New Testament.⁶

Different James in Scripture: (Missler)

1. James, the son of Zebedee; brother of John the beloved disciple. Called to be a follower early (Mark 1:19). Became, with his brother John and Peter, one of the insiders. (Mark 5:37; 9:2; 10:35; 14:33). Slain by Herod very soon after Pentecost.
2. James, the son Alpheus, brother of Judas (not Iscariot). Only in lists and (possibly) in Mark 15:40 as "James the Younger" or "Lesser"; simply James in the parallel, Matthew 27:56).
3. James, the father of Judas, not Iscariot (see John 14:22), identified as one of the twelve in Luke 6:16 (and in Acts 1:13) and is probably to be identified with Thaddaeus in Matthew 10:3 and Mark 3:18.
4. James, the brother of our Lord. Considered by the early church as a son of Mary and Joseph. (So Jerome, Augustine, et al.) Cf. Matthew 12:46, 47; 13:55; Mark 3:31, 32; Luke 8:19, 20; 1 Cor 9:5.

Unbeliever before the resurrection: John 7:5.

Lord appeared to James: 1 Cor 15:7; thus Gal 1:19.

Prominent as outstanding leader in the Jerusalem Church (Acts 15); those going to other churches founded by Paul are said to have come from James (Gal 2:12). Note that in 2:9, James is named first (although he had already disavowed having authorized them to use his name as an endorsement of their legal teachings: Acts 15:24). We dismiss the tradition that he was "The first bishop" of Jerusalem.

James was intensely Jewish: his advice to Paul when he came to Jerusalem bringing alms for his nation; James suggested that Paul should be at charges for some brethren who were about to complete their Nazariteship... (Acts 21:18ff).

⁵ Believer's Study Bible

⁶ Believer's Study Bible

James 1:1

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

Clarke: James, a servant of God—For an account of this person, or rather for the conjectures concerning him, see the preface. He neither calls himself an apostle, nor does he say that he was the brother of Christ, or bishop of Jerusalem; whether he was James the elder, son of Zebedee, or James the less, called our Lord's brother, or some other person of the same name, we know not. The assertions of writers concerning these points are worthy of no regard. The Church has always received him as an apostle of Christ.⁷

[servant] Greek: *doulos* (GSN-1401), bondman. One giving himself wholly to another's will. a *slave* (literal or figurative, involuntary or voluntary; frequently therefore in a qualified sense of *subjection* or *subserviency*) :- bond (-man), servant.

It is used of:

1. Bondservants of men (Galatians 3:28; Ephes. 6:8; Col. 3:11; Rev. 6:15)
2. Servants to kings (Matthew 18:23-26; Matthew 23:1-14) and others including hired servants (Luke 15:17-22)
3. Civil officers (John 18:18)
4. Sinners who serve sin (John 8:34; Romans 6:16-22; 2 Peter 2:19)
5. All disciples of Christ (Matthew 10:24-25; Romans 6:16-22; Rev. 19:5)
6. Christ the servant of God (Phil. 2:7; Isaiah 42:1; Isaiah 52:11)
7. Moses and all the prophets (Hebrews 3:5; Rev. 10:7; Rev. 11:18; Rev. 15:3)
8. All ministers and deacons (Matthew 20:27; Mark 10:44; Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1:1)

Both ministers and servants of Matthew 20:26-28 refer to the lowest secular and ecclesiastical office among Christians, as exemplified by Christ Himself. No minister has a right to be a lord over God's people (1 Peter 5:1-9). He is to be least of all and servant of all (Mark 9:35).⁸

Lord is an important word. It translates the ancient Greek word *kurios*. It means that James considered Jesus *God*. "Hellenistic Jews used *Kurios* as a name for God; the non-use of the article gains in significance when it is remembered that *o Kurios*, 'Dominus,' was a title given to the early Roman Emperors in order to express their deity."⁹

[of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ] Another clear reference to two separate and distinct persons—God and Christ.

[twelve tribes] The twelve tribes were still in existence, so ten of them weren't lost and never have been lost, any more than the two tribes.

⁷ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the New Testament

⁸ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

⁹ David Guzik, Calvary Chapel

[scattered abroad] Jews lived in all lands and in every city of Europe, Asia, and Africa (Acts 2:5-9; Acts 26:6). They maintained their own laws and synagogues remaining separate from all other peoples.

[greeting] Greek: *chairō* (GSN-5463), rejoice; joy; hail. An ancient greeting of health and prosperity. Translated greeting (James 1:1; Acts 15:23; Acts 23:26); Godspeed (2 John 10-11); farewell (2 Cor. 13:11); joyfully (Luke 19:6); joy (2 Cor. 7:13; Phil. 2:17-18; Col. 2:5; 1 Thes. 3:9); hail 6 times; be glad 14 times; and rejoice 37 times.

LAN: The writer of this letter, a leader of the church in Jerusalem (see Acts 12:17; Acts 15:13), was James, Jesus' brother, not James the apostle. The book of James was one of the earliest letters, probably written before A.D. 50. After Stephen was martyred (Acts 7:55-8:3), persecution increased, and Christians in Jerusalem were scattered throughout the Roman world. There were thriving Jewish-Christian communities in Rome, Alexandria, Cyprus, and cities in Greece and Asia Minor. Because these early believers did not have the support of established Christian churches, James wrote to them as a concerned leader, to encourage them in their faith during those difficult times.¹⁰

James was actually Jacob (*Iakōbos*). It is not certain why the English translators chose "James" rather than "Jacob." "James," "Jake," and "Jacob" all come from the same root. Bible translations in other languages tend to utilize the transliterated name from the actual Hebrew "Jacob" (*ya 'āqōb*). Could it be that King James desired to see his name in the English translation he authorized?

James, or Jacob, described himself simply as **a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ**. James considered himself a bond-slave (*doulos*). He was the property of God and of the One he could have called his "Brother," the Lord Jesus Christ. Obviously James recognized the deity of Christ by placing Him coequal with God. Furthermore, James used His full name, "the Lord Jesus Christ." "Jesus" means "Savior" and "Christ" is the Greek for "Messiah," the "Anointed." The eternal "Lord" became the Savior, "Jesus," and rose again as everlasting Sovereign, "Christ." The Lord of lords is King of kings (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16).¹¹

The letter is addressed **to the 12 tribes scattered among the nations**. James was writing to the Jews dispersed from their homeland. The technical term "scattered" (*diaspora*) occurs in only two other places in the New Testament (John 7:35; 1 Peter 1:1). It refers to the Jews who were scattered among the Gentiles as their ancestors had been in the days of the Captivity. Though the 12 tribes of Israel are scattered, they are never lost. They are again listed at the close of biblical history in the Book of Revelation: Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin (Rev. 7:5-8; cf. 21:12).¹²

¹⁰ Life Application Notes

¹¹ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jas 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹² Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jas 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Chuck Smith: Not to the ten lost tribes for they were not and they have not been. They are the twelve tribes that are scattered abroad. This is before the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus. In fact, they think that James is probably one of the earliest epistles written. It pre-dates the Pauline epistles. And so there's some people who say, "Well, James wrote his epistle to counteract Paul's teaching on salvation through grace and all." Not so, James wrote his epistle before Paul wrote his. So if he wrote it to counteract Paul's epistles, it was a pretty interesting document in that he wrote his epistle probably five years before Paul wrote his first epistle; two years at least.

So, James addressing the twelve tribes scattered abroad. His greeting. He uses the typical Greek greeting here which actually is the same word for grace.¹³

McGee: "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." "Servant" is literally a bond slave. Now I do not know about you, but I am confident that if I had been the Lord's half brother on the human side, somewhere in this epistle I would have let you know that. I would have brought in that fact in a very pious and humble way, but I surely would have let you know. However, James does not do that. Instead, he calls himself a bond slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

At first the Lord Jesus' human brethren did not believe He was the Son of God. They had been brought up with Him and had played with Him. They had seen Him grow. They noticed that He was unusual, but they did not believe that He was the Savior of the world. Our Lord Jesus was so human when He was here on this earth that even His own brethren did not believe at the first. Of course, your family members are always the hardest people to reach, yet they are the ones we should reach. James came to know the Lord Jesus not only as his blood brother but as his own Savior, and then he became His bond slave. Notice what James calls Him—he uses His full name, the Lord Jesus Christ. James says, "He is my Lord." Jesus was His human name, and James knew Him as Jesus, his half brother; but he also knew Him as Christ, the Messiah who had come and had died for the sins of the world. *Jesus* was not just a name, but He was called Jesus because He would save His people from their sins.

"To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting." It is obvious that James is referring to the believers in Israel. He is writing to the Christian Jews of that day. After all, the early church was 100 percent Jewish for quite a period of time. A few Gentiles became believers, and then a great revival broke out in the heart of the Roman Empire in the area of what is Turkey today. That is where the seven churches of Asia Minor were located. But James, evidently writing before this took place, is addressing the Jewish believers.

"To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." Today people speak of the "ten lost tribes of Israel," but no tribes really got lost. God scattered them throughout the world. They did not settle in England or the United States, although there are many Jews in both places. They are on every continent of the world. There is a tremendous Jewish population in Russia. There are some in China, some in Japan—they are "scattered abroad." James wrote this epistle to believing Jews of that day who were scattered abroad.

¹³ Chuck Smith, Pastor Commentary, Calvary Chapel

“Greeting”—that translation is a little stilted, for the word in the Greek literally means “rejoice.” He writes to them and says, “Rejoice.” James was not sour-tempered. James was a man with a lot of life in him.¹⁴

JNTC: Ya’akov was not only **a slave of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah** but also his brother, as well as leader of the Messianic community in Jerusalem. See Mt 13:55, Ac 12:17N.

“**The Twelve Tribes**” refers to Jews and is not merely a metaphor for Christians, as some Christian commentators maintain. This is clear from the style of the letter generally, and particularly from the fact that they had synagogues (2:2&N). Not that Gentile Christians were excluded from reading it, but that the leader of the Messianic Jewish community in Jerusalem is addressing fellow Jewish believers **in the Diaspora**, outside Israel; compare Yn 7:35&N, 1 Ke 1:1&N, and this citation from the Talmud (Shabbat 16a): “Rabbi [Judah haNasi] went to the Diaspora,” where the Greek word “*diaspora*,” which means “dispersion,” appears in Hebrew transliteration. Possibly Ya’akov is writing Messianic Jews who knew him personally in Jerusalem but fled Sha’ul’s persecution (Ac 8:1–3) or the later one of Acts 12 (44 C.E.). But it seems more likely that these were Jews already living in the Diaspora when they came to faith, for whom Ya’akov’s words carry his authority as the Lord’s brother and leader of the Jerusalem community.¹⁵

James 1:2

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

[fall into] Greek: *peripipto* (GSN-4045), to fall into; to be caught by. Here; Luke 10:30; Acts 27:41.

[divers temptations] Different trials. Greek: *peirasmos* (GSN-3986), trial; attack; put to proof; examine; question (Galatians 4:14). A trial of any kind, not necessarily temptation to sin (James 1:2-4,12; 1 Peter 1:7). Signifies affliction, persecution, or trial of any kind; and in this sense it is used here, not intending diabolic suggestion, or what is generally understood by the word temptation.

LAN: James doesn’t say *if* you face trials, but *whenever* you face them. He assumes that we will have trials and that it is possible to profit from them. The point is not to pretend to be happy when we face pain, but to have a positive outlook (“consider it pure joy”) because of what trials can produce in our lives. James tells us to turn our hardships into times of learning. Tough times can teach us perseverance. For other passages dealing with perseverance (also called patience and steadfastness), see Romans 2:7; Romans 5:3-5; Romans 8:24-25; 2 Cor. 6:3-7; 2 Peter 1:2-9.

¹⁴ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁵ Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:1). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Though James' command was direct and forceful, he did not preach at his audience. He identified with them. He addressed them warmly as "my brothers." This mode of address is characteristic of the epistle. He used this familiar form no less than 15 times. James' direct commands are coupled with deep compassion.

McGee: "Divers temptations" means various trials. In other words, when you are having trouble, don't start crying as if something terrible has happened to you. You are to *rejoice* and count it all joy that God is testing you in this way!

The question is often asked whether the Christian is to experience joy in depth in all the trials and tensions of life. Very frankly, the answer is no—that is not what James is saying here. It leads to unreality to say that you are reconciled to the will of God when troubles come to you when you really are not reconciled. People piously say they have accepted God's will yet go around with a long face and weep half the time. My friend, you are not reconciled to the will of God until you can rejoice.

James goes on to make it clear that God does not give us trouble for trouble's sake; it is not an end in itself.¹⁶

BSB: In this chapter (vv. 2, 12-14) is found the classic example of the biblical distinction between "trial" and "temptation." "Trials" in v. 2 comes from *πειρασμος* (Gk.), which often means a "fiery trial" or a "proving," tests which are for the purpose of building fortitude in the believer. The word translated "perfect" (*τελειος*, Gk., v. 4) means the "end" or "completeness" of a process or thing. The trials are designed to bring about spiritual maturity and completeness in the believer (v. 3). In vv. 12-14, James makes it clear that God never takes the initiative in "tempting" men. The general biblical teaching on this distinction is that whereas God allows men to be tested, He cannot by His very nature test men with evil intent (v. 13). Clearly when men are tempted to do evil, it is the consequence of yielding to Satan's enticements because of their own fallen sinful natures (cf. Eph 2:1-3). "Brethren" is a key word in the epistle, used 15 times by James. It sometimes softens a harsh rebuke. James also uses it as a linguistic device to make transition to a new topic of discussion.

Chuck Smith: We are constantly faced with temptations. It's just a part of life. And in each temptation there has to be a decision on our part, whether or not we are going to walk in the flesh or to walk in the Spirit. For temptation is any situation that would draw me into the flesh and into a fleshly reaction. I have to choose. Will I walk after the flesh? Will I walk after the Spirit? And we realize that there are all kinds of temptation. They come from all directions.

Temptations that come because of our possessions. Something happening to my possession because we try to possess our possessions. We so often find ourselves angered, responding in the flesh because something has happened to my prized possession.

Now we are told to count it all joy, a strange response to temptations. Usually I don't like to be tested. I would rather that everything went very smoothly. I would rather that

¹⁶ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

no one got in my way. I would rather that no one cross me. No one cut in front of me. That I would much rather see. But it doesn't happen that way. Life isn't that way. Life is filled with disappointments. There are always those that are going crosscurrent to you. There will always be those who will be irritants to you. An irritating situation. I cannot rule and order my life, as I would have it.

If I did, I would become so spoiled and rotten and pompous. Wanting everybody to bow. Wanting everybody to yield. Wanting everybody to submit. Doesn't happen that way. And so for my growth, for my development, temptation is necessary. It's a part of the testing and that's what we are told here.

James 1:3

Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

[trying of your faith worketh patience] Trials test religion and faith and the man who stands true in them proves his religion sound and his faith genuine. Tests work patience and patience works perfection (James 1:3-4,12; Romans 5:3-5; 1 Peter 1:7).

LAN: We can't really know the depth of our character until we see how we react under pressure. It is easy to be kind to others when everything is going well, but can we still be kind when others are treating us unfairly? God wants to make us mature and complete, not to keep us from all pain. Instead of complaining about our struggles, we should see them as opportunities for growth. Thank God for promising to be with you in rough times. Ask him to help you solve your problems or to give you the strength to endure them. Then be patient. God will not leave you alone with your problems; he will stay close and help you grow.

McGee: God has a goal in mind—you can count on that. James is speaking here about the attitude of your heart toward your trouble. The Greek aorist tense used here suggests that the joy is the result of the trial. In Hebrews 12 we see that one method God uses in the life of the believer is chastening, which literally means “child training.” Trials are meaningless, suffering is senseless, and testing is irrational unless there is some good purpose for them. God says there is a reason for them, and it is a *good* reason. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). When the external pressures of testing are upon us and we are placed in the fires of adversity and tragedy and suffering, the attitude of faith should be that God has permitted it for a purpose and He has a high and lofty goal in view. We can know that God is working something out in our lives.

I must hasten to add that this does not necessarily mean that we will *understand* what purpose God has in it. This is the test of *faith*. We walk by faith and not by sight. Someone in the Middle Ages said, “God nothing does, nor suffers to be done, but what we would ourselves, if we could see through all events of things as well as He.”

What are some of the purposes served in the testing of faith? In this epistle, James says that testing is the proof positive of genuine faith. Let me use a rather homely illustration. Some years ago I had the privilege of leading to the Lord a secretary to one of the officers in a large airplane plant here in Southern California. On a number of

occasions she asked me to speak to a Bible study class in that plant. While I was there I learned something of how airplanes are built. They start out by designing a new plane on the drawing board. Then blueprints are drawn up and models are made. The models are tested, and then construction begins. After about two years the first plane will roll off the assembly line. The question remains: Will it fly? Will it perform? Will it stand the test? So a test pilot must then put the plane through the paces up in the air. When the plane has proven to be all that the maker has said it is, there is confidence in the plane and the airlines will buy it. It is then brought to the airport where passengers will board it, and the plane thus becomes serviceable and useful. In the same sense, ore is brought to an assayer to prove that it is gold or that it is silver. He will put a fire under it and pour acid on it, and then he declares whether or not it is genuine. Likewise God puts faith to the test to prove that it is genuine. Someone has expressed it like this: "The acid of grief tests the coin of belief" There is a lot of truth in that.

God tests our faith for a purpose: "Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." He tests us in order that He might produce patience in our lives.¹⁷

NSB: The word translated **testing of your faith** occurs only here and in 1 Pet. 1:7. The term, which means "tested" or "approved," was used for coins that were genuine and not debased. The aim of testing is not to destroy or afflict, but to purge and refine. It is essential to Christian maturity, for even Abraham's faith had to be tested (see Gen. 22:1–8). The meaning of **patience** transcends the idea of bearing affliction; it includes the idea of standing fast under pressure, with a staying power that turns adversities into opportunities.¹⁸

Chuck Smith: The another word for that is the proving of our faith. You say you believe God? Hey, big deal. Devils do, too. The proving of your faith.

Now the proving of the faith is never really for God's benefit. God knows the truth about you the whole while.

Someone told me the other day, "Oh, I'm afraid I've disappointed God." I said, "No, no, no, it's impossible to disappoint God. You've disappointed yourself. God knew it all the time. You didn't and so you disappointed yourself. You didn't disappoint God. He knew that was there. He knew that that would be your response. He wasn't at all disappointed."

We disappoint ourselves because we oftentimes think we are further down the road than we really are. I thought I was over that hump. I thought I had conquered that area. And here comes the situation where I'm tested and golly, I blow it. You know I'm so disappointed. Why did I say that? Why did I do that? But I shouldn't feel condemned like "Oh, I've let God down," or "I disappointed God." No, God knew it the whole while. But I needed to know it. And so God allowed the situation so I could find it out. And so temptation, something that is common to all men. Count it all joy because temptation is the testing of our faith and this testing of our faith develops patience, or works patience (Jam 1:3).

What a needed quality, patience. So often our failure is in waiting upon God. And that is true throughout the Bible. So many within the Scriptures got into trouble because they didn't wait upon God. They failed in the test of faith in areas of their life.

¹⁷ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁸ Nelson Study Bible

Abraham though he passed the test magnificently with Isaac, yet failed in the birth of Isaac. When God promised to give him a son. He wasn't patient. Sarah finally came and said, oh, come on, Abraham; it's not going to work. You take my handmaid and you have a son by her. And when the child is born, I'll take it on my lap and it will be as my child. But I'm just not going to be able to bear a child, Abraham. Now let's be reasonable about this. Failure of faith. They didn't wait upon God until God responded or answered. The testing of our faith develops patience.

But, like Abraham, whenever I do not wait upon God, I'm always botching things up. Creating problems for myself. And so it's important that I'm tested. That I learn to wait upon God. Knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience.

James 1:4

But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

Six Perfect Things in James (Dake)

1. Perfect work of patience (James 1:4)
2. Perfect knowledge (Phil. 3:15)
3. Perfect gifts (James 1:17)
4. Perfect law of liberty (James 1:25)
5. Perfect faith by works (James 2:22)
6. Perfect man by restraint (James 3:2)

[that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing] Two blessings of perfect patience:

1. Perfect—personal perfection in the knowledge of the gospel and the will of God. Greek: *teleios* (GSN-5046) (Phil. 3:15).
2. Entire—personal completeness in all graces and gifts of God. Greek: *holokleros* (GSN-3648), complete in all parts. Translated whole in 1 Thes. 5:23.

McGee: It is patience which will make you a full-grown Christian, but how does God produce patience in you? The very interesting thing is that patience is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. You will never become patient by trying to be patient, but neither will the Holy Spirit place it on a silver platter and offer it to you as a gift. Patience comes through suffering and testing.

“But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” You will never be a “perfect”—that is, a complete, fully mature—Christian without patience. Some Christians therefore have never really grown up but have remained babes. I made the statement as a pastor one Sunday morning that there were more babes in the church service than there were in the nursery downstairs. I tell you, I didn't get too many laughs from that comment. The difference, however, is that the babies in the nursery were beautiful, but the ones sitting in the church service were not very pretty. There is much clamoring and criticizing, turmoil and tension in our churches today. The reason is that many Christians have not grown up; they are still babes.

David wrote in Psalm 131, “LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child” (Ps. 131:1–2). In other words, David said, “I found out I had to grow up. I needed to get off milk and start eating porterhouse steak. I needed to eat of the Bread of Life.” God tested David, and that testing enabled him to grow up.

Paul wrote in the Book of Romans that patience is one of the results of being justified by faith: “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope” (Rom. 5:3–4). There is a purpose in it all, you see.

There are many shallow and superficial saints today. There are many who are insecure as Christians. There are believers who try to be intellectual and who question the Word of God. And there are those who feel that as Christians we should try the “new morality.” My friend, the problem with such believers is that they have never grown up—they are still little babes. God gives testing and trials to produce patience in our lives and that we might become full-grown children of God. How we need that today.

God must send us trouble so that we learn patience, which will also produce hope and love in the lives of men and women. Over the years of my ministry I have seen the Holy Spirit work this out in the lives of many folk. I recall one man who, when I first knew him, was always finding fault; as a pastor I had never had such a critic before. Then he began to attend the midweek Bible study at the church. I noticed that he brought his Bible and took notes. Over a period of ten years God sent that man a great deal of trouble, but he grew up and became one of the sweetest Christians I have ever known in my life. This is the type of testing which God gives to those who are His own.¹⁹

Chuck Smith: And that's the whole purpose of God is to bring you into a maturity. That we quit acting and responding like little children to the disappointments of life. That we quit throwing our little tantrums at God, stomping our foot and walking away and saying, I'm not going to talk to you anymore. But that we grow up and become mature.

James 1:5

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

[lack] Greek: *leipo* (GSN-3007), come short of. Translated lack (James 1:5; Luke 18:22); wanting (James 1:4; Titus 1:5; Titus 3:13); and destitute (James 2:15). What any man lacks of wisdom he may have.

[wisdom] Greek: *sophia* (GSN-4678), cleverness; skill; scientific knowledge; wisdom. Translated wisdom 49 times.

¹⁹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Clarke: If any of you lack wisdom—Wisdom signifies in general knowledge of the best end, and the best means of attaining it; but in Scripture it signifies the same as true religion, the thorough practical knowledge of God, of one's self, and of a Savior.

Fifteen Ways "Wisdom" Is Used (Dake)

1. Human education (Acts 7:22)
2. Man's wisdom (1 Cor. 1:19-22; 1 Cor. 2:1-13)
3. Human philosophy and religion (Col. 2:23; 1 Cor. 3:19; 2 Cor. 1:12; Galatians 1:14)
4. Earthly, sensual, devilish wisdom (James 3:14-16)
5. Prophetic anointing (Luke 11:49)
6. Godly training (Luke 2:40,52)
7. Anointing to speak (Luke 21:15; Acts 6; 1 Cor. 2:7)
8. Ministerial ability (Ephes. 1:8,17; Ephes. 3:10; Col. 1:19,28)
9. Christ the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24,30; Col. 2:3; Col. 3:16)
10. Divine gift of wisdom (1 Cor. 12:8)
11. Divine attribute of God (Romans 11:33)
12. Heavenly wisdom (James 3:17-18)
13. Spirit of revelation (2 Peter 3:15)
14. Ability of Christ (Matthew 12:42; Matthew 13:54)
15. Native insight (Rev. 13:18; Rev. 17:9)

[let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him]

Six Secrets of Answered Prayer (Dake)

1. Lack—consciousness of needs (James 1:5)
2. Let him ask of God (James 1:5; Phil. 4:6)
3. That giveth to all men liberally (James 1:5; Matthew 7:7-11; Matthew 21:22; Mark 11:22-24)
4. Upbraideth not (James 1:5). Greek: oneidizo (GSN-3679). Translated upbraid (James 1:5; Matthew 11:20; Mark 16:14); revile (Matthew 5:11; Mark 15:32); cast in one's teeth (Matthew 27:44); and reproach (Luke 6:22; Romans 15:3; 1 Tim. 4:10; 1 Peter 4:14). Men have been rebuked for unbelief, but never for having faith (Matthew 6:30; Matthew 8:26; Matthew 11:20; Matthew 17:17; Mark 16:14)
5. It shall be given him (James 1:5; Matthew 7:7-11; Matthew 17:20; Matthew 21:22; Mark 9:23; Mark 11:22-24; Luke 11:1-13; Luke 18:1-14; John 14:12-15; John 15:7,16; John 16:23-26; 1 John 3:21-22; 1 John 5:13-14)
6. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering (James 1:6; Hebrews 11:6)

McGee: "Wisdom" here is related to the trials which James has been talking about. You and I have troubles and trials and problems. How are you going to solve this problem? How are you going to meet this issue? How are you going to deal with this person? If you lack wisdom in regard to a problem, you need to go to God in prayer.

Wisdom is the exercise and practical use of knowledge. Many people have knowledge, but they do not have any practical sense whatsoever. Even to this day I get a good laugh just thinking about the man with a Ph.D. with whom I used to play golf. One

day out on the golf course it began to rain, and he looked at me in utter amazement and asked, “What shall we do now?” Well, you don’t need a Ph.D. to know that you need to get in out of the rain! I said to him, “I think we’d better seek shelter.” Wisdom is to know how to act under certain circumstances of testing, of trial, or when problems or questions arise. Life is filled with these, and you and I need wisdom from God.

“That giveth to all men liberally, and up-braideth not.” God is in the business of giving out wisdom “liberally,” that is, simply. He will just simply help you out in times like that. He “upbraideth not” means, according to Marvin R. Vincent in his *Word Studies in the New Testament*, it is the “pure, simple giving of good without admixture of evil or bitterness.” If we lack wisdom, let’s go to God who will hear and answer our prayer.²⁰

James 1:6

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

[let him ask in faith]

Sevenfold Way to Pray to Get Answers (Dake)

1. Pray to the Father (John 16:23)
2. In the name of Jesus (John 14:12-15)
3. By the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26)
4. With full understanding of rights and privileges (1 Cor. 14:14-15)
5. In harmony with the Word (John 15:7)
6. In faith, nothing doubting (James 1:6)
7. With praise for the answer (Phil. 4:6)

[nothing wavering] Nothing doubting. Greek: *diakrino* (GSN-1252), doubting; staggering (1 Cor. 11:29).

[he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed] He who doubts is like a wave that is rising one moment, sinking the next. One minute he believes; another he does not. He says yes and then no to what God has promised, never making up his mind which way he believes. He staggers like a drunken man, helpless in prayer.

McGee: Maybe it is not your problem, but it has been my problem over a great deal of my Christian life that I simply have not believed God. Don’t misunderstand me—I have trusted Christ as my Savior, and I believe with all my soul that He saved me and is going to save me for heaven. I believe that with all my heart, but down here in this life, where the rubber meets the road, is where I have had my problems. For example, I went through college in almost total unbelief—I didn’t believe God could put me through college. I was a poor boy who had to borrow money and work at a full-time job. It was difficult. Every year I would finish, thinking I would not be able to come back the next year. Lo and behold, God always opened up a door, and I was able to continue. I was actually a miserable fellow as I went through college; when I look back, I realize I could have had a lot more fun if I had only believed God.

²⁰ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

“But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.” Why don’t you believe God, my friend? Do you as a Christian have a long face today? Are you wondering how your problems are going to work out? I know exactly how you feel—I’ve been there. Why don’t you believe God? Why don’t you trust Him and turn them over to Him? I know I do not have the brains to meet the problems of life; I know I am not capable of living in this complex civilization, but I have a heavenly Father who can supply the wisdom that I need.

“For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.” We say, “I believe God is going to work this out,” but then we jump at it ourselves and make our own decision. So often I turn a problem over to the Lord and believe Him, but then the next day I do not believe Him. I decide that nothing has shown up by way of solution, so I will solve it myself. That’s where I make my mistake. Such a man is “like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.”²¹

James 1:7

For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

[let not that men think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord] It is as certain that a doubtful man will not get an answer as it is that the man of faith will get an answer (James 1:5,7).

Chuck Smith: My commitment to God needs to be a complete commitment. I'm not to hold things out and then pull them back. I'm not to offer God my life and then take it back. I'm not really to ask for wisdom and then do my own thing. It isn't asking for wisdom and then making up my mind whether or not I want to follow it. Asking God to reveal His will so I can determine whether or not I want to yield to it. I must make a decision. I must make a commitment. I must determine that I'm going to just commit my life to the Lord's keeping, and then just believe the Lord to keep it. And when things aren't going quite right, or I can't quite understand what's happening, don't say, "Oh, I better take over here now, you know, I don't know what the Lord is doing." And this is so common among us, this wavering bit. Not really for sure. Offering and then taking back. You become unstable in everything.

James 1:8

A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

[double minded] This term was used by the Jews of a man who attempted to worship God and still loved the creature; who wished to secure both worlds. He would not give up the world here and yet was loathe to give up heaven—one torn between carnal and spiritual things.

²¹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

McGee: This was Israel’s big problem. Hosea said Israel was like a silly dove. She first flew off to Egypt seeking help, and then she flew to Assyria. She turned first to one and then to the other, but she did not turn to God. Many times when a problem comes up we go here and there trying to solve it, until it occurs to us that we have never taken it to God. When you started out today did you turn the issues of the day over to God? I used to do a great deal of counseling as a pastor, and I would meet many new people during the day. One of the prayers I always prayed was, “Lord, I’m going to meet some new people today, and I don’t know how to treat them. This man may prove to be a wonderful friend who wants to help me get out the Word of God. This other man may be seeking to hurt my ministry. Lord, help me to know the difference. Help me to be able to know which man I can put my arm around and help, and make me wary of the man who does not want my help at all. Lord, give me wisdom today.” We need wisdom to meet the issues of life.²²

James 1:9

Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

[Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted] Let the poor Christian rejoice in his hope of heaven, but the rich one in his humiliation, for both are here only for a short while (James 1:9-11).

Christians who aren’t in high positions in this world should be glad, because they are great in the Lord’s eyes. This “brother in humble circumstances” is a person without status or wealth. Such people are often overlooked, even in our churches today, but they are not overlooked by God.

McGee: You may say, “I’m just a poor individual. I don’t have very much. I don’t have any wealth.” My friend, if you are a child of God you have a lot of wealth. You have treasure in heaven. And have you ever stopped to think what you have down here, what you have in Christ? We have everything in Him. Paul wrote, “Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” (1 Cor 3:21–23). I belong to Christ, and everything He has He will make over to me. I have life. I have blessings. Even death is coming to me someday, if Christ doesn’t come in the meantime. All of that is from Him, and all of these things we can rejoice in. It does not matter if you are the humblest saint or the poorest person on earth, you are rich in Christ, my friend, and you have something to rejoice over.²³

²² McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²³ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

James 1:10

But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

[flower] Greek: *anthos* (GSN-438). Here and 1 Peter 1:24.

McGee: I always think of this verse when I walk across the campus of my alma mater. Every building there is named for some rich man. Do you know where those rich men are today? They are like the flowers which bloomed yesterday but are gone today. I think of how powerful they were, the riches and the influence they had, but today they are pushing up daisies somewhere and they have faded away. Don't rejoice in the fact that you are a rich man, because you will not have your money very long. You may have invested in gilt-edged bonds, and you may have stocks which you do not think you will lose. My friend, you may not lose them, but those stocks and bonds are going to lose *you* one of these days. In death you will not be able to hold on to them. The old adage says, "There's no pocket in a shroud." You won't be able to take it with you. The rich man is like the flower of the grass—he shall pass away.²⁴

JNTC: Ya'akov has more to say about the poor and **the rich** at 2:1–9, 5:1–6; compare 1C 7:22.

The *sharav* is the hot, dry wind which blows across Israel from the deserts east of the Land in the spring and (less often) in the fall. **The sun rises with the *sharav*.** Weather like this made Jonah faint and want to die (Jonah 4:8). Compare Isaiah 40:7 ("The grass withers, the flower fades when a wind from *Adonai* blows upon it"); Psalm 102:4, 11.²⁵

James 1:11

For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

[burning] Greek: *kauson* (GSN-2742). Here; Matthew 20:12; Luke 12:55.

[so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways] The rich man who is outside of Christ fades away like a flower (1 Tim. 6:9-18).

McGee: I had the privilege years ago of speaking occasionally to a group of Christians in Hollywood, California. Among those who attended was a movie star who had become a Christian later on in life. She was getting old at that time, and when I looked at her I thought of how that beauty, which had brought her fame and fortune at one time, was now passing away. God says that the rich man shall "fade away in his ways."

²⁴ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²⁵ Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:9). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

My friend, rejoice today that you have a Savior who is not only going to save you for heaven—that's good enough for me—but He is going to help you this very day.

When I teach the Book of Proverbs I liken it to a young man who is considering the catalogs he has received from different universities—among which is the University of Wisdom. Here in the Epistle of James we find a different school—the School of Hard Knocks. That is the school most of us are in today. God wants to bring all those who are His own to full maturity as Christians, and He has many tests for doing that. He tests all of His children to see whether or not they are genuine, to weed out the phonies and the pseudosaints. He also wants to give assurance to His children. We should not regard our trials as evidence that we are not His children but rather as proof positive of our faith. My friend, if you are not having a little trouble today, you should question your salvation; if you are having trouble, that is a good sign that you belong to Him. While God has many goals in His testing, the one James has emphasized here is patience. God not only wants to give you proof that you are a genuine child of His, he also wants to produce patience in your life.

Much has been written about testing and God's purposes in it. William Penn, the man from whom the state of Pennsylvania got its name, made this statement: "No pain, no balm. No thorn, no throne. No gall, no glory. No cross, no crown."

Someone else has expressed it like this: "If I must carry a burden, Christ will carry me. Sometimes we must be laid low before we look high. In ourselves we are weak, even where we are strong. In Christ we are strong, even where we are weak. It's not how long you'll live, but how you are going to live." This perspective is important to have.

Many people wonder why in the world they must endure a particular experience. A number of years ago I received a letter from a Christian man who wrote: "I have a wife who has been sick for the past twenty years and has been paralysed for the last ten years with Parkinson's disease. There is no hope of her ever leaving the hospital. How can a loving Father make a person suffer and linger as she has? And I know she loves the Lord." This man was genuinely concerned. He didn't have an answer for his problem, and neither did I. I couldn't tell him why it was happening, but I could tell him there was a purpose in it and that God was working out something in her life.²⁶

Chuck Smith: So James has quite a few things to say concerning the rich. And that is, those who are possessed by their riches he rebukes in chapter two those people in the church who pay special respect to the rich people. Because a person has money, sort of giving them special favors. And that's a policy rebuked in chapter two.

Here in chapter one, he speaks out against those rich who would use their riches to oppress others, to gain a special position. He says, "Hey, you're going to fade like a flower in the field. You're going to pass away." A man of low degree better rejoice in that he's exalted. But the rich in that he is made low.

In the final chapter of the book, he says, "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for the miseries that are come upon you. For you've laid up your gold and silver for the last days. But now it's worthless" (James 5:1-3).

²⁶ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

James 1:12

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

[**Blessed**] Greek: *makarios* (GSN-3107). Translated happy 6 times and blessed 43 times (Matthew 5:3-11; etc.).

[**the crown of life**] The crown is laid up for all who prove true, but possessed of none until time of reward. It is in view, not in possession.

Ten Crowns in Scripture (Dake)

1. Crown of honor (Proverbs 12:4; Proverbs 17:6; Esther 8:15; Job 19:9)
2. Crown of kings (2 Samuel 12:30; Esther 1:11; Esther 2:17; Rev. 19:12-16)
3. High Priest's crown (Exodus 29:6)
4. Crown of pride (Isaiah 28:1-5)
5. Crown of thorns (Matthew 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2-5)
6. Crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4; Proverbs 4:9; Proverbs 16:31; Isaiah 62:3)
7. Crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8)
8. Crown of life (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10)
9. Corruptible crown (1 Cor. 9:25)
10. Soul winner's crown (1 Thes. 2:19)

The crown of life is like the victory wreath given to winning athletes (see 1 Cor. 9:25). God's crown of life is not glory and honor here on earth, but the reward of eternal life—living with God forever. The way to be in God's winners' circle is by loving him and staying faithful even under pressure.

McGee: "Temptation" is the same word as we have had before, which is sometimes translated as "testing" or "trying." "Temptation" is a good translation if you understand it in a good sense, as we will see later in this chapter.

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." Testing is one of God's methods of developing us in the Christian faith. This is the way He is going to enable us to grow and develop patience in our lives down here, but He also has something in mind for the future—"the crown of life."

Testing of any kind, but especially if it is a severe calamity or tragedy, has a tendency to produce a miasma of pessimism and hopelessness. I do not blame the man whose wife was ill with Parkinson's disease for feeling like he did. I do not blame him for asking, "Why?" But the child of God can have the confidence that God is doing it for a very definite reason and that He has a purpose in it all.

However, the man of the world will sink beneath the waves of adversity. Life, even at its best, makes him pessimistic. How many pessimists are there today? How many cynics? How many are there who are filled with bitterness, although they have everything? We are seeing an epidemic of suicides among teenagers, and thousands of other young people are dropping out of society today. Why? It is because they have no goal in life. One of the more sensible news commentators made this remark: "Back

during the Depression people had a will to live and there were very few suicides, but today when everything has been given to them they want to die.”

When faith is tested and surrounded by darkness, when the waves are rolling high and all seems lost, the child of God knows that this is not the end. It may be gloom now, but it will be glory later on. As the psalmist said “... weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Ps. 30:5). James says here, “He shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”

I have noticed that people who have suffered a great deal have been brought into a closer loving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Someone has expressed it like this:

Is there no other way open, God,
Except through sorrow, pain, and loss,
To stamp Christ’s likeness on my soul—
No other way except the cross?

And then a voice stills all my soul
As stilled the waves of Galilee,
“Can’st thou not bear the furnace heat
If midst the flames I walk with thee?
“I bore the cross. I know its weight.
I drank the cup I hold for thee.
Can’st thou not follow where I lead?
I’ll give thee strength. Lean hard on Me.”
—Author unknown

You see, suffering brings an individual into a loving relationship with Christ. And it causes him to look forward to that day when he will be brought into the presence of the Lord Jesus who will give him the crown of life.

What is “the crown of life”? There are many crowns mentioned in Scripture which are given as *rewards* to believers. A crown is not salvation, but it represents a reward. It is something that is given to an individual as a reward. For example, there was an unknown boy from California who went to the Olympic Games and won six gold medals. Suddenly his face was seen on every billboard, on television, and even in commercials. I am told he also signed a movie contract. He won six medals—he received his rewards. My Christian friend, the Lord Jesus has a reward for those who will endure down here. James says, “He shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”

Testing will either drive you to the Lord or it will drive you away from Him. So many Christians become bitter. My friend, it is not going to be a pleasant experience to come someday into the presence of Christ if you have let the very thing your heavenly Father was using to develop your character and to bring you into a loving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ make you bitter. We will have testings, but there is going to be a crown of life for those who persevere under trial.

I have done a great deal of reading about the crowns which are mentioned in Scripture, and I sometimes wonder where some of the interpreters get all their information. Let me give you my very simple interpretation of what I think a crown of life is. We find in Scripture that there are different kinds of punishment for the lost. Some will receive so many stripes, others will receive more stripes. There are *degrees of*

punishment for the lost. Likewise there are *degrees of rewards* for believers. I do not expect to receive the reward that a man like Paul the apostle or Martin Luther or John Wesley will receive. Although I don't expect to receive a reward as they will, I do hope that I can come in for something—I am very much interested in that. I think that a “crown of life” is that which can bring you into a closer relationship with the Lord Jesus more than anything else possibly could.

In the Book of Revelation it speaks about the Lord giving to each of His own a stone with a name written on it (see Rev. 2:17). We have assumed that that means He will give each of us a new name. There's an old favorite gospel song that says, “There's a new name written down in glory....” Well, it is not the new name spoken of in Revelation, but it is *your* name that is written down in glory if you are a child of God. As best as I can determine, the new name spoken of in Revelation means that God is going to give each of us a stone on which there is written a name of Christ which applies to our experience with Him. To you He means something a little special other than what He might mean to someone else. In other words, the Lord Jesus means something to you that He does not mean to me. He means something to me that He does not mean to you.

I can remember a time in my life as a young fellow that I stood at the crossroads at a Bible conference, trying to decide if I would go into the ministry or continue to follow a life of sin. There was a girl there at that conference in whom I was very much interested, but she was not really what you would call Bible conference material. I never shall forget that night yonder in Middle Tennessee. I crawled in under a water maple tree which was thick with leaves. In the shade—for the moon was shining brightly—I got down on my face and told the Lord Jesus that I needed His help and strength to make a decision. As a result of that night He means something to me that I'm sure He does not mean to you. You probably have a precious moment in your life which I have not experienced. I believe that the new name written on a stone is going to reflect what Christ means specially to you.

It is my conclusion that the crown of life means that you are going to have a degree of life in heaven which someone else will not have. There are a lot of folk who have gone through this world without doing anything for God. I thank God there was one thief on a cross who turned to Christ, but I cannot imagine that he will get very much of a reward, especially when I compare him to a man like Paul the apostle. Imagine what it is going to be like someday when Paul receives the crown of life!

Paul was very much interested in the crown of life, and James was interested in it too. There will be a crown of life, but you cannot receive that crown of life until you have been out on the racecourse of life, until you have gotten right down where the rubber meets the road and where life is being lived out. If you can live for God down here, my friend, He has a crown of life for you someday. That is something to which we can look forward.

When I think of the testings of this life, I am reminded of the deacon who got up in a testimony meeting in which the people were being asked to give their favorite verses of Scripture. This deacon got up and said, “My favorite verse is ‘It came to pass.’” The minister looked up in amazement, and all the people were puzzled. Finally, the pastor asked, “Brother, what do you mean your favorite verse is ‘It came to pass?’” The man replied, “When I have trouble and trials, I just go to the Lord and praise Him and say, ‘I

thank You, Lord, that it came to pass—it didn't come to stay!" Thank God for that, my friend. I don't know a better way of putting it: The trouble hasn't come to stay.

James uses the same argument to warn the rich when he says, "You are like the grass and the flower of the grass." It may look pretty for you today. Life may be beautiful, my friend, but the flower is withering and your riches will not deliver you. Someday you will stand before Jesus Christ. Every human being is to stand before Him—the unbelievers will stand before God at the Great White Throne judgment. Also all believers, called the church, will go beforehand to the *bema* seat of Christ to see whether or not they will receive a crown of life. I don't know about you, but I'd like to have that crown, the crown which He offers to those who, after they have endured the testings of this life, *love Him*.²⁷

Chuck Smith: That has victory over temptations. What a glorious thing it is when I have been tempted and I'm victorious. I didn't respond after the flesh. I didn't get all upset and angry and say mean things that now I am sorry for. Have you ever noticed how miserable you are whenever you fail? Whenever you blow it? Whenever you just give over to the flesh and you say all these nasty things and you just you know yell and say mean things to people. Afterwards you ever notice how miserable you are? How you just sort of hate yourself and you're embarrassed to go around the people again. You know you've got to apologize for the things you said and all. And you just feel horrible, you feel miserable. I got in the flesh. Miserable experience.

But oh how blessed it is when you have victory and I didn't respond according to the flesh. When I responded after the Spirit, when I did the right thing. And you feel so good because you know that the Lord gave you the strength to respond in the Spirit. Happy is the man that endures temptations, for when he is tempted.

Faith is tested; we turn out to be true. And it's important that the faith be tested because we are so prone to deceive ourselves. In the next chapter, actually in this chapter he's going to talk twice of self-deception. If you're a "hearer of the word only, you're deceiving yourself" (James 1:22). If you think that you're a religious person and yet you don't bridle your own tongue, you're deceiving yourself. Your religion is vain. So it is important that faith be tested. It's important that I know where I am. That I know what God knows about me. That I not think more highly of myself than I ought to. That I am not deceived and living in a false sense of security. But that I know the truth. And God allows the temptations, the testing, in order that I might know the truth about myself.

God said to the children of Israel, "For forty years I suffered you in the wilderness, and I tempted you and I proved you, to see what was in your heart" (Deuteronomy 8:2). Not that God would see what was in their heart, He knew it but they didn't know it. So He tested them so that they could see what was in their heart. "For the heart is deceitful, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). It is deceitful and we are guilty so often of deceiving ourselves.

"Be not deceived," Paul said (1 Corinthians 6:9). Testing is a great way to learn the truth about me. It comes out in the time of trial. Again, when everything is going great, everything is running smooth; I don't know the truth about me. I don't know how I would respond in real adversity. God allows the adversity so that I can see the truth about myself and how I would respond in adversity. And when the adversity comes and I

²⁷ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

respond after the Spirit, Ah man, what a joyful delight. I often say, "Hey, that's not me. That's the Lord working in me because that isn't the way I would naturally respond." And it's a joy to see God's Spirit working in our lives, transforming us into the image of Jesus Christ.

When we've been tried, [we] shall receive the crown of life (Jam 1:12),

Now Jesus to the church of Smyrna in His letter to the church of Smyrna in book of Revelation 2, He spoke about the trials that they were going to go through. But He said, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give to thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). And so this glorious crown of life, that eternal life that we have through Jesus Christ.

James 1:13

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

[let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man] After using the word temptation in the sense of trial, James now uses it in the sense of solicitation to sin. God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does He tempt any man with it. Evil temptations come from evil, not from good.

LAN: Temptation comes from evil desires inside us, not from God. It begins with an evil thought and becomes sin when we dwell on the thought and allow it to become an action. Like a snowball rolling downhill, sin grows more destructive the more we let it have its way. The best time to stop a temptation is before it is too strong or moving too fast to control. See Matthew 4:1-11; 1 Cor. 10:13; and 2 Tim. 2:22 for more about escaping temptation.

McGee: "Temptation" is used in two senses: testing under trial, as we have seen in verse 12, and now solicitation to evil, verses 13–14. James is now going to talk about that temptation, which is temptation to do evil. People often say that the Lord tested them when it wasn't the Lord at all. God cannot be tempted with evil, and He does not tempt with evil. James deals with something here which is very important for God's children to understand, because we often blame God for a great many things in our lives for which He is not responsible.

We have seen in the preceding verses that God tests His own children, but now James makes it very clear that God never tests men with evil and with sin. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God"—a more literal translation is this: "Let not one man being tempted say, I am tempted of God." Notice that James is no longer using the noun *temptation* as he was previously. He is now using the verb; he is speaking of the action.

The natural propensity of mankind is to blame God for his own fumbles, all of his foibles, all of his faults and failures and filth. From the very beginning, since the time of the fall of man, this has been true. Adam said, "... The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Gen. 3:12)—he really passed the buck!

The woman did the same thing; she said, "... The serpent beguiled me ..." (Gen. 3:13). Actually, all three of them were responsible.

We often hear questions like this: Why does God send floods and earthquakes and allow the killing of babies? We blame God today for the result of the greed and avarice and selfishness of mankind—that is what is really responsible for floods and earthquakes. Man builds too close to a river and, when in the natural course of events the river rises, he calls it a flood and an act of God. But man thinks it is more pleasant to build by the river, or it's nearer transportation, or that is where the business is. It is actually the greed and avarice of man that causes him to build where it is really dangerous to build.

If you are going to live in Southern California, for example, you are going to take a chance on having an earthquake—you can be sure of that. We had a small one just the other evening as my wife and I were sitting in our den. The seismologists predict that we are in for a big earthquake here, yet people are still streaming into Southern California and putting up high-rise buildings. We ought not to blame God if a slab of concrete falls off one of those high-rise buildings and kills one of our loved ones. It would be much safer in the wide open spaces of Texas. I'm a Texan, but who wants to go back there? I know it's nicer there than when I was just a boy growing up, but I want to stay here in California. However, I'm not going to blame God when the earthquake comes. We have already been warned that it is coming.

Men also blame God in their philosophies today. Pantheism, for instance, says that everything is God, but good is God's right hand and evil is His left hand. Fatalism says that everything is running like blind necessity. If there is a God, they say, He has wound up this universe like an eight-day clock and has gone off and left it. Materialism's explanation of the problem with the human race is that the loftiest aspirations and the vilest passions are the natural metabolism of a physical organism.

God has answered these philosophies in His Word. There is no evil in God. In Him all is goodness and all is light and all is right. John wrote in his first epistle, "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light [that is, He is holy], and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). The Lord Jesus made this very interesting statement: "... for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (John 14:30). That means there is no evil or sin in Him. But every time Satan gets around me, he is able to find something in me.

Let me introduce something which is theological at this point: *Jesus could not sin*. Someone will immediately ask, "Why, then, was He tempted?" In Matthew 4:7 our Lord said to Satan, "... It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." God wants to *save* from sin, and He does not tempt men to sin—He wants to *deliver* men. He never uses sin as a test, but He will permit it, as we shall see. The Lord Jesus had no sin in Him—"The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." The reason He was tempted was to *prove* that there was nothing in Him. After He had lived a life down here for thirty-three years, Satan came with this temptation, a temptation that appealed to man's total personality—the physical side, the mental side, and the spiritual side of man. The Lord Jesus could not fall, and the testing was given to demonstrate that He could not fall. If He could have fallen, then any moment your salvation and mine is in doubt. The minute He yielded to sin, we would have no Savior. His temptation was to prove that He could not sin.

Let me illustrate this with a very homely illustration from my boyhood in west Texas. My dad built cotton gins for the Murray Gin Company, and we lived in a little town that was near a branch of the Brazos River. In the summertime there wasn't enough water in that river to rust a shingle nail, but when it began to rain in wintertime, you could almost float a battleship on it. One year a flood washed out the wooden bridge on which the Santa Fe railroad crossed the river. They replaced it with a steel bridge, and when they completed it, they brought in two locomotives, stopped them on top of the bridge, and tied down both of the whistles. All of us who lived in that little town knew for sure that something was happening. We ran down to see what it was—all twenty-three of us! When we got there, one of the braver citizens asked the engineer, "What are you doing?" The engineer replied, "Well, we built this bridge, and we are testing it." The man asked, "Why? Do you think it's going to fall down?" That engineer drew himself up to his full height and said, "Of course it will not fall down! We are *proving* it won't fall down." For the same reason, Jesus was tested to prove that you and I have a Savior who could not sin. God cannot be tempted with sin, and God will not tempt you with sin.

However, God does *permit* us to be tempted with sin. In 2 Samuel 24:1 we read, "And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." Frankly, that was sinful. Then, *did* God tempt David with evil? My friend, to understand the Bible you always need to get the full story. In 2 Samuel you have man's viewpoint of the events recorded. From man's viewpoint it looked as if God was angry with Israel and He simply had David do this. However, in 1 Chronicles we are told God's viewpoint of it: "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel" (1 Chr. 21:1). Who provoked David to sin? It was Satan, not God. God merely permitted Satan to do that because He was angry with Israel and their sin. God never tempts men with evil.²⁸

JNTC: Satan tempted (or: "tested") Job (Job 1–2) and Yeshua (Mt 4:1–11), but **God tempts no one**. Genesis 22:1 must be understood as God's means of strengthening Abraham's faith (compare MJ 11:17–19, 12:5–10; and see below, 2:17–24), not as tempting him to sin.²⁹

NSB: The focus of the chapter turns from trials (vv. 2–12) to temptation (vv. 13–18). **nor does He ... tempt anyone:** Enticement to sin does not come from God. God will never deliberately lead a person to commit sin because that would not only go against His nature, but it would be opposed to His purpose of molding His creation into His holy image. Yet God does sometimes place His people in adverse circumstances for the purpose of building godly character (see Gen. 22:1, 12).

Chuck Smith: Now this is temptation in a little different sense. This is temptation, which is a solicitation to evil. It isn't a testing that you can find out where you are. But this is actually a solicitation to evil. God doesn't solicit any man to evil. Satan solicits man to evil. Satan solicited Eve to evil.

²⁸ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²⁹ Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:13). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

You remember when there were the five thousand who had followed Jesus to a wilderness place and it was evening and Jesus said to Philip, "You better go in town and buy bread for this multitude" (John 6:5). And John said, "This He said proving him" (John 6:6). The word "prove" there is the same Greek word as "tempt." This He said tempting him because Jesus knew what He was going to do. He just wanted Philip to say, "Oh man, what do you mean, Lord, you know. Where can we buy enough bread for all these people?" And so Jesus said this testing him. Proving him. The Greek word is the same used for tempting him. But it wasn't a solicitation to evil. It is how are you going to respond; in the flesh or in the Spirit?

And so when our temptations come, if it is a solicitation to evil it isn't of God. It's from Satan. So when I am tempted, solicited to do something evil, I shouldn't say, "Oh God really tempted me today, you know. I saw a man drop his wallet and I could see a hundred-dollar bill in it. Boy, I was tempted by God to keep that money." No, no, no! You weren't tempted by God to keep it.

So "don't let any man say when he's tempted I've been tempted of God. God is not tempted with evil, nor does He tempt man with evil." God does put test before us that we might have the opportunity to respond in the flesh or in the Spirit. But God doesn't tempt us or solicit us to evil.

James 1:14

But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

Seven Steps in Temptation

1. Tempted: thought of evil (James 1:14)
2. Drawn away: strong imagination (James 1:14)
3. Lust: delight in viewing it (James 1:14)
4. Enticed: weakening of the will (James 1:14)
5. Lust conceived: yielding (James 1:15)
6. Sin: sinful act committed (James 1:15)
7. Death: result of actual sin (James 1:15)

[own lust] Three kinds of lusts (desires):

1. Lusts of man (James 1:14; James 4:2; Galatians 5:16)
2. Lusts of Satan (John 8:44; Ephes. 2:2-3; Romans 6:12; 1 John 2:17; 1 John 3:8)
3. Lusts (desires) of God (Galatians 5:17,22-23; Psalm 51:6)

[enticed] Greek: *deleazo* (GSN-1185). Translated entice (James 1:14); beguile (2 Peter 2:14); and allure (2 Peter 2:18).

LAN: People who live for God often wonder why they still have temptations. Does God tempt them? God *tests* people, but he does not *tempt* them by trying to seduce them into sin. God allows Satan to tempt people, however, in order to refine their faith and to help them grow in their dependence on Christ. We can resist the temptation to sin by turning to God for strength and choosing to obey his Word.

McGee: We are talking here about the sins of the flesh. Who is responsible when you are drawn away to do evil? When you yield to evil temptation? God is not responsible. The Devil is not responsible. *You* are responsible.

A man got lost in the hills of Arkansas back in the days of the Model T Ford. He had lost his way, and there were no highway markings. He came into a small town and saw some little boys playing there. He asked one of them, "Where am I?" The little fellow looked at him puzzled for just a moment. Finally he pointed at the man with his finger and said, "*There* you are!" My friend, when you ask, "Who tempted me to do this?" God says, "*There* you are. It's in your own skin—that is where the problem is."

"Every man is tempted." *Every* man—this is the declaration of the individuality of the personality in the race of mankind. Just as each one of us has a different fingerprint, each one of us has a different moral nature. We have our own idiosyncrasies, our own eccentricities. All of us have something a little different.

One man was talking to another and said, "You know, everybody has some peculiarity." "I disagree with you," said the other. "I don't think I have a peculiarity." "Well, then, let me ask you a question. Do you stir your coffee with your right hand or with your left hand?" asked the first man. "I stir it with my right hand," the other man replied. "Well, that's your peculiarity. Most people stir their coffee with a spoon!" May I say to you, all of us have our peculiarities. One person may be tempted to drink. Another may be tempted to overeat. Another may be tempted in the realm of sex. The problem is always within the individual. No outside thing or influence can make us sin. The trouble is here, within us, with that old nature that we have.

I think of the little boy who was playing around one evening in the pantry. He had gotten down the cookie jar. His mother called to him and said, "Willie, what are you doing in the pantry?" He said, "I'm fighting temptation!" He was in the wrong place to fight temptation, but that is the same place a lot of grown-up people are today. Many things are not bad within themselves, but it is the use we make of them that is wrong. Food is good, but you can become a glutton. Alcohol is medicine, but you can become an alcoholic if you abuse it. Sex is good if it is exercised within marriage. When it is exercised outside of marriage, you are going to experience several kinds of damage. Our society has an epidemic of venereal disease because of the looseness of the "new morality" today.

Many psychologists are trying to help us get rid of our guilt complexes. A Christian psychologist who taught in one of our universities here in Southern California told me one time, "You need to emphasize in your teaching that guilt complex more than you do. A guilt complex is as much a part of you as your right arm. You just cannot get rid of it."

However, the godless psychologist may attempt to remove the guilt complex in the wrong way. For example, a Christian lady called me one time and said, "Dr. McGee, a most frightful thing has happened to me. I've been having a real problem and have been on the verge of a nervous breakdown due to certain trials I've been going through. I went to a psychologist whom my doctor recommended. When he found out that I was a Christian, he said, 'What you need to do is to go downstairs to the barroom and pick up the first man you find there. Then you'll get rid of your guilt complex.'" I agree with the woman that such counsel is frightful indeed!

Then there are other psychologists who say, "What about your background? Did your mother love you? Did anything unusual happen while you were in the womb?" If you

said, “Well, my mother was caught in a rainstorm while she was carrying me,” the psychologist would say, “That’s the reason you’re a drip!” Well, he *practically* says that when he blames his patient’s problems on the mother.

My friend, you could solve a great deal of your problems for which you are blaming someone else if you would say to the living Lord Jesus who is right now at God’s right hand, “I’m a sinner. *I’m* guilty.” Then He will remove your guilt complex—He is the only One who can do that.

Proverbs says, “For as he [man] thinketh in his heart, so is he ...” (Prov. 23:7). The solicitation to sin must have a corresponding response from within. James says that it is of your own lust (lust is an overweening desire and uncontrolled longing) that you are drawn away into sin. The Lord Jesus said, “I will draw all men unto Me” (see John 12:32), but the scoffer says, “He’ll *not* draw me!” My friend, He will not force you. Hosea tells us that He will only use bands of love to draw us to Himself. He wants to woo and win you by His grace and love. Frankly, evil is attractive today; it is winsome. We are told that Moses was caught up at first in the pleasures of sin. Man can be enticed; the hook can be baited. If he yields, before long a person will become an alcoholic or a dope addict.³⁰

JNTC: His own desire, known in Judaism as the *yetzer ra* (“evil inclination”); see Ro 5:12–21N. The genesis of sinful acts is treated similarly by the rabbis; see, for example, *The Gates of Repentance*, by Rabbi Jonah of Gerona (a cousin of Maimonides):

“One who commits a transgression has been seized by lust and incited thereto by the evil inclination (*yetzer*, with *ra* understood).”

Repentance halts at once the vicious sequence described in vv. 14–15.³¹

Chuck Smith: Now there is deep within every man a great desire for fulfillment. There is deep within every man a thirst, which creates sort of a frustration with life. A awareness that there's got to be more to life than this. Jesus was referring to that in the seventh chapter of John in the great day of the feast when He said, "If any man thirst, let him come to me, and drink" ([John 7:37](#)). He's talking about the spiritual thirst that man has. Not the physical. There is this desire, deep desire that I have for meaning, for fulfillment in life.

Now Satan comes along and he suggests to me that in order to have fulfillment I don't have to be patient and walk the path that God has set before me. But temptation usually involves the idea that I can have immediate fulfillment if I will just turn aside from God's path. Now when Satan came to Jesus, that was the whole idea behind the temptation.

You've come to redeem the world. You've come to bring the world back under the sphere and dominion of God. God has sent You for that purpose, to redeem the world. And God has purposed that you go to the cross and that you suffer and you die in order to redeem the world. Tell you what. You can escape the cross. You don't have to take God's path by way of the cross that's a painful way. You can have immediate fulfillment. Tell you how. If you'll just bow down and worship me, I'll just give you all the kingdoms of

³⁰ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³¹ Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:14). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

the world. You see, the idea was turn aside from God's path and you can find immediate fulfillment right here.

Now that is what Satan is always using, the concept of immediate fulfillment. And to different people he holds out different enticements. You don't have to take God's path. You don't have to follow the word of God. You see, God is restricting you. God is holding you back. That's what he said to Eve. God's keeping you from something good. Here you have fulfillment, it's right here. It's in this fruit, Eve, and God's trying to keep you from something good because He's afraid that you're going to be as wise as He is when you eat of it because this fruit contains the knowledge of good and evil. God doesn't want you to share this knowledge with Him. He's holding back from you. Now you can have immediate fulfillment, Eve, eat and you can have immediate fulfillment. And so he holds to us forbidden fruit. Something that is contrary to the word of God. Oh, you don't have to take God's path. You can have immediate fulfillment. It lies in this relationship. Maybe fornication, maybe adultery. But oh, he holds it up and you know, here's immediate fulfillment. You don't have to follow God's path at the cross, denying yourself, denying the flesh. No, no, the it lies in turning aside from God's path and indulging the flesh. You can have the fulfillment now. This is what you're really desiring. And he holds out the enticement of immediate fulfillment.

Paul said something quite interesting in his letter to the Ephesians. He said, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be ye filled with the Spirit" ([Ephesians 5:18](#)). Now those seem like two very unlikely things to relate together. The alcoholic to the Spirit-filled man. And they seem a very unlikely combination to put together. But if you look at it carefully, it isn't. The man who turns to alcohol, what is he looking for? An immediate fulfillment. And Satan has deceived him and said, Hey, here it is. Here's the way to get happy. Here's the way to forget your problems. Here's the way to cope with life. Just enjoy a few drinks till your mind gets fuzzy and you don't have to think about these things. You know, it will just relax you and it will just release the tensions and you can have immediate fulfillment. You don't have to follow God's path.

But what happens to the man who is filled with the Spirit? He has that fulfillment. He has that sense of well being. He has that peace. He is a relaxed person. So the one is searching for it in alcohol, the other has found it in the fullness of the Spirit. And that man who is joyful in the fullness of the Spirit has exactly what the other man is really looking for and searching for. But he's turned aside from God's path and he's searching in the wrong place.

So every man when he is tempted is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. There's a great desire inside. Satan is pointing to this path and saying, "Hey, hey, don't have to go the way of the cross. You don't have to deny yourself. You don't have to take up the cross and follow Jesus. Tell you what, you just follow my path and I'll give it to you instantly. You don't have to wait; you can have it right now."

James 1:15

Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

Three Kinds of Death in Scripture (Dake)

1. Physical death—the separation of the inner man from the body (James 2:26)
2. Spiritual death—separation from God because of sin (Ephes. 2:1,5; Isaiah 59:2; Matthew 8:22; Col. 2:13; 1 Tim. 5:6)
3. Eternal death—eternal separation from God because man chooses to remain separated from God in sin (Matthew 10:28; Matthew 25:41,46; Rev. 2:11; Rev. 14:9-11; Rev. 20:11-15; Rev. 21:8; Rev. 22:15 Isaiah 66:22-24). This is called the second death or second separation from God (Rev. 2:11; Rev. 20:14; Rev. 21:8). Death in all Scripture means separation from the purpose for which one was created, never annihilation or extinction of being. Physical death is separation of the inner man from the body. Only the body dies at this time and goes back to dust (Genesis 3:19; James 2:26). The spirit and soul are immortal and are either dead in sins or in possession of eternal life in Christ at the time of physical death. In either case, they continue in consciousness whether in heaven or hell (see notes on *1 Peter 3:4; Luke 12:5; Luke 16:23; Where Are the Dead?).

Sin is a small matter in its commencement; but by indulgence it grows great, and multiplies itself beyond all calculation. To use the rabbinical metaphor lately adduced, it is, in the commencement, like the thread of a spider's web—almost imperceptible through its extreme tenuity or fineness, and as easily broken, for it is as yet but a simple irregular imagination; afterwards it becomes like a cart rope—it has, by being indulged produced strong desire and delight; next consent; then, time, place, and opportunity serving, that which was conceived in the mind, and finished in that purpose, is consummated by act.

“The soul, which the Greek philosophers considered as the seat of the appetites and passions.. In allusion to this notion, James represents men's lust as a harlot; which entices their understanding and will into its impure embraces, and from that conjunction conceives sin. Sin, being brought forth, immediately acts, and is nourished by frequent repetition, till at length it gains such strength that in its turn it begets death. This is the true genealogy of sin and death. Lust is the mother of sin, and sin the mother of death, and the sinner the parent of both.” See Macknight.³²

LAN: It is easy to blame others and make excuses for evil thoughts and wrong actions. Excuses include (1) it's the other person's fault; (2) I couldn't help it; (3) everybody's doing it; (4) it was just a mistake; (5) nobody's perfect; (6) the devil made me do it; (7) I was pressured into it; (8) I didn't know it was wrong; (9) God is tempting me. A person who makes excuses is trying to shift the blame from himself or herself to something or someone else. A Christian, on the other hand, accepts responsibility for his or her wrongs, confesses them, and asks God for forgiveness.

³² Adam Clarke's Commentary on the New Testament

The biological imagery is vivid. The lust or **desire** conceives and from this conception **sin** is born. The unmentioned father is most certainly Satan. The grotesque child, **sin**, then matures and produces its own offspring, death. The steps are all too clear: unchecked lust yields sin, and unconfessed sin brings death. How strange that sin **gives birth to death**. It may seem strange, but James warned his dear brothers and sisters who were to read this “genealogy” not to be **deceived** or led astray. Just as a right response to trials can result in growth to full spiritual maturity, so a wrong response to lust will result in decline to abject spiritual poverty and ultimately to death itself.³³

McGee: In other words, when the desire of the soul, having conceived, gives birth to sin, the sin, having been completed, brings forth death. James uses a very interesting word here: “when lust hath *conceived*.” The word actually means “to become pregnant.” Conception is the joining or union of two. The desire of this old nature of ours joins with the outward temptation that faces us and thus becomes sin. The Lord Jesus said, “If you are angry with your brother, you are guilty of murder”—because it begins in the heart and moves out into action. He also said, “If you look upon a woman to lust after her, you have already committed adultery with her”—because it begins in your heart. That is where sin always begins.

The natural question at this point is: Is temptation sin? Of course it’s not sin; the answer is definitely no. It is when the conception takes place—when the thought in the heart is carried out in action—that temptation becomes sin. Martin Luther expressed it in this novel way: “You cannot keep birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from nesting in your hair.” Sin is the consummation of the act inwardly and outwardly.

Temptation in and of itself is not sin. We all have an evil nature—there is no use trying to kid ourselves concerning that. We all have been tempted to do evil; everyone has a weakness in the flesh. One person may be a glutton and another may be a gossip. Both sins are absolutely of the flesh; both come from within. It is only the Lord Jesus who could say, “. . . for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (John 14:30).

“Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin.” There cannot be a stillbirth. Lust is going to bring forth something. When that evil thought in the heart is joined to the outward temptation, there is a birth—a birth of the act, a birth of *sin*.

Now we rationalize sin today. We rationalize our bad tempers. We rationalize our gossip. We rationalize a lot of polite sins, and we even rationalize gross immorality; but the Bible calls them *sins*.

“And sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” There are three kinds of death spoken of in Scripture. There is (1) *physical* death, and that comes to every man, you can be sure of that. Then there is (2) *spiritual* death, which is the condition of the lost man—he is “dead in trespasses and sins” (see Eph. 2:1). Finally, there is (3) *eternal* death, which is the fate of the man who dies an unbeliever. The word *death* here primarily means “separation.” Therefore, for a believer it means that when sin is born in his life, when it becomes an action, his fellowship with God is broken. There is a separation. In 1 John 1:6 we read, “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we

³³ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jas 1:15–16). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

lie, and do not the truth.” You cannot have fellowship with Him and permit sin continually to happen in your life.

The great sin today, I suppose, is adultery. It is something that nearly every person has been faced with—and it is not something new. I think that the emphasis that is given to sex in our society and the present-day mode of dress have led to the committing of adultery probably more than it ever has been committed in American history. Certainly, adultery along with the free use of alcohol have pulled down the great nations of the past. Wine, women, and song have brought down the great nations of the world. Rome did not fall to some outside conqueror; Rome fell from within because it was honeycombed with sin.

I recall a fine-looking young man who came to me and said, “I’ve fallen in love with a very beautiful girl. I want her to be mine.” I asked him, “Have you asked her to marry you?” “Well, not exactly,” he said. “She’s married.” I said, “You had better give up this notion right now.” The young man went on to say, “But I want to ask you if it would be wrong for her to get a divorce and for us then to get married?” I told him, “Certainly it would be. You’ve been tempted, and I mean tempted a great deal, but as a child of God you would never be able to get by with such sin.” I went on to tell him of several instances of couples who thought they could get by with it but were never happy.

It is tragic today when people think they can get by with sin. When lust conceives, it brings forth sin. The only kind of little brat that lust can bring into the world is sin, and sin will bring forth death. Sin will bring forth separation of fellowship with God if you are His child, and He will judge you for it unless you judge yourself.

That young man left my office after I had tried to put the fear of God in him. He was a wonderful Christian, and he surely had been tempted. He came back a few weeks later and said, “Dr. McGee, we have made our decision.” I was certainly afraid they had made the wrong one, but he went on, “We recognize that in this life we never could be joined together. That’s entirely out of the question for us. I’m simply asking God to let us be together someday in heaven.” He worked with a very large company, and he told me that he had asked for a transfer to another city. I don’t think a month went by before he came to me after the morning church service, shook my hand, and told me good-bye.

Temptation—there is a lot of it today. Many Christians say, “Oh, the Devil tempted me.” My friend, temptation cannot conceive until it is joined with the desire of your evil nature. The important thing is that when it is joined, it will bring forth sin, and sin eventually brings forth death. If you are a child of God, it immediately breaks your fellowship with Him—and that is a death, by the way.³⁴

JNTC: Sin gives birth to death, an example of Ya’akov’s striking manner of expression. Contrast with v. 18: God “gave birth to us,” i.e., new birth (Yn 3:3).³⁵

BSB: A more literal translation of this verse provides one of the most vivid expressions of the progressive stages and the tragedy of sin to be found in the Scriptures: “Desire, having conceived, continually gives birth to sin, and sin, when it reaches maturity, continually gives birth to death.”

³⁴ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³⁵ Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:15). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

NSB: Drawn away and **enticed** express the intensity with which desire lures an individual until he or she is tragically entrapped. Sin does not force itself on the unwilling, but is chosen because of its attractions. **Conceived** suggests the image of a person's will bending toward and finally seizing evil. This same idea is vividly illustrated by the tragic path of an addict: a habit once acquired by an individual in the end completely controls that person. **Full-grown** suggests bringing a goal to completion. The idea here is that sin has reached its maturity and has possessed the very character of the individual. **Death** here refers to physical death (see Prov. 10:27; 11:19; Rom. 8:13).

Chuck Smith: The sin isn't in the temptation. We all of us experience temptation. Even Jesus was tempted of the devil. The sin doesn't lie in the temptation. The sin is there when I give into my desire of my flesh and I turn after the path that Satan suggests. That when the lust is conceived, it gives birth to sin. That's the beginning of sin.

Spiritual death; ultimately, physical death.

James 1:16

Do not err, my beloved brethren.

[Do not err] Do not be deceived by supposing that God is the author of sin or that He impels any man to commit it (James 1:13).

McGee: "Do not *err*"—the word here means to wander, to roam about, or to stray. It is like the little lost sheep the Lord Jesus told about which the shepherd went out after. James is saying, "Don't wander. Don't think that somehow you can get by with sin." The habitual and perpetual sinner definitely does not have a line of communication with God; he never has been born again. If you can live in sin and enjoy it, you are not a child of God—it's just that simple.

The story is told of the Calvinist and the Arminian who were having an argument. The Calvinist believes that once you are saved you can never be lost; the Arminian believes you can lose your salvation. The Arminian said, "If I believed your doctrine and were sure I was converted, I would take my fill of sin." To which the Calvinist replied, "How much sin do you think it would take to fill a genuine Christian to his own satisfaction?" May I say to you, that is a tremendous answer. If you can be satisfied with sin, you need to examine yourself to see whether or not you are in the faith. "He that falls into sin is a man," someone has said. "He that grieves at sin is a saint. He that boasts of sin is a devil." My friend, all of us are subject to temptation, but let's make sure that we do not give birth to sin. There can be no abortion here if you go through with temptation. Sin and death *will* be the end result.³⁶

³⁶ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

James 1:17

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

[**Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above**] Whatever is good comes from God who never changes; whatever is evil comes from Satan and fallen man who are bent on doing whatever gains a selfish and sinful end.

[Father of lights] God Is Called (Dake)

1. The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 11:31; Ephes. 1:3; Ephes. 3:14; Col. 1:3)
2. The Father of Mercies (2 Cor. 1:3)
3. The God of all Comfort (2 Cor. 1:3)
4. The Father of Glory (Ephes. 1:17)
5. The Father of All (Ephes. 4:6)
6. The Father of Spirits (Hebrews 12:9)
7. The Father of Lights (James 1:17)
8. The God of Peace (Phil. 4:9)

[**variableness**] Greek: *parallage* (GSN-3883), change; variation. Only appears here. It is an astronomical term descriptive of the varying positions of the heavenly bodies causing changes in the seasons of the year. God is not changeable like this. In every season He is the same, neither does He change like the shadow on a sun dial (Hebrews 13:8).

Clarke: Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above—Whatever is good is from God; whatever is evil is from man himself. As from the sun, which is the father or fountain of light, all light comes; so from GOD, who is the infinite Fountain, Father, and Source of good, all good comes. And whatever can be called good, or pure, or light, or excellence of any kind, must necessarily spring from him, as he is the only source of all goodness and perfection.

The Bible often compares goodness with light and evil with darkness. For other passages where God is pictured as light, see Psalm 27:1, Isaiah 60:19-22, John 1:1-14.

McGee: One side of the moon is dark, and the other side is light. But in God there is no dark side. In all of us there is a shadow; you and I cast a shadow. The story is told that when Alexander the Great had conquered the world and returned to Greece, he looked up his old teacher, Aristotle, to tell him all that had happened. When he found Aristotle, he was taking a bath. Alexander stood in the doorway and told Aristotle what had happened. Then he said, "Now I am prepared to give you anything in the world that you want. What do you want?" Aristotle looked up and replied, "I want you to get out of my light!" May I say to you, that's all any of us do—we cast a shadow. But there is no shadow in God at all.

“With whom is no variableness.” God doesn’t vary, He doesn’t change, as the laws of creation reveal. God is not on a yo-yo like a lot of Christians are today—up today and down tomorrow, and round and round they go.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.” I have a friend who is an insurance agent, and I like to kid him about the wording in his house insurance policy. It says that the policy does not include certain things which might happen to your house, including “any act of God.” I said to him, “What in the world do you think God is going to do to my house?” “Well,” he said, “there could be a cyclone or something like that.” I asked, “Do you think God is to be blamed for that?” I realize that it is just an expression which is used, but it has been the custom down through the centuries to blame God for such things. My friend, if you have a *good* gift, it came from Him. Count your many blessings today: the sunshine, the rain, the cloudy day, the bright day, the green grass, the water you drink, and the air you breathe. God gave us clean air and pure water. It is man who has polluted it. God gives *good* gifts, my friend. God is *good*! You and I don’t really understand how good He is.³⁷

JNTC: Heavenly lights ... variation ... darkness caused by turning. Astronomical language: either eclipse or phases of the moon. Ya’akov’s cosmology was more Copernican than Ptolemaic; the Roman Catholic Church’s condemnation of Galileo (recently corrected) was inconsistent with this verse. The meaning, of course, is that God does not change (Malachi 3:6, 1 Yn 1:5).³⁸

Chuck Smith Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift (Jam 1:16,17) Now the Greek word here is different from the second Greek word for gift, this is "dosis" and the other one comes from "didomi." And one refers to the giver and the other refers to the gift. The first one here refers to the giver. The act of giving. Every good gift that is given and every or every good giver in a sense.

and every perfect gift is from above (Jam 1:17),

The gift of God to us. His goodness, His grace, His love, comes from above, comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (Jam 1:17).

The immutability of God. He said, "Behold, I am the Lord God, I change not" (Malachi 3:6). What does that mean? It means that He doesn't alter the rules for you. You're no special exception and you have no special case.

It's interesting how Satan so often seeks to lie to people and say, "Hey, hey, that doesn't apply to you. You know, this is special. I mean, this is real love. And so the rules don't apply to you. You've got a special dispensation of indulgence that God has granted." No way. God does not change the rules for anybody. There is neither shadow, nor variableness of turning with Him.

³⁷ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³⁸ Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:17). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

James 1:18

Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

[**own will**] It is God's will that all people be saved—begotten by the Word (John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; Rev. 22:17).

[**begat he us with the word of truth**] The Word of Truth is one of the agents that make men new creatures (note, □ John 3:5; 1 Peter 1:23; Ephes. 5:26).

[**firstfruits**] The first blessings of the outpoured Spirit upon all flesh. Greek: *aparche* (GSN-536), used of the first of several kinds of blessings (Romans 8:23; Romans 11:16; Romans 16:5; 1 Cor. 15:20,23; 1 Cor. 16:15; James 1:18; Rev. 14:4).

LAN: First-century Christians were the first generation to believe in Jesus Christ as Messiah. James called them “a kind of firstfruits of all he created.” The Jewish leaders would be well aware of the practice of offering the first crops to ripen just prior to harvest as an act of worship, and also as a blessing on the rest of the harvest (see Deut. 26:9-11). In 1 Cor. 15:20, Paul refers to Christ as the firstfruits of those who have died.

McGee: This is definitely a reference to the new birth. How does He beget us? “With the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” *Beget* means “to bring forth.” There are those who say, “Well, if I am predestined to be lost, there is nothing I can do about it. And if I am to be saved, I’ll be saved.” There are two wills involved here—“Of his own will begat he us.” Again, you have in conception *two* coming together—there is no other way for a conception to take place. Therefore, when *His* will is joined with *your* will, you will be born again. Don’t tell me that you are not responsible. It is not His will that any should perish. You are begotten by the Word of God. When you are willing to come, when you believe the Word of God and accept Jesus Christ as your Savior, you will be born again. “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet. 1:23).³⁹

JNTC: **Having made his decision** of his own free will, by grace and not because he owed it to us, God **gave birth to us through a Word that can be relied upon** (compare Ro 10:17). The Word of truth is Yeshua the Messiah; this is taught most clearly by the Gospel of Yochanan (see Yn 1:1, 14; 3:5–8; 15:26; 16:7–15; also 1 Yn 5:4–8). We are **a kind of firstfruits of all that God created**, as can be inferred from Ro 8:19–23, 29; 1C 15:20&N, 23.⁴⁰

Chuck Smith: Interesting. In John chapter one, the gospel, it says, "Who were born," talking about being born again, "not by the will of man, nor by the will of the flesh, but

³⁹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴⁰ Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:18). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

by the will of God" (John 1:13). Have you been born again? How is it that you were born again? Because you chose to be born again? Not really. Because God chose that you should be born again. You were born again "not of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh but of the will of God."

Jesus said, "You didn't choose me, I chose you, and ordained that you should be my disciples and that you should bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16). That to me is a glorious glorious truth that God chose me. That thrills me that God would choose me. It thrills me because God chose me on the basis of His foreknowledge. "Whom he did foreknow, he did also predestinate" (Romans 8:29). And on the basis of His foreknowledge, He chose me and I have been begotten again by the will of God. I've been born again by the will of God. You've been born "not by the will of man, nor the will of flesh, but by the will of God."

I love it that God should choose me. I love it! I love it especially because He chose me on the basis of His foreknowledge, which means He knew the end from the beginning. And He chose me on the basis of what He knew would be the end of my walk and fellowship with Him. You see, God wouldn't be so foolish as to choose losers. If you had the power of foreknowledge, you wouldn't choose the losers. That'd be ridiculous, wouldn't it? Think of what you can do if you could make all of your choices with the advantage of foreknowledge. You knew exactly what would be the result of this choice. I knew exactly which horse was going to win every race. I knew the results. You know, win place or show, or whatever they do. Now if you had that kind of knowledge, if you knew in advance that as God does, and you'd go to Santa Anita, would you pick a bunch of losers? You'd be foolish if you did. Of course you wouldn't. You'd pick winners. Now God has that kind of knowledge and He chose you. Hey, hey, hey, what's it mean? Means you're a winner. Means you can't lose. Who have been born again of God.

Peter in his first epistle said, "Thanks be unto God who has begotten us again" (1 Peter 1:3). But you know that that's but how would you say, Who has borned us again. But that's literally what it is, who has borned us again. My being born again is a work of God, God has chosen me and I was born again by a work of God's Spirit, not by even my own will. "Not the will of man nor the will of the flesh but by the will of God." So here again, Of his own will, He begat us with His word of truth.

James 1:19

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

Seven Commands to Christians (Dake)

1. Be swift to hear (James 1:19)
2. Be slow to speak (James 1:19)
3. Be slow to wrath (James 1:19)
4. Lay aside all filthiness (James 1:21)
5. Lay aside all overflowing of wickedness (James 1:21)
6. Receive the Word with meekness (James 1:21)
7. Be doers of the Word (James 1:22)

[slow to wrath] Four Kinds of Disposition

1. Those easily angered and easily pacified
2. Those easily angered and difficult to appease
3. Those not easily angered and easily appeased
4. Those not easily angered and difficult to appease

Clarke: Slow to wrath—“There are four kinds of dispositions,” says the Midrash hanaalam, cap. v. 11: “First, Those who are easily incensed, and easily pacified; these gain on one hand, and lose on the other. Secondly, Those who are not easily incensed, but are difficult to be appeased; these lose on the one hand, and gain on the other. Thirdly, Those who are difficult to be incensed, and are easily appeased; these are the good. Fourthly, Those who are easily angered, and difficult to be appeased; these are the wicked.” Those who are hasty in speech are generally of a peevish or angry disposition. A person who is careful to consider what he says, is not likely to be soon angry.

Swift to hear—Talk little and work much, is a rabbinical adage.—Pirkey Aboth, cap. i. 15.

The righteous speak little, and do much; the wicked speak much, and do nothing.—Bava Metzia, fol. 87.

The son of Sirach says, cap. v. 11: “Be swift to hear, and with deep consideration give answer.”

When we talk too much and listen too little, we communicate to others that we think our ideas are much more important than theirs. James wisely advises us to reverse this process. Put a mental stopwatch on your conversations and keep track of how much you talk and how much you listen. When people talk with you, do they feel that their viewpoints and ideas have value?

McGee: “Wherefore, my beloved brethren”—James is talking to the child of God.

“Let every man be swift to hear.” Swift to hear what? To hear the Word of God, of course. After you have been begotten by the Word of God, you are not through with it. You are going to *grow* by the Word of God. You have something that is living, powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword (see Heb. 4:12). “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). However, as a child of God you are indwelt by the Spirit of God who wants to teach you the Word of God. The Creator of this universe and the Redeemer of lost sinners wants to talk to you, my friend. James says, “Be swift to hear. Be alert.” As I stand before a church congregation, I sometimes feel like crying out to them, “Wake up!” or, “The place is on fire!” because I would like to get them alert and moving. Oh, how we need to be alert and quick to hear the Word of God.

“Slow to speak.” God gave us *two* ears and *one* mouth—there must be a very definite reason for that. There is a real danger of our talking too much. There are those who argue that the minute someone is saved they should begin to witness. I do not think a newborn

Christian is quite ready to witness. If he got saved last night, we want to hear his testimony today—especially if he is a prominent person, if he is a rich man, if he has been a gangster, if he is in the entertainment business, or if he happens to be an outstanding politician. Those are the ones whose testimonies we are eager to hear. I often regret it when singers give a little talk before they begin their song. Many times I have just bowed my head in embarrassment at some of the things they have said. One sweet little girl had a lovely voice, but when she got up and said, “I’ve just been saved two months,” I cringed, and I had a right to, because what she went on to say was as contrary to the Word of God as anything possibly could be. I also think it is a tragedy that some of these Hollywood entertainers have been encouraged to testify shortly after their salvation experience simply because they are well-known persons. Their theology is sometimes as rank as it can be. They need to study and know the Word of God before they are pushed up front to speak. God says we are to be quick to hear but slow to speak.

Someone will ask, “But aren’t we to witness?” Yes, but be very careful how you witness and make sure about your own life first. The story is told about Socrates and a young man who was brought to him to enter his school. Socrates was a school teacher as well as a philosopher. The young man came in and was introduced to Socrates. Before he could say a word, the young man started talking, and he talked for about ten minutes. Finally, when the young man finished, Socrates said, “I’ll take you as a student, but I’m going to charge you twice as much.” The young man asked, “Why are you going to charge me double?” Socrates’ reply was this: “First I am going to have to teach you how to hold your tongue and then how to use it.” James says, “Quick to hear but slow to speak.” Christians need to be very careful not to reveal their ignorance of the Word of God. *Listen* to Him. Yes, the Bible says, “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,” but we need to be very careful what we say.

“Slow to wrath”—that is, slow to anger. Don’t argue about religion and lose your temper. It is good to be a fundamentalist, but don’t start fighting about every little jot and tittle of theology with everybody in sight who disagrees with you. After all, you don’t have *all* the truth.

Be “slow to wrath.” Don’t get angry. Jonathan Edwards was the third president of Princeton and probably one of America’s greatest thinkers and preachers, but he had a daughter who had an uncontrollable temper. One day a fine young man at the school, who had fallen in love with her, came to Jonathan Edwards and asked for her hand in marriage. (That was the custom in that day, but it seems to have fallen by the wayside now.) Jonathan Edwards said, “You can’t have her.” The young man said, “But I love her.” Edwards said, “You can’t have her.” The young man said, “But she loves me.” Again Edwards said, “You can’t have her.” “Why can’t I have her?” he protested. “Because she is not worthy of you,” replied Jonathan Edwards. “Yes, she *is* a Christian, but the grace of God can live with some people with whom no one else could ever live.” May I say to you, there are a lot of unworthy Christians today with uncontrollable tempers that spoil their testimonies as much as anything in this life can spoil them.⁴¹

JNTC: Let every person be quick to listen but slow to speak (compare 3:3–12), **slow to get angry** (compare Ecclesiastes 7:9). Can modern psychology match this advice for improving interpersonal relations? When someone does or says something that would

⁴¹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

normally provoke quick angry speech, invite him to explain more clearly what he has done or said; listen carefully to him, trying to understand him and his situation; and respond in love, aware that, like you, he was “made in the image of God” (3:9, Genesis 1:27).⁴²

James 1:20

For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

[wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God] This verse explains why men should be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath. The wrath of man cannot work the righteousness that God requires. For example, the zeal of Israel in murdering the prophets, their own Messiah, and His followers.

Clarke: The wrath of man—A furious zeal in matters of religion is detestable in the sight of God; he will have no sacrifice that is not consumed by fire from his own altar. The zeal that made the Papists persecute and burn the Protestants, was kindled in hell. This was the wrath of man, and did not work any righteous act for God; nor was it the means of working righteousness in others; the bad fruit of a bad tree. And do they still vindicate these cruelties? Yes: for still they maintain that no faith is to be kept with heretics, and they acknowledge the inquisition.

LAN: These verses speak of anger that erupts when our egos are bruised—“*I am hurt;*” “*My opinions are not being heard.*” When injustice and sin occur, we *should* become angry because others are being hurt. But we should not become angry when we fail to win an argument or when we feel offended or neglected. Selfish anger never helps anybody.

McGee: The anger of man is contrary to the will and work of God. This is the reason we shouldn't argue about religion. I have never yet found anybody who agrees with me 100 percent or with whom I agree 100 percent, but that is no reason for me to fall out with him. Someone came to my office the other day while I was listening to our broadcast as it came over the radio. He said to me, “What are you doing?” And I said to him, “You know, I am listening to the only man with whom I agree 100 percent!”

James says, “The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” You may feel that you are angry because you are a defender of the faith, but, my friend, the wrath of man simply does not work the righteousness of God. Don't kid yourself that you are angry for His sake, because He's not angry—He's in the saying business.⁴³

JNTC: The history of Jewish-Christian relations is riddled with the sad consequences of believers' failure to heed this verse. If Jews have tenaciously refused to trust in Yeshua, it is partly because frustrated Christians have attempted to **accomplish God's righteousness** through their own **anger**. It cannot be done. Jews receive God's

⁴² Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:19). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

⁴³ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

righteousness through Gentile believers' mercy not their anger (Ro 11:31&N), through their humility not their arrogance (Ro 11:16–22).⁴⁴

James 1:21

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

[filthiness] Greek: *rhuparia* (GSN-4507), moral filthiness; impure and unholy affections; baseness; vileness; depravity. Only used here. It is from *rhuparos* (GSN-4508) meaning cheap or shabby; foul; dirty; moral wickedness; sordid; mean. Translated vile (James 2:2). The root word *rhupos* (GSN-4509) is translated filth in 1 Peter 3:21. See also *rhupoo* (GSN-4510), moral filth (Rev. 22:11).

[superfluity of naughtiness] Greek: *perisseia* (GSN-4050). Translated superfluity (James 1:21) and abundance (Romans 5:17; 2 Cor. 8:2; 2 Cor. 10:15). The word for naughtiness is *kakia* (GSN-2549), wickedness (note, [□]Ephes. 4:31). Here the idea is the abundance of wickedness.

[meekness] Greek: *prautes* (GSN-4240), mildness; gentleness. Here; James 3:13; 1 Peter 3:15.

[engrafted] Greek: *emphutos* (GSN-1721), inborn; innate. Only here. It is by the Word of Truth inborn and implanted in the soul that one is saved and begotten (James 1:18; Ephes. 5:26). The Word is called seed (1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 3:9). When it is implanted in the soul it germinates and springs forth into eternal life. Only the seed that fails to be sown on properly prepared soil and cared for, will fail to bring forth fruit (Matthew 13:3-30).

McGee: “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness”—that is, put away all filthiness of the flesh. “And super-fluity of naughtiness” is better translated as “abundance of wickedness.”

“And receive with meekness the engrafted word.” The word *engrafted* should be “implanted”—the implanted Word of God. In other words, you are to receive the Word of God. I believe the Word of God is the greatest preventative against the sins of the flesh. The old Scottish preacher said, “Sin will keep you from the Bible, or the Bible will keep you from sin.” He was certainly accurate in that.

“Which is able to save your souls.” James is speaking to those who have been saved. You have received the implanted Word—it has been planted in your hearts. The Word has already brought salvation to you, but you have a life to live as a Christian. Salvation is in three tenses: I have been saved; I am being saved; I shall be saved. James is speaking here of salvation in the present tense.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:20). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

⁴⁵ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Chuck Smith: Whatever that is. Superfluid. Another good word would be overflowing. Fluid flows, super is over, so the overflowing of wickedness. Or the abounding of wickedness. So "set apart all filthiness, overflowing of wickedness,"

and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which
is able to save your soul (Jam 1:21).

Set aside our pride, set aside our wicked ways, and let's just hear the word of God because it is by the word of God that we are born again. It is the seed planted that brings the new birth. The word of God sown in our hearts brings new life, new birth. And so "receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls."

James 1:22

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

[doers] Greek: *poietai* (GSN-4163), a performer. Translated doer (James 1:22,23,25; James 4:11; Romans 2:13) and poet (Acts 17:28).

[hearers] Greek: *akroates* (GSN-202). Here; James 1:23,25; Romans 2:13.

[deceiving] Greek: *paralogizomai* (GSN-3884), to deceive by false reasoning. Here and Col. 2:4.

It is important to listen to what God's Word says, but it is much more important to obey it, to *do* what it says. We can measure the effectiveness of our Bible study time by the effect it has on our behavior and attitudes. Do you put into action what you have studied?

McGee: You and I live in day when we have many translations of the Bible. They are multiplying—every year, two or three new translations are published. Personally, I have not found a new translation that I feel is really adequate to take the place of the Authorized Version. I think the Authorized Version needs improving in certain places, but I still use it, as you well know. However, we do need a new translation! It should be different from Tyndale's and from the Authorized Version and from the American Standard and from all of these new translation. Any Christian could make this new translation. *You* could make a new translation of the Bible. You might say, "You don't know me. I'm not capable—I'm not familiar with the original languages, and I know nothing about the handling of manuscripts." My friend, in spite of your limitations—which may be many—it is still possible for you to make the best translation of Scripture that has ever been made. Do you know what the name of the translation is? It is known as the Doer's Translation. "Be ye *doers* of the word." That's a good translation—a Doer's Translation.

Paul put the same thought in just a little different phraseology: "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (2 Cor. 3:2–3). The world today is not reading the Bible, but they are reading you and me. Someone has expressed it poetically.

The Gospel is written a chapter a day
By deeds that you do and by words that you say.
Men read what you say, whether faithless or true.
Say, what is the Gospel according to you?

In verses 22 through 25 we have come to the real pragmatism of James. I like to outline these verses like this: (1) Verse 22—the *demands* of the Word; (2) verse 23–24—the *danger* of the Word; and (3) verse 25—the *design* of the Word. We have in this section that which is substantive, that which really gets down to where we live.

Here in verse 22 we have the *demands*, or the imperatives, of the Word: “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” There is an element about the Word of God which makes it different from any other book. There are many books which you can read to gain information, knowledge, intellectual stimulation, spiritual inspiration, amusement, or entertainment. But the Word of God is different, and this is probably the reason it is not as popular as other books: it *demands action*. “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only.” It requires attention. The Lord Jesus said, “If any man will *do* his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:17, italics mine). The Word of God demands action: “O *taste* and see that the LORD is good ...” (Ps. 34:8, italics mine).

You can read history, but it asks nothing of you. You can read literature, but there are no imperatives, no declarations, and no explanations, although it may have a lesson to teach which may or may not have been in the mind of the author. You can read science, but it makes no demands on you whatsoever. You can read a cookbook and it gives you a recipe, but it does not say you have to cook. There is no demand that you mix up a batch of biscuits or that you make a chocolate cake. However, the Word of God is a command. It is a trumpet. It is an appeal for action. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). The message of the Lord Jesus Christ is (1) “repent”; (2) “come unto Me”; and (3) “believe” (see Matt. 11:28; Mark 1:15). The Word of God demands belief.

All advertising today is high-pressured. It is being used on radio, television, billboards, and in newspapers and magazines. They all use the hard sell. We are not only being brainwashed by the news on television and radio, we are also being brainwashed by advertising. Madison Avenue is throwing everything at the consumer. You are to buy a certain make of car, and you are told how wonderful it is over last year’s model—when about all they did was to make the steering wheel a little smaller than last year’s. And you are told if you don’t use a certain deodorant you will lose your job. But the Word of God says that you are going to *die* in your sins if you don’t turn to Christ! Talk about high pressure—that is high pressure! The Word of God says, “... behold, *now* is the accepted time ...” (2 Cor. 6:2, italics mine), and, “... *To-day* if ye will hear his voice” (Ps. 95:7, italics mine).

I believe that the greatest failure of the Christian church in recent years has been at this point. After World War II the Western world came out of the bomb shelters and went to church—prompted by fear of the bombs but not by fear of God. Church membership and attendance soared to new heights. I am very thankful I had a ministry during that period. I had a full church, and it was to me a glorious, wonderful time for ministry. But at that same time, lawlessness and immorality increased dramatically. Drunkenness, divorce, and juvenile delinquency escalated. And in the lives of Christians there was a

total breakdown in separation from the things of the world. What had happened? The church had been getting out the Word of God in the passive voice; it had been giving it out in the subjunctive mood, but God had originally given it in the *imperative* mood. We had forgotten that a leather-bound Bible needs some shoe leather to go with it.

Memorizing Scripture is good, but it also demands action.

“But *be ye* doers of the word.” James does not use the ordinary Greek verb for “be,” which is *eimi*; the word here is *ginesthe* which literally means “to become, to be born, to come into existence.” The imperative given here is for the born-again child of God. God is not asking the unsaved person to do anything, except one thing—and that is actually not *doing*, but believing. When the people came to the Lord Jesus and asked, “What shall we *do* that we might inherit eternal life?” He replied, “Do? Why, this is the will of God that ye *believe* on Him whom He has sent” (see John 6:28–29). *Doing*, as far as God’s will is concerned, for the unsaved is *believing* on Christ. God is not asking the unsaved to do anything at all; He wants to tell them that *He* has done something.

As a boy I played baseball on the school lot on Saturdays. I played first base, and it was a wonderful thing to which I really looked forward. We played the teams of other high schools around us, and it generally ended up in a fight no matter who we played. One Saturday as I was playing ball, I saw my dad coming up, and I knew he wasn’t coming to see the game. He had come to tell me he had some work for me to do. The truth is, I had neglected taking care of my chores before I had left home. My dad didn’t ask any of the other boys to do a single thing—he just asked me. Why? Those other boys weren’t his sons; I was.

My friend, God isn’t asking anything of you until you become His child. But to those of us who have become children of God, He says, “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”

It is sometimes difficult for us preachers to see that we also need to be doers of the Word. I remember one time playing golf with a medical doctor friend who is also a wonderful Christian. Another friend of this doctor wanted to join us, so the doctor introduced me to his friend, saying, “This is Dr. McGee.” The man said, “Oh, we have two doctors.” I wanted to make it clear to him what kind of doctor I was, so I said, “I’m a doctor who *preaches*, and he’s a doctor who *practices*.” May I say, we need more Th.D.’s who practice as well as preach!

Someone expressed it in a little poem like this:

It’s easier to preach than to practice;
It’s easier to say than to do.
Most sermons are heard by the many,
But taken to heart by the few.
—Author unknown

Hearing the Word of God will lead to doing by those who are His children. It will not lead to rote and ritual and habitual action; it will not lead to the drab, the monotonous, or the routine. The intent of the Word is to produce creative action and to make for productive performance, exciting living, and a thrilling experience. If we are motivated by an inner desire and are enjoying Spirit-filled living, you and I can go out on the golf course and enjoy playing golf and then enjoy Bible study equally as well—in fact, it will be thrilling to us.

Hearing the Word will lead to doing for God that which is motivated by an inner desire. As we began our radio broadcast ministry, we also began to build up our office staff. I know that it is the finest staff I have ever had in all my years of ministry. God has sent each individual to us, and each has made a marvelous contribution. They are creative and dedicated workers. It is my feeling that in God's work we need that which is creative, that which is dynamic, that which produces.

“And not hearers only.” There is a difference between being a student in a class and being an auditor. I used to have quite a few folk who would audit my classes when I was teaching at the Bible Institute in downtown Los Angeles many years ago. I had more trouble with the auditors than I ever did with the students. They were constantly telling me I was too hard on the students. They didn't realize I needed to be hard-boiled, but the students understood that I was kidding them half the time. Those auditors never had to take exams; they never had to make preparation; they never wrote any papers; they never got a diploma. They didn't do anything. They just sat there. Faith leads to *action*, my friend—it will make you more than an auditor.

The story is told of a man who was always talking about his faith—he never did anything for anybody, he just talked about his faith. One day a friend came along and saw him stuck in the mud with his wagon. The friend said, “Well, you sure are well established in the faith!” May I say to you, what we need to do today is to keep moving. After we get established, we need to keep moving in the faith and not get stuck in the mud.

“Deceiving your own selves.” Self-deception is a terrible thing. The apostle John says that those who say they don't have any sin in their lives do not deceive anyone but themselves (see 1 John 1:8). It is very easy to fall into the trap of rationalizing our sin and rationalizing our inaction.⁴⁶

JNTC: Having received the new birth through a Word of God (v. 18), we should **receive** it (v. 21) and **do it** (v. 22). True religion involves not **only hearing** but doing (vv. 22–27). The entire letter emphasizes deed over creed, action over profession; and this is the usual Jewish approach to religion, morals and life. See Rv 1:3N and references there.⁴⁷

James 1:23

For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

[beholding his natural face] The Word—A Mirror

He sees his blemishes and imperfections and is moved by what he sees. As long as he sees his deformities, spots, and ugliness he tries to do something about them. But when he turns away from the mirror, he forgets and his imperfections no longer bother him. So it is with the Bible. As long as one studies it, he sees himself as he really is and constantly seeks to improve himself and conform to its teaching (James 1:25). If he gets

⁴⁶ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:22). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴⁷ Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:21). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

away from the Bible, a man soon forgets the real picture of himself, "what manner of man he was" (James 1:24).

[glass] Greek: *esoptron* (GSN-2072), mirror. Here; 1 Cor. 13:12.

Clarke: Beholding his natural face in a glass—This metaphor is very simple, but very expressive. A man wishes to see his own face, and how, in its natural state, it appears; for this purpose he looks into a mirror, by which his real face, with all its blemishes and imperfections, is exhibited. He is affected with his own appearance; he sees deformities that might be remedied; spots, superfluities, and impurities, that might be removed. While he continues to look into the mirror he is affected, and wishes himself different to what he appears, and forms purposes of doing what he can to render his countenance agreeable. On going away he soon forgets what manner of person he was, because the mirror is now removed, and his face is no longer reflected to himself; and he no longer recollects how disagreeable he appeared, and his own resolutions of improving his countenance. The doctrines of God, faithfully preached, are such a mirror; he who hears cannot help discovering his own character, and being affected with his own deformity; he sorrows, and purposes amendment; but when the preaching is over, the mirror is removed, and not being careful to examine the records of his salvation, the perfect law of liberty, James 1:25, or not continuing to look therein, he soon forgets what manner of man he was; or, reposing some unscriptural trust in God's mercy, he reasons himself out of the necessity of repentance and amendment of life, and thus deceives his soul.

Clarke: Shall be blessed in his deed—In Pirkey Aboth, cap. v. 14, it is said: "There are four kinds of men who visit the synagogues,

1. He who enters but does not work;
2. He who works but does not enter.
3. He who enters and works.
4. He who neither enters nor works.

The first two are indifferent characters; the third is the righteous man; the fourth is wholly evil."

As the path of duty is the way of safety, so it is the way of happiness; he who obeys God from a loving heart and pure conscience, will infallibly find continual blessedness.

McGee: "A man beholding his natural face in a glass." A very highly polished piece of brass was used as a mirror in that day. A mirror is a very interesting thing, and it is used here as a picture of the Word of God. When you look into a mirror, you see a reflection of yourself—you see yourself as you really are.

You may have noticed that on some pictures of Abraham Lincoln there is a wart on his cheek but that on others it is not there. As one artist was preparing to paint his portrait, he began to have Lincoln move around. He said, "President Lincoln, will you sit here?" Then this man would move his easel and have Lincoln shift around again. President Lincoln began to smile because he saw what the artist was doing. He was trying to get Lincoln in a position where the wart would not show. Finally the artist was satisfied, and he asked, "President Lincoln, how do you want me to paint you?" Lincoln replied, "Paint me just as I am—wart and all." That's what a mirror would tell you; if you

have a wart, it will show up. That is one reason many of us don't like to spend too much time in the presence of a mirror. My friend, the Word of God will tell you what you are.

“For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a *man* beholding his natural face in a glass.” Someone will say, “It ought to say *woman*.” A woman usually carries a little mirror around with her to be sure her hair and makeup are all right. But what about men? Do they look in mirrors? They are just as vain, my friend. A man likes to be sure his tie is straight and his hair is combed. We are living in a day when our appearance seems to be important. A mirror reveals our flaws.

There is a danger, though, of looking into the mirror, seeing the flaw but doing nothing about it.⁴⁸

James 1:24

For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

Clarke: He being not a forgetful hearer—This seems to be a reference to Deuteronomy 4:9: “Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life.” He who studies and forgets is like to a woman who brings forth children, and immediately buries them. Aboth R. Nathan, cap. 23.

McGee: James is answering what he has said in verse 19 where he wrote, “Be swift to hear, slow to speak,” Here his emphasis is, “Don't be so quick or hasty as you look into the mirror.” The thought in being “swift to hear” is to give it all your attention, to be alert to the Word of God. What James is saying here is, “Don't treat it casually. Don't go over it hurriedly like that.” Any man who is just a hearer of the Word and not a doer—his knowledge of the Bible doesn't lead to action—is like a man beholding his natural face in mirror, “for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.”

Folk who do not like to read in the Bible the fact that they are sinners simply pass over those sections. That is the reason, I think, that textual preaching is outmoded. I feel that we need to go through the entire Word of God and not pull out nice, sweet verses here and there. God did not give His Word in verses; verses are man-made. We need to take the Word of God as it is. The Word is a mirror that reveals what is wrong with you. A man who goes to the doctor and has an X-ray taken which reveals a cancer in his body can respond by saying, “Now, look, doctor, I don't put such much confidence in X-rays. I think I'll just ignore it and forget it.” I've known some people who have said that, and they have died. When the doctor told me that I had cancer, I wanted treatment just as quickly as I could get it. My friend, you cannot afford to read the Word of God and not respond to it. It demands your response, and if you don't respond, *you* are responsible. If the doctor tells you you have cancer and you don't do anything about it, is the doctor responsible? He absolutely is not responsible at all. God has given you His Word, and you are responsible for your response to it. To a man who has been born again, the Word

⁴⁸ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:23). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

will say, "Look, you are no longer growing. You are actually leaving your first love." God uses His Word to remind us of Himself and to call us back.

One time I heard a song leader down in Chattanooga, Tennessee, say, "Let's stand and sing 'Standing on the Promises,' but the trouble is that we sing 'Standing on the Promises' when we are really sitting on the premises." That is what James is telling us not to do. The Word of God is a mirror which reveals our shortcomings, and we are not to forget what it says. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). The Word reveals us as we are, penetrating below the surface of our beings.

The Bible is not a popular book today. It is the best seller but the worst read. It is not popular because it shows us who we are. Many years ago in eastern Tennessee the story went around about a mountaineer's contact with some tourists who had camped in the hills around his area. Because the mountain folk didn't see many tourists in those days, when the tourists left, this particular mountaineer went to look around the area where they had camped. He found several things they had left behind, including a mirror. He had never seen a mirror before. He looked into it longingly and said, "I never knew my pappy had his picture took!" He was very sentimental about it, of course, and took it home. He slipped into the house, climbed up into the loft and hid the mirror. His wife saw him do that but didn't say anything. After he went out of the house, she went up to see what he had hidden. She found the mirror, and when she looked into it, she said, "So that's the old hag he's been running around with!" May I say to you, it is so easy to read the Word of God and to think it is a picture of someone else. It is a picture of you, and it is a picture of me.⁴⁹

Chuck Smith: And so the man who is a hearer of the word. You begin to get a false concept of yourself. "Well, after all, I go to Bible studies and I'm really studying the word of God. I really know the Scriptures. I've memorized the book of John and I really know the Scriptures." Yeah, but are you doing it? You see, if you're just a hearer and not a doer of the word, then you are deceiving yourself. You think that you're in better shape than you really are. You're not acknowledging the truth about yourself. And so we need to be the doers of the word. It's "not those that have the law that are justified, but those that do the law," Paul said ([Romans 2:13](#)). And that was the mistake that the Jewish people were making. They thought, well, we have the law of Moses. Paul said, No, no, that isn't enough. You've got to keep the law of Moses.

James said, Well you say you have the word of God; that isn't enough. You've got to be doing the word of God. There's got to be the practical application. There's got to be obedience to the commands. Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only because you'll deceive yourself.

⁴⁹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

James 1:25

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

[**looketh into**] Greek: *parakupto* (GSN-3879), to bend over for a better look.
Translated look into (James 1:25) and stoop down (Luke 24:12; John 20:5,11).

[**the perfect law of liberty**] This is not the law of Moses, but the new covenant, the only perfect law (Hebrews 8:6). The law of Moses was imperfect and faulty (Hebrews 7:12,18-19,22; Hebrews 8:6-7). See Eighty-five Old and New Covenant Contrasts (cp. Psalm 19:7).

[**continueth**] Greek: *parameno* (GSN-3887), to stay beside; stand by; stand fast.
Translated continue (James 1:25; Hebrews 7:23; Phil. 1:25) and abide (1 Cor. 16:6).
The idea is taken from women spending much time at the mirror decorating themselves to the greatest advantage, not leaving one hair or the smallest ornament out of place.
Thus, if one will be as careful to take every advantage of the Word of God to keep his soul saved and his life conformed to the gospel, he will "be blessed in his deed."

LAN: It seems paradoxical that a law could give us freedom, but God's law points out sin in us and gives us the opportunity to ask for God's forgiveness (see Romans 7:7-8). As Christians, we are saved by God's grace, and salvation frees us from sin's control. As believers, we are free to live as God created us to live. Of course, this does not mean that we are free to do as we please (see 1 Peter 2:16). We are now free to obey God.

McGee: *Looketh* means "to look attentively, penetratingly."

"The perfect law of liberty." This is not the Mosaic Law; it is the law of grace. James does not talk about law here in the same sense that Paul does. When Paul talks about law, he is talking about the Mosaic Law. When James talks about law, it is the law of faith. There is love in law in the Old Testament, and there is law in love in the New Testament. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). However, the Lord also said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15), and Paul said, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). What law? Christ's law. John says in his first epistle, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments ..." (1 John 5:3).

When you are driving down a freeway, you will see that it is loaded with traffic, and it is also loaded with laws. If you want to have freedom to drive down that freeway, you had better obey the laws. There is liberty in Christ, and it is the only true freedom. However, you can be sure that if you are in Christ, you are going to obey Him—and His laws are not hard; they are not rigorous. Because you are a child of God, your freedom does not entitle you to break the Ten Commandments. Those laws are for the weak, for the natural man. Laws are for lawbreakers: what to do, where to go, and how, with a punishment prescribed for those who break over. Honest citizens do not need the law. I do not know one half of the laws of this state in which I live, but every shyster lawyer knows them, because he is seeking loopholes to break those laws.

Today God has called His children to a higher level. A child of God has a spiritual spontaneity, a high and lofty motive, an inspiration of God. The believer has no desire to murder. He lives above the law. He is now motivated by the love of the Savior, and he desires to obey Him. The more we read and study the Word, the more we will learn, we will love, and we will live. Joy fills and floods the soul. We are not like galley slaves, whipped and chained to a bench and doing that which we do not want to do.

You and I may not need to know all the laws of our state or of our country, but we certainly need to know the Word of God if we are to live for Him. I do not agree with the popular song today which says, “You don’t need to understand, you just need to hold His hand.” My friend, you *do* need to understand. You’re not apt to be holding His hand unless you do understand. There are too many folk today who are ignorant of the Word of God. It is no disgrace to be ignorant. I don’t know about you, but I was born ignorant. I didn’t know A from B when I was born. I couldn’t even walk or talk. I was in bad shape, but I didn’t stay in that shape and neither did you. It’s no disgrace to be ignorant, but it’s a disgrace to stay ignorant if you are a child of God.⁵⁰

JNTC: Someone who looks at his face in a mirror, who looks at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like—instead of grooming himself to face the day—is failing to use the mirror properly, that is, actively instead of passively. **The perfect Torah** (or: “the complete *Torah*,” Mt 5:17&N) is the believer’s perfect, complete mirror; it perfectly, completely reflects his ungroomed (i.e., sinful) condition—as Sha’ul puts it, “what *Torah* really does is show people how sinful they are” (Ro 3:20). The believer uses the perfect mirror’s assessment of his spiritual condition to correct and groom his behavior; and as with the bathroom mirror, he **continues** to use it this way throughout his life.

The perfect Torah, which gives freedom, literally, “a perfect [or: “completed”] law of the freedom.” Ya’akov speaks again at 2:12 of the “*Torah* which gives freedom,” having earlier spoken of it as “Kingdom *Torah*” (2:8&N). At the same time he regards it as the God-given standard which no one may transgress (2:9–11), speak against or judge (4:11–12).

The perfect Torah. Yechiel Lichtenstein (see MJ 3:13N) comments, again alluding to Mt. 5:17:

“The Messiah perfected it, since the Lord said that he came to make the *Torah* complete.”

***Torah* which gives freedom.** He continues,

“It means that the believer in Yeshua no longer serves God like a slave, out of fear, but like a son serving his father, out of love. The Spirit of the Messiah freed him and gave him a new spirit.” (*Commentary to the New Testament, ad loc.*)

Lichtenstein is correct; but some Christians misuse this verse, along with Ro 7:3, to proclaim their joy in being “free from the Law,” by which they mean “free from the supposedly oppressive rules and regulations prescribed for Jews by the *Torah* of Moses.” Actually, the situation is precisely the opposite: it is the *Torah* which, because it is perfect, gives freedom! Only rebellious antinomians seek to be free from rules and

⁵⁰ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:25). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

regulations; the wise understand that only within a framework of law is true freedom possible.

Moreover, the *b.rit chadashah* itself, the New Covenant, the New Testament, “has been made *Torah*” (MJ 8:6b&N; see also Ac 6:13–14&N, 1C 9:20&NN, Ga 6:2&N), and no believer is free from it. The “perfect” or “completed” *Torah*, then, is the *Torah* which includes the New Covenant. Within the framework of this perfect *Torah*, Messianic Jews observing the *mitzvot* given to the Jewish people at Sinai serve God in full freedom of spirit, while the same perfect *Torah* gives Messianic Gentiles equal freedom not to observe them (Ac 15:20–21&NN, 28–29). Be warned, however, that this perfect *Torah* is just as capable as the pre-New Covenant *Torah* of being perverted into an oppressive legalism (see Ga 3:23b&N).

But is the *Torah* of Moses, then, incomplete, less than perfect? Of course not. It was God’s perfect, complete and sufficient revelation to mankind at the point in history when it was given. Later, “when the appointed time arrived, God sent forth his Son” (Ga 4:4) to initiate the New Covenant and provide further revelation and instruction (*Torah*), adding to and completing, in the light of the history which had transpired since Sinai, the *Torah* which was already perfect. And there is promise of yet fuller revelation in the End of Days, when the Messiah returns, and we see him not as in a mirror, obscurely, but as he truly is (1C 13:12, 1 Yn 3:2).⁵¹

NSB: The perfect law of liberty is the law of love. Loving God and loving one’s neighbor sums up the Law (see Matt. 26:36–40). But it is Christ’s love (Eph. 3:17–19) which frees us from our sins to truly love others (John 8:36–38; Gal. 5:13).

James 1:26

If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.

[religious] Greek: *threskos* (GSN-2357), a careful follower of his belief. Only occurs here.

[bridleth] Greek: *chalinagoeo* (GSN-5468). Used only here; James 3:2.

[deceiveth] Greek: *apatao* (GSN-538), to cheat; outwit; to be deceived. Here; Ephes. 5:6; 1 Tim. 2:14.

[religion] Greek: *threskeia* (GSN-2356). Translated religion (James 1:26-27; Acts 26:5) and worshiping (Col. 2:18).

[vain] Greek: *mataios* (GSN-3152). Translated vain (James 1:26; 1 Cor. 3:20; 1 Cor. 15:17; Titus 3:9) and vanity (Acts 14:15). Pure and undefiled religion is twofold:

1. To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction (James 1:27)

⁵¹ Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:23). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

2. Keep self unspotted from the world. True religion consists of universal benevolence and purity of heart and life (Matthew 5:16,44; 2 Cor. 9:8; Col. 1:10; 1 Tim. 1:5; Titus 2:7,14; Titus 3:1,8; Hebrews 12:14; James 1:27; James 3:13,17; 1 Peter 2:12; 1 John 3:17)

McGee: *Religious* and *religion* are not actually Bible words—that is, they occur only about half a dozen times in the New Testament. James uses them more than any other New Testament writer. The word *religion* comes from a Latin word which means “to bind back.” Although Herodotus used the word, it was not a word used commonly in the Greek language. He spoke of the *religion* of the Egyptian priests. The word has to do with going through a ritual, a form, or a ceremony.

There are many religions today, and they can demonstrate that they have faithful, zealous followers. But you cannot call a religion Christian simply because it conforms to certain outward forms of ritual. Christianity is not a religion; it is a person, and that person is Jesus Christ—you either have Him or you don’t have Him.

James is saying here that if a religious man does not control his speech, his religion—regardless of what it is—is vain. What about the Christian and his tongue? James is going to have a great deal to say in chapter 3 about the child of God and this matter of bridling the tongue. Someone has said, “You can’t believe half of what you hear, but you can repeat it.” That is a real problem in the church today. We have too many people who have unbridled tongues.⁵²

JNTC: Anyone who thinks he is religiously observant. Greek *thrêskos* in this verse and *thrêskeia* (“religious observance”) in the next (as well as the same or related words in Co 2:18, 23, the only other places in the New Testament where they appear) connote zeal in performing religious acts, whether in connection with true religion or false. In Jewish terms one could say, equivalently, “Anyone who thinks he is *dati*” (“religious”) or “*frum*” (Yiddish, “pious”) or “*shomer-mitzvot*” (“one who observes the commandments” of the *Torah*) **but does not control his tongue** (see 1:19–21, 3:3–12; also Psalms 34:14(13), 39:2(1), 141:3) **is deceiving himself.**⁵³

James 1:27

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

LAN: In the first century, orphans and widows had very little means of economic support. Unless a family member was willing to care for them, they were reduced to begging, selling themselves as slaves, or starving. By caring for these powerless people, the church put God’s Word into practice. When we give with no hope of receiving in return, we show what it means to serve others.

⁵² McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:26). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵³ Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:26). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

To keep ourselves from being polluted by the world, we need to commit ourselves to Christ's ethical and moral system, not the world's. We are not to adapt to the world's value system, which is based on money, power, and pleasure. True faith means nothing if we are contaminated with such values.

McGee: This is a tremendous statement. "Pure" is the positive side, and "undefiled" is the negative side. You need to have both if you are to have the right kind of religion—and Christianity certainly ought to produce this.

"To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." This is the positive side. A child of God ought to be in personal contact with the sorrow of the world and the problems of the people of the world. This is where the politicians are very clever. They go out and meet the people and shake their hands. They make a personal contact. In the same way, Christians should be getting out where the people are. I feel there is a grave danger in our having a religion of the sanctuary but not a religion of the street. We need a religion of the street also. We should be in contact with the world in a personal way, with tenderness and kindness and helpfulness.

"And to keep himself unspotted from the world." This now is the negative side. Contact with the world does not mean that we should become implicated in the things of the world. As believers we are *in* this world but we are not *of* this world.

I think of the story of the little boy whose mother had died. His father was a poor man, but he worked and tried to raise the little fellow. There was a wealthy couple, relatives, who became interested in the boy. They said to the father, "You are not able to give the boy everything in life. We are wealthy; we can give him everything." So the father went to the little boy to talk to him about going to live with these folks. He said to the little fellow, "They'll give you a bicycle, give you toys, and give you wonderful gifts at Christmas. And they will take you on trips. They will do things for you that I can't do for you." The little boy said, "I don't want to go." And the father said, "Why?" The boy said, "They can't give me *you*." That's what the little fellow wanted. There are a lot of people out yonder today who want that personal contact. My friend, you can bring a Christian contact to these people with sweetness and love and consideration and kindness. But let us remember to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. We can get so implicated in the things of the world that it becomes a dangerous thing.⁵⁴

JNTC: This verse, apparently based on Isaiah 1:15–16 (quoted below in 4:8), sums up the burden of all the Prophets, who zealously insisted that true religion must consist not in mere external observances but in good deeds flowing from a sound spiritual condition. In reducing the *Torah* to two commandments—the one enjoining a practical expression of self-giving love toward those who can offer little or nothing in return, the other concerning the inward spiritual and outward ethical purity prerequisite to right action—Ya'akov entered a time-honored Jewish tradition of epitomizing the *Torah*, as is seen from the well-known Talmud passage, Makkot 23b–24a, quoted in Ga 5:14N. This verse, like the book of Galatians, is a warning to believers who become enamored of

⁵⁴ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:27). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

specific observances at the expense of “the weightier matters of the *Torah*—justice, mercy, trust” (Mt 23:23).⁵⁵

BSB: In keeping with the author’s emphasis upon genuine faith and its consequent good works, James defines pure religion in terms of one’s ability: (1) to control his tongue; (2) to perform ministry to those in need, i.e., to orphans and widows; and (3) to strive after and achieve moral purity. This is not intended to describe the full essence of the Christian faith. Indeed James will go on to address Christian virtues of avoiding partiality, providing for the physical needs of a fellow believer, devoting oneself to God and rejecting worldly enticements, handling financial resources correctly, and cultivating consistency and fervency in prayer. These verses are an affirmation of the nature of Christian ministry and the moral posture which inevitably results from faith.

NSB: To visit comes from the Greek word usually translated *bishop*, a person who oversees God’s people (1 Tim. 3:1). **Orphans and widows** were among the most unprotected and needy classes in ancient societies (see Ezek. 22:7). Pure religion does not merely give material goods for the relief of the distressed, it also oversees their care (see Acts 6:1–7; 1 Tim. 5:3–16).

⁵⁵ Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:27). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

The Parallels and Possible Allusions of James to the Sermon on the Mount

James	Sermon on the Mount	Subject
1:2	Matt 5:10-12 (Luke 6:22, 23)	Joy in the midst of trials
1:4	Matt 5:48	God's desire and work in us: perfection
1:5	Matt 7:7	Asking God for good gifts
1:17	Matt 7:11	God is the giver of good gifts
1:19, 20	Matt 5:22	Command against anger
1:22, 23	Matt 7:24-27	Contrast between hearers and doers (illustrated)
1:26, 27	Matt 7:21-23	Religious person whose religion is worthless
2:5	Matt 5:3	The poor as heirs of the kingdom
2:10	Matt 5:19	The whole moral law to be kept
2:11	Matt 5:21, 22	Command against murder
2:13	Matt 5:7; 6:14, 15	The merciful blessed, the unmerciful condemned
2:14-26	Matt 7:21-23	Dead, worthless (and deceiving) faith
3:12	Matt 7:16 (Luke 6:44, 45)	Tree producing what is in keeping with its kind
3:18	Matt 5:9	Blessing of those who make peace
4:2, 3	Matt 7:7, 8	Importance of asking God
4:4	Matt 6:24	Friendship with the world = hostility with God
4:8	Matt 5:8	Blessing on and call for the pure in heart
4:9	Matt 5:4	Blessing on and call for those who mourn
4:11, 12	Matt 7:1-5	Command against wrongly judging others
4:13, 14	Matt 6:34	Not focusing too much on tomorrow
5:1	(Luke 6:24, 25)	Woe to the rich
5:2	Matt 6:19, 20	Moth and rust spoiling earthly riches
5:6	(Luke 6:37)	Against condemning the righteous man
5:9	Matt 5:22; 7:1	Not judging—the Judge standing at the door
5:10	Matt 5:12	The prophets as examples of wrongful suffering
5:12	Matt 5:33-37	Not making hasty and irreverent oaths

Rich or Poor?

In ancient Israel, there were grasses that sprouted out of the ground in the morning and by the afternoon would wither away under the intense heat of the summer sun. James compares the instability of wealth to this type of grass; it is here today and gone tomorrow. The following chart delineates what Scripture says about riches.

The World's View of Riches	The Word's View of Riches
Money brings freedom.	The desire for money can be enslaving and lead to destruction; only Christ brings true freedom (1 Tim. 6:7–10).
Money brings security.	Worldly wealth is very insecure; it will quickly pass away (1:10). Real security is found in knowing and trusting God (Jer. 9:23, 24; 1 Tim. 6:17–19).
Money is what matters.	Christ and the kingdom of God are what matters (Matt. 6:33; Phil. 3:7–10).
Money is power.	Power comes from being filled with the Spirit (Acts 1:8; 3:1–10).
Money establishes not only your net worth, but your worth as a person.	Your worth is based on what God says, not what your bank statement says (John 3:16; Eph. 1:3–14).
Money makes you successful.	Success comes from knowing and doing what God says (Josh. 1:8).
Money gives you options.	God is the One who ultimately gives you options (Eph. 3:20).
Money brings happiness.	The happiness that money brings is short-lived. And in the long run, money can actually produce “many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:10). Lasting joy comes from knowing God (5:1–6; John 15:11; 16:24).
Money is your reward. Save it, and spend it on yourself.	Give as much as you can (Matt. 6:19–24; Acts 20:35; 2 Cor. 9:6–11; 1 Tim. 6:18).
Money is your possession. Spend it on whatever you want.	All that you have is God's to do with as He pleases. You are merely a manager of His possessions (Ps. 24:1; Luke 19:11–27; 2 Cor. 5:10).