

Tests and Temptations

October 8 – James 1:1-17

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 280 – 85 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We transitioned to the book of *James*, the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the church in Jerusalem. Though James rejected Christ as the Messiah at first (*Jn. 7:5*), his heart was changed. He now equated Jesus with God (*Jas. 1:1*). Historians place James' death at 62 AD, but it is uncertain when he wrote his letter. Thus, the chronological Bible places it in this position, during Paul's imprisonment in Rome. James' letter was written to Jewish Christians scattered throughout the empire, those facing intense persecution for their faith (*v.1*).

Scholars often refer to *James* as the *Proverbs* of the New Testament because of its rapid-fire change of topics. One could spend hours unpacking each verse. However, **let's consider his opening passage in light of one subject — trials**. That which James shared with his fellow Jewish believers is also applicable for us.

Life is full of trials. We can't avoid them. What we can do, however, is choose how to view them (*v.1*). **Our view of trials affects our reaction to them**. We can react in anger and frustration, viewing trials as annoyances or inconveniences. We can react with hopelessness and discouragement, viewing trials as defeats. We can react in self-pity, viewing trials as a way to get attention. **Or we can react in faith, viewing trials as God's means to test and strengthen us**.

A test is meant to challenge us, to reveal what we've learned. If we view tests or trials as allowed by God to grow our faith, then we will rejoice when they come, for faith does not grow during times of ease (*v.2-4*). Just as our bodies grow weak and flabby without exercise, so does our faith grow weak without trials. Tests are intended to complete what we are lacking. When we submit to God's purposes, we will have peace, and those trials will no longer throw us into a tailspin. **Rather we will seek to know what it is the Lord is producing in us** (*v.12*).

But let's be honest. Viewing life's trials this way is difficult. We need wisdom to see as God sees. James encouraged us to ask God for wisdom, who gives it without shame (*v.5*). But we must ask in faith, without doubting (*v.6-8*). We must not pretend to trust God when we really trust ourselves. Such pretense and inconsistency will only leave us unstable.

But James had a warning for us — we must not consider temptation as a divine test. Some might say that temptation is a trial of God meant for our good, or that God has made us this way, and we cannot resist. God's tests are designed for our good, to make us more like Christ. Temptation is meant for our harm. God does not tempt us. Rather temptation is an appeal to our flesh, our fallen nature. God is good. He can only do good and give good gifts (*v.17*). In Him, there is no shadow of deception.

Daily Reflection

Trials come to all of us, rich and poor (*v.9-11*). The poor should thank God that He cares enough to elevate them to the image of His Son. The rich should thank God that He has helped them see past the insignificance of their wealth. **Problems level us all to faith in God**.

Some trials are temporary, while others may be repeated until we learn what God is trying to teach us. We may even have to endure a trial for a lifetime. God wants us to be content with our circumstances, trusting and resting in Him.

What trial(s) have you faced recently? How did you view them? What did you learn?

The Word of Truth

October 9 – James 1:18-27

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 281 – 84 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

James addressed the importance of God’s Word — the word of truth — in our lives. First, **it was God’s Word (spoken or read) that “brought us forth” to salvation** (v.18). This phrase insinuates a new birth, an event that was entirely “an exercise of God’s will,” not a result of any merits of our own. Like Jesus commanding Lazarus to come forth, God’s Word has resurrected or regenerated our heart from death to life.

Second, **the same word of God that awakened our souls has been given to transform us into the image of His Son** (which is sanctification). James challenged us to be “quick to hear” it but “slow to speak” it (v.19). He also encouraged us to be “slow to anger” when God’s Word confronts our sin or convicts us to action (v.19, 20). Instead, we should receive the word of truth with humility. We should lay down our pride and submit to its authority (v.21).

Third, **James challenged us to be more than hearers of the word of truth. We should rather “prove ourselves to be doers”** (v.22). We often read or hear God’s Word without responding to it. In that case, Scripture intake is simply a chore to complete, a duty to fulfill, or an academic exercise to undergo, but it has no effect on our life. We are only deluding or deceiving ourselves (v.22). The enemy has blinded us to God’s transformative words. We are like a person who looks in a mirror and sees flaws to be corrected but does nothing about them (v.23, 24). He quickly forgets what has been said and what needs to be changed.

In contrast, **James encouraged us to take a long, hard look at God’s Word, to look at it intently and obey it** (v.25). For God’s Word is perfect, and it will have its perfect result, if we will only humble ourselves and submit to its wisdom. His words are not burdensome or oppressive, rather they are liberating. Anyone who abides by them will be blessed in what he does (v.25).

Next, James provided immediate application of God’s Word in three areas. If the word of truth has been truly implanted in our hearts, then His words of truth will be evident on our tongue. We will learn to rein in our words (v.26), a topic that James will address more fully in Chapter 3. Also, if we are submitting to God’s words, then we will have a genuine care for people, particularly those who have no one to care for them, such as orphans and widows (v.27). Finally, those who take God’s word of truth seriously will be “unstained by the world,” meaning they will live a life in stark contrast to the views and values of this present age (v.27).

Daily Reflection

The word that I find most convicting in this passage is to look *intently*, which means to observe with close attention or application, to be fixed or employed in study. Similarly, we are to be *intentional* when looking at God’s Word, to be purposeful in that time. Describe what it means to you to look intently at, or to be intentional with, God’s Word.

Would you say that your description is reflective of your time in the Word? Why or why not?

I grew up with a song called, “Magic Mirror.” Its words still ring in my ears today. **“Magic Mirror, don’t let me walk away without seeing who I am. Magic Mirror, don’t let me see who I am and only walk away.”**

Playing Favorites

October 10 – James 2:1-13

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 282 – 83 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

James blasted the practice of partiality or favoritism, which was a common problem in the early church (v.1). **Frankly, favoritism is still a problem in the church today.** Partiality is defined as an undue bias towards one party or side, which warps our judgment. Favoritism is simply giving preference to one over another.

The situation that James addressed is favoring the rich over the poor, giving them special attention, and making distinctions based on external factors (v.2-4). In this case, Jews were showing partiality in their synagogues to those with money. Wealthy donors earned a place of prominence and prestige, while those without money were neglected and despised.

Such practices have no place in Christ or His church, for the Lord showed favor to no one. All were welcome to be one of His followers (just consider the differences of the Disciples). Did God base His choice of the elect on their external qualities or merits? Not at all. He is no respecter of persons. In Him, there is no partiality (Rom. 2:11; Gal. 2:6).

All people are image-bearers of God. Therefore, all people are equal, valuable, and deserving of respect. Thus, we are called to love all people equally, even to love them as ourselves. By showing partiality or favoritism, we are violating this great commandment (v.5-11). We are acting in a way that is inconsistent with the character of God and the example of His Son.

Finally, James makes an appeal to the Ten Commandments, that by violating one of them, we are guilty of violating all of them (v.9-13). But haven't Christians been set free from the law of God? Yes. The Lord fulfilled the Law in His sinless life and paid the penalty for our violations of God's perfect standards. We are free from the Law or Commandments, and we will not be judged for breaking them.

However, since Jesus fulfilled the Law in His life, He now is our holy pattern to follow. We are to be transformed into His image, which includes living out the laws He fulfilled. While we will not be judged for falling short of God's laws, we are expected to be holy as He is holy, to adhere to "the law of liberty," which is Christ (v.12). The judgment James speaks of is not that of our eternal destiny but our eternal rewards. We will be judged as we judge others (Matt. 5:7; 7:1, 2; 18:33).

Daily Reflection

Test yourself on this issue of partiality. Do you give preference to people because of their age, beauty, talents, social status, handicap, nationality, skin color, or any other external feature? Do you play favorites so that you can get something in return? Or do you treat all people the same, with equal value and respect?

Favoritism has no place in the Christian's life. Remember the story of Joseph in *Genesis 37*? How did his father's favoritism work out among his brothers? Why is favoritism so destructive?

Be honest, has the sinful weed of partiality or favoritism grown in your heart? If so, stop it from growing today! Pull it out and say, "No more!" Love people the way Christ loves them. Treat others the way you want to be treated.

Faith and Works

October 11 – James 2:14-26

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 283 – 82 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

James addressed the important topic of faith and works, which is arguably one of the most controversial passages in the Bible. At first, it seems to contradict the rest of the New Testament, particularly the teaching of Paul, who affirmed that salvation is by faith alone. So then, who is right, James or Paul? Is salvation by faith alone or by faith and works?

There is no contradiction between James and Paul. Both men are right. Let me explain.

When Paul wrote, "For we maintain that a man is justified (made right with God) by faith apart from the works of the Law" (*Rom. 3:28*), he was emphasizing that we cannot save ourselves by following the laws of God. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (*3:23*). **No one can earn the favor of God by his works. Instead, salvation can only be attained by faith in the work of Christ alone. It is He who saves us and not ourselves.** James affirmed this truth when he wrote, "In the exercise of God's will, He brought us forth by the word of truth..." (*Jas. 1:18*). **Salvation is a work of God, not men.**

So then, what does James mean when he said, "A man is not justified by works and not by faith alone"? (*v.24*). The key is found in the first verse. "If someone says he has faith, but he has no works, can that faith (or that kind of faith) save him?" (*v.14*). **James is not downplaying the importance of faith in salvation; rather he is arguing that just because someone claims to have faith (a belief in God) does not necessarily mean that he is saved.**

In other words, someone may believe that God exists, but he may not have placed his trust (or faith) in God to forgive him of his sins. Therefore, that person might claim to have faith, but he is not a follower of Christ. **Simply put, salvation is not just an intellectual exercise. It is the wholesale surrender of one's life to the saving grace of God through Christ Jesus.**

Daily Reflection

Many people claim to be Christians who are not. Simply acknowledging God's existence, or believing aspects about God, does not equate to salvation. Even James pointed out that demons believe in God, but that does not save them (*v.19*).

So then, how are we to recognize those who have truly put their faith in Christ alone? Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruit" (*Matt. 7:20, 21*). **This fruit is what James calls works. One of the ways that we can determine that people are true followers of Christ is by the fruit or works in their lives.** Are they exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit? Do they exhibit a true love of God, His Church, His Word, and His ways? Do they exhibit a godly love for others? How do they spend their money, their time, or their talents, on themselves or the causes of Christ?

James argued that claiming faith without exhibiting works (or fruit) is a dead faith, or rather a faith that was never alive at all (*Jas. 2:15-18*). It is useless (*v.20*). Then, James gave two examples of people with genuine faith in God — Abraham (*v.21-24*) and Rahab (*v.25*). We are not saved by our works, but we are saved for good works (*Eph. 2:10*). If we have truly surrendered our lives to Christ — as both Savior and Lord — and the Holy Spirit indwells us, we will not be able to contain ourselves. We will inevitably exhibit that transformation externally so that others will see our fruit.

So then, is your faith dead or alive? How can you tell?

Words of Wisdom

October 12 – James 3:1-18

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 284 – 81 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

James addressed the topics of wisdom and our words. At first, these two subjects may seem disconnected (they certainly could be taught separately), but there is benefit in linking them together. **One of the ways to gauge a person's growth in wisdom is to listen to their words.**

Careless words are destructive, which is why James says very few people should teach (v.1). Teachers (anyone communicating information) influence people's lives, perhaps more than anyone else, so their words are weighty. Teaching others requires great responsibility, for both the intentional and unintentional use of words can have serious consequences.

But James believed everyone has this responsibility — to be careful with our words — for **all of us have hurt people with things we've said**. No one is perfect. "No one can tame the tongue (without help). It is a restless evil and full of deadly poison" (v.7, 8). All of us have stumbled in this area (v.2). He who has not sinned with his words is perfect (v.2).

We are fully aware of the power of words. "The tongue is such a small part of the body, but it can set everything on fire" (v.2-6). Imagine a dragon spewing flames from its mouth, incinerating towns, forests, even people with such little effort. Similarly, our words "set on fire the course of our life" (v.6). **We can burn bridges in the time it takes to speak a sentence.**

When we were kids, we used to say, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." We all know that's a lie. **Stone bruises heal in time, but wounding words fester. They may never heal. We somehow tend to remember cutting words forever.** That's why James said Christians should never be guilty of holding the knife. Worshiping the Lord and wounding people is hypocritical (v.9-12). It's inconsistent with the example and teaching of Christ. **If our hearts are His, so are our tongues.**

Daily Reflection

What is the connection between our words and godly wisdom? One who is growing in wisdom will demonstrate it by his "good behavior and gentleness" (v.13). Anyone who has jealousy and selfish ambition in his heart will exhibit them in arrogant and dishonest words (v.14).

But the wisdom of God is "pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy, good, reliable, and without hypocrisy" (v.17). Better yet, those who are wise in God's eyes are those who sow seeds of peace (v.18). **While there are countless other ways that we can demonstrate the wisdom of God in our lives, the most revealing expression is what comes out of our mouth.**

We would be wise to apply God's filter to our words. Take a minute to read these verses. Write down the filters He expects of us.

Proverbs 3:3, 4 _____

Proverbs 2:11 _____

Ephesians 4:29 _____

Only speak those things that are kind, true, and necessary. Your words should always edify and encourage others, never beat them up or tear them down. Do your words reveal God's wisdom or your foolishness?

All Such Boasting Is Evil

October 13 – James 4:1-17

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 285 – 80 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

James addressed several more sins that he witnessed in the church (other than words and favoritism), sins that were (and are) **all related to pride or arrogance**. Sadly, these same sins still exist because human nature has not changed. Thus, James' admonishments are still as applicable as when he first wrote them.

Pride may be the root of all (if not most) sins.

Pride is part of the sin package that we inherited from our forebears. In fact, the first temptation they faced in the garden related to pride. The serpent told them that if they ate the forbidden fruit, then they would be like God Himself (*Gen. 3:5*). Satan appealed to their pride, and why wouldn't he? It was in pride that He challenged God and attempted to rob Him of His glory (*Isa. 14; Ezek. 28*). It was Satan's (then Lucifer) pride that forced God to remove him from heaven. **The same pride that led to his fall has been transferred to us.**

First, James addressed the quarrels and conflicts that existed in the church (*Jas. 4:1*). Our sinful flesh naturally places self above others, even to the extent of hurting them. We desire what they have — possessions, positions, privileges, powers, etc. — and we will not stop until we acquire or eclipse them. Our **arrogance towards others** ignites bitterness, jealousy, envy, covetousness, even murder (*v.2*).

God's people should not treat others this way. When we do, we are violating the law of God, that "we are to love our neighbor as ourselves" (*Mk. 12:30, 31*). In our arrogance, we are not submitting to God's laws, but rather placing ourselves above them, as a judge (*Jas. 4:11*). But there is only one Lawgiver and Judge, and it's not us (*v.12*).

Second, **our arrogance towards others stems from an arrogance towards God**. We believe that He is not good, that He does not care, that He doesn't do what He should (or what we

want), or that He doesn't act quickly enough for us. Therefore, what good is God to us? We would rather replace Him on the throne with ourselves or seek other options that fulfill our longing. As a result, we do not pray, and when we do pray, it is with selfish motives (*v.2, 3*). We desire the world, its wares and ways, and like adulterers, we abandon our relationship with God for other loves (*v.4, 5*).

Finally, James said that we display arrogance towards God when we leave Him out of our planning (*v.13-15*). **To live as if He has no control over our lives is the ultimate expression of pride, as well as the ultimate sign of disrespect**. Truth be told, we are not in control. We have no idea what a day will bring. It is only if the Lord wills that we live, or do, or have.

Daily Reflection

James ended by saying, "As it is, you boast in your arrogance, but all such boasting is evil." Pride, arrogance, and boasting are of the devil, not of God. (*v.16*). "God is opposed to the proud. He gives grace to the humble" (*v.6, 10*).

Take a minute to re-read *James 4:7-10*. Write out at least seven suggestions that he gives to deal with our pride.

"To one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin" (*v.17*).

Profit, Patience, and Prayer

October 14 – James 5:1-20

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 286 – 79 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We closed the letter of *James*, who ended by covering several topics, including profit, patience, and prayer.

First, James addressed the misuse of profit or wealth (v.1-6). Our resources are a blessing of God. They are given by His hand and, therefore, belong to Him. **We should steward His resources in a way that glorifies Him, for we will stand before Him on judgment day and give an account of our stewardship.** Those who have hoarded riches, neglected their neighbors, and refused to help the poor will be judged harshly.

It is not a sin to have wealth. But when one trusts in his money, hordes it for himself, and refuses to use it as God would, he has “fattened his heart in the day of slaughter” (v.5). In other words, what good has it done him?

Second, **James encouraged suffering Christians to be patient** (v.7-12). When under duress, it is easy to become impatient. The Christians of that day were facing the pressure of persecution, not only from the Romans (under Nero), but also from their own people (the Jews). They may have even been tempted to walk away from the faith in Christ and believe the lie that He was not worth their suffering.

James exhorted them to remain faithful, to persevere like the prophets of old (v.10), like Job (v.11), and like a farmer waiting for the harvest (v.7, 8). The Lord’s return is eminent, and the judgment is near (v.8, 9). In the meantime, while they waited, James challenged them not to complain (v.9), but to be found trustworthy, people of their word (v.12).

Finally, James addressed the topic of prayer, particularly for those who are sick, sinning, or suffering (v.13-20). Prayer is simply our communication with God, from whom we receive strength, healing, and forgiveness. **Prayer should be our first resort, not our last.**

Most of James’ attention in this passage is given to the prayer of healing. While it is appropriate to pray for the healing of anyone who is sick, the sickness here is related to the issue of sin. While sickness or disease is a general result of the fall of man (sin), sometimes sickness is a specific result of a person’s individual sin (*1 Cor. 11:30*). Notice James’ comments regarding sin in the following verses (*Jas. 5:15, 16, 19, 20*). It is true that confession is good for the soul, but in this case, it is also good for the body.

This passage also sheds light on one of the roles of the pastor-elders — care for the spiritual and physical wellbeing of the local church. As the overseers of the flock of God, it is necessary that they be faithful men of prayer, above reproach, for “the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (v.16).

It is not that these men are better than anyone else. They, too, are redeemed sinners, but God blesses obedience. When the church obeys God’s instructions to install godly men as elders (*1 Tim. 3*), when a church member obeys God’s instructions to call for the elders of the church to pray, when the elders obey God’s instructions to anoint the sick with oil in the name of the Lord, and when all obey God’s instructions to pray in faith, we should expect God to “restore the one who is sick, raise him up, and forgive his sins” (v.14, 15).

Daily Reflection

How are prayer and patience connected?

Are you glorifying God with your profit? If so, how so? If not, what are you saying to God?