

Becoming

A DOCTOR'S NOTES ON THE BOOK OF JAMES

Leaders Guide and Introduction

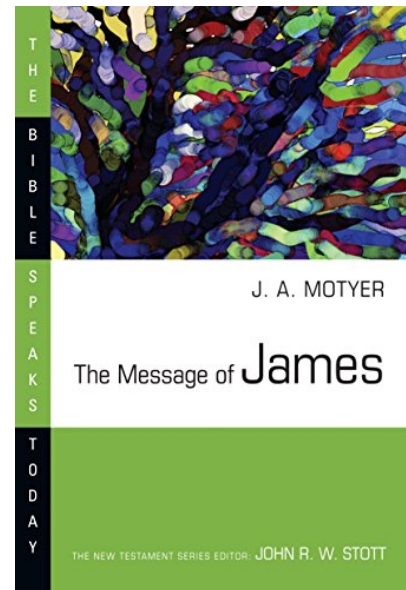
You may be wondering what the book of James has to do with medical students. Most people can remember that James is fairly intense and filled with some confusing language about faith and works, but they haven't spent much time studying the book. It is my hope that through this study you will be able to understand the pastoral wisdom contained in this book and use it to shape the Christian community on your campus. Before we can begin to understand the major themes of the book, it is important that we understand the man who wrote it. Scholars generally agree, along with longstanding church tradition, that this letter was written by James the Just, the brother of Jesus and leader of the church in Jerusalem in the first century. This would give the book a date prior to 62 A.D. when James was martyred for his faith. (Maier) What we know about James we learn mostly from Acts and early church tradition. We know from Acts 15 and 21 that James was able to navigate the tumultuous times as Second Temple Jewish followers of God learned to accept Jesus as Messiah and incorporate Gentile believers into a new faith later named Christianity. If you can imagine our own sociocultural, political discourse today, navigating this in a just and vibrant way would be nothing less than miraculous. We can see that James had developed true wisdom in his leadership of the Jerusalem church and that he was "the real deal" when it comes to all the direction he lays out in his epistle. We know that James was devout in a way that most of us today would think was crazy. He was described by a contemporary historian as James the Just and *Oblias* meaning "Bulwark of the People". (Maier) It is said of him that his knees were hard like a camel's from continually kneeling in worship and prayer. He lived as a Nazarite like John the Baptist never cutting his hair, drinking alcohol, or eating meat. He also stood out among all the leaders in Jerusalem for his righteousness and mastery of philosophy and religion. Such a man certainly has the life experience to give us a book in which half the content is imperative statements. James' life of righteousness and wisdom can carry the weight of such teaching.

JAMES WAS RENOWNED FOR HIS MASTERY OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION. HIS LIFE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND WISDOM CAN CARRY THE WEIGHT OF HIS BOLD TEACHING.

IT WAS THIS ENCOUNTER WITH THE RISEN CHRIST THAT ENABLED JAMES, A LIFELONG SKEPTIC, TO DESCRIBE HIMSELF AS A SERVANT OF CHRIST.

James opens his letter by saying, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1), but such an introduction would not always have been true of James. When we first meet James in the Gospels he is not saying that Jesus is the Christ, he thinks Jesus is crazy. In Mark 3, Jesus' fame is beginning to grow. He has healed the paralytic man lowered from the roof by his friends and has contended with the Pharisees about healing on the Sabbath. Crowds are starting to gather and Jesus is speaking boldly and claiming to be the messianic figure of the Son of Man. He selects and commissions his twelve disciples and Mark 3:20-21 says that when he returned home his family tried to seize him because they feared he was out of his mind. In John 7, his family has given up on trying to suppress him and turn to taunting Jesus. We see that Jesus had been doing miraculous things in Galilee, but when it came time for the Feast of Booths in Jerusalem, John tells us that Jesus' brothers said, "If you do these things show yourself to the world" (John 7:4, ESV). They weren't saying this to encourage Jesus, they were saying this (as verse 5 tells us) because they didn't believe in him. In effect, they were taunting Jesus telling him to go to Jerusalem and put up or shut up in the big leagues rather than remaining in obscurity in their small town.

This is the last we hear from James in the Gospels. Remember when Jesus was crucified, his mother was there, but Jesus commissioned John to be her adopted son to look after her. His brothers were nowhere to be found. But something happened to radically change James from a skeptic to a servant. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead in accordance with the Scriptures and then appeared to Cephas and the other disciples. He appeared to a large group of 500 people who could attest publicly to Jesus' resurrection and then he appeared to James. Jesus made a special effort to visit his brother after his resurrection and James' life was never the same. We have the opportunity to read about Paul's Damascus road encounter with Jesus, but I wish we had a glimpse of the exchange between these two brothers. It is likely that James, a devout Jew, was glad that his rebellious brother had been silenced. Perhaps he had heard murmuring that his brother had risen from the dead and maybe he wanted to believe, or maybe he wanted to squash the movement like Saul. Either way, we can be sure this interaction would have been impressive. How do you juxtapose the intimacy of family with all the history that goes into a brotherly relationship and overlay a resurrected reality on top of that? Imagine the exchange as James comes to acknowledge that his brother truly is the Son of Man, the Messiah, God's plan for the redemption of the world. This event changed James forever. It was this encounter with the risen Christ that enabled James, a lifelong skeptic, to describe himself as a servant of Christ.



I recommend this commentary to help with your preparation for the study. ([Amazon](#))

These are the two themes for the book that it is your job to blend: Encountering Christ will radically change your life and the fullness of that change is slow and progressive, but possible. In nearly every week I highlight how James' teaching contains an exposition on content from the Sermon on the Mount. James, a devout Jew from childhood, calls Jesus' message the royal law, the law of liberty. This book is full of applications of Jesus' teaching and this should be emphasized at each opportunity. Next, we need to show students that the Christian life (and the medical profession) is about progress. Some people, depending on their background, may read James and feel like it presents an unbearable weight of perfection that they cannot live into. It is your job as a leader to point them to the process of growth like James does.

In his book *Changes that Heal*, Henry Cloud describes three essential ingredients for Christian growth: grace, truth, and time. He says "Grace is the unmerited favor of God toward his people. Grace is unconditional love and acceptance. Grace is something we have not earned and do not deserve." "Truth is what is real. It describes how things really are." Not only does James blend these two natures of God's revelation to us, he also encourages believers towards their growth over time. James was an exceedingly devout person as we stated above, but he encourages his readers to grow through trials towards full maturity. He tells them to be patient and persistent over time as they live faithfully awaiting the return of Christ. This is the message of Jesus, and his brother James. In each session, come to the text with the question "How do we see the importance of grace, truth, and time in our growth in discipleship in this text?" If I had to summarize the book of James in one sentence it would be: Count it all joy as you grow into the person God is making you through faithful practice and patient anticipation. Perhaps some of your students will move from skeptic to servant, or others will move from storm-tossed doubter to wise leader. It may not happen overnight, but it will happen in combination with grace, truth and time. May this material be fuel for your relationship with them. Help them to see the beauty of Gospel-centered grace and feel the cleansing sting of truth. Walk with them over time and trust that steadfastness will lead them to maturity.

Peace in Christ,

David Goodman MD, MPH

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Becoming

A DOCTOR'S NOTES ON THE BOOK OF JAMES

James 1:1-4: Count it all Joy

I love backpacking. I love the entire process of packing your gear, planning a route, hauling a load, and conversing with friends in the outdoors. I find great joy in the exhaustion and the grime of the journey. You might be surprised, but I made time for this a few times a year while I was a medical student in North Carolina. On one trip, my usual group brought a new guy along. About 1 mile into a 10-mile climb from the parking lot up to the Appalachian Trail he impatiently asked "When is it going to level out?"

Do you ever ask that question about life? When is life going to be easier? When will I know more, be more, love more? James opens up acknowledging that we will meet a variety of trials on our journey of the Christian life, but that is the point. He does not say, "try to survive if you have some hard times", he instructs his audience to make a conscious choice to be joyful when life is difficult.

But notice that Christians are not meant to suffer merely for the sake of suffering. James promises that making the conscious choice towards **joy** builds in us steadfastness. This word 'steadfastness' (*hypermenaen* in the Greek) literally means to hyperstand. Weathering the trials of our faith, and making conscious decisions to be joyful trusting in God, builds in us the ability to stand our ground with uncanny ability.

You are involved in a process right now that is literally trying to make you fall at every given opportunity. Like it or not, that is what medical education has evolved to in the twenty-first century. You may feel like God has called you to the medical profession, but you may question that calling with every difficult multiple choice question or demeaning interaction with a chief resident. Unfortunately, your education has not taught you how to be joyful in all circumstances. In fact, the hidden curriculum of negativity teaches you to complain at any given opportunity when things don't go your way.

**HE DOES NOT SAY, "TRY TO SURVIVE
IF YOU HAVE SOME HARD TIMES", HE
INSTRUCTS HIS AUDIENCE TO MAKE
A CONSCIOUS CHOICE TO BE JOYFUL
WHEN LIFE IS DIFFICULT.**

THE PATH TO CHRISTIAN MATURITY IS A LONG JOURNEY UPHILL TO A GLORIOUS DESTINATION.

James is not writing to us saying, "I have found the secret to success." What he is saying is that the path to Christian maturity is a long journey uphill to a glorious destination. The goal in this process is to become perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. That does not mean perfection in the sense of never sinning like a cloistered nun in the Middle Ages. (see Mt 5:48, Phil 3:15) It means that you will grow into a mature person equipped with the wisdom necessary for navigating life well. James says, "let steadfastness have its full effect." When I read that as a student, I had to just let that phrase wash over me repeatedly. I still do to this day. Our culture seeks to interrupt the effect of steadfastness at the first sign of discomfort. God wants you to move into maturity in each phase of your life because he wants you to be engaging in the other works he is calling Christians to throughout the book of James. Christian growth begins with personal growth, but it doesn't end there. God is moving you to maturity because he wants to use you to be his agent of restoration in the world. I want to encourage you to find joy in your trials, take hope in your steadfastness, and let the Spirit grow you into the trained professional God has called you to be.

Side Notes

- 👁️ SOME COMMENTATORS BELIEVE JAMES IS A COLLECTION OF SERMON NOTES COMPILED FROM JAMES, THE BROTHER OF JESUS, LEADER OF THE FIRST-GENERATION JERUSALEM CHURCH.
- 👁️ NOTICE THE WAY THE AUTHOR SEEMS CLOSE TO HIS AUDIENCE: "MY BROTHERS."
- 👁️ JAMES IS THE MOST IMPERATIVE-DENSE BOOK IN THE BIBLE, CONTAINING 61 IMPERATIVES IN 108 VERSES!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. When James opens up talking about trials in life, what came to your mind first? Would you describe your response as joyful?
2. When has testing had a positive effect in your life?
3. If life is climbing up a mountain, what are you hoping for at the top? Is there a way that your vision of the end could help you cope with the trials of the present?

DIGITAL RESOURCES

THE BIBLE PROJECT—Book of James ([8 MIN VIDEO LINK](#))
MATT CHANDLER—Trials and Temptations ([SERMON LINK](#))

PRAYER POINTS

1. ASK FOR JOY IN THE MIDST OF TRIALS.
2. PRAY FOR WISDOM TO SEE CLEARLY HOW TO NAVIGATE YOUR JOURNEY AHEAD.
3. IN WHICH AREA OF MY LIFE TODAY DO I NEED TO "LET STEADFASTNESS HAVE ITS FULL EFFECT"?

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A DOCTOR'S NOTES ON THE BOOK OF JAMES

James 1:5-8: Wisdom Over Doubt

Last week we set the vision for a life that is made perfect and complete (wise and mature) through the joyful endurance of **trials**. James ends that set of verses with the image of a Christian lacking in nothing. Out of his depth of pastoral experience James then asks, "Do you feel like you lack wisdom?" The hands go up around the room.

Jesus was said to have grown in wisdom (Luke 2:52). Jesus promised his disciples that in a time of trial they would be given a mouth to speak wisdom. (Luke 21:15) Wisdom is something that is both grown into and granted by the Spirit. Pastor Ben Stuart says "Wisdom is an understanding of how life works and the ability to navigate it well." (Joy in Pain 9/8/09) Even Jesus, who was infinitely knowledgeable, had to grow in wisdom. You are being filled with knowledge in your role as a student, but don't lose sight of your need to *apply* that knowledge in an array of situations. I find it disappointing these days that students often lack the foresight to understand how challenges (or scut work) help them to grow into healthcare professionals. For instance, as a medical resident I had to know how to get a CD with Radiology images imported and read at 3 AM so that my attending could see it at 5 AM. That is more about exercising wisdom of how the hospital works than it is demonstrating knowledge of pathological imaging results.

**WISDOM IS AN UNDERSTANDING OF
HOW LIFE WORKS AND THE ABILITY
TO NAVIGATE IT WELL.**

James tells us that **we gain wisdom by asking God**. He says quite literally for us to "ask from the giving God" stating that it is inherent to God's nature that he is giving. The way that God gives is hard to translate from the Greek. We translate the Greek adverb *haplos* as "generously", but it comes from an idiomatic expression for a "sound eye." Jesus used the adjective form in Matthew 6:22 when he says "If the eye is healthy (*haplous*) then the whole body will be filled with light." In both instances, it is referring to a single-mindedness that is sound, whole, good. God gives to us with an "exclusive preoccupation" (Motyer) that is set on this task as if there was nothing else to do. James is not saying that God gives lavishly the way the world defines generosity. God gives to us out of a focused intention to develop us in his wise and loving plan for how life works.

GOD GIVES TO US OUT OF A FOCUSED INTENTION TO DEVELOP US IN HIS WISE AND LOVING PLAN FOR HOW LIFE WORKS.

I can just imagine how this would have hit the crowd that initially heard James' teaching. He says that God is single-minded in how he answers our prayer, but that we should not be double-minded in our response. What a play on words that penetrates us to the core. Raise your hand again if you ever feel like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. I will be honest with you, doubt has been and is the recurring sin in my life. A creeping doubt that God may not be everything that the Bible and our Christian rhetoric says he is can be crippling for some.

James says that a “double-minded” person should not think they will receive anything from the Lord, but I don't think he is saying that a person who wrestles with doubt is doomed for eternity. Remember the father in Mark 9 who cried to Jesus "I believe, help my unbelief!" There is remarkable generosity for a person who overcomes their doubts like a good sailor who ballasts their ship to keep it from capsizing in the storm they know will come. Pastor Tim Keller says that we should "doubt our doubts" such that we apply the same honest questions to them that we do our faith. I have heard too many stories of Millennials that are passively waiting on God to overcome their doubts. James says that person must not presume to receive the evidence they expect from the Lord. **God will work through a combination of the Spirit's power and your perseverance** to answer your prayer for wisdom. I pray that you may have the confidence and the faithfulness to stand secure in the storms around

Side Notes

- 1. MODERN DOUBTS TYPICALLY COME DOWN TO TWO ISSUES: CAN THE BIBLE BE TRUSTED, BASED ON OUR SCIENTIFIC WORLDVIEW? OR HOW CAN GOD BE GOOD WHEN THERE IS SO MUCH SUFFERING IN THE WORLD?
- 2. I'VE FOUND THAT OFTEN AT THE HEART OF THESE QUESTIONS THERE ARE DEEPER ISSUES, SUCH AS ABUSE FROM A TRUSTED SPIRITUAL MENTOR OR A DESIRE TO LIVE FOR ONE'S OWN PLEASURE.
- 3. I MAKE A HABIT OF DEEPLY INVESTIGATING DOUBTS OF MY OWN AND OTHERS, AND WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO DO THE SAME.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Who or what do you think of when you think about wisdom?
2. What other Scriptures can you think of about God's giving nature. How do those affect your view of God?
3. What are some challenges that make you feel unsteady and 'tossed by the wind'? What are you doing to fight them?

DIGITAL RESOURCES

JOSEPH SOLOMON—The Shadow of Doubt ([Spoken Word Video](#))
TIM KELLER—Doubt Your Doubts ([Article Link](#))

PRAYER POINTS

1. ASK FOR WISDOM.
2. PRAY FOR TRUTH TO SUPERSEDE YOUR DOUBTS
3. WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO HAVE SINGLE-MINDED FOCUS ON?

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James 1:9-12: Rich and Poor Alike

Kirk Cousins, at one time the NFL's highest paid QB and a committed believer, has a jar of rocks outside his house. What would a multimillionaire need with a jar of rocks you might ask? He uses it to number his days. He has 720 stones in a large glass jar on his porch. Each stone represents one month of his life between 30 and 90, it also represents 30 days to walk faithfully in the opportunity he has been given. His motivation comes from Psalm 90:12, "*Teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom*", but it just as easily could have come from James.

Our pastor, James, has already addressed one of the various trials in which we are meant to fight for joy: namely the battle of our mind between wisdom and doubt. He moves next into the battle for our money. James tells both rich and poor alike to rejoice in their trials. The word boast here is *kauchaomai* in the Greek which is translated in the Bible as "to glory in", "to boast" or "to rejoice." He tells the poor to rejoice in the exultation that is available to them in the Gospel that is sure to overcome their current circumstances. He warns the rich person to take on a posture of humility because their wealth is fleeting.

In our world, it seems obvious that a poor person would rather trade places with a rich person, but in the Biblical economy it is clear that the problems of prosperity are every bit as dangerous, if not more so, as the trials of poverty. (Motyer) I believe we need to hear this as doctors more so than most of the people in the world. We should read verse 10 as "The doctor who is obsessed with working for their own glory and financial gain will fade away in the midst of their pursuits." This message is countercultural, but that is the path we are called to as physician Christians.

James will have more to say about living with wealth in the coming chapters, but his message to us this week is to live with humility knowing that your prosperity is fragile and temporary. Something in our medical culture causes many physicians to feel invincible. That sense of confidence may feel hard to imagine from your current perspective, but a lot can change as you become an accomplished doctor, a partner in a successful practice, or well-respected in your community. James is teaching you that a wise person is humble about their status no matter their circumstances.

**THE PROBLEMS OF PROSPERITY
ARE AS DANGEROUS, IF NOT MORE
SO, AS THE TRIALS OF POVERTY.**

A WISE PERSON IS HUMBLE ABOUT THEIR STATUS NO MATTER THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES.

Why does money matter so much to God? Because nothing in your life is a better barometer about who your master is than how you deal with money. Look at what Jesus says in Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." Motyer writes that "the love of [money] is the most common source of double-mindedness." If you try to make money, and the pride that comes with wealth and social status, your principle end in life you will perish like a wave that disappears into a sea of other waves or a flower that shrivels up and dies in the heat of the sun.

But look at the image James give us for the faithful person that remains steadfast. The persevering person who withstands trials with joy will grow in wisdom and become the fullest version of Christian maturity. Certainly gaining the ability to navigate life well is a worthwhile goal, but James tells us that God has promised the *crown of life* the those who endure well. (1 Pet 5:4, Rev 2:10) Your current progress and performance matter to God now and extend into eternity. I pray that you may have wisdom to walk, like our brother Kirk, in knowledge of your own mortality, of the goodness of God, and of the temporary nature of wealth. May you walk in humility as you pursue wisdom.

Side Notes

- 1. THE MAGNETISM OF RICHES IS POWERFUL AND INSISTENT. WE NEED WISDOM TO SEE THROUGH THE FACADE. (MOTYER)
- 2. 1 TIMOTHY 6:9 SAYS THAT YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE WEALTHY TO SUFFER FROM THE SIN OF DESIRING MONEY.
- 3. KEEP THIS IN MIND AS YOU ARE NAVIGATING THIS PHASE IN LIFE. IF YOU FEEL LIKE GOD IS CALLING YOU TO PRIMARY CARE, BUT YOU ARE IGNORING IT FOR THE SAKE OF A MORE LUCRATIVE SPECIALTY, TRY TO BE VERY CLEAR THAT YOU ARE NOT SINFULLY DESIRING WHAT MAY ULTIMATELY BE DESTRUCTIVE.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. James is talking about a posture of our hearts with respect to money. Do you have any role models for giving and stewardship in your life? When do you know if you are giving "enough"?
2. What are some other Scripture passages that come to your mind when you think wealth and poverty in God's eyes? How have those passages shaped your approach?
3. What are some things that you think are really important in life, that in the end will be fleeting like a withering flower?

DIGITAL RESOURCES

LIGONIER MINISTRIES—Proper Boasting ([Article Link](#))
ROBBIE SEAY BAND—Rich and Poor ([Song link](#))

PRAYER POINTS

1. THANK GOD FOR YOUR OPPORTUNITIES IN LIFE.
2. PRAY FOR WISDOM AND HUMILITY TO NAVIGATE THE COMPLEXITIES OF MONEY THAT SURROUND YOUR PROFESSION.
3. COMMIT YOUR LIFE TO BE A STEWARD THAT DISPLAYS THE GOODNESS OF GOD THROUGH THEIR INTERACTION WITH MONEY.

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A DOCTOR'S NOTES ON THE BOOK OF JAMES

James 1:13-18 : The Birth of Sin

When I was a second-year medical student I developed a bad habit of crashing after tests. After two weeks of diligence and a weekend of non-stop studying I would stop by the mall beside my apartment and shop. It didn't matter if I needed anything, I felt entitled to buy something because of my hard work leading up to that moment. I would then go to the Chili's connected to that mall and get an order of chips and salsa and go home and eat nearly the whole bag by myself. Somehow in the midst of trials, I convinced myself that I deserved things that I knew were harmful to my goals of financial wisdom and physical health. Can anybody relate or am I the only student in history that struggled to fight for joy in the process?

We have seen over the last few weeks that trials in our life are inevitable. James has set the vision for us that the life of a Christian is one that is marked by maturity. We are to be people that thoughtfully choose joy in our circumstances, that stand with extreme perseverance, and that steady our ships in the storms of doubt. We see that the person who faithfully withstands the trials of life will be blessed with maturity and the crown of life. Our Christian progress does not always follow the wonderful plan that Pastor James has laid out. Do you ever get tired of facing trials? Do you ever feel like you've done "enough" and thought "It doesn't matter if I do _____, God will love me anyway?" I've had those thoughts too, more times than I wish I had.

Often in our trials, we will be faced with a choice. In a difficult moment we will hear a voice that presents us with an option that if you were in a completely neutral place would be clearly inappropriate, immoral, or unwise. (Ben Stuart) In your right mind, you may know that binging on social media filling your heart with envy, discontentment, lust, or pride is not a good idea, but do you ever hear a voice in your head at midnight telling you that it sounds great? Perhaps you hear the news that your best friend just got engaged. You could be joyful with them and satisfied in your singleness, but you may hear a voice telling you that you could get drunk and hook up with the most available person at this weekend's party.

**IN A DIFFICULT MOMENT WE
WILL HEAR A VOICE THAT IF
YOU WERE IN A COMPLETELY
NEUTRAL PLACE WOULD BE
CLEARLY INAPPROPRIATE,
IMMORAL, OR UNWISE.**

THE WAY WE FIGHT OUR SINFUL DESIRES IS TO SEE THEM FOR WHAT THEY ARE

Here is the truth you need to hear: We will certainly encounter temptations as we face trials on our path to maturity. Those temptations are not from God. It is not in God's character to tempt his children. It is also not in his development plan to remove every temptation from our path. (Gen 3, Deut 8, Judges 2) James says that desire grows out of *our own* hearts. We are lured and enticed by *our own* desires, but those desires are not sin. Those whispering voices in your mind that you hear are not sin, but if you allow them to persist they will come to life in a moment of conception and ultimately give birth to sin. But James warns us to not be deceived. He is telling us not to believe: "It doesn't matter if I _____." It all matters. Small inclinations to our subtle enticements bring forth death. But that is not God's plan for you. God has good and perfect gifts planned for you as a believer called to his purposes.

Side Notes

- 1. SOME PSYCHOLOGISTS USE THE TERM WILLPOWER FATIGUE TO DESCRIBE MUSCULAR NATURE OF OUR WILLPOWER.
- 2. THIS IS ONE REASON WHY IT IS HARDER TO MAKE WISE DECISIONS WHEN YOU ARE TIRED FROM STUDYING OR EMOTIONALLY SPENT FROM SOME INTERACTION.
- 3. SELF CONTROL IS A SIGN THAT THE SPIRIT IS ACTIVE IN YOUR LIFE, BUT YOU CAN USE WISDOM TO NOT PUT YOURSELF IN SITUATIONS WHERE YOUR SELF CONTROL WILL BE TESTED.

The way we fight our sinful desires is to see them as for what they are—luring enticements that are promised to lead only to death. Do not deceive yourself that sin wants to do anything but derail your Christian maturity. James tell us that God brought us forth (gave birth to us) by his truth (not deception) that we should be the firstfruits (special sanctified parts) of all creation. The way that we fight sin is to be aware of our origin and our future. We are called by God to be his agents in the world and he is using the process to move us towards maturity. I pray that you may walk in strength so that you may not deceive yourself.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Has there been a time in your life that you have blamed God for your sin? What caused you to feel that way? How might you see that event differently in light of this passage?
2. What are some signals for you that you are susceptible to temptation? How have you avoided sin in the last few days? What does this teach you about temptation going forward?
3. Compare God's good and perfect gifts to the deadly nature of our sinful enticements. How does understanding this reality help you in your fight with sin?

DIGITAL RESOURCES

JOHN PIPER—Pornography and Resisting the Power of Sin ([AUDIO LINK](#)), such a good analogy that is broadly applicable. or try this one:

Thirteen Practical Steps to Kill Sin ([ARTICLE LINK](#))

BEN STUART—Tempted and Tried ([SERMON LINK](#))

PRAYER POINTS

1. THANK GOD FOR HIS UNFAILING GOODNESS
2. PRAY FOR STRENGTH TO BE STEADFAST IN THE MIDST OF TEMPTATIONS.
3. ASK GOD FOR FORGIVENESS AND WALK IN THE CONFIDENCE OF GOD'S PROMISES.

Becoming

A DOCTOR'S NOTES ON THE BOOK OF JAMES

James 1:19-21: Receive the Word

One reason I love the book of James is that it is full of phrases that can help you reset your mind throughout the day. The first that we've encountered is "Let steadfastness have its full effect." You can remind yourself of that nearly every day as you question why you are experiencing the challenges before you. The next one that I find helpful is "receive with meekness the implanted word", but it raises a few questions: What does it mean to "receive" something? What does meekness really look like? and What is the word that is implanted in me?

One thing my mother-in-law (who's made a career of ministry and discipleship) used to always say before I got married was that one has to receive their spouse. I used to think "What are you talking about? Of course I am going to receive Bethany, I already asked her to marry me, we have a date set, I am clearly doing that." What I have come to learn is that receiving your spouse is more than committing to them once or having your spouse around. It is more about accepting them and delighting in them. It is the opposite of rejection. Coming to, and growing, in Christ is a continual putting off of the things we are to reject, such as filthiness and wickedness, and instead putting on the Godly things we are to receive. This process is an essential step on our journey, but is to be characterized by meekness.

I don't know about you, but I don't like the first impression the word meekness creates. In my mind, which has been shaped by an image of American robustness and an unquenchable competitive spirit, meekness was probably one of the last adjectives I would have picked to describe Christians. But don't forget, James is reflecting on Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount where He says "Blessed are the meek." I have read meekness defined as 'an inner disposition that relates to God and others because of a proper estimation of oneself'. James is not telling us to weakly just accept the word like a mindless noodle. Meekness is a disposition that grows out of the strength of wisdom that balances all that you know of yourself with all that you know of God. Meekness is not marked by becoming angry at petty things. A wise and meek person is quick to listen, to assess their situation and speak life and truth into scenarios rather than malice. You will have to

**COMING TO, AND GROWING IN,
CHRIST IS A CONTINUAL
PUTTING OFF OF THE THINGS
WE ARE TO REJECT, AND
PUTTING ON THE GODLY THINGS
WE ARE TO RECEIVE.**

BEFORE WE CAN DO THE WORK OF THE GOSPEL, THE GOSPEL HAS TO DO A WORK IN US

make this choice every day interacting with patients, coworkers, and staff. The choice to be slow to speak and to control frivolous outbursts of anger is only made possible by the word that is planted within us.

What then is the implanted word that when received leads to our salvation? Do you think I am beating the drum again for Scripture memory? No, think back to another time in Scripture when the word of God has been related to a seed and salvation...Are you there yet? The parable of the sower in Matthew 13. Jesus describes his message as seeds that are being sown in different kinds of soil. James uses that same imagery to talk about the gospel, the message of the goodness of the Kingdom of God that Jesus came to live and announce, that we receive at salvation and over again as we navigate the Christian life. Pastor Ben Stuart says that James is about to start talking a lot about the works of a Christian, but before we can do the work of the gospel, the gospel has to do a work in us. The message of the gospel that works in us is best summarized by Tim Keller: “The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.” As Christians in healthcare, we are to let that idea permeate our lives such that it defines how we relate to God, ourselves, and others. So next time that you are prone to be wicked, angry, or proud - receive this word and the finished work of Christ in your life again and respond accordingly.

Side Notes

- IN THE 2000'S THERE WAS A MOVEMENT IN EVANGELICALISM FOR EVERYTHING TO BE "GOSPEL"-CENTERED.
- AT ITS HEART, BEING GOSPEL-CENTERED MEANS THAT WE VALUE HEARING THE GOSPEL PREACHED OVER US, SPEAKING THE GOSPEL TO OURSELVES, AND SHARING THE GOSPEL WITH OTHER PEOPLE.
- THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE GET SAVED OVER AND OVER AGAIN. IT MEANS THAT WE REMIND OURSELVES OF THE TRUTH, THAT WE ARE SAVED BY LAVISH GRACE THAT SHOULD FLOW WITHIN US AND OUT FROM US.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What does it look like to be “gospel-centered” in healthcare today?
2. How do you react to the word “meek”? Is there someone in your life or a famous person that you would describe as meek? How is being meek different than being humble? Is that a distinction without a difference?
3. How are you doing receiving God and the message of his gospel? Where do you struggle to accept God without conditions?

DIGITAL RESOURCES

- JOHN PIPER—What does it mean to be Gospel-Centered ([5 MIN VIDEO](#))
- FBC CLOVIS—The Gospel-Centered Life ([5 MIN VIDEO](#))
- NT WRIGHT—What is the Gospel? ([13 MIN VIDEO](#)) often controversial, never dull
- SAM STORMS—Receive the Word Implanted Word ([ARTICLE LINK](#))

PRAYER POINTS

1. THANK GOD FOR THE IMPLANTED WORD WHICH IS ABLE TO SAVE YOU.
2. PRAY FOR A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCE OF MEEKNESS
3. ASK GOD FOR SATURATE YOUR INTERACTIONS AT SCHOOL AND WORK WITH GRACE THAT FLOWS FROM THE GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SHOWN.

Becoming

A DOCTOR'S NOTES ON THE BOOK OF JAMES

James 1:22-27: Hearers and Doers

Every now and then we have patients that come to the hospital believing they are pregnant when they are not. I recall one woman from my time in residency who was rushed off the elevator screaming as if she was about to deliver a baby right there in her wheelchair when she was not the least bit pregnant. She was convinced that she had been feeling a baby move inside of her for months when in fact there had never been any signs of new life on the inside. This is termed 'pseudocyesis' or false pregnancy. This woman, and several like her, are deceived. They believe they have life inside of them when it was never there.

The greatest tragedy in the world is that someone could go through life believing that they have new spiritual life inside of them when in reality they have only been deceiving themselves. Perhaps a person could find a way to be reasonably joyful, to put off wickedness, and to agree with what they hear when they listen to people talk about God without ever truly coming to Christ fully. They think they are feeling inner movements and showing outward signs (like a growing pregnant belly) when it is all based on a false understanding. James equates this to a person that looks at a mirror for a long time and thinks they know they know what they look like, but they go away and immediately forget what they are like. James says that we are meant to be *doers* of the word, not hearers who forget. I would argue that from James' perspective, doing the word is both radically inward and outward. It must be both or it is not genuine at all.

**DOING THE WORD IS BOTH
RADICALLY INWARD AND
OUTWARD. IT MUST BE BOTH
OR IT IS NOT GENUINE AT ALL.**

We can see this inward and outward direction of salvation if we look at what James means by the 'law of liberty.' There is much debate about the difference between James' use of the 'law' compared to Paul's. I think we gain clarity if we remember that James is providing pastoral reflections on the teachings of Jesus, primarily on the Sermon on the Mount. The law of liberty (or royal law in chapter 2) is the law as summarized by Jesus in Matthew 22:36-40 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." We come to salvation when we love God with our whole being. We declare "Jesus is Lord"

THE GRACE THAT CHANGES US BY FAITH CANNOT HELP BUT FLOW OUTWARD IN OUR LIVES.

over our identity and desires and believe that he is risen from the dead and now reigning in authority over the world. That phrase, “Jesus is Lord,” stands in sharp distinction to the pledge that “Caesar is Lord,” which was common in the first century. It is likely that refusal to make this statement is what led James' first readers to be persecuted and dispersed. Jesus also said that faithfulness to God and fullness as a redeemed individual is displayed in the outward flow of faith as we love our neighbor as ourselves.

Outward works and expressions of faith matter, not because they earn salvation, but because they prove to ourselves and others that we have genuinely been transformed by faith. The grace that changes us by faith cannot help but flow outward in our lives. (John 13:35) For James, the immediate application of this is threefold: 1) Christians ought to control their tongue 2) Minister to the needy, and 3) Value personal holiness. Much of the rest of James is simply expounding on this idea. He has shown us what it looks like to be born of God, what it means to grow in the Father's wisdom, and as we continue we will see how to live in His image.

Side Notes

- MY WIFE WAS TALKING TO A NEW FRIEND THE OTHER DAY AND TOLD HER THAT SHE WAS A CHRISTIAN, THE FRIEND IMMEDIATELY ASKED “THEN WHAT PARTY DO YOU VOTE FOR?”
- IT SEEMS LIKE OUR CULTURE IS DIVIDED BY THOSE THAT CARE FOR THE POWERLESS AND THOSE THAT VALUE PERSONAL HOLINESS.
- JAMES SAYS CHRISTIANS SHOULD VALUE BOTH. CHECK OUT TIM KELLER'S ARTICLE ABOUT THIS DICHOTOMY LISTED BELOW.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Have you clearly and definitively responded to Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life? What would you say makes you sure?
2. How would you define “pure religion”? How is that similar or different from James’ definition? What outward expressions of faith are reasonable in your current life situation?
3. If you looked at yourself in the mirror through the lens of Jesus’ teaching, what impression would you come away with?

DIGITAL RESOURCES

THOMAS SCHREINER- Do Paul and James Disagree on Justification by Faith Alone? ([ARTICLE LINK](#))
TIM KELLER—How Do Christians Fit into a Two-Party System ([ARTICLE](#))

PRAYER POINTS

1. THANK GOD FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO HEAR AND DO HIS WORD.
2. PRAY FOR FAITHFULNESS TO LIVE OUT YOUR BELIEFS IN YOUR EDUCATION AND WORK.
3. ASK GOD TO SHOW YOU NEW WAYS THAT YOU CAN GROW IN HOLINESS, MINISTRY, OR BOTH.