

Becoming

A DOCTOR'S NOTES ON THE BOOK OF JAMES

James 2:1-7: Show No Partiality

Imagine you are working in the Emergency Department, and the resident asks you to go see the patient in room 7. His name is Steve, and he has severe RUQ pain. Now imagine how you would feel if you open the door and there lies Steve Jobs, suffering from the effects of pancreatic cancer and chemotherapy. How would you treat the man who reinvented the relationship between humans and computers, and has more money than you can count? Hold that thought. What would you do if you opened the door, and there sits Steve No-Jobs, a frequent flyer in the ED who is known for recurrent bouts of pain and delirium due to his liver failure from a lifetime of alcohol abuse and scorched relationships. Where do you find the strength to treat him as a person of dignity that God loves?

James uses an illustration from church life as he describes our tendency to make distinctions amongst each other, but he easily could have used the above illustration if he was speaking at a modern day medical conference. He asks us, "if you show preference to the wealthy, influential person, and treat the poor (and literally in the Greek, 'disgusting') person with disregard, have you not then made distinctions amongst yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" I have to tell you guys, Pastor James has been hitting me hard in writing this.

You see, it is right and good that you learn to make distinctions as a medical professional. You have to be able to skillfully assess whether a person is sick or not sick so that you can care for them in the most appropriate way. Somewhere in the course of your training you will be tempted, not to make assessments about the *health* of a person, but of their *value*. The truth that we need to hear from James is this: In God's mind people are not either valuable or not valuable. People are valuable always, period, end of story. James is telling us that our need to grow in this area is not just a character flaw that should be improved; it is downright evil.

When James tells us to show no partiality as we hold to the faith in our Lord Jesus, the Lord of Glory, he is setting our eyes on the goodness and grandeur of God. He has already told us that we are to receive the Gospel into our lives and to look into the Gospel deeply until it is fixed in our memories.

**IN GOD'S MIND PEOPLE ARE
NOT EITHER VALUABLE OR
NOT VALUABLE. PEOPLE ARE
VALUABLE ALWAYS, PERIOD,
END OF STORY.**

THE PERSON WHO HAS BEEN CHANGED BY THE GOSPEL WILL BE MERCIFUL IN RESPONSE TO THE GREAT MERCY THEY HAVE RECEIVED.

Now he shows us one aspect of Gospel-centered living. The reason that showing partiality is evil is that it shows we have not processed and internalized the Gospel. That makes us inconsistent judges that contradict God's stated value for the poor. Think back to Jesus' parable of the Unforgiving Servant in Matthew 18:21-35. In this story a man is forgiven an inconceivably large debt, but when he steps out of the King's presence he viciously seeks repayment of a minor debt from his neighbor. James, just like Jesus, is saying that the person who has truly been changed by the Gospel will be merciful in response to the great mercy they have received. To do otherwise is to be "inconsistent within ourselves" which is a more direct translation of verse 2:4.

James is always moving us from spiritual reality to practical reality. Please never hear in his teaching that these external manifestations of spiritual change can be produced by your own strength. The word James uses for partiality literally means to "receive face". It is a word that New Testament writers invented because the practice of showing partiality was so common in the 1st Century that no one had even stopped to articulate it. God gives us the power through his Spirit to live out these things. Students often ask for practical application or about tips for sharing your faith at work. How about we all commit to putting away this evil in our lives and living out our faith without partiality? Try that for a while and see what it does in your own life and the questions it begs about the hope that is in you.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Think back to a patient that was hard to love. What made this so? What sort of feelings did it stir up in you? How did you communicate it with your co-workers or friends?
2. How would reflection on James or CS Lewis (above) affect your thoughts and behavior in the previous question?
3. Verse 1 uses partiality in a plural sense, then wealth and poverty are given as one example. What is another 'partiality' or distinction that we are prone to make that we may need to rethink in light of the Gospel?

Side Notes

- 🔊 I AM OFTEN MOTIVATED BY THIS CS LEWIS QUOTE FROM THE WEIGHT OF GLORY: "THERE ARE NO ORDINARY PEOPLE. YOU HAVE NEVER TALKED TO A MERE MORTAL."
- 🔊 IN THE SERMON SECTION LINKED BELOW CSL EXPOUNDS ON THE REALITY THAT WE ARE ALL ON OUR WAY TO ETERNAL GLORY OR ETERNAL DESTRUCTION.
- 🔊 LET THE POSSIBILITY OF FUTURE GLORY SHAPE HOW YOU INTERACT WITH PATIENTS.

DIGITAL RESOURCES

LIFEWAY—Three Reasons God Condemns Favoritism ([ARTICLE](#))
C.S. LEWIS—Exert from *The Weight of Glory* ([ARTICLE](#))

PRAYER POINTS

1. THANK GOD FOR OPPORTUNITY TO BE IN PROXIMITY OF A WIDE ARRAY OF PEOPLE
2. PRAY FOR FAITHFULNESS TO LIVE OUT YOUR BELIEFS IN YOUR EDUCATION AND WORK.
3. ASK GOD TO REVEAL ANY 'PARTIALITY', OR FAVORITISM, IN YOUR OWN LIFE.

Becoming

A DOCTOR'S NOTES ON THE BOOK OF JAMES

James 2:8-13: The Law of Liberty

Imagine a wonderful playground in a beautiful seaside park where the waves crash beneath a majestic cliff just beyond the park. Now imagine two children. One child is petrified of the cliff and the powerful waters churning beneath the playground. This child can't leave his father's side out of fear for what might happen. Now imagine another child. This little girl is fearless and foolish, and she would certainly tumble to her death out of her desire to explore the cliff and the dangers beneath. Her mother loves her too much to ever let her play for long at this lovely park. Now imagine someone builds a fence around this park. This sort of fixed "law" protects both children and gives them the freedom to enjoy the park to its fullest extent.

For James, he sees the "law of liberty" (the message of the Messiah Jesus) as this fence. James coined the term "law of liberty" likely after years of reflecting on Jesus' life and words and teaching people how Messianic faith was different than the life they experienced previously. For God, the law had always been about liberty. The foundational story for the Israelites was the Passover and the Exodus. They knew themselves to be God's liberated people, and one of God's first acts of liberation was to set the boundaries for how they could enjoy Him and prosper within the relationship.

Jesus fulfilled God's ultimate law to the full. He never broke a single part of it and became for Israel (and the world) what no person could have ever been. He gave us his "royal law" which sums up all the Law and the Prophets: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself." That law is incredibly freeing and restricting at the same time. Like our two children in the example above, we are all prone to folly either through legalism or license. Jesus' law is like the fence that gives us the freedom to navigate life safely and joyfully. Remember James is always reminding us that behavior flows out of relationship. Neither legalism nor license are signs of a healthy relationship. He tells us that the royal law, God's intention for human flourishing, is an inseparable whole. We don't have the freedom to pick and chose which aspects of this framework we want to follow (avoiding murder and adultery) and which ones we don't (showing

**JAMES IS ALWAYS REMINDING US
THAT BEHAVIOR FLOWS OUT OF
RELATIONSHIP. NEITHER LEGALISM
NOR LICENSE ARE SIGNS OF A
HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP.**

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GOD'S INTENTION FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING, IS AN INSEPARABLE WHOLE THAT WE SEE LIVED OUT IN JESUS.

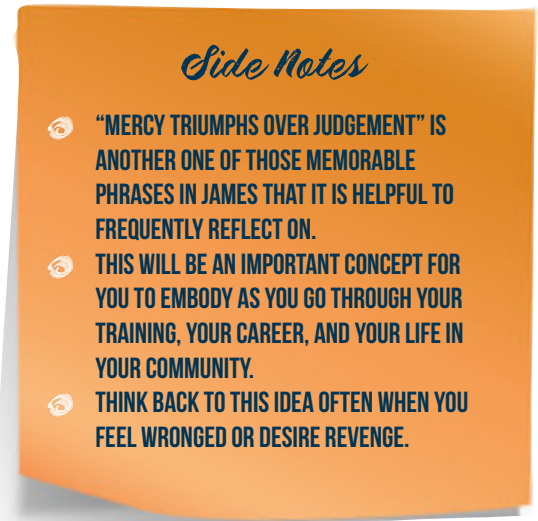
partiality). Such avoidance cannot save anyone, anymore than a fence would be effective if it was full of gaps.

James reminds us of the fact that judgment is a reality for everyone, even doctors. Breaking the law, even at one point, is a serious offense because of the Law Giver. Christians, however, will be judged under the law of liberty. James is making a radical application of Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount "blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy" and in the Lord's Prayer "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." James is saying bluntly what Jesus said obtusely. In his sermon on this passage, Professor N.T. Wright says "The same door through which the mercy of God will come into your heart and life, rescuing and transforming you and enabling you to live by the royal law, is the door through which that mercy must flow out to others. But if you slam that door shut because you don't like the others, or don't trust them, or feel yourself to be socially superior to them, then you have slammed and locked the very door through which God's mercy was longing to come to you as well."

For those who have so much knowledge, influence, and power: May God help us to be practitioners who care for the ignorant, lowly, and weak. May mercy flow from us as those who have truly received mercy.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Based on your upbringing and approach to the world, would you say that "Mercy triumphs over judgement"? When have you seen mercy demonstrated? Where do you struggle to be merciful?
2. To which kid on the playground do you relate? How does that affect your relationship with God? What are some "laws" from God that have been a helpful fence for you?
3. Israel was meant to be a light of liberty to the world, but failed in their vocation. How can you be a "light to the world" as a believer, student, and physician?



- Side Notes*
- 1. "MERCY TRIUMPHS OVER JUDGEMENT" IS ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE MEMORABLE PHRASES IN JAMES THAT IT IS HELPFUL TO FREQUENTLY REFLECT ON.
 - 2. THIS WILL BE AN IMPORTANT CONCEPT FOR YOU TO EMBODY AS YOU GO THROUGH YOUR TRAINING, YOUR CAREER, AND YOUR LIFE IN YOUR COMMUNITY.
 - 3. THINK BACK TO THIS IDEA OFTEN WHEN YOU FEEL WRONGED OR DESIRE REVENGE.

DIGITAL RESOURCES

- JOHN PIPER—The Peril of Partiality ([ARTICLE](#))
THE BIBLE PROJECT—The Law (*very helpful 6 min video*) ([VIDEO](#))

PRAYER POINTS

1. THANK GOD FOR MERCY THAT HAS BEEN SHOWN TO YOU AND PRAY THAT YOU MAY BE MERCIFUL.
2. PRAY FOR FAITHFULNESS TO GOD'S LAW WITHOUT LICENSE OR LEGALISM
3. ASK GOD TO SHOW YOU WHERE YOU ARE FAILING TO LOVE HIM OR LOVE OTHERS WELL. REPENT AND MOVE FORWARD.

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Becoming

A DOCTOR'S NOTES ON THE BOOK OF JAMES

James 2:14-26: Faith and Works

She shouldn't have been there, but there she was. She was a vibrant 19-year-old woman involved in a random auto accident, and I was a fourth-year medical student on an ICU rotation. Meanwhile, people on a wait list were coming to the hospital hoping this young woman's organs could save their own lives. I remember going into the room with the Neurology team to run the tests to declare her brain dead. We ran the apnea test, checked reflexes, and performed some other examination steps, and we had a goal: We were looking for life in this woman.. and didn't find it.

James is bringing his discussion of faith and works to a close, and he is asking us to look within ourselves and ask that important question "Is there life in here?" Keep in mind that James' main point (which builds off the end of chapter 1) is that we not be deceived. He is not telling us about the *way* to salvation, but he is teaching us about the *fruit* of salvation.

I am concerned for us as providers. If we aren't careful we will equate knowing things about God with knowing and loving God in a saving way. James' admonition is that even the demons believe truths about God, enough to make them shudder, but they are not saved. Pastor Matt Chandler once said in a sermon on James: "Intellectual assent to correct doctrine is not salvation." We cannot hear that often enough. Doctrine matters, of course it does, but James is saying that doctrine without application is lifeless (vs 26). It is acting out our faith that gives life to our faith, the same way that the soul animates our bodies.

So what does this mean for us as providers? We frequently see people who are poorly clothed and lacking in daily necessities. Should we buy dinner for everyone in the clinic waiting room after each shift? Or give backpacks to all the kids in your Pediatrics office? Maybe. But that is not what James is getting at with the examples of Abraham and Rahab. The more that I have thought about the way James uses these individuals as examples, the more I am convinced that the key to a life of faith is *trust*. James uses the word 'justify' in a different way than Paul does. Paul uses the Greek '*dikaioo*' in its primary sense which is to declare righteous (as a judge may call an accused criminal 'justified' in their action). James uses the term in its secondary sense which is 'to show or exhibit that something is true'. It is as if I said "North Carolina barbecue is better than Texas barbecue" and you said, "Oh yeah, justify that statement to me." Abraham

**INTELLECTUAL ASSENT TO
CORRECT DOCTRINE IS NOT
SALVATION.**

THE LIFE OF FAITH IS MORE THAN A PRIVATE (LONG PAST) TRANSACTION OF THE HEART WITH GOD. IT IS THE LIFE OF ACTIVE CONSECRATION SEEN IN THE OBEDIENCE WHICH HOLDS NOTHING BACK FROM GOD, AND THE CONCERN WHICH HOLDS NOTHING BACK FROM HUMAN NEED.

had already demonstrated "saving faith" nearly 35 years before the example James highlights (Gen 15, Rom 4). In trusting God to be faithful to his promise even to the point of sacrificing his promised heir, Abraham demonstrated his faith in a justifying second sense of the word. Rahab did the same thing. She heard of the power of Israel's God and believed then demonstrated her faith by trusting the Israeli spies to save her and her family when the time came.

We demonstrate our faith by acts of trust. Sometimes that means trusting God with our money when giving seems hard. Other times that will mean trusting God with our doubts, priorities, chastity, or prestige. "The life of faith is more than a private (long past) transaction of the heart with God. It is the life of active consecration seen in the obedience which holds nothing back from God, and the concern which holds nothing back from human need." (Motyer) So how are you doing? If we gave your faith the apnea test, would you freshly inspire God's life-giving breath? If we hit your stress points would you reflexively respond with faith? In response to painful stimuli do you recoil in faith that God is better and trust him moving forward?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. How have you heard the relationship between 'faith' and 'works' described before? How would you explain this to someone else?
2. What are some times in life that your faith felt "fully alive"? Why were those times different? How can you live in that reality more often?
3. What do you think it looks like for you in your current life, and then future life in practice, to be demonstrating your faith by your works? Do you ever think those activities will make God love you more?

Side Notes

- THE INTERACTION BETWEEN GOD AND ABRAHAM THAT JAMES REFERENCES HERE FROM GENESIS 22 CAUSES SOME THEOLOGIANS (E.G. GREG BOYD AND ROB BELL) TO CLAIM THAT GOD IS IGNORANT ABOUT THE FUTURE.
- THIS APPROACH IS TERMED "OPEN THEISM" AND I BELIEVE IT IS AN ERRONEOUS INTERPRETATION. FOR MORE INFO SEE THE LINK BELOW.

DIGITAL RESOURCES

ANDREW WILSON—Series of three articles about Open Theism ([THREE ARTICLES FROM MAY 2017](#))

MATT CHANDLER—Faith and Works ([SERMON VIDEO AND TEXT](#))

TIM KELLER—Helpful quote about the Gospel and obedience ([ARTICLE](#))

PRAYER POINTS

1. THANK GOD FOR EYES TO SEE JAMES' WARNING THAT LIFELESS FAITH IS PERILOUS.
2. PRAY FOR FAITHFULNESS TO GOD'S CALLING ON YOUR LIFE TO BE A PERSON OF ACTION MOTIVATED BY TRUST.
3. ASK GOD TO SHOW YOU WHERE YOU CAN BE MORE ACTIVELY TRUSTING HIM WITH YOUR TIME, EMOTIONS, THOUGHTS, AND ACTIONS

Becoming

A DOCTOR'S NOTES ON THE BOOK OF JAMES

James 3:1-12: The Tongue

Do you remember all the random things we learned about the tongue in anatomy? An astute practitioner can sometimes diagnose concealed pathologies if they pay attention during conversations. A smooth tongue may mean that a person has dentures, but it also may be a sign of B12 deficiency or menopause. A hairy tongue may be a herald of EBV infection or aspergillosis. New-onset fasciculations may be a tragic early sign of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.

In the same way that the tongue may reveal diseases developing within us, James says that the tongue has the power to reveal what is in our hearts. If we fit this part of the book into the broader theme of what it means to be "perfect and complete", James says that learning to control your tongue is an outward sign of maturity in Christ. It was Jesus himself who said in Luke 6:45 that "out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." James asks "Can blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth?" The truth you need to hear is this: Our words really matter. The words we speak to ourselves and to others have the power to shape our destiny and to reveal either the pollution or purity of our hearts.

**LEARNING TO CONTROL YOUR
TONGUE IS AN OUTWARD SIGN OF
MATURITY IN CHRIST.**

Controlling the tongue begins with fighting for maturity with our thoughts in our own heads. If we are not to be deceived in our spiritual development we must be honest with ourselves. James Motyer writes "But if our tongue were so well under control that it refused to formulate the words of self-pity, the images of lustfulness, the thoughts of anger and resentment, then these things are cut down before they have a chance to live: the master switch has deprived them of any power to 'switch on' that side of our lives. It is in this way that *if any one makes no mistakes in what he says he is a perfect man*. The control of the tongue is more than an evidence of spiritual maturity; it is the means to it." Just like a large ship is guided by a small rudder, the thoughts in our heads have a way of shaping our whole lives. When James says "Consider it all joy", that involves a good deal of Gospel-driven self talk. Paul says, "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil 4:8, ESV). Are these the sort of thoughts and words that are driving your life? This is the battle for maturity to which James is calling us.

DEFAMATORY, UNLOVING SPEECH ISSUES FROM A HEART WHERE THE LOVE OF JESUS IS A STRANGER.

Once we have begun to control the narrative inside our heads and developed the thought patterns consistent with Christian maturity, we can speak wisely in daily life. Paul says in Ephesians 4:29 that we ought to not let any corrupting talk come out of our mouths, but only what gives grace to those who hear us. How would obeying this affect your home and in your workplace? This is the mark of a mature believer, that your words give grace to those you speak to.

In light of the Gospel we have been forgiven so many failings and been granted so much grace, that to turn around and curse others is absurdly inconsistent. Just like a fig must come from a fig tree or salt water must come from a salty source, bitterness can only arise out of a bitter heart. Non-constructive criticism can only come out of a critical spirit. Pastor Motyer writes that "defamatory, unloving speech issues from a heart where the love of Jesus is a stranger." Be aware of the power of your tongue to shape your internal and external world.

People will hang on to your words throughout your career. Patients never forget the words spoken to them at the time of a difficult diagnosis. The way you communicate with your colleagues will shape the culture around you. Your own speech is just as much of a medical skill that you need to learn as is surgical techniques or differential diagnoses. May you grow in this for the sake of your faith and practice.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What sort of narratives act as a rudder or bit in your life? Who spoke those into you?
2. What is a time in your life when you really messed up either by saying the wrong thing or failing to say the right thing? How have you learned from that?
3. What are some practical steps you can take at school or work to have controlled grace-filled speech?

Side Notes

- 📖 "THE POWER OF POSITIVE LEADERSHIP" BY JON GORDON IS A HELPFUL READ WHEN IT COMES TO SHAPING A POSITIVE CULTURE THROUGH OUR WORDS.
- 📖 HE USES THE TERM "ENERGY VAMPIRES" TO DESCRIBE PEOPLE THAT SUCK THE LIFE OUT OF GROUPS THROUGH NEGATIVITY. THEY HAVE TO EITHER BE REFORMED OR REMOVED.

DIGITAL RESOURCES

GOSPEL COALITION—How do you keep a reign on your tongue? [\(10 MIN VIDEO/ARTICLE FROM THREE WOMEN IN GOSPEL COALITION\)](#)

MATT CHANDLER—Taming the Tongue [\(2 MIN VIDEO\)](#)

PRAYER POINTS

1. THANK GOD HIS MERCIES THAT ARE NEW EVERY MORNING NO MATTER OUR OWN FAILURES.
2. PRAY FOR FAITHFULNESS TO BE CONTROLLED AND CONSISTENT WITH YOUR SPEECH.
3. ASK GOD TO SHOW YOU HOW YOUR HEART IS REFLECTED IN YOUR SPEECH.



Becoming

A DOCTOR'S NOTES ON THE BOOK OF JAMES

James 3:13-18: Walking in Wisdom

Who is wise and understanding among you? Did you notice that James didn't ask who is 'smart' among you? The tricky thing about wisdom is that it is hard to measure. It is not well correlated with IQ, test performance, or academic degrees. Pastor Ben Stuart describes wisdom as "To know what things are, to know how things work, and then know what to do about it...[It is] to be in touch with reality and then respond accordingly." Interesting isn't it, how that sounds like the process of medical training? You spend the first part learning what things are, second part learning how they work, and then you spend a whole career learning how to apply your experience in a variety of situations. Think about how serious you have been about school and all the effort you've put towards being successful. Are you that intentional about developing wisdom in your life?

**OUR WISDOM IS SHOWN IN HUMILITY
TOWARDS CHRIST THROUGH BEAUTIFUL
GOOD WORKS THAT ADORN THE GOSPEL.**

James asks who is wise, and then he says, "Show me". He then tells us how we display our wisdom to ourselves and other people, namely through our good conduct. There are two Greek words that he could have used for 'good' in this scenario. One is *agathos*, which means "intrinsically good" and carries a moral quality and the other is *kalos*, which means something closer to "lovely" and paints an image of the attractiveness of the good life. He says we should have *kalos* conduct that is accompanied by the meekness of wisdom. Remember that we have previously defined meekness as "an inner disposition that relates to God and others because of a proper estimation of oneself." What James is driving home here is that wisdom is a God-given gift that is our personal responsibility to seek and cultivate. If we put it at the center of our beings, we can live by it, but it cannot be kept if we are not walking in a right relationship with God himself, and therefore nourished daily with grace upon grace. (Motyer paraphrase)

I heard Scott Sauls (pastor and author in Nashville, TN) say in an interview that the old question in apologetics (the defense of the Christian faith) was "Is Christianity true?", but our current culture is not asking whether Christianity is true so much as it is asking "Is Christianity beautiful?" Scott is saying again for our day exactly what Pastor James said to his disciples: That our wisdom is shown in humility towards Christ through beautiful good works that adorn the gospel. If you can pursue this now, rather than ignoring it until training is completed, you will be on your way to the life James (and Jesus) wants for you.

DO I, WITH CONFIDENT HUMILITY, DISPLAY WISDOM THAT IS PURE, PEACEABLE, GENTLE, OPEN TO REASON, FULL OF MERCY AND GOOD FRUITS, IMPARTIAL, AND SINCERE?

So what are you learning now from the unwritten curriculum we absorb from our healthcare environments? I am afraid that we are taught that bitter jealousy and selfish ambition are expected characteristics if you are meant to be successful. For many of you, you have experienced the idea that you have to beat out your classmates for the residency spot you want or that your ambition should be the driving motivator your career performance. I beg you, learn and serve and achieve the fullest extent of what God has made you to do in medicine, but do it out of a beautiful trust in God's goodness *not* out of worldly ambition. James says what we all know, such a life only leads to disorder and every vile practice. The gunner that burns their bridges and builds their career will find themselves lonely and isolated as they ask themselves at some point in their career what all this was for.

Take this list that James gives us and ask yourself, "Do I, with confident humility, display wisdom that is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere?" Think about what it looks like in your life to be a person that promotes peace. In your daily interactions, you have three options for what you will build: violence, indifference, and peace. This is what beautiful conduct in the meekness of wisdom does, it creates peace wherever it goes. I pray that you will embody James' list of characteristics in a way that develops your mind and shapes your life and affects the world around you.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. If you were really honest with yourself, where are jealousy and selfish ambition motivating you? How could you convert these desires into a Godly, rather than earthly, ambition?
2. How could being more pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere have brought peace into your environment lately?
3. If someone asked you "Can you show me that Christianity beautiful?", what would you say?

Side Notes

- 1. BEN STUART QUOTES THE BOOK "DEEP SURVIVAL" THAT HE MOTIVATED ME TO READ.
- 2. THE AUTHOR CONCLUDES THAT THE KEY CHARACTER TRAIT TO SURVIVING PERILOUS SITUATIONS IS HUMILITY NOT STRENGTH OR BRAVERY.
- 3. PEOPLE THAT ARE HUMBLE ABOUT THEIR ABILITIES AND LIMITATIONS SURVIVE IN THE WOODS AND IN LIFE. PEOPLE THAT OVERESTIMATE THEIR ABILITY (ROCKCLIMBING, HANG GLIDING, ETC) OFTEN DIE AS A RESULT OF THEIR FOLLY.

DIGITAL RESOURCES

GOSPEL COALITION—Tim Keller Wants to Help You Become Wise ([ARTICLE](#))
SAM STORMS—Wisdom From Below ([Article](#))

PRAYER POINTS

1. THANK GOD THAT HE MADE PEACE WITH US, SO THAT WE CAN BE PEACEMAKERS IN OUR WORLD.
2. PRAY FOR FAITHFULNESS TO LET WISDOM FLOURISH IN YOUR LIFE BY MAKING THE HARD CHOICES TO DEVELOP WISE BEHAVIOR PATTERNS.
3. ASK GOD TO SHOW YOU WHERE YOU ARE BEING DECEIVED BY JEALOUSY AND AMBITION.

Becoming

A DOCTOR'S NOTES ON THE BOOK OF JAMES

James 4:1-12: Exclusive, Expressive, and Expecting

In 2005, Christian Smith and Melinda Norquist Denton published *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* in which they describe the prevailing theological persuasion of the Millennial generation as "moralistic, therapeutic deism" (MTD). They identify the five tenets of MTD to be:

1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

This is the theological milieu in which we are swimming, and although it is different from the world James was speaking into, his scathing critique is no less applicable to our MTD situation. In this passage James shows us that a relationship with God (contrary to MTD) is in fact exclusive, expressive, and expecting.

If we aren't careful we will live like the central goal in life is to be happy and feel good about oneself. Into that perspective James says that we have misguided passions. We may believe that God exists, and even turn to him to resolve our problems, but in doing so we reduce God to a cosmic vending machine that dispenses what we think we want in order to make us "happy". But God is more powerful than that. As C.S. Lewis writes in *The Weight of Glory* "It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." It is this sort of attitude that James calls 'adulterous', because God is exclusive. We cannot find the joy we are looking for in either carnal pleasures like drink and sex or in the more subtle adulterous pursuit of ambition, comfort, and self-reliance. Seeking out ultimate joy in other things is not only foolish, it is dangerous. Aligning ourselves with other sex partners breaks our relationship with God and makes us enemies with him. But God does not leave us as unfaithful enemies, exiled and awaiting punishment. He gives more grace. In so many ways this is the message of James. Remember how he previously said "Mercy triumphs over

**IT WOULD SEEM THAT OUR LORD FINDS
OUR DESIRES NOT TOO STRONG, BUT
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INFINITE JOY IS OFFERED US**

WE CANNOT DRIFT INTO FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD ANY MORE THAN WE DRIFT INTO HOLINESS. IT IS OUR FIRST OBEDIENCE.

judgement"? Now James says that grace triumphs over distance. This is the expressive love of God that pursues us like the prophet Hosea pursued his adulterous wife, Gomer. There is grace that is sufficient for all our sins.

Because of the work of Jesus, God has made his very Spirit to indwell a corrupt and adulterous people. We quarrel, murder, and covet, but he gives more grace. “His resources are never at an end, his patience is never exhausted, his initiative never stops, his generosity knows no limit: he gives more grace” (Motyer). But grace is never cheap. God does have expectations that we are to live up to. It would be unloving for him to do otherwise. The fifth tenet of MTD is not true, because it is cheap. Good people do not go to heaven. Motyer writes that “Fellowship with God—and its consequent blessing of his fellowship with us—does not ‘just happen’; we cannot drift into it any more than we drift into holiness. It is our first obedience.” Walking in holiness includes active allegiance to God over the Satan (the dividing one, vs 7), proximity to the presence of God accompanied by killing of our sin (vs 8), being sorrowful of our shortcomings (vs 9) and eager expectation of God’s affirmation for a life lived in joyful submission to him (vs 10). May you put to death the selfishness that lurks in your heart and nurture into full life the humility and holiness that God can provide in you. May you learn to be passionate for the vocation God has called you to, so that you can contend for the faith in a life of faithfulness.

Side Notes

- ⑥ JAMES WAS INTEGRAL TO ONE OF THE EARLIEST AND MOST PROFOUND DIVIDING ARGUMENTS IN ALL OF CHRISTIAN HISTORY NAMED, ‘WHAT DO YOU DO WITH GENTILE BELIEVERS?’ (SEE ACTS 21 AND GALATIANS 2)
- ⑥ SOMEHOW, THE JAMES WE SEE IN ACTS MUST HAVE LIVED THROUGH, AND BEEN CHANGED BY, EARLY CHRISTIAN QUARRELS IF HE WAS TO WRITE THE MATERIAL THAT WE HAVE READ HERE IN THIS BOOK

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What is your <insert your favorite topic here> that would make you prone to quarrel with other believers? How should you approach discussing this topic in a way that builds up the church for the glory of God?
2. Is there anything you are expecting from God out of selfishness rather than trusting in him to provide?
3. As you read James’ list of spiritual practices (7-10) what stands out to you as something that needs to change in your life?

DIGITAL RESOURCES

JOHN PIPER—A 250-yr-old Model: How Calvinist Simeon Related to Wesley ([ARTICLE](#)) How to “quarrel” well.
D.A. CARSON—Drifting towards holiness ([QUICK QUOTE](#))

PRAYER POINTS

1. THANK GOD FOR HIS GRACE THAT IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE.
2. PRAY FOR FAITHFULNESS TO PURSUE HOLINESS WITH CLEAN HANDS AND PURE HEARTS BY THE POWER HE PROVIDES IN THE SPIRIT.
3. ASK GOD TO SHOW YOU WHERE YOUR HEART IS DIVIDED AND ASK HIM TO GIVE YOU HIS DESIRES FOR YOU.

Becoming

A DOCTOR'S NOTES ON THE BOOK OF JAMES

James 4:13-17: Life is a Vapor

Driving down the road on Halloween at the start of his second year of medical school, Zach was cruising through life. Behind him was a college football career and successful life combining sports, academics, and ministry. In front of him was another year of school and a new marriage to enjoy. But on this Halloween evening, Zach had a flat tire. Asserting his manhood he pulled over to the side of the road and took out the car jack and lug wrench and prepared to work. That is the last thing he remembers. Zach was hit by a distracted driver and his life changed forever. In an instant, by no fault of his own, he suffered a depressed skull fracture complicated by an epidural hematoma, a mid-shaft femur fracture, and a ruptured ankle capsule with multiple torn ligaments. Through the coma, the surgeries, and the intensive rehabilitation Zach learned very clearly that his life is a vapor. How many of you have planned out your whole track for school? Could James say to us "Come now, you who say I am going to get into this school and this residency and spend 3-5 years there as I train and make a name for myself— what is your life? Do you not know that your life is a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes?" God forbid that we have to go through what Zach went through to learn that our life can be changed in an instant. James is criticizing his audience for a tendency that we need to hear for ourselves, namely a tendency to be presumptuous with our goals.

This type of presumption is not only foolish, James calls it downright evil. It is evil because it is destructive. A self-focused arrogance that sees the events of your life under your control for your good and your glory is a corruption of your humanity, because it fails to rely on God as the source of all good things.

Planning is not wrong, but it can be done wrongly. You are in a time in life when you need to make plans, seek God's will, and decide who you will be. James is asking you to do so with *humility*. In your heart, and occasionally in your speech, we are to say "If the Lord wills then I will do this or that." Finding God's will can at times feel like groping around in the dark more than we would like to admit. It doesn't have to be though. It is only unclear because we often have unrealistic expectations for what God wants to reveal to us. His direct, explicit plan is often not made clear, but in humility we can live faithfully in such a way that what we need to know becomes apparent.

**A SELF-FOCUSED ARROGANCE THAT
SEES THE EVENTS OF YOUR LIFE
UNDER YOUR CONTROL FOR YOUR
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CORRUPTION OF YOUR HUMANITY,
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KNOWING GOD'S WILL INVOLVES SATURATING OURSELVES IN SCRIPTURE, PRAYING FAITHFULLY IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND WALKING CLOSELY IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY.

Knowing God's will involves 1) saturating ourselves in Scripture 2) praying faithfully in the Holy Spirit 3) walking closely in Christian community. Saturating ourselves in Scripture teaches us more about God's clearly revealed will. This is the antidote to the cultural influences which cause us to wrongly understand God's will. If we can read and repeatedly ingest what God has communicated with us, we can have a framework for making decisions. This sounds so obvious, but it is true! Plenty of people make decisions based on feelings without considering the weight of Scriptural guidance. Praying in the Spirit means that we submit ourselves through the spiritual and physical practice of prayer. I say spiritual because it is the effective means that God prescribes for us to communicate with him. I say physical because it is a physical act of the body and the mind to align ourselves with God's desires. Walking in Christian community provides us with access to the wisdom God has given others to help us navigate decisions. For instance, someone may desire, based on Scripture, to be a missionary, but one's community may point out that they are mean-spirited, horrified of flying, and too distracted to learn a foreign language. We don't speak often enough about the power of prophecy in community, but we should welcome the Spirit-led insight others have into our abilities in life. God's will is often made clear by life events, new revelations, wise counsel, and spiritual promptings. It may not be on the timeline we would like, but our perception of God's will is always limited by time. The important thing is to walk humbly, seek guidance, and commit each step as the Lord wills.

Side Notes

- 1. MY SWEET, SOUTHERN, MOMMA SAYS "LORD WILLING" NEARLY EVERY TIME SHE TALKS ABOUT DOING ANYTHING. E.G. "LORD WILLIN' I'M GOING TO FIX A HAM ON SUNDAY."
- 2. IN 1 COR 16 PAUL SAYS "IF IT SEEMS ADVISABLE" THAT HE SHOULD GO TO JERUSALEM, HE WOULD GO. LATER HE SAYS "IF THE LORD PERMITS."
- 3. YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE LIKE MY MOM, BUT JESUS, JAMES, AND PAUL WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO BE CAREFUL WITH STATING YOUR PLANS.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What are you seeking direction from God about these days? What are some first steps you can take to find your answer?
2. Have you ever been very confident about "God's will" for your life only to be proven wrong by reality?
3. How would viewing your life as a vapor change your approach to tomorrow? If you knew you would die in 6 months, what would you do differently and why?

DIGITAL RESOURCES

- DAVID PLATT—How to Find God's Will for Your Life ([SHORT VIDEO](#))
JOHN PIPER—Look at the Book: Your Life is a Mist ([15-MINUTE VIDEO](#))
LIGONIERS—Knowing God's Will ([ARTICLE](#))

PRAYER POINTS

1. THANK GOD FOR THE LIFE THAT HE HAS GIVEN YOU.
2. PRAY FOR FAITHFULNESS TO HIS REVEALED WILL IN SCRIPTURE AND HUMILITY TO APPROACH YOUR FUTURE TRUSTING IN HIM.
3. ASK GOD TO SHOW YOU WHAT HE HAS FOR YOU TODAY AND HOW YOU SHOULD PREPARE FOR TOMORROW. ASK FOR HIM TO FORM YOU ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN OF HIS WILL.

Becoming

A DOCTOR'S NOTES ON THE BOOK OF JAMES

James 5:1-12: Establish Your Hearts

There is a tendency in our generation to want everything and want it *now*. I was captivated the other night when the TV in the doctors' lounge was showing a young couple in the same stage of life as my family on one of those home remodeling shows. They bought a house that an older family friend had been happy to live in and immediately gutted it for the sake of an open floor plan, updated kitchen, and a snazzy living room that could not possibly be as toddler friendly as the designer claimed it would be. I could see in them the desires of my own heart, and I could hear the echoes of James telling me to "Be patient...for the coming of the Lord is at hand."

The problem of wealth, the reason James is so vehement with "the rich" in this passage, is that wealth binds and blinds. In a voice consistent with the prophets of old, James tells his readers to wake up from their stupor to see their reality. God never condemns the faithful accumulation of wealth, but the love and trust of money are warned against throughout the whole Bible, with all the force of eternal judgment.

**THE PROBLEM OF WEALTH IS THAT IN
BINDS AND BLINDS.**

The first thing that James points out is that money binds us to this world. He says that the perceived security allegedly found in money will eat a person's flesh like fire. Andrew Peterson has a wonderful lyric in the song "Land of the Free" that says, "I am weary of the spoils of my ambition and shackled by the comforts of my couch. I wish I had the courage to deny these of myself, and start to store my treasure in the clouds." Do we not feel that in our generation? We believe, I too often believe, that material possessions can provide fulfillment they were never created to provide. We fatten our hearts, grow our bank accounts and expand our waistlines in the pursuit of adding things that we think will make us happy when Jesus says clearly in the Sermon on the Mount that He is enough. He says to "seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and [the things you need] will be added to you" (Matt 6:33). This was the major change that living in Tanzania produced in my life. It took living and working in difficult conditions to internalize that "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim 6:6). In recent years a "FIRE" movement has started within medicine. The goal of several blogs and podcasts that bear this monicker is to be "**f**inancially **i**ndependent and **r**etire **e**arly." In some ways, this movement is to be praised because it awakens American consumers to the binding nature of work and money. Prophets within this movement encourage austerity and prudence for the sake of freedom. However when this freedom remains self seeking it fails to shift our gaze to things of eternal significance.

IT IS MY PRAYER FOR YOU THAT YOU WILL "ESTABLISH YOUR HEARTS, FOR THE COMING OF THE LORD IS AT HAND."

The other temptation of wealth is that it blinds. James beckons the wickedly rich to look around. The laborers that they have treated unjustly are calling out against them. Worse than that, they are blind to the eternal purposes of God they have squandered. James tells us to be patient like a good farmer awaits their harvest. Does a farmer sit around and wait for a meager harvest? No, they want an abundant harvest, but they are patient for it. James calls us to a steadfastness that is like Job. One of the major themes of Job is that he was faithful when he was wealthy, then destitute, and then wealthy again. He was aware of God's purpose to be compassionate and merciful. He was not blinded by the wealth he had accumulated, in fact he says "I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him" (29:12). "Have I not wept for those in trouble? Has not my soul grieved for the poor?" (30:25) He was a man whose heart was moved for the poor because he had eyes to see.

Side Notes

- 📌 THINK MONEY ISN'T BLINDING? [HERE'S A STAT I READ](#)
- 📌 PREPPING FOR THIS:
 - 📌 WEALTHY PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN A ZIP CODE WHERE >40% OF THE PEOPLE MAKE MORE THAN \$200,000/YEAR, GIVE ONLY 2.8% OF THEIR DISCRETIONARY INCOME AWAY.
 - 📌 IF YOU LIVE IN A NON-WEALTHY ZIP CODE BUT ARE WEALTHY, YOU TEND TO GIVE 4.8% OF YOUR DISCRETIONARY INCOME AWAY.

This is God's heart for you. Many of you, even through faithful service and wise living, will be in the top 1% of earners within your state. It may not feel like it now, but the siren call of finances will reach your ears soon enough. It is my prayer for you that you will "Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand." Be patient with your finances and ambitious with your compassion. Dream of how you may make God's name great with your work and your wealth. May you be strengthened to break what binds you and overcome what blinds you so that you can carry out your vocation with faithful perseverance.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you consider yourself wealthy? What has been your view of money growing up?
2. Think about your image of your ideal future. What aspects of that image do you hear God telling you to consider in light of his desires for you and his promise to return?
3. Search your Bible app for the words rich, poor, wealth, and money and discuss themes that you find jumping out.

DIGITAL RESOURCES

CHARLES DUHIG—Wealthy Successful and miserable ([NYT ARTICLE](#))
JOHN PIPER—What is the right way to be rich? ([ARTICLE LINK](#))
ERLC—Does Jesus want you to be poor? ([ARTICLE LINK](#))

PRAYER POINTS

1. THANK GOD FOR THE OPPORTUNITIES HE HAS PLACED IN YOUR LIFE TO BE TRAINED AND EDUCATED.
2. PRAY FOR FAITHFULNESS TO STEWARD MONEY IN A WAY THAT GLORIFIES GOD AND PREPARES FOR HIS RETURN
3. ASK GOD TO GIVE YOU PATIENCE WITH YOUR DESIRES AND EXPECTATIONS SO THAT YOU MAY SEE HIM WORK THROUGH YOU.

Becoming

A DOCTOR'S NOTES ON THE BOOK OF JAMES

James 5:13-20: Prayer in, of, through Faith

Think back to when you prepared and studied to get into this school (MCAT, etc.). I don't know about you, but for me it was hard. I was a junior in college, and I committed Tuesday and Thursday nights and all day on Saturday to studying for something like 10 weeks. I have images seared into my memory of walking past friends packing up for a weekend of camping knowing that I was going to do practice tests for 8 hours. Now why would I have done that? Why did you do something similar? Because you wanted to become something that mattered. You believed that the sacrificial actions you took in the moment were necessary for the goals you wanted to achieve in the future.

That is what the book of James is all about. James has been inviting us to see the reality of a life of holiness and motivating you to take hold of that reality for yourself. He opens the book with the image that we may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing if we can persist in faithfulness through the trials of life. Such perseverance requires a putting on of Godly things and a putting off of worldly things just like my MCAT studying required picking up books and saying no to fun activities. James goes on to warn us that we may be deceiving ourselves if we are living a duplicitous life of doubt, neglect, jealousy, slander, falsehood, or arrogance. It is with a humble confidence that we are to persist in the strength provided by presence of the Spirit, the truth of the Gospel, and the promise of Christ's return.

And so we come to the end of this book. James asks, is anyone experiencing bad things? Then pray. Is anyone experiencing good things? Then pray. He then paints this picture of elders coming around a deathly ill person and praying for them. It is easy to go off on a theological tangent that asks all sorts of questions about praying for healing, but I believe the message James has for you is to become this type of person- the type of person who can approach a sick person, care for them with all the skill that modern medicine can provide, but *also* be able to turn to God in faith and intercede on their behalf. I believe that is done formally through the office of an elder in a church, but we lose sight of the power of the Spirit and the mission of the church if we think ministering is something that is reserved for spiritual professionals. In verse 16 James says "pray for one another that you that you may be healed." Ephesians 4:12 says the point of the church is to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry." The truth you need to hear is that you are meant to be a minister. It may be in your home, your office, your

**YOU BELIEVED THAT THE
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ACHIEVE IN THE FUTURE.**

IN OTHER WORDS, [ELIJAH] WAS 'AN ORDINARY PERSON', BUT HE WAS RIGHT WITH GOD...

ELIJAH'S FAITH WAS ACTIVE IN HIS WORKS, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS

church, or your community, but this is what the development journey James has been describing is all about. You don't work to earn God's approval, your works of faith as a Christian are intended to minister to other people. You simply can't go on living for yourself. The task is real. It is not for some mystical class of elite Christians. It is the call of every Christian to be walking by faith in the power of the Spirit to grow in maturity, and let that maturity bleed onto others through ministering relationships with believers and non-believers.

Interesting that James chooses Elijah as the example to close out his book. Motyer writes, "Elijah who, [James] notes, was a man of like nature with ourselves (17), [could] rise to the heights of faith and commitment (1 Ki. 18: 36–38) and fall into the depths of despair and depression (1 Ki. 19: 4). He could be brave and resolute sometimes (1 Ki. 18: 17–19) and then fly for his life at a whiff of danger (1 Ki. 19: 3). He could be selfless in his concern for others (1 Ki. 17: 19–24) and then filled with self-pity (1 Ki. 19: 10). In other words, he was 'an ordinary person', but he was right with God—or to put things in the sort of terminology that we find in James' letter, his faith was active in his works, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness (Jas. 2: 22–23)."

May you find some peace in the example of Elijah. May you see yourself as a minister filled with the Holy Spirit to bring healing into your surroundings. May this healing occur in your own heart as you grow through trials. May it touch your patients in natural and supernatural ways. Be steadfast, trusting in the God who is merciful and working in the strength He provides while anticipating his glorious return.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Where are you right now: Are you suffering or offering praise? How have you turned to God lately in either of those feelings?
2. What is your view of God's role in healing? How have you either believed perhaps too much or too little in this area? How does this shape your faith and practice?
3. Peruse through some Elijah's story (1 Kings 17–19). How can you relate to his response to different events of his life? Do you feel like your prayers are effective? Why or why not?

DIGITAL RESOURCES

LIGONIERS—What is the prayer of faith? ([ARTICLE](#))
DESIRING GOD—The main ingredient to effective prayer ([ARTICLE LINK](#))

PRAYER POINTS

1. THANK GOD FOR THE OPPORTUNITIES TO PRAY FOR YOURSELF AND FOR OTHERS
2. PRAY FOR FAITHFULNESS TO THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER AND DEEPER EXPERIENCE OF ITS FRUITFULNESS.
3. ASK GOD TO GIVE TEMPORARY BLESSINGS LIKE HEALING AND SUCCESS AND ETERNAL BLESSINGS LIKE WISDOM AND FAITH.

Side Notes

- 1 THE PRAYER OF FAITH CANNOT MEAN THAT A SICK PERSON'S FAITH DETERMINES GOD'S RESPONSIVENESS TO A REQUEST.
- 2 THIS APPLICATION HAS DESTROYED PEOPLE AND FILLED THE POCKETS OF MANIPULATIVE SO-CALLED "FAITH HEALERS".
- 3 I BELIEVE, AND HAVE EXPERIENCED, GOD'S POWER AND PREROGATIVE TO HEAL AGAINST APPARENT MEDICAL LIKELIHOOD, AND THIS PASSAGE SHEDS LIGHT ON WHY AND HOW HE DOES IT.

