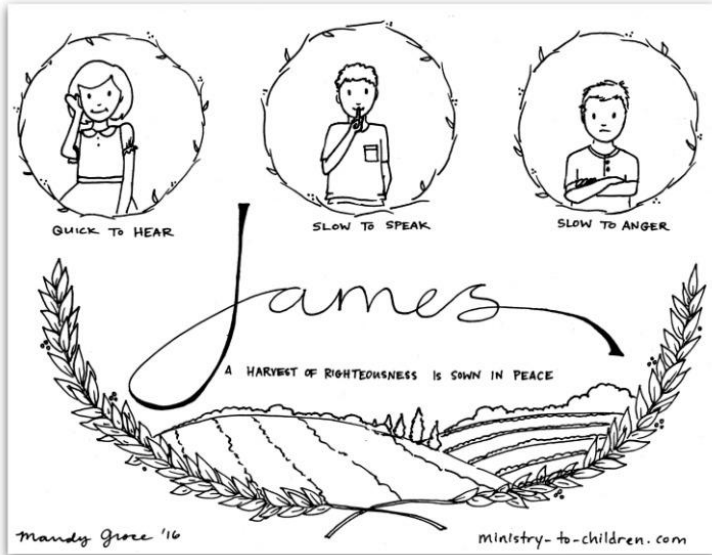


Devotional Series: James



Day 1: Camel Knees

***James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.
James 1v1***

We're going to begin a devotional series on the book of James. Be warned: it is not for the fainthearted! Truth be told, in my humanness I sometimes wish it wasn't in the Bible! James is not noted for his subtlety, but he is known for his practicality on living the Christian life. The good news is that God's grace enables us to lead the life He calls us to lead.

His opening statement reveals who is writing the letter. It's good to know things like this because then we know if it is worth listening to or not (and more importantly, worth obeying!). Piecing together different parts of Scripture, we can identify this particular James as the brother of Jesus. James was skeptical of Jesus and did not believe in him whilst growing up (see John 7:5). Who of us would believe that our brother is God?

And yet early church history identifies James as a key leader of the Church, especially in Jerusalem (see Acts 12:17 & Acts 15:13). His nickname was James the Just which gives you an idea of the integrity and godliness of the man. Tradition also says he was nicknamed 'camel knees' because of the way his knees looked - which was a result of the amount of time spent in prayer. James was also martyred (according to Eusebius he was thrown down from the temple parapet and then beaten to death with a club).

What made the difference? He encountered the resurrected Christ (1 Cor 15:7), and the result is profound. The result is so profound he identifies himself as a slave (translated 'servant' in above text) to Jesus and to God. We will explore that tomorrow.

Have you encountered the resurrected Christ? If not, why not ask Him to reveal Himself to you?

Day 2: Slave to Freedom

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. James 1:1

We have seen that the letter on which we are about to embark is written by someone who was intimately familiar with Jesus (first as a brother), and then believed in Jesus after seeing His resurrection. He was a man known for his godliness, integrity and prayer. He is a man worth listening to.

He chooses to identify himself as a slave of God and Jesus. The word he uses actually comes from the verb meaning 'to bind' and another verb which means 'to work hard.' This is the relationship between the Christian and Christ. We are bound to Christ, and we are called to serve.

We are not called to drag Christ to where we want to go, but rather to follow where He wants us to go. And as a slave, we need not worry, because our Master is responsible for provision (see Matt 6:25-34).

James chooses to be a slave because of the grace of God he encountered.

Will you gladly make the same choice?

Day 3: The Joy of Life

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds...James 1:2

A challenging text indeed!

What is James saying? In essence, he is saying that in every experience, we must seek to derive joy from it. We should not be dividing our life experiences into 'pleasant' and 'unpleasant,' but rather get the most out of every experience. Sick in bed? Get joy out of it. Broke? Get joy out of it. Persecuted? Get joy out of it. We need to remember that this letter is written to Jewish Christians who were scattered because of persecution.

But take heart. James is not saying that the trial itself is joyful. There is actually a future aspect to this, in that we can rejoice in the truth that the trial will be over. We can rejoice in the victory we can win and experience. Focus on the joy set before you in order to sustain you through the present (just like Jesus did - see Hebrews 12:1-3). As the Psalmist said (30:5): *Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.*

How true.

Let God's joy guide you and sustain you through all of life's circumstances. One day we will know that joy in full.

*Day 4: Patience is a virtue, possess it if
you can...*

*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, **for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness** - James 1:2&3*

The reality of the Christian life is that we face temptations every day (part of the meaning behind facing trials which we looked at yesterday). We can be tempted to take an easy road, or to give up.

Our challenge, which comes through in verse 3 (highlighted above), is to discern the purpose behind the test. We are being tested for a purpose. It is designed to accomplish something in you. Remember: when it comes to our walk with God, the heart of the issue is always the issue of the heart.

The testing of our faith through trials and temptations accomplishes two important things: It firstly reveals our faith. It shows us what is in our heart.

The second accomplishment is that it produces steadfastness or patience - the ability to remain calm under pressure and not run away from it. When you pray for patience, it is a prayer that gets answered through testing it, so that you can grow in it. The difficult colleague, the frustrating family member, these are what I like to call '*sanctification facilitators*.' They are God's gift to you to grow.

The good news? You only need patience for today. You can get tomorrow's dose tomorrow.

Day 5: Complete Maturity

And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:4

Just to recap: we have seen that this is a letter written by James, a man known for his godliness and prayer life. He was the earthly brother of Jesus, and initially sceptical, but after encountering the risen Christ he chose to identify himself as a slave of God and Christ. He is a man of faith, and as we shall see through the course of this letter, true faith in Christ reveals itself in a way of living.

His opening counsel is to derive joy from all of life. He does not counsel us on how to get out of difficulty (trials and temptations), but rather to focus on what we can get out of it. Patience is the result of being tested (as well as revealing our faith!).

Now we see that patience is absolutely necessary if we are going to be mature. We're not talking passive patience here, but rather seek to move forward even under pressure. Zodiates (whose commentary is primary source for these devotions) notes how a loaded cargo ship sails more smoothly than an empty one. This is what trials seek to achieve for us: that we will be settled in our walk with God despite the fury of the proverbial sea. Personally, I've yet to meet a person of character who had it easy.

Christians are not called to stay in nappies. We're called to grow into maturity. May that desire characterize us!

Day 6: The gift of wisdom

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. James 1:5

To live life wisely is not exactly the easiest thing to do. It's relatively easy to live life 'street-wise' where pragmatics rule the day. But just because something seems practical doesn't make it right (for example: abortion is very practical if you don't want children). It's a different matter entirely to live life with spiritual wisdom.

And we face challenges daily. James has just spoken of how we face trials and temptations. How do we face them so that we don't see difficult circumstances as our enemy but as our gracious mentor?

We ask God for wisdom. And this is very specific wisdom: the wisdom of God, given to us through the Holy Spirit. I love the way Zodiates puts it: *"Unless there is within us that which is above us, we shall soon yield to that which is about us"*

And God will give it. He has an endless supply! And God will give wisdom specific to you and your situation. You need only ask.

Isn't that wonderful?

Day 7: How to ask

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. James 1:6

It's easy to ask for something isn't it? And when it comes to asking God, there is no shortage of requests that we bring before Him!

But *how* we ask is crucial. We teach our children to say 'please' and 'thank you,' but they also have to mean it!

When it comes to asking God, we are told to ask in faith, without any doubting. Clearly God knows the human heart! We so often ask, but we do not really believe that we will get an answer. The force of this verse can be illustrated by saying that if you're going to pray for rain, take your umbrella with you!

But what specifically is being referred to here? Does this mean God will give whatever we ask? A good father would never do that. The previous verses have already told us what this refers to: wisdom to deal with the difficulties of life, that we might discern the purpose of God through them.

Don't think you're wise in your own eyes (you've landed yourself in enough trouble already thinking that!). How often we lose the battle of the mind through trusting our own judgements rather than God. If we doubt God's ability to grant us wisdom, we will be unstable as the waves of the sea, which only takes a breeze to get it to change direction.

Trusting God sure makes more sense doesn't it?

Day 8: Double soul

For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. James 1:7&8

We saw yesterday that there is a way to ask God for wisdom, and that is in faith, believing that God will answer.

If we doubt God's ability to answer our prayer, then we cannot expect to receive anything from God. We're quick to blame God for unanswered prayer, but the fault does not exactly always lie with God!

To doubt God's ability to answer is to be double-minded. The word that this comes from means "*the one who has two souls*" (boy - that would take blues music to a whole new level! 😊)

Hypocrite is the understanding we attach to the term. You're able to behave in contradictory ways depending upon the circumstances and personal preference. The result is instability, the inability to settle down and grow into maturity.

Wisdom, joy, patience and maturity are available to those who believe God can and will answer. May all our prayers be that God would grant us hearts that wants what He wants it to want!

Day 9: The height of humility

Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation - James 1:9

At the outset, let's be clear that this verse is not telling us to be humble and proud of it!

But we can be proud and even boastful of the truth that even in, and especially in, humble circumstances, we can rejoice in our height: our height comes not from us, but from the companionship of God with us through our trials and circumstances. When we come through difficulty with victory, we can boast of the truth that Christ carried us through and brought us through.

No matter how low we are, in Christ we have infinite height.

And that's worth shouting about!

Day 10: Humbly Rich?

Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. James 1:9&10

The humble have plenty to rejoice in, because in Christ they are high!

What about the rich? There's something about the acquisition of money that seems to change the psyche to a mindset of delusional superiority and entitlement. It's as if we think we deserved and earned our wealth. It's part of the human condition, and so we need to intentionally humble ourselves before God, or be humbled by Him.

In Deuteronomy 8 God warns the Israelites to not forget Him because of their wealth. In verse 17&18 of this chapter He warns and states:

Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth...

Let's never forget that our status must rest in Christ alone, because we take that into eternity. As Zodiates so beautifully puts it: *God wants you to be like the stalk of wheat that is full of beautiful grains. The more it is loaded, the lower it stoops down. Thus, my dear friends, your real riches will be manifested by your humility.*

May we walk humbly before our God!

Day 11: Bloomin' good idea

For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

James 1:11

Nothing like a bit of Scripture to give life some perspective!

Have you noticed how people like to look at people who are rich? They admire them, but you can only admire for so long. When asked how much a millionaire left behind, the answer was 'every cent.'

The image above hides a lesson. Pursuing riches as a life-goal is ultimately meaningless. Some sanctified hedonism is also required: derive pleasure from blessing others with your riches! As Alcorn puts it: God prospers us not to raise our standard of living, but to raise our standard of giving.

But for the person of wealth (which is basically everyone reading this!), this requires intentionality. The sun which causes the grass to grow can also wither it - why? Shallow roots.

How we need to be rooted in Christ and align our hearts with His! That way we will not fade, but indeed blossom.

May you all bloom!

Day 12: Gluey love

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. James 1:12

Winston Churchill said it best at a school prizegiving speech: *Never, ever give up - never, never, never* - and then he sat down. I remember that one, but I don't remember a single speech from any of my school prizegivings!

The lesson applies especially to our walk with God. It is not always going to be easy, and it was never meant to be. You cannot, in this world, create beauty through comfort. Beauty can only emerge through hardship, like an Emperor Moth coming out of its cocoon (it has to emerge through a constricting hole so as to force fluid from the body into the wings so that it can give strength to the wings and fly).

What will our reward be if we remain steadfast? We are promised the crown of life (Paul calls it a crown of righteousness and Peter a crown of glory). Ultimately it refers to all that God wants to give us in glory. Part of that is reigning with Him! So there is a small possibility that those who speak evil of us now will one day be judged by us - and if that thought gives you pleasure at the prospect of revenge, then you're due for another test 😊

Remaining true to our Lord even when it's hard is part of our evidence that we love God. The reward is not for those who once made a profession of love and may even have gone through waters of baptism: it's for those who continue to love to the end.

So: is it evident that you love God now?

*Day 13: With all due respect...it's Your
fault!*

***Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by
God," James 1:13a***

If I could have a Rand (or better still, a Pound Sterling 😊) for every time someone, especially me, has blamed God for something, I would be exceedingly wealthy! It's part of our nature, and we have a long human history of blaming others. Remember how Adam blamed God for Eve?

Our reasoning tends to be something as follows: God has given me desires, He is in control of all things, He has placed me here, so therefore it's His fault!

Such reasoning would have a measure of validity if we were not given the capacity to choose. But we have been given the gift of choice, and in the verse above James has shifted direction from dealing with outward circumstances of life (trials) to issues of the heart (temptation).

Certainly temptations get allowed, but that does not force us to sin. We can take all the credit for that. The good news is that God does not allow us to face temptation unaided. Look up 1 Corinthians 10:13 and memorize!

Own responsibility for your sin - don't blame others, and don't blame God!

Day 14: God is good

..for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. James 1:13b

We have seen that God brings and allows (there's a difference) difficult circumstances into our lives to test the genuineness of our faith, and to enable us to grow in faith.

When it comes to temptations however, we cannot blame God for our failures. This particular verse is a real 'can of worms' opener, especially in the light of other Scriptures (particularly from OT).

The truth revealed through this verse however is deep and powerful. James in a simple statement declares why we cannot blame God, and it has to do with the nature and character of God.

God doesn't do evil. Evil is not within the heart of God, and evil has no effect on Him. By that I mean that evil does not have the capacity to overpower God or move Him to act contrary to His nature.

Subsequently, God, since He doesn't have a sinful nature (only perfect goodness and holiness), is not going to lead you to sin either.

What's the implication? It's to be incredibly careful when you say "God led me to do this" because unfortunately, it is a statement that has been used far too glibly by Christians in the name of following personal preference as opposed to soul searching prayer. Don't forget we will one day give an account of our actions!

How wonderful to know God will never lead us to do wrong!

Day 15: Nike?

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire - James 1:14

Sin. We all do it. But it takes a person of character to recognise the source of sin. It's not God, and it's not the devil. God cannot be tempted, and He doesn't tempt (that was established in previous verse). The devil however does tempt, but he cannot force you to sin.

We alone are responsible for sin, and it has to do with the inner disposition of our heart. Our soul yearns or longs for something, and then we can be baited with an inappropriate expression of that desire. Even good, when misused, can become evil.

Just like we cannot stop the birds flying above us but we can prevent them making nests in our hair, so it is with temptation. We cannot stop being tempted and having tempting thoughts flying around in our head, as we live in a world that is geared towards enticement. But we can refuse the landing rights.

So, don't always listen to Nike (i.e *just do it!*)

Follow Christ instead.

Day 16: Takes two to tango

Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. James 1:15

We saw how we have to take ownership of our capacity to sin. It is inherent in our nature, it is part of our identity, to want to do things that are ultimately wrong.

We cannot help the desire to sin - only Jesus can do that. But we can do something with the desire: either it must be given into, or thrown away. And we all know what that struggle is like!

So when is sin conceived? It takes two for conception to take place, and in this instance, we submit our *'wrong-wanting tendency'* to that of Satan and together work on growing and giving substance to the desire. And what is inside must come out, and so sin gets born, and as that gets nurtured, it results in death.

What is death? Death is separation. Physical death is a separation of the spirit from the body. Spiritual death is a separation of our spirit from God. I know many will disagree with me on this, but I do believe that in our walk with God, sin has the capacity to break fellowship with God (but not His love for us!). Attitude is everything: if we gladly go on sinning, there's a problem. If we grieve over our sin - that's different! Confession and repentance is our recognition that we need God's grace continually.

So - be careful when you tango!

Day 17: Spiritual wanderlust

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers - James 1:16

This is actually a beautiful, hope-filled verse! The word 'deceived' comes from a word meaning 'to wander, to roam about, to stray from the right course.' Straying is what happens when we get deceived.

So why is this verse beautiful? Because of the second part. Even though we may find ourselves having wandered away from the path we were meant to be walking on, that, just like the Prodigal Son, does not take away our sonship. We are still children of God, still beloved brothers and sisters.

And its love that will win the wanderer back to the heart of God. Not criticism, not scandalised gossip, not telling people what they deserve because you have taken offence. Remember: God knows all that stuff and worse about you.

But He still receives His wandering children back.

Beautiful isn't it?

Day 18: Lifelong Christmas

***Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above –
James 1:17a***

Who doesn't like a good gift? We all enjoy them!

What is interesting in the above verse is that the two 'gift' words actually differ in meaning. The first 'gift' has to do with the act of giving, whilst the second 'gift' has to do with the result of the giving.

Gifts from God are good because He is good. It's not that God arbitrarily decides what is good and bad (that is what Allah does), but rather that He is goodness itself, and only good can emanate from Him. It is His nature to give good gifts, just like it is natural for the sun to shine. Everything God has made is good, but unfortunately can be twisted for evil.

And the giving of good gifts has a purpose and result. If you recall early on in the chapter, we were told to give thanks for tests in our lives because they help us become mature. The good gifts of God are for the purpose of accomplishing Christlikeness within us - perfection.

God knows exactly what we need, and He can be trusted. We can always give thanks!

God is indeed good - all the time!

Day 19: God ain't shifty

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. James 1:17

We saw that God is good, and so gifts coming from Him are always good, and have a good result.

Do you notice the tense of the second part of the verse? It's in the present continuous (do you remember that stuff from school?) In others words, good gifts are ***always*** coming down from God to His children.

And unlike people, who have a knack for changing their tune in relationships, God does not change. In essence, I take full credit for all the wrongs in my life (I'm a regular *Despicable Me*), but for any beauty and goodness that does so happen to come through me, all the credit has to go to God alone.

God is consistently good: what a beautiful reality!

Day 20: God's Free Will brings Freedom

***Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth -
James 1:18a***

What enables or enabled you to become a child of God? Why is it that you can experience a transition from death into life?

Only because of God's free will. That opening phrase: *of his own will* - contains more than meets the eye! It means that purposeful thought was put into enabling you to have the means of being restored to God. It's like there was this Trinitarian Conference in eternity past where the issue of your salvation was the agenda under discussion. At this conference (pardon the analogy - I've often wondered if Omniscience actually has to engage in thinking processes!), it was unanimously agreed (which is quite easy when you are one) that your salvation would be achieved through great loss and pain to Them/Himself.

Of God's own free will He chose not to leave you in darkness and separated from Him.

Without God, you could not be His child.

Have you accepted the invite?

Day 21: The will to live

Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures – James 1:18

We have seen that there is no salvation possible without the will of God. But just as it takes two to sin (v15), so it also takes two to have life.

So how are we 'brought forth?' Life happens when we submit our wills to God, and believe in the message and person of the gospel: Jesus Christ. You get two groups of people in this world: the 'whosoever wills' and the 'whosoever wont.'

The result of truly believing is that we become a 'firstfruit.' In the OT, the firstfruit was that portion of the harvest that was offered up to God. When we believe, we become the possession of God.

I for one am glad I have a possessive Dad! But I do have to ask myself: am I living for Him, or am I expecting Him to live for me?

I would probably get a clue to the answer if I examine my prayer requests.

Day 22: Tongue in cheek

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; James 1:19

What incredibly sound counsel - if only we would all implement it!

So often we are quick to speak and slow to listen. There is a skill to listening; you also have to listen to what is not said instead of jumping to conclusions based on what is said. Many misunderstandings and conflicts would be avoided if we used our ears in proportion to our mouth (you've all heard the math: two ears, one mouth - therefore use your ears as twice as your mouth!). We really do need to use the two physical barriers provided to the tongue: teeth and lips!

And what is the most important 'thing' we must we listen to? The Word of truth (v18). We mustn't allow our ears to become dustbins, because then garbage will come out of our mouth. Rather, God's Word will enable us to speak less and indeed more effectively.

So - let's all be tongue in cheek and the quickest listeners around!

Day 23: Anger management

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires. James 1:19&20

Ok - hands up if you think you prefer to think of your quick temper as a quick reaction to nonsense...

At the risk of sounding like a shrink, most of us have "anger issues." What we need to note is that James is not saying anger is wrong, but rather we need to be so careful as to the source of the anger and the result of the anger. In our humanness, we can get angry and allow it to simmer there, even wishing for some type of revenge. That's anger from the wrong source and "*does not produce the righteousness that God require*.' Believe it or not, a popular source of anger is when we hear God's truth spoken to us. Who hasn't wanted to shoot the messenger because of the message? How we need to be so careful! As the writer of Ecclesiastes puts it (7:9):

Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools

But there is also a good anger; anger over injustice and wrongdoing. But we still need to be careful in it, because we can still react instead of respond. We don't have the perfect nature of God, but we do have a God to whom we can bring our anger and ask His help in constructively dealing with it. It's hard to stay angry in His presence.

Day 24: Cool headed

Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. James 1:21

In today's age we like to downplay the reality of sin. But just as a rose by any other name is still a rose, so is sin. And in the above verse, following on from the verse about a quick temper, James labels such a sin for what it is: filthy and wicked.

It's jarring to our ears isn't it? After all, it just a human weakness.

But anger in the heart is deadly, and blocks the capacity to receive God's Word. In essence, the verse above is saying that if you want to keep your soul safe, keep a cool head and a warm heart!

Who do you need to forgive? And if your anger issue doesn't seem that serious to you, remember that its only a corpse that doesn't feel any weight'.

Day 25: Spiritual Cerumol

***Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness -
James 1:21a***

James certainly has a knack for telling it like it is.

What has been translated as a command above (therefore put away), is not so much a command in the original as much as it is a conditional statement. In other words, if you put away filthiness and wickedness, then you will be able to receive the Word of truth.

We all enter the Christian life with baggage, which comes in the form of different types of sin. We like to differentiate between big and little sins, but a snake is still a snake no matter what size. Harboring resentment in the heart is just as bad as exploding in temper. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, we are to engage in a process of getting rid of this baggage or rampant wickedness (see Col 3:8-10).

And here is something interesting. The word for filthiness is a word used for wax in the ear. Quite a picture isn't it? Sin is like ear-wax, because it blocks the hearing of the word of God and it then cannot penetrate our hearts.

Do you want to receive God's Word and allow it to change you? Then you know what you need to do! Clear out those ears!

Day 26: Be a tree

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only..James 1:21

"*But be*" has a lot more than meets the eye (turns out that Greek is quite a rich, precise language - no wonder God in His sovereignty ordained that the NT be written in it!)

Being before doing is the essence of our lesson this morning. We cannot do the things of God without first being a child of God.

And we need to keep on being children that grow in the Lord. We are to grow into doers of God's Word. As Zodiates puts it:

Many of us are like posts instead of trees. If we plant a tree, it begins to grow; if we set a post, it begins to decay.

And our doings need to be beautiful - so that we are walking poetry or art before our God and in front of a watching world.

How wonderful that God desires the best of us and is willing to help us!

Day 27: Deceived?

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. James 1:22

God is quite clear on what He wants from His children. He desires children who will attentively listen to His Word with the intention of actually applying it.

God knows our hearts. One of the top reasons given today for Christians to leave the church 'is because they're not being fed. As James Emery White so insightfully put it, this is often a "euphemism for any and all disagreements that desire a spiritual smokescreen for departure" (if you would like to read his blog on the issue of when to leave the church, let me know and I will forward it to you). But so often the teaching is not the issue - there is no shortage of teaching, but rather the issue lies in the living. It's easy to enjoy the benefits of grace without actually applying any personal responsibility to it.

Be doers of the Word - may God help us to take discipleship seriously! Otherwise we can deceive ourselves into thinking we're doing ok when we're actually not.

Day 28: For the men...

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror...James 1:23

As Zodhiates so eloquently put it: *There is no doubt that women are the best patrons of the mirror...*

And Zodhiates makes a powerful point, because he uses the image of a man before a mirror and not a woman. Why? Could it be that women respond to what they see in the mirror? Men, on the other hand, tend not to. In this context, the mirror is referring to the Word of God.

Observe who are the most active in church.

Women. That includes working women.

If it were not for women, there would be very few missionaries.

Even though there is understanding of the requirements of God (looking intently), there does not seem to be the will from men to actively seek and obey the will of God. Hearing is not the same as doing.

Are you the exception?

Day 29: Hello Gorgeous?

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. James 1:23&24

It's a silly person that does not want to go to the doctor for fear of what he or she will hear.

Unfortunately, that's how we sometimes treat the Word of God. We don't want to hear it because we don't want our true selves to be exposed.

That's like taking a good look in the mirror, seeing what you look like and what grooming needs to be done, and then not doing anything about it. All because you got offended by the way you look.

Walking away doesn't solve a thing, because you carry your heart wherever you go.

Let's rather ask the Potter to shape us!

Day 30: Ah! There's the rub...

But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty...James 1:25a

Wait a minute - aren't we under grace? What is this about a law?

Sinner or saint, gravity still affects you. But more on that tomorrow:-)

Let's hone in on the approach first: *looks into*

Remember how we were told that the person who doesn't obey the Word is like a person who looks in the mirror and then forgets what he looks like? Why would that be?

Because doing what the Word requires begins with recognising our condition. You can't clean yourself if you won't admit you're dirty. In other words, we're dealing with the issue of pride.

A doer of the Word is a person who has the humility to recognise he or she needs help. And the word for 'looks into' comes from a Greek word meaning to stoop down.

God's Word will only have attraction and application for us if we humble ourselves.

Are you prepared to do that?

Day 31: Love and let live

***But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty
- James 1:25a***

So, what is this law?

It isn't the law of Moses, and according to my commentary (Zodhiates), the verse could be better translated as "a perfect law, a law of liberty" as opposed to 'the law' (something about the definite article being missing!).

We are called to humble ourselves to a perfect law of freedom. It sounds contradictory, but it isn't. We tend to associate freedom with lack of restraint. Scripturally, freedom (as I've come to understand it) is about fulfilment of purpose.

And we can choose to fulfil that purpose, or to ignore it. We can choose to submit to Christ out of love, or we can try and follow rules out of fear. But submitting to Christ and His love, and indeed His law of love, is the only route to true freedom. In Christ we are granted the capacity to say no to that which formerly imprisoned us. Bondage to that which brings death is not Christ's intention for us.

In the words of that chorus: *turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of the earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.*

Day 32: Conditional blessing

But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. James 1:25

This verse is a very clear reminder that salvation is not about a once-off prayer, any more than marriage is about once saying 'I do.'

We need to stay the course, to stay close to Christ. It's wonderful to be saved, but its even better to have the companionship of Christ. Then we will obey God not out of compulsion but out of love, and that represents the person who is truly free.

We are challenged to not be forgetful hearers, but doers who engage in beautiful work for God. In a world that has plenty to be sad about, we can be beacons of hope pointing to the beauty of God by allowing His beauty to be revealed through our works for Him.

May our efforts not be fruitless!

Day 33: Goodness Gracious

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. James 1:26

Pascal puts it beautifully: there are two kinds of men - the righteous who believe themselves sinners, and the sinners who believe themselves righteous.

There is a real danger in seeking to live for Christ. We can begin to think we're something special because we're doing good works. And then we can begin to speak about the good deeds we are doing, and so the journey from the head to the heart gets sabotaged by the use of our tongue.

Religion says I'm doing ok because I'm doing good things - and then we deceive our hearts. But when good deeds arise as a result of our faith in Christ, that makes all the difference. Actions do speak louder than words, and good actions don't need words to explain them.

It's the pure in heart who will see God, not those who think they are pure in heart. And only Christ can accomplish that in us.

Day 34: What do you like?

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. James 1:27

If ever there was a book on practical theology, James is it!

It's easy to be religious, but that is not what God is looking for. Our religion needs to be rooted in purity and not be defiled.

In essence, this verse reminds us that God sees our hearts. If we do good works in order to buy off God, or to feed our ego (a clue is how you react when things don't go your way), then it's of no interest to God. It is incredibly easy to do things to feed our sense of self-worth, and we're so good at convincing ourselves we're doing it for God!

This is a call to be careful in our walk with God. We may very well begin with the right motive, and then do something silly or serious that undermines our motive and witness. And can we really be unstained by the world? Yes - we can choose to live by different values. We really don't have to be shaped by Facebook (um - just to be clear, I'm using that as a metaphor! I also use it!).

A heart that serves and expects nothing in return - that's quite something! How good to know our Father knows our frailty. Our service will probably never be perfect, and our Father is gracious - but He has the right to discipline us.

Lord, give us hearts that want what You want it to want!

Day 35: Generous to a fault – Is that possible?

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. James 1:27

This is truly a challenging verse for me, and I am sure for you too. When last did you personally visit and minister to someone who was and is destitute? When last were you generous to a person who had no means of being generous back to you? Our lives have indeed become so busy that it has robbed us of the privilege of the fellowship of sharing in the suffering of others. We find it easier to give money to people and organisations to do it on our behalf. But hurting people want presence before presents.

And then have you noticed how willing we are to give away what we don't have? We often say "If I had a million dollars I would give...(finish the sentence)."

If we are to please our Father, we need to live by the values of generosity (with what we *do* have) and godliness.

Truly I am in desperate, desperate need of God's grace to work in me. Will you pray for me as I will for you?

Day 36: I'm not ok and you're not ok

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. James 2:1

God, through the apostle James, continues to teach us how to live if we are to honour Him.

In this next chapter, we are going to be taught about how we are to relate to each other, with the opening verse stating the principle, which then gets unpacked for us.

We are told not to discriminate against others. It's so easy to think we're better than other people. It's so easy to criticize the actions of other people because we think we're better, when we have not actually been in their shoes. In my pastoral ministry, I have come to truly understand that behaviour is rooted in a context, normally of pain, and I have had to work really hard (unfortunately not very successfully) at not jumping to conclusions.

Only Jesus knows the full story. We only see the outside, not the heart. Let's not forget that, and let's seek to relate in grace - because as someone put it: be kind, especially to those who aren't, because they need it most!

Day 37: Snobs Anonymous

***For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?
James 2:2-4***

When we gather together as the body of Christ, there should be no focus on class distinction, but on the person of Christ.

And neither should we be snobs, thinking that we're better than others. Have you noticed how ingrained it is? The spectrum for the display of snobbery is huge: from denominational pride through to personal self-righteousness.

And lets be honest - it happens in our hearts and our churches. I remember overhearing some folk laughing because they forgot to bring an air freshener on account of a homeless person who frequently visits the church where I happened to be visiting.

They didn't know they were laughing about our Lord.

May God help us - it's so incredibly easy to judge. We need to guard our hearts against such thinking, because in the eyes of God, it is simply evil.

Let's rather focus on our equality before God, rather than delude ourselves.

Day 38: Poor yet rich; Rich yet poor

Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? James 2:5

This chapter began with the statement that to discriminate against others in the body of Christ is wrong. An example was then given of how easily the poor and rich get divided in the assembly of worship, when the focus should be on the person of Christ.

Now we are taught as to why it is wrong. Those who are in the family of God, who might be considered poor by the standards of the world, have in fact been chosen by God to be rich in faith.

I am sure you have seen this yourself. Those with affluence within the body tend towards thinking themselves better (it's an unavoidable temptation which requires constant vigilance), and certainly those with less have to be careful of coveting what the more affluent person has. But how privileged the 'poor' person is! They have been chosen by God to be rich in faith.

In other words, they are under no illusions about their utter dependency upon God and their need to trust Him. They are in a sense closer to the throne of heaven, and through their trust bring joy to the heart of God. After all, as Hebrews 11:6 puts it: without faith it is impossible to please God.

So if you are in the bracket of the well-off; don't despise the poor - learn from them. They can teach you a thing or two about what really matters in life.

Day 39: The bottom line?

But you have dishonoured the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honourable name by which you were called? James 2:5&6

Unlike the rich, generally speaking, God has a 'soft spot' for the poor. James has been criticizing the favour shown to the rich in the body of believers (which was often for the purpose of the hope of utilising them for personal gain).

Tragically, even within the body of Christ, the rich oppress the poor. Our economic system is not based on the worth of the person, but on the value of the skill. But as Christians, we should seek to not pay a minimum wage, but a liveable one.

The reason the poor get so easily abused by the rich is simple: the dignity of the person is not respected.

Let's move beyond the bottom line in our dealings with people, and treat one another with dignity. All of us have been made in the image of God.

Day 40: R U A Pimp?

***If you really fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture,
"You shall love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing
well. James 1:8***

It's as if James is anticipating an objection - "*what if I am showing preferential treatment to the rich out of love?*" If the motive is really love, then well and good.

But...

The essence of the challenge is this: if we only focus or invest relationally on those from whom we can gain (i.e they can service our personal vision for our life) and ignore those from whom we cannot gain anything, then we are not keeping the royal law. To be in relation with those who can scratch our backs or further our objectives is to really be nothing but a sophisticated pimp. To paraphrase what Jesus said: *what's so great about being good to those who are good to you* (see Matt 5:43-48)?

So - why are you in relationship with those that you are?

And now for the crunch: why are you in a relationship with God?

Day 41: Spread the Love

But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. James 2:9

Truth, no matter how nicely put, has a knack for offending when the heart is not right.

And here James is not exactly doing Dale Carnegie, but telling us the truth. The sad reality is that within the church, the majority of us habitually sin through judging people by their external appearance. Not only do we do that, we ourselves are guilty of putting on appearances: we wear masks to hide our true intent and heart.

And whether you're speaking from the perspective of the Mosaic law, or the Royal Law of Love, this issue of the heart convicts us as a law-breaker.

We might pat ourselves on the back because we haven't stolen from anyone, or murdered anyone, or committed adultery.

But a discriminating judgemental thought against a brother or sister, based on external appearance, is a serious sin.

Sobering isn't it? Isn't it wonderful that God did not discriminate against us, but gave His Son freely that we might be forgiven? May God help us to have the same love to those around us.

Day 42: Lawlessness

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. James 2:10&11

Ever broken the speed limit? That makes you a law-breaker. More than once? That makes you a repeat offender.

One of Satan's strategies is to get us to minimize our sin. We do something, and then rationalise away what we do by pointing out how we have not done something major like murder, and that our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds.

But we do not worship Allah. We worship God. And our God demands absolute perfection, which is in keeping with His character.

Just one sin - that's all it takes for us to cause pain and offence to our God. If you hit my toe, it's not only my toe that experiences the offence and pain.

It's not the law we offend, its the law-giver.

Have you absorbed Christ's Calvary into your heart? It's the only way forgiveness can be made available. Get hold of me if you want to know more!

Day 43: Parrot fashion?

So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. James 2:12

I have this African Grey parrot who can speak quite a bit: but not with purpose (other than to disturb a Sabbath cat-nap!). He will often mix together things that have been taught or picked up, and the results can be quite hilarious.

In this verse we are challenged to both speak and act in accordance with the law of liberty: i.e love. We're called to practice what we preach, and live our lives as if we're about to be judged by the standard of love (which we one day will be). We're to relate to family, friends, colleagues and employees on the basis of intentional love.

Which is exactly how God relates to us.

Day 44: God of Mercy

For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. James 2:13

We will all stand before God one day. Children of God will also be judged, but not in terms of salvation, but on our works of gratitude. It is the desire of God to bless His children with reward!

However, the question we must each ask ourselves is this: on that day, recognising that as I have walked the road of faith, I have displayed many shortcomings - do I want to be shown justice for those shortcomings, or mercy?

The apostle James is teaching us an important lesson here - one which Jesus powerfully taught too. If we want to be shown mercy for our shortcomings, we need to extend mercy to others as well.

If we show mercy, instead of holding on to judgemental attitudes and un-forgiveness, then we need not fear Judgment Day. Against our shortcomings will be the mercy we showed to others, and we too will be judged by the standard of God's mercy - which is way better than ours!

Let mercy rule our hearts. Let's be mercy-filled.

Day 45: Faith

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? James 2:14

This is the verse that has caused so much controversy in theological circles. It has been understood as being in opposition to Paul's teaching of salvation through faith.

Zodhiates (the commentary on which these devotions are based) has some useful analogies to help us understand that there is no contradiction at all whatsoever, but rather a complementation between James and Paul. We shall briefly share these to give a context and then tomorrow explore the meaning further.

Firstly: faith is like calories - you can't see them but you can see the result.

Secondly, Paul and James are not standing face to face fighting against each other, but rather back to back fighting opposite enemies. Both Paul and James mean the same thing by faith, but Paul speaks of it in terms of its conception in our hearts, whilst James speaks of it in terms of its outward fruit.

Hope that helps!

Day 46: Dead Faith

***What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?
James 2:14***

Throughout church history, and I daresay especially since the Reformation, there have existed within the church some interesting people: people who are concerned about right belief, but not so much about right behaviour. This is the challenge of the verse above: if your belief is only in the head, and there is no change in heart, then do you truly believe?

To put it differently: you can be a Baptist (my background) - you can even be an ultra-reformed Baptist in terms of the orthodoxy of your beliefs, but there's a lot more Catholics who have a way better chance of entering heaven than you do.

Profession of faith is one thing; a changed heart is something entirely different. Its sobering to realise that one can go through the waters of baptism and only come out wet.

A professed faith cannot save; only a living faith in the living Christ can.

Day 47: Charity begins at home

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. James 2:15&16

When a brother or sister in Christ who you know is in need walks into church, how does it make you feel?

Do you feel awkward? Do you want to avoid the person? Do you find ways to justify your lack of engagement?

The challenging verses above teach us that if our faith is real, it will be revealed through our actions. James gives a simple test: if we are aware of a need of a brother or sister, we will seek to make a difference in that person's life through practical, costly generosity.

We won't go philosophizing our inaction by pointing out how we're just feeding a cycle of dependency and how God helps those who help themselves (which, incidentally is one of those Scriptural myths).

Instead we will be characterised by compassion seeking to make a difference.

It has something to do with understanding how God's grace has reached out to u

Day 48: Hopping along?

***But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works."
Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show
you my faith by my works." James 2:18***

This is not the easiest of verses to understand (not all scholars agree on the translation). The point being made however, is quite clear.

Faith, while it is invisible, shows itself through fruit. There is a difference between dead faith (which just gives mental or intellectual assent) and living faith. True faith reveals itself through obedience.

It's like having two legs. Faith and obedience. If you're going to get somewhere, you need both, otherwise you find yourself hopping for a short while only.

So, is the evidence strong enough to convict you of having a living faith?

Day 49: Demonic Faith

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe - and shudder! James 2:19

This has got to be one of the most sobering verses in the Bible. It should cause each and every one of us to re-examine our hearts and ensure that we truly do have a saving faith (i.e. that we are truly right with God).

Just believing that there is a God is simply not enough. Being willing to accept the tenets of the faith isn't what God is after. If this is the level of your faith, then Scripture teaches us in the verse above that it is the same as demonic faith. This is quite an eye-opener!

But it's true isn't it? Demons also believe in God. But they don't desire to obey Him.

There literally is an eternity of difference between a professing faith and a living faith. And it's sad to realise that Jesus taught that there would be many who profess, and they would be in congregations everywhere, but who would not be known by Him.

Are you known by God?

Day 50: Heart Knowledge

Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? James 2:20

You can imagine James standing in the congregation and preaching this sermon on faith and works. Someone disagrees and says "but I have faith - I believe in God!" James responds by labouring the point of distinguishing between true faith and dead faith, and as we have seen, the Apostle never attended a Dale Carnegie course. For this we can be grateful, because with eternity at stake, we need to be told the truth.

And James asks an important question of this person who wants to justify his dead faith as living (take note how he calls such a person foolish, and by implication, evil): Do you want to be shown?

"Do you really want to know?" is the question being asked. In other words, do you want to move beyond head knowledge to heart knowledge? It is only through the heart that we can truly understand and know the truths of God.

And that is a question worth pondering isn't it? Do we really, really want to know God and what He desires of us?

Let's not settle for superficiality where our faith gets reduced to feel-good sound-bites that are easy to repost! God has depth that we're being invited to explore - both now and for eternity.

Day 51: Faith Justified

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? James 2:21

As we look at what James is teaching, we need to remember that he is not in conflict with Paul over the issue of faith and works. James is dealing with mere profession of faith which cannot save, and argues that there needs to be evidence of saving faith through works. Paul presumes fruit in saving faith, and when speaking of works, is usually referring to the Mosaic law which cannot save. Both Paul and James use Abraham to state their case.

Abraham is regarded as the father of the Jewish people, but pedigree is not the guarantee of salvation. You can be the offspring of the greatest saints in history and still not be right with God.

What counts is a heart changed by God. And Abraham revealed his changed heart when he was willing to obey God by offering up his son Isaac. He was indeed justified by God (only God can justify you), and the obedience of Abraham is also how James can justify the claim that saving faith reveals itself through works of obedience.

In other words, faith is a lot more than talk.

Day 52: The heart of work

You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works - James 2:22

Just to recap: James has been teaching us about the nature of true faith. It is not just a profession of belief (which is equivalent to demonic faith), but reveals itself through works. Abraham is cited as an example...

And in this verse he is re-iterating his point that faith and works are intimately connected. True faith brings about the works of love. The fruit does not create the tree, but it does reveal what type of tree it is. So it is with faith and works. It is our fruit that helps reveal the type of faith we have. Faith in the heart enables the works of the hands: Abraham would not have lifted the dagger if his heart was not willing to obey.

And so we need to continually assess ourselves: do we have a living faith that desires to obey, or are our works rooted in something else?

Day 53: Toddling along?

You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; - James 2:22

To say that faith was completed by his works is to say that faith accomplished its goal. What was that goal?

In the life of Abraham, it was not the sparing of Isaac, although that was certainly a most welcome and relieving by-product! The goal of faith was to be able to trust God without questioning His commands. God, and not man, is the centre of existence. This is a truth we need to perpetually remind ourselves of.

And it is God who enables this faith to complete its goal. Our role is to lead a life of obedience, and through this, we can come to appreciate the truth of *Soli Deo Gloria - To God alone be the glory*. Only the life lived for the glory of God, where we are obedient even when we don't understand (and even if others have issue with your obedience) - only this type of life will enable faith to come into maturity. If we do not seek to live like this, we remain spiritual toddlers, wanting ourselves to be the centre of God's existence.

May God be our reason for living - in the words of Paul in 1 Cor 10:31: *So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

Day 54: Believing God

..and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness" - and he was called a friend of God. James 2:23

"*And the Scripture was fulfilled...*" - these are truly special words, because fulfilled prophecy is an incredibly powerful evidence for the truth of the reality of God. As Zodiates puts it: prophecy is history written ahead of time, that we may not be ignorant of the things to come.

And what was fulfilled in this context? Through the obedience of Abraham in being willing to offer up Isaac, his actions fulfilled what God had already declared about him about 40 years earlier: that Abraham was a man who believed in Him.

God knows the heart; we can only see outward actions. God knew that Abraham's faith was real long before Abraham demonstrated it. God speaks truth and cannot be deceived by us. He knows whether our faith is true!

And its not just that Abraham believed in God, but rather that he believed what God said. Abraham believed in the context of human impossibility (geriatrics do not become parents remember!)

Do you believe what God has said?

Day 55: Frenemy?

Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness - and he was called a friend of God – James 2:23

Sometime ago I saw a picture that issued a warning along the following lines: Beware of frenemies - enemies who pretend to be friends. There was a stick-figure picture representing being stabbed in the back.

I look at the verse above, and I am challenged. Have I been a "frenemy" to God? Do I proclaim with my lips that I love God, but in my actions serve myself? It's one thing to say that I consider myself a friend of God, but the real question is whether God can consider me a friend of His.

Abraham was willing to give up his son, but he was fortunately spared. God loved us so much that He did not spare His son, but gave Him for us. The way has been paved for us to be a friend of God, and our willingness to give up our lives for Him will be our barometer for whether we can be counted friends of God, because true friendship never counts the cost.

Day 56: Worthless Works

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. James 2:24

James is not preaching a different gospel from Paul (Romans 3:28), but is also teaching that salvation is through faith. What James has been addressing is the mere profession of faith, whereas Paul presupposes a genuine faith. James is teaching us that real faith is a working faith, and that faith and fruit have are tied together when it is genuine. Faith without works and works without faith are equally dangerous.

And in sharing the example of Abraham, James now in effect says; "you see how the two are tied up together?" Interestingly, the Greek word translated as 'you see' also has a secondary meaning of 'be careful/ be warned' - so this is also a warning against hypocrisy. The test of a Christian is not on Sunday, but on Monday!

All Christians have two knees: the knee of faith and the knee of works. Both need to be bowed before Christ. Believe and behave; surrender both mind and heart to Christ!

Day 57: Praying Prostitute

And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? James 2:25

The Apostle James continues to hone in on the point that only a living faith revealing itself through fruit (works) is a saving faith. The starting point is faith, and true faith results in works.

The first example James cited was Abraham. He is regarded as the father of faith, of Jews and of course believing Gentiles. From what we can gather, Abraham was a pretty good guy before God called him.

Rahab wasn't. She was a prostitute, but God changed her too. You can read her story in Joshua 2, and take note of her confession of faith.

Both good and bad (humanly speaking), and both men and women, need the saving grace of God. Whether you have a pretty good pedigree in terms of upbringing (even if that involved church), or if you're a regular profligate (when last did you hear that word?), you need God to justify you.

You cannot justify yourself, but you can allow God to. No matter what the past, what the sin, the grace of God is able to transform you. Have you let Him?

Day 58: Are you a corpse?

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. James 2:26

Well, this verse really does seal the argument with the proverbial nail in the coffin! The Holy Spirit, through James, has been teaching us that a mere profession of faith is not a saving faith, but a dead one. True faith is living, revealed through works. Abraham was cited as an example, and so was Rahab.

And now James closes off the argument with this image: a corpse. All of us are alive because we have a spirit. We die physically when our spirit departs this body. What remains is a corpse, and a corpse is not a pretty sight. Neither does it release a pleasant fragrance.

And the horrible truth is this. We have spiritual corpses in our churches. They sing every Sunday and even serve tea. They even give money and have their names on the register.

But they're corpses. If this were not the case, James would not have been led to use this image! And as one person put it, it's easier to cool down a fanatic than give life to a corpse.

But let us not waste our energies on trying to identify corpses and moan about the state of the church.

Let's rather ensure that we're not guilty of dead faith, and let us spur and encourage one another to grow into maturity living our faith, rather than just quoting it. The good news is that our Lord specialises in resurrection!

Day 59: Rather keep quiet?

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. James 3:1

There are many portions of Scripture that I do not understand, but in the words of Spurgeon (I think), it's the parts that I do understand that bother me. This is one of those parts - it leaves me trembling. As a person who has the calling to teach God's Word, I must confess that I have sometimes wished for a different life. I know I am 'not up to scratch.'" There is plenty to criticize in my life. This verse is one of the reasons why I cannot understand what I see today. If James could have seen into the Christian church today, he would have undoubtedly shook his head in amazement at how many self-proclaimed preachers and teachers there are!

It's human nature to want to be a teacher of the faith rather than a 'practicer' of it. Scroll through Facebook posts and you'll see what I mean. A few verses here and there and people feel qualified to preach away.

Here's a secret: the secret to being a good teacher is to be teachable. Think of the apostle Paul. Soon after his conversion (around A D 59) he declares himself unworthy to be an apostle. As he grows, he moves on to say (around AD 64) "I am less than the least of all saints" - and just before his martyrdom (around AD 65) he cries "I am the chief of sinners."

Let's not be proud of having answers, but be humbled by The Answer having us - we really are beggars telling others beggars where to find bread.

Day 60: Stumbling along?

For we all stumble in many ways...James 3:2a

If verse one causes me to tremble, then this part gives me comfort. Even as an Apostle, James never places himself above those he is speaking to, but points out a simple fact: we ***all*** stumble.

Even when we have trusted in Christ for our salvation and turned away from living for self, we have this capacity to stumble. While we are supposed to be running from sin instead of to it, we still miss the mark of God's standard for us. The devil knows how to trip us up, and we know how to let him.

Of course stumbling can only happen if you're seeking to move forward. How wonderful that our Lord is more than able to lift us up and strengthen us.

May we never forget our roots, but more importantly, may we never stop striving to run the race set before us, to win the prize of seeing Jesus. We have many heroes of faith who have gone before us cheering us on (Hebrews 12:1&2)!

Day 61: Tongue Tied?

For we all stumble in many ways, and if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man. James 3:2

What a powerful statement James makes here. Yes, we all make mistakes, but the person who makes no mistake with his tongue is perfect.

Words express the heart and mind, and we can console ourselves that we don't do any 'big' sins like murder. But if we're honest with ourselves, we have - in the heart. Have you ever said something unkind about someone without them being present? Zophiathes tells the story of a peasant who went to a monk for advice. This person had spread stories about a friend that turned out to not be true. The monk said he was to fill a bag with chicken feathers, and drop a feather on the doormat of each house he told the gossip to. The person did so and went back to the monk, saying he had done his penance. The monk replied "not yet - now you need to go and collect each feather." "But the wind would have blown them away!" replied the person. "Yes" said the monk - "and the same is with gossip - you can easily drop words, but no matter how hard you try, you cannot take them back again."

How we need to admit with Isaiah (6:5): *I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips*

May God grant us the grace to be tongue-tied!

Day 62: Zoo keeper

For we all stumble in many ways...James 3:2a

We have already touched on this, but Zodiates (the commentary on which these devotions are based) shares a lovely illustration on the reality of our struggle and so I thought I would share it with you (paraphrased):

An old man often complained of pain and exhaustion in the evening. A friend asked why this was the case. He replied: 'I have so much to do every day - I have two falcons to tame, two hares to prevent running away, two hawks to manage, a serpent to confine, a lion to chain and a sick man to look after.' His friend replied how surely no person could do all this at once! 'I'm not joking' said the friend: 'the falcons are my eyes which I must watch, the hares are my feet which I must prevent from walking in sin; the hawks are my hands which I must train to work so that I can provide for myself and those in need; the serpent is my tongue which I have to bridle otherwise I will say what I shouldn't; the lion is my heart which I am forever fighting otherwise evil will come out, and the sick man is my whole body which needs looking after. All of this wears out my strength.

In today's age, we have successfully relegated many sins to 'personality traits' and have absolved ourselves of the responsibility of dealing with them.

Let us not forget we are in a battle, and let us not forget that in Christ we are enabled to have victory. Let us deal with sin so that Christ may be magnified.

Day 63: Sore Tongue?

...he is a perfect man, able to bridle his whole body. If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well - James 3:2c&3

An unbridled horse is of no use to anyone. Left to itself, it will, like us, do its own thing. A horse does not function by logic. The horse needs someone who has the capacity to think to put it to good use.

And by putting a bridle or bit into the mouth of a horse, it can be controlled.

And if we allow God to bridle our tongues, then indeed our whole personalities will be in submission to Him. We cannot bridle ourselves, but we can allow God to bridle us. We can submit to His purpose for our lives, rather than just following our own self-destructive path.

Submitting our tongues to the Spirit enables maturity. The tongue is behind teeth for a reason!

Day 64: Bridled by love

...able to bridle his whole body. If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well - James 3:2c&3

God's Word is really like a gold-mine. The more you dig, the more you discover.

There are two challenges that we can hone in on here.

Firstly, your tongue is like a barometer or symptom. What comes out of it is an indication of who is winning in your heart: your sinful self or the new nature that has been planted within you when you truly gave your life to Christ.

The second challenge is this. A horse needs a bit because it won't willingly go anywhere, or carry a burden, without it.

As children of God, God does not desire to make us obey through force, but to rather persuade us to willingly submit to Him. We don't always want to do this though do we? We think we know what will make our lives happy.

Yet God is the One who created us, and true joy will only be found in willingly submitting to Him.

It's so easy to go astray; it takes courage to stay the course.

Let's be bridled and led by Love.

Day 65: Let God Steer

Look at the ships also: though they are so large and driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs - James 3:4

As the bridle is to the horse, and the rudder to the ship, so the tongue is to the body. Little things count.

And certainly this illustration alone has spiritual food for thought. Just like we need to entrust our bridles to our Creator, so too we need to allow the Lord to be pilot of our lives (not co-pilot). With Christ as our pilot, we can be steered through the circumstances of life, to bring glory by fulfilling the purpose Christ desires of us. The winds help the sail boat move, and the pilot knows how to use the winds to get to the destination, no matter how fierce they may be. The storms also reveal the strength of the boat.

In the words of Proverbs 3:5&6, we truly need to trust in our God through all of life, because then He can direct our paths. We serve One who can even still the storm if He so chooses.

Better a storm with Christ as pilot than a gentle breeze without Him.

Day 66: Forked Tongue

So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. James 3:5a

Sorry - but your tongue is not meant to be on autopilot.

I was intrigued to discover that the word translated as 'member' has a double meaning in the Greek. The first meaning has to do with a limb or member or part of the whole. The second meaning is 'melody, the music to which a song is set.'

Our tongue has been created for a purpose: to produce music for the body (and obviously the Lord!). If the tongue is out of tune, then we will not be able to honour God through our lives. There needs to be congruence between the tongue and hand, otherwise we produce a cacophony instead of harmony. Neither is there peace within if the tongue is forked.

And that also results in discord amongst relationships. Have you ever known an unkind word to promote healing? Even when spoken behind a person's back it somehow still has the capacity to damage.

How we need to be careful! May our tongues indeed be music to our Lord, ourselves and our neighbours.

Day 67: Be the mouth!

So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. James 3:5

I think we can all appreciate the truth of how we must not underestimate the ability of the tongue. I remember the motto of my high school: *I can and I will* (a school for the disabled, so it was designed to help us believe and strive - I was there because of a hearing loss) and how we would joke "*I can't and I won't*," not recognising the power of what we joked!

But in this verse, James is actually referring to legitimate boasting. It turns out the Greek word used is only used here in the NT, and it carries the sense of the tongue "*which accomplishes great things, is also entitled to talk big, to hold the head high, because there is no hypocrisy involved*" (quoting Zodhiates).

And in what context can our tongues legitimately boast? When it is directed by God. We must boast and brag about the greatness of God! As David says (Psalm 34:1&2):

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

My soul makes it boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad.

Will you be a sanctified Big Mouth?

Day 69: Tongue Tied?

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness – James 3:5b&6a

The tongue, directed by God, brings incredible blessing. The tongue itself is a blessing. Imagine the world without it. How could teachers teach? How could ideas be exchanged? How could business be conducted? How could singers sing? How could lovers (husband and wife!) express? We are indeed blessed to be given a tongue. How could politicians promise? Ok - that last one was a bad example:-) But who doesn't know the value of a timely word of encouragement spoken?

Unfortunately, we all know too well the damage the tongue can cause. A hasty unkind word spoken in a quarrel; a sarcastic word spoken in jest; a lie told against another in the playground or the corporate world or the church. What about lies and rhetoric between nations?

The tongue really has been responsible for bringing a world of unrighteousness, and unbridled is itself a world of unrighteousness. As Washington Irving put it: *'A sharp tongue is the only edged tool that grows sharper with constant use*

Better a bit tongue than a free one! May our tongues be instruments of God's grace.

Day 70: Fight fire with fire?

The tongue is set among our members staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. James 3:6b

This is got to be one of the more difficult verses to understand, and also very sobering.

When it comes to being righteous, the tongue radically cramps our style. The tongue gives ourselves away. Do you trust a person who lies or gossips? That person may be superb in what they do, but when you hear the tongue it makes you wary (see Proverbs 11:13 & 20:19).

And what comes out of the mouth affects our life: both now and in eternity. A little boy was once asked "what is a lie?" His answer was: an abomination to the Lord and an ever present help in trouble...

A lie might get you out of trouble temporarily, but the source is not God. If we can accept that God would be the source of the good that comes out of our mouths to build up others, is it not logical to accept that the evil which comes out of our mouth also has a source - hell?

How we need to filter our glib words through the teeth of grace! Turn your character opinions about people into prayers instead...I can't think of a better way to extinguish the fire of hell on the tongue.

Day 71: Gift of Tongue

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. James 3: 7&8

God, through James, is really bringing home the point that the tongue needs an outside controlling power - God.

We're able to control and subdue animals, who have never cursed their Creator. Human nature can control animal nature, but human nature cannot control itself. It's not taming that human nature needs; but rather a new nature.

And our tongues remind us of our nature. Have you ever tried holding your tongue in place with your fingers (don't do this in public:-) ? Slippery little member isn't it?

We might be able to control our external behaviour, but the tongue reveals that we cannot change our nature. Our tongues remain restless, and they know how to shoot.

But a tongue controlled by God? Now that is truly a gift revealing fullness of the Spirit.

Day 72: Tongue in Cheek

With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people, who are made in the likeness of God. James 3:9

Throughout this letter, James has been pointing out the areas of hypocrisy that children of God need to pay attention to. The tongue has been receiving special attention, and for good reason.

It's so easy to look up to God and recognise His superiority over us, and then we look at others and think we're superior to them! What is the point of speaking honey about and to our God and then lemons about our fellow believers and neighbours? Must God then be expected to believe what we say about Him?

This is challenging stuff in a culture where the noise and fog of blogs and opinions have a knack for distracting from the depths of truth. As we used to sing in Sunday School:

O be careful little tongue what you say...for the Father up above is looking down in love...o be careful little tongue what you say

Sometimes it is better to be literally tongue in cheek.

Day 73: Which Mouth?

From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. James 3:10-12

Imagine you had two mouths. One is for praising and talking to God and sharing about Him with others . The other is for your personal opinions, criticisms, gossip, wishing evil on others etc etc.

Based on the past year (or month, or week, or even day!), which mouth has talked the most?

Brothers (and sisters)...these things ought not to be so.

Day 74: Wisdom

Who is wise and understanding among you? James 3:13a

After effectively challenging us as to the use of our tongue, James now moves over to another aspect of human personality: the mind.

He asks a simple question - who is wise and understanding among you? Prudence would dictate that we at best take the line of Socrates in which he never wanted to be called wise or saw himself as wise, but rather saw himself as a friend of wisdom. In his eyes, only God alone was wise.

But...all children of God do have the source of wisdom within! We have the person of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. What an incredible gift.

We just need to listen. And obey.

Day 75: The Wise Life

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. James 3:13

Right living is wise living.

Day 76: Strongly Meek

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. James 3:13

There is a difference between wisdom and knowledge. Paul shrewdly observed that knowledge puffs up (1 Cor 8:1), and if we're not careful, as implied through the above verse, we can also be guilty of misapplying the wisdom which has been given to us through Christ.

The heart behind the highlighted phrase is to have a grace saturated soul that is in utter trust of God. It represents the soul that has the ability to accept personal adversity and mistreatment with thankfulness to God (check out 2 Sam 16:5-11 and David's response in v11).

Contrary to popular opinion, meekness is not weakness. Rather its the acme of character.

Day 77: Stay Wise

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth - James 3:14

Just as with the word 'therefore' in Scripture (always look to see what it is there for!), we also need to take note of the word 'but.'

True wisdom is characterised by meekness, because we are able to trust Christ completely.

But what about misdirected zeal? Zeal is a quality that can be utilised for both good and evil (as the world is being repeatedly reminded of).

If we however harbour bitter jealousy, or desire to get ahead at whatever cost, then we have veered off the path of wisdom.

And that is not a good route to go.

Day 78: Lying in Christ

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. James 3:14

Do not boast and be false to the truth...

Have you ever followed a course of action that you wanted to pursue, and then justified it by attaching the Lord's name to it?

In the course of ministry I often heard variations of this phrase "the Lord said to me..." In some cases it was clear they were led of the Lord. On more than one occasion the reasoning was not Scriptural. Actions were not based on concerns of righteousness, but rather self-will (ranging from laziness to offense).

It's so easy to lie to ourselves. And we all have to recognise that we still have to fight evil in our own hearts, and we need to learn to discern the voice we listen to, because Satan knows how to look righteous.

One only has to look at the world at large to see the result of being false to the truth. Lies kill.

And isn't it amazing that just over 2000 years ago, Truth Personified allowed himself to be crucified by lies - and defeated evil in the process?

What an amazing God!

He can always be trusted.

Day 79: Far out wisdom?

***This is not the wisdom that comes down from above...
James 3:15a***

James has posed the question as to who considers themselves to be wise, with the challenge of revealing this wisdom through action.

Earthly wisdom might get earthly results, but children of God are called to something far higher.

And isn't it wonderful that God makes His wisdom available? Is that not also an expression of kindness and grace? And it's not a once-off dose either; God continually supplies His wisdom to the child that genuinely seeks.

Earthly wisdom with its earthly focus - its just so limiting isn't it?

Day 80: The road less travelled (even in church)

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. James 3:13-15

You can have divine wisdom, or earthly wisdom. Earthly wisdom only helps for the world around you. It will help you to get successful by the world's standards (which only has value for life on earth), but it will not help you to become mature in your walk with God (which has eternal value). Earthly wisdom will not teach you how to live for God where you have been planted. Divine wisdom will enable you to live the life God desires you to live.

Which path will you choose this week?

Day 81: Disordered hearts?

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. James 3:16

We return to the letter written by James. Just to recap, this letter really is an excellent primer in practical theology: it teaches us how to see and live.

We have learnt to see trials as blessings and not curses; we have been challenged in the nature of true faith which has to reveal itself through living. We have been called to watch how we treat other people, and have been challenged to observe how we speak and to reign in our tongues.

Then we got taught about the true nature of wisdom. We can possess earthly wisdom which gets earthly results, but this is not the wisdom God desires of us.

Earthly wisdom which is characterised by selfish ambition and jealousy doesn't come from God, it comes from below.

And we can see the fruit of it in the world around us. We see it very clearly manifested through Islamic extremism, which is indeed characterised by "disorder and every vile practice."

But James is not written for Muslims.

We need to examine our own hearts, and indeed the local expressions of Christ's body to which we belong, because it is sad but true: we can easily fall into the trap of believing what we think (instead of thinking about what we believe). Order, and not confusion and power-struggles, is of God.

How blessed we are to have the Word of God! May we grant Christ full access to our hearts so that He may order it

Day 82: Pure Wisdom

But the wisdom from above is first pure...James 3:17a

I think James must have clearly remembered the words of Jesus whilst writing this letter! Back then he just saw Jesus as his brother, but after encountering the risen Jesus, things changed: Jesus became his Lord.

But Jesus often spoke of how you would know people by their fruit. This has really been the theme of this letter. When it comes to wisdom, the fruit will reveal the source. Confusion, disorder, misplaced zeal, selfish ambition - this is not from above!

Wisdom from above is firstly pure. This makes perfect sense because God is pure.

Purity of heart will lead to purity of action. Its wise to be pure, and purity is a fruit of wisdom. We cannot be wise in God's eyes if we are not pure, and we certainly cannot be pure if we do not have the wisdom of God.

How blessed we are to have available to us our Lord and the fruit of Calvary! When we offer our lives to Christ, He cleanses us, and then the way is paved for His wisdom to be manifested through our lives.

We just need to listen.

Day 83: Peace bru!

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable...James 3:17

Godly wisdom is both pure and peaceable. A heart that is pure is a heart that is right with God. A heart that is right with God is a heart at peace, no matter what the circumstances.

And such a heart can only be known if there is utter trust in Christ.

There is a well-known saying that is often portrayed in various posters: the peace of God is not the absence of trouble, but the knowledge of the presence of God through it all.

That is what is being spoken of here, as well as the fruit that this brings. Being peaceable will also reflect in our relationships. It's a fact that people will not always like you, and will, because of their own heart issues, not appreciate decisions you make. Church history is filled with godly people whose obedience to Christ made others angry.

But when we allow Christ's peace to indwell us, their reactions to us need not provoke us to anger, but rather we can commit them to the Father in love. After all, Jesus did that to us when He cried "Father forgive them, they know not what they do..." (Luke 23:34)

Truly a Saviour worth following!

Day 84: Gently does it!

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle...James 3:17

Would you consider yourself gentle?

In areas where you have been wronged, offended, hurt – do you stand on the foundation of your self-righteousness, or do you seek to forgive and restore?

Is your disposition (at the risk of sounding like Mary Poppins!) one of gentleness, in that you yield your rights for the benefit of others? Or does standing your ground or holding a grudge feed your fragile sense of self-worth?

Make no mistake: gentleness is hard work as it goes against our natural instinct. But, it is the path of Divine wisdom. What is more, God demonstrated it to us: *but God showed His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).*

I gladly and ignorantly nailed Jesus.

He joyfully and knowingly embraced me.

I pray that I can somehow have just an iota of that gentleness in my life.

How about you?

Day 85: Be Reasonable!

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason...James 3:17

Yesterday we saw that divine wisdom is gentle. It has the connotation of relating to those who are 'under' us, in the sense of some form of dependency. It is a call to express the leniency of love (see for example the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matt 18:15-35).

The next characteristic has been variously translated, simply because there is no direct English equivalent. The Greek word it is translated from has the virtue of only ever being used in this verse in the entire NT!

But the interesting thing is that now the connotation is how we relate to those who are in a position of superiority and authority over us.

The word combines submission (NIV) and being open to reason. In essence, we are called to be good followers when we recognise that a person in authority over us has shown themselves to be trustworthy. Listen and follow.

Don't oppose for the sake of opposing. Listen.

Don't jump to conclusions about motives. Listen.

Listen with an open heart: you may just end up not believing what you think!

Day 86: May Mercy Manifest!

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy...James 3:17

We've been unpacking what divine wisdom is characterised by, and the next characteristic is that it is full of mercy.

It's just so beautiful to receive mercy isn't it? Perhaps you have been in an incredibly difficult spot, and you haven't been able to fulfil what you hoped (it's just awful to not deliver on a promise or commitment isn't it?) – and the person or persons you're responsible to have responded not with shock and horror, but with mercy. Few sighs of relief are more beautifully and thankfully experienced than the relief at receiving mercy! Mercy really does triumph over judgement (as James says earlier in 2:13).

And how do we display such mercy? How do we minister to those in pain? How do we veer away from self-righteous judgement to Christ honouring mercy?

Surely part of that answer lies in remembering how Christ has treated us?

If Christ is ruling in our hearts, then mercy shouldn't be too much of an issue.

Back to my knees I go...

Day 87: Yummy Fruit

***But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable,
gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits...
James 3:17***

This divine wisdom is truly a beautiful gift, and I have had the privilege of knowing Christians through whom it is revealed, and they are truly beautiful people. That should come as no surprise though, because our God is beautiful!

We see next that divine wisdom is characterised not only by being full of mercy, but also good fruits. This means that we are called to reveal this mercy through action. It's easy to say the words, but to be merciful in practice – that is truly beautiful.

The description of showing good fruits recalls the parable of the sower. Yesterday in our local congregation we were challenged by the parable of the Sower, and the call was issued to examine our hearts to see whether our own hearts represent good soil.

We will only bear fruit if our hearts are open and willing to receive God and His Word – and put it into practice.

An open heart to receive God's Word...now that's a wise move!

Day 88: It ain't wise to be fickle

***But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable,
gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits,
impartial and sincere – James 3:17***

Impartial and sincere. There's a lot packed into those two words. In essence, divine wisdom is also characterised by humility and a lack of hypocrisy. A story from Aesop's fables illustrates it well:

A man and a satyr struck up a friendship, and they sat down to eat. It was a cold day, and so the man put his fingers to his mouth to blow them. "Why are you doing that?" asked the satyr. The man explained it was to warm his fingers because it was so cold.

Then when the man picked up some hot food, he blew on it. Again the satyr asked why, to which the man explained that the porridge is so hot, he is blowing on it to cool it down.

The satyr then announced "from this moment I renounce our friendship, for I will have nothing to do with one who blows hot and cold with the same mouth."

It's so easy to make judgements based on personal preference, and so easy to be a hypocrite. Divine wisdom does neither.

Praise God He isn't fickle!

Day 89: Prepare for Harvest

***And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those
who make peace – James 3:18***

This is a rather intriguing verse!

James has been teaching us about the fruit of divine wisdom – how it looks and reveals itself in the heart that has submitted to Christ. Lives that reflect that wisdom create the climate for right living to grow.

The world around us reflects the truth that peace and righteousness cannot reign in the context of disorder and chaos. And so you and I have the responsibility and calling to sow the seeds of peace. Jesus Himself taught that the peacemakers are blessed, for they shall be called sons of God (Matt 5:9).

Too many Christians fall for rhetoric that demonises people different from us. The energy utilised for various forms of discrimination would be far better suited to sowing the seeds of the gospel, through which people can know the privilege of being at peace with God.

And it begins in your own heart, and in your own sphere of relationships.

Are you sowing the seeds of peace or bitterness?

Day 90: Game of Thrones?

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at within you? James 4:1

I think all those in pastoral ministry would agree: this verse should be mandatory reading before any church meeting, as well as by those who are quick to leave the church, because it represents a far more honest answer in many cases than the ubiquitous ‘the Lord led me’.

Ever since the inception of the church, it has been characterized by division. The Apostle Paul also had to deal with this issue. The source of division has ranged from control issues of people and leaders through to doctrinal concerns, as well as through people not discerning the will of God and wanting to remain in tradition rather than the Spirit.

But why is this the case, when we have available to us the grace of God, the wisdom of God and the instruction to glorify Him?

Because the self and its desires run very deep. Paul so aptly describes this battle in Romans 7:15-25. The words James uses above (quarrels and fights) can also be translated as battles and wars.

As Christians we are in a battle, not a game. It’s easy in the West to be lulled into consumer complacency when it comes to our walk with God, and Satan has no issue with many Christians and local congregations.

May God work in us so that Satan does have issue with us!
Let us join the Spirit in crucifying ourselves. A high price was
paid for our salvation.

Day 91: Body of Evidence?

You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. James 4:2a

It is incredibly sobering to get a divine perspective on behaviours we so easily engage in.

We slander so glibly, and Jesus calls it murder. We complain about the crime rate and murders in the country, but we ignore all the murders taking place within the body through slander. We disagree with someone, we don't get our own way, so we raise ourselves by pulling the other person down (and actually sink ourselves in the process).

We get jealous of others and we envy. My definition of envy is this (I think I got this from Andy Stanley): jealousy at the favour God is showing someone else.

Have you sobered up yet?

Murdered anyone lately? Need resurrection power?

Speak to Jesus - He's listening.

Day 92: Pray Correctly

You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. James 4:2b&3

Praise God for unanswered prayer!

So often our prayers are focused on ourselves, with wants rather than needs being our goal.

We may come before God with incredible submissiveness, as a beggar to someone with vast wealth (the picture behind the phrase of 'to ask'), but if our motive is not correct, our God shall graciously not answer.

It's always good to be blatantly honest with ourselves, and be glad we have a Father who knows what is best.

May God give us hearts that want what He wants it to want - that ensures a 100% prayer-answering rate!

Day 93: BFF?

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. James 4:4

These are strong words which perhaps sound a bit extreme and uncomfortable to our ears?

A huge danger today is that Christ and Christianity is simply seen as something we integrate into our lives to hopefully make our lives better. We live in this world, want to make it in this world, and Jesus is simply part of the game plan to make that happen.

If that is your view, then you are an enemy of God. You are an adulterer.

It's really jarring isn't it? This comment by Guthrie I found to be personally challenging:

If you find yourself loving any pleasure better than your prayers, any book better than the Bible, any house better than the house of God, any table better than the Lord's table, any persons better than Christ, any indulgence better than the hope of Heaven - take alarm.

Most of us are in danger of becoming so acculturated that we actually don't realise we're in trouble.

Let us engage in lifesaving action and give God permission to align our hearts with His!

Day 94: Deadly Envy

Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? James 4:5

This is one of those verses that has commentators divided over how it should be translated. The other translation would give the understanding of God being jealous for the loyalty of the spirit that He planted within us (see ESV).

The other issue is that there is no direct quotation of words of the Old Testament here, but rather a translation of meaning. Both understandings of the verse have Scriptural support.

I'm going to go with this meaning above, because James has been very strongly pointing out the reality of our sinful nature to desire, be jealous and envious. He has used graphic language such as murder and adultery, and it may seem over the top.

In effect James is saying that his comments are not over the top. Scripture testifies to the fact that we have this sinful nature living within us and that this nature envies intensely. It shows jealousy to others, but not just jealousy – its jealousy with malevolence. Cain murdered Abel. Joseph got sold by his brothers.

And what is your contribution? Perhaps you haven't acted on the impulse – but don't deny it wasn't there!

Do you appreciate just how much you need a Saviour?

Day 95: Monday Grace (and Tuesday and Wednesday and...)

But he gives more grace. James 4:6a

I know – this is just the verse you need for Monday morning!

Remember how James has been challenging believers on the issue of jealousy and envy, and how this causes so much trouble within ourselves, within the community of faith, and ultimately in our relationship with God.

But God does not chastise us for our envy without giving the means to deal with it. The logic is simple: envy and grace cannot co-exist. The person who is not envious is the person who is generous (see the parable of the labourers in Matt 20).

We live in a world where we are surrounded by appeals to appetite, where various products are promoted as being an indication of social standing. Advertising thrives on envy.

But God has available infinite, continuous grace. We need only go to Him and drink from Him. No matter what, God's grace will enable you to pursue that which is right.

So don't give up.

Day 96: Depraved Pride

But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." James 4:6

It's wonderful that God is extravagant in giving his grace, but it's a bit pointless if we don't receive it. If you're thirsty, I can offer you water, but you need to take it and drink it to gain the benefit.

And in our walk with God, if we are to receive His grace, we need to humble ourselves before Him. God resists those who are proud, who think they are better than others. Pride turned a host of angels into devils.

Rather we need to recognise our absolute and utter dependence upon God. Whilst we need to often consciously humble ourselves, what really helps is to simply understand how small we actually are (in this respect I love to look at mountains and stars and recall the words of David in Psalm 8:3&4). Phillip Brooks puts it well:

"The true way to be humble is not to stoop till you are smaller than yourself, but to stand at your real height against some higher nature that shall show you what the real smallness of your greatest greatness is"

Whilst you may be the pinnacle of creation, you're still small stuff☺

Day 97: Submission

Submit yourselves therefore to God. James 4:7a

We have seen how it is the humble who receive the grace of God. In this light the above instruction makes perfect sense (incidentally, we now encounter '10 commands' from James).

We are all called to place ourselves under the hand of God, and to do so this side of eternity. If we submit this side of eternity, we encounter the grace of God. If we leave it too late, we will then encounter His justice, and that is a terrifying prospect because we all know what we deserve.

Rather when we choose to submit to God, we trust God for what is best for His glory, even when we don't understand (it's kind of a submission requirement). Many children of God have had to make tough decisions in submission to the will of God, even though it has not always made sense. God however has a 100% track record in remaining faithful!

May we humble ourselves before Him, so that we may receive grace to remain in submission, and trust Him wholeheartedly with our lives. In property investment, the three key principles are location, location, location. In spiritual investment, the three key principles are submit, submit, submit.

Day 98: Don't just do it

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. James 4:7b

We saw yesterday how we need to submit to God. Submission to God is not passive, but an active pursuing of His will in our lives.

Satan however also has a plan for your life, and his strategy is quite simple: feed your pride.

If submission and humility is a consequence of recognising the greatness of God and our dependence upon Him, you can be rest assured that Satan will seek to feed pride in your heart, because pride is the vehicle he can best use to accomplish his purpose. Satan well knows the truth from first-hand experience of how pride comes before a fall.

Of course that is not his only strategy. He is, to use the language of old, a 'wily trickster'.

And the best way to defeat Satan is to go in the opposite direction he tempts you to. Stay the course of Christ, and Satan will flee from you...temporarily. Satan will be back, but you just stay the course.

Day 99: Closer than Google

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

James 4:8a

It's one thing to resist the devil and make Him flee, but we need to couple that with clinging to God.

This is an incredible command that James makes. It means that God wants us to draw near to Him and that God is knowable.

At the risk of repeating the obvious: you and I can speak to God. This God who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, makes His presence available to us to know and enjoy. To quote the Shorter Westminster Catechism, this is our duty: to enjoy God forever.

We need only draw near. We have to want the presence of God. We have to want to enjoy His company and obey His will. And we are only able to do so because Christ made it possible through Calvary.

We spend our lives rushing around, trying to accomplish earthly stuff, and yet we neglect the greatest invitation to know the God whom we will be spending eternity with (if we have trusted in Him for our salvation).

To paraphrase Paul (Acts 17:27), God is closer than Google.

Will you draw near?

Day 100: Come Clean, Get Clean

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded – James 4:8b

We were instructed yesterday to draw near to God.

If we are to draw near to God, and be welcome in His presence, then either God must cease to be holy, or we must cease to be sinners.

Since God is Holy, and cannot change, it is up to us to quit sinning.

This commandment applies to those who have never come to Christ, but it also applies to us who have trusted in Christ for salvation. We are not sinless, and to think we are is to deceive ourselves (1 John 1:8-10). Do we clean ourselves by washing our hands?

If only! This image I am sure has roots in the Old Testament where the priests would wash their hands and feet before entering the tabernacle. James is telling us to recognise that we have dirt in our lives (our hands engage in action), and that the root of the problem is our heart. How do we get clean?

In the words of a hymn written by William Cowper (1731-1800):

There is a fountain filled with blood

Drawn from Emmanuel's veins

A Shepherd Led Life Resource

And sinners plunged beneath that flood

Lose all their guilty stains

Come clean before Christ, and get cleaned by Him.

Day 101: Mourning into Dancing

Be wretched and mourn and weep...James 4:9a

True joy can only be known after true repentance.
Superficial repentance results in self-deception.

If we think we can get away with simply saying “gee God, I’m sorry for that,” then we don’t understand just how serious sin is.

A relationship with God has repentance at its foundation. It is not rule following with fellow ‘pat my back’ rule-following Christians, but rather built on the tearful recognition that I am in fundamental rebellion against God, that I cannot get rid of the sin weighing me down and separating me from God, and that I need Christ to set me free. If you have never experienced this, then may I humbly suggest you give the Holy Spirit permission to work in your life.

Grace is then appreciated so much more.

Day 102: Good Grief

Be wretched and mourn and weep...James 4:9a

We are looking at what constitutes true repentance. Yesterday we saw that it goes beyond a superficial 'I'm sorry'. If that is all we can come up with, then we do not recognise the seriousness of sin. The words 'be wretched' has to do with recognising our true condition.

To mourn and weep has to do with showing visible evidence of being sorry for one's sin (it's where the idea of penance came from). It means to display grief over sin. But the tense is that this grief is temporary; and rightly so because we have a Saviour, a High Priest, that we can run to, who knows what it is to be weak, even though He never sinned.

And the best way to reveal true grief over the sin we committed, is to repent, which means to change the direction of our life. We commit, by God's grace, to not go down that road again.

Divorce from sin is indeed allowed, and Jesus is the One who can set us free.

Day 103: Litmus Laughter

Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom...James 4:9b

Ok...is James seriously advocating that we go around being miserable?

Fortunately not. In the context of what James has been saying in the past few verses, we know that this is about where the heart lies. The child of God is not called to be a friend of the world.

On the surface of things, it does look like people of the world seem to have a fun time. I mean, who wouldn't enjoy loud music, excessive booze, dirty jokes and loose morals???

That's the archetypal picture of the world isn't it? And then the archetypal picture of the Christian is someone who is anti-everything: sombre and sullen.

I've said it before: the heart of the issue is the issue of the heart. If you still have the same appetite for the things of the world as you had before you allegedly gave your life to Christ, then there is a problem. If there is no conviction in the heart over wrong doing, if we find that we don't have an issue with temptation (and rather enjoy it), then there is a problem.

Then we need to allow the Holy Spirit to examine our hearts, and then let wrong laughter be turned to right mourning, wrong joy to right gloom...and then move into the realm of true laughter and joy.

The world disguises its emptiness through these things; but we can find our joy in Christ. Let's not gloat over sin, but rejoice in Him.

Day 104: Basement Please

***Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.
James 4:10***

We have seen that the Christian is not called to tolerate sin. We are called to be sorrowful in the presence of sin, not joyful. Our joy must be in Christ.

A very real danger with having a correct attitude towards sin (not tolerating it) is to have an incorrect attitude towards oneself. Pride can slip in so easily when one sees sin in others, and so this next commandment is very timely in this list that James gives.

It actually has the sense of this: Allow yourselves to be humbled by God...

And the truth is that God has given us the grace to humble ourselves before Him, but as a rule we like to be seen. Ironically, in our walk with God, and as we serve in our various gifts, the temptation is ever present to want to be seen as spiritual. Successes we experience can be misperceived as our doing rather than God's doing.

But God's elevator works differently. To get closer to Him requires us going as low as we can, in the sense of simply recognising our weakness and utter dependence upon Christ. Then we can receive even more of Him in our lives. In God's mine, the lower we go, the richer the treasure.

How low can you go?

Day 105: Psst!

Do not speak evil against one another, brothers...James 4:11

This is the “tenth commandment of James” that we now come to.

It’s very simple: don’t slander.

Slander is a fruit of self-righteousness, as well as a fruit of not thinking. It’s a case of, to quote an English proverb: empty vessels making the most noise. In terms of the words and tenses used in the original Greek, that is the essence of what James is saying in this statement.

If we do not humble ourselves before God (yesterday’s command), we will run the danger of thinking we are better than others, and judge others without even realising it or contemplating context to the actions of others. Slander is satanic and poisons the body of Christ. If we are guilty, we need to repent.

But think about how slander can operate at a broader level too. Wars thrive on slander. This is a challenge as I reflect on my own context in South Africa. Our country is at a critical point at the moment, and the solution does not lie in slandering others (that just perpetuates the problem), but in confronting darkness with light. I do not agree with many of the actions I am seeing (it’s just plain wrong), but I do not want to fall into the polarizing trap of labelling. This is so important because what we see is not the full picture.

Let's shine the light of Christ. Darkness will be exposed, and a better way revealed.

Day 106: Love behind their backs

Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. James 4:11

Strong words! But they only seem strong because we don't have an appreciation for the purity and love of God, and slander is one of those things we can so easily do, like drinking coffee.

As we grow closer to God, the irony is that Satan can still slip in and cause us to see and judge the sin in others (oftentimes it isn't sin, it's just something that violates our opinion). As Zodiates so eloquently puts it: "One of the greatest temptations of an advanced, well-informed Christian is to assume an authoritative attitude toward others Christians." Christians will judge other Christians on all sorts of issues, and think that they're better.

But a person who criticizes easily will never be properly happy and content. And our calling is not to condemn others, but to build up and love. In other words, we're called to treat and speak of others in the same way we would like God to treat us.

Otherwise we speak against the law of love, and against the One who gave it.

Not a good place to be.

Day 107: Sorry – who are you again?

There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbour? James 4:12

This is a verse that can be unpacked at great length, as it is rich in its teaching. We will however hone in on the logic that James presents to us:

Remember he is speaking against the Christian's ability to quickly slander and judge another brother or sister.

In a sense, this verse is the 'case closed' argument as to why we shouldn't do this. Only God is the lawgiver, and only God is the judge. None of us were there to advise God on what the law should be, and we should not presume to see ourselves above the law and to be judgemental and critical.

We are under God, not above Him. We are alongside the person we slander, and since we are not God, we do not know the full picture.

And in reminding us that God alone is God, James then asks a pointed question designed to humble the listener: *who are you anyway?*

It's a rhetorical question, but here's the answer anyway: a fellow sinner in need of mercy from a merciful God.

Day 108: Profit Provider

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit" - ...James 4:13

James really is challenging Christians to ponder how they live their lives! In this 4th chapter alone he has already challenged us on our preference for the world over God, for our disregard of God in how we so quickly judge our brother, and now in the next few verses he challenges us on how we can so quickly forget the sovereignty and provision of God.

And in short here is the lesson: Do not leave God out of your planning.

If you are in business (James seems to be addressing travelling merchants in this verse), your motivation needs to be a lot deeper than profit. It is God who provides, so it is only appropriate that He be asked where the profits must go. It's silly to accumulate earthly wealth and not invest eternally.

As we begin the week, lets give thanks for God's provision in our lives. And lets invest in eternity.

*Day 109: Tomorrow! I love you
tomorrow!..*

Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring...

James 4:14a

To quote Augustine: God will not suffer man to have the knowledge of things to come: for if he had prescience of his prosperity, he would be careless; and understanding of his adversity, he would be senseless.

We all know our past, but humanity has a desire to know the future. Astrology is big business!

But it's a good thing we don't know our future, but it's foolish to live as if our future is in our hands. We need to plan, but we need to more importantly realise that we are totally and utterly dependent upon God.

Not knowing the future has some important implications for us. Firstly, it means we can have hope, because who hopes for what they already have (Romans 8:24&25)? Secondly, it means we need to make the most of today, especially in terms of our walk with Christ (Hebrews 3:13).

You may not be here tomorrow.

Day 105: What is your life?

What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes – James 4:14

There's nothing quite like a verse from the letter of James to put life into perspective.

Life. It's a miracle, and it should surely make people question the strange notion of having arrived here by chance.

But how would you answer the question "What is your life?"

James is challenging the business people who focus their lives on making money and trying to make it in this world. It's interesting that he uses the word mist, because, like wealth, it can appear for a while and even attract attention, but then it goes away.

And one day we will die, and then face God.

Do you know Him?

How are you using your life?

Day 106: God willing...

Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” James 4:15

It’s good and wise to plan, but it’s foolish to plan with only the ‘me’ factor and not the God factor.

It’s a phrase I don’t hear much these days when it comes to making plans. Growing up I often used to hear the phrase “Lord willing” or “God willing” prefacing the stated intention.

Nowadays I am more likely to hear “The Lord told me,” or “The Lord led me” and often it is in the same convenient way that Allah seemed to have told Muhammad his will. Personal motivation is a powerful ally in any religion!

But we are called to be different. We are indeed called to “Islam” (submit) to “Allah” (God) – but as Christians we submit out of joyful gratitude, not fatalistic fear of reprisal, to our Lord Jesus Christ.

May the words of Proverbs 3:5&6 be our motto.

Day 107: Got that lovin' feeling?

As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. James 4:16&17

Pity the businessperson making money and bragging about it. To leave God out of the picture, and to think you are rich because of your own efforts, is simply evil.

Tough words, but how we need reminding! It's so easy to think that it is because of our own efforts that we have money, and this then leads to sense of entitlement, which subsequently makes us very reluctant to give to those in need (because 'they haven't worked for it and we don't want to create a cycle of dependency')

But if we know there is need, and we don't help, then we have sinned. God calls us to love not just with our feelings (our hearts), but also with our hands and wallets.

The only reason you have been able to receive salvation is because God was and is generous - not because you are deserving.

Let us never forget to Whom we belong.

Day 108: You're Rich? How sad!

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you...James 5:1

What a 'hectic' verse! And there's more to come.

James has been challenging rich business people, and he continues to do so for the next six verses. He is not concerned about not causing offense, but rather anguished over sinners going to hell. He states the case very clearly: if you are rich and have gained your riches without any reference to God, and only for your own pleasures, then you do not have reason to be proud of your self-achievement, but rather reason to weep and howl. We will explore this further tomorrow.

For now, where do you think you would fit in when it comes to money in the following scenarios?

1. Materially rich in this world and poor towards God
2. Materially poor in this world and rich towards God
3. Poor in this world and in the next
4. Rich in this world, but holding it loosely so that you're rich in the next world too

Whether we are rich or poor in this world, may we always be rich towards God!

Day 109: Howling Rich?

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you...James 5:1

If you have money in this world, it can get you a lot of things: from coffee and cheesecake through to property, prostitutes and power. But it cannot buy you this: the glorious eternal presence of God.

James is issuing a strong message here: if you have gotten your money through selfish means and for selfish purposes, you have no reason to rejoice but to howl.

Why? Because, as Jesus taught, what's the point of gaining everything on earth and having nothing in heaven? Riches are so incredibly fleeting. Financial markets are volatile, as many a "once-rich-now-broke" person can testify. There seems to be a prophetic element to this message of James, since he is writing to Christians in Jerusalem, and the letter is dated around 60 AD, with the destruction of Jerusalem taking place just ten years later. Those who were rich lost everything.

But of course there is the more serious matter of eternal destiny. Money can only buy you hell. To live a life focussed only on money is to commit spiritual suicide.

But to live a life of generosity towards God with the gifts He gives (both spiritually and materially), is to invest eternally.

Let that be true of us.

Day 110: Dirty Rotten Scoundrel?

Your riches have rotted...James 5:2a

It would be wrong to think that God is against the rich and only for the poor. God is not against the rich, but the rich have a knack for being against God.

Take note of how James words it: ***your riches have rotted*** (can also be translated as 'corrupted'). There are some riches that don't rot or corrupt, and it all has to do with attitude. Is money your end, or a means to an end? Put differently, does money have intrinsic value to you, or instrumental?

If money has intrinsic value to you (its an end in itself), then it has become a curse to you. The word behind 'rotted' has the meaning of a 'putrefying sore.' If you had a putrefying sore, it would not be pleasant - it would be 'smelly and gross,' and you would want to get rid of it.

Trying to have money as a means in itself is like giving oneself a festering ulcer.

But gaining money as a means for blessings others...well, that's a different story altogether!

Day 111: Moths love Nike

**Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten.
James 5:2**

The status symbol of the Ancient Near East was a garment. You displayed your wealth through what you wore. This was before the days when consumers got duped into spending money to advertise brand goods.

Nothing wrong with wearing good clothes, but if your desire is to show off and bring attention to yourself, then you have a pride issue.

Nothing wrong with wearing quality clothes, but if you have plenty and you're not helping the less fortunate, then you are being selfish.

To have riches without God as our reference point is to invite disaster. Just like the moth doesn't exactly look vicious but quietly destroys, so will self-centred wealth destroy us.

So, what can you give away today?

Day 112: Heart Rust

Your gold and silver have corroded,...James 5:3a

James is challenging rich people who live for themselves. He makes an interesting statement here, because isn't the whole point of gold and silver the fact they don't rust?

Perhaps there is something deeper being referred to here, such as the issue of the heart?

The very real danger of riches is that it cannot supply what is hoped for. Money can provide loads and loads of superficial, temporary happiness. It can get you the dream car and the amazing holiday. It cannot provide meaning, and sooner or later, the things hoped for through money will become more and more elusive, ironically making you poorer and poorer.

Let's rather place our trust in God.

Day 113: Hellishly Rich?

Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire.

James 5:3

A disturbingly merciful verse.

Judgement day shall reveal our priority, and we shall be treated accordingly. To the person who lived for selfish riches, he will be unhappy not only in this life, but in the next as well.

I don't hear much about hell these days, and perhaps if there was more preaching of it in the pulpit, there would be less people going (to paraphrase Tozer).

Hell is an uncomfortably awful reality to think about, but God wants us to know it is real. If it were not, then Calvary was the stupidest act in history.

But it wasn't. It was the ultimate grace act, the provision of mercy to those who recognise their need for it. Forgiven is my favourite word.

Life's too short to live for self. Let's live for the glory of God instead.

Day 114: Live Life, Retire...and then?

You have laid up treasure in the last days...James 5:3

It's really good and wise to plan for old age.

But to not plan for what comes after that?

Well that is foolishness of the highest degree.

How's your heavenly investment looking? Do you have one?

Day 115: Heaven won't help

Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. James 5:4

James is not mincing his words. To those who employ people, and who hold back wages out of selfish greed, heaven won't help you.

Capitalism is to be defined by compassion and fairness. The labourer (note: the Bible says labourer, not lazourer!) has a right to a living wage (the idea is not to pay as little as possible but as much), and the employer has a right to a profit. The employer and employee need each other, and if some basic respect could be shown both ways, then a lot of issues would be resolved. Both need to recognise that we are all accountable to God.

What if our economy was defined by generous grace?

What if our hearts were?

Day 116: How's the heart?

***You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence.
You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.***

James 5:13

What an image of living for the self without a thought of consequence of how we must stand before God! Like the cow or pig that continues to eat unawares of what is about to take place. Scaringly, the historian Josephus actually recounts how at the destruction of Jerusalem (about 10 years after this letter was written), those Jews who show signs of being wealthy (fat and well dressed) were tortured to reveal where their treasures were hidden.

It's one thing to feed our bodies, but we have to be careful of what we feed our hearts. To focus on desires and pleasures is to develop a fat heart so to speak, and that means a heart that is less and less sensitive to God. The result of that is disastrous.

Is it time to put your heart on diet?

Day 117: Thou shalt not murder...

You have condemned; you have murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you. James 5:6

Money and power have the knack for harvesting corruption, and innocent lives get lost. The righteous person does not live by the same values as a person who loves money and power, and so they get easily done away with.

Both literally and figuratively.

The implication behind the word condemned is that the rich paid or set up the courts to condemn their labourers – in other words, they justified their evil of not paying the wages they ought to have paid. It's the mindset of a dictator.

But this type of thing happens every day at a heart level too. Labourers who do not get their due wages by employers are having their livelihood taken away from them. Sadly, within the church many ministers of the gospel (from the Sunday School teacher to the pastor to the missionary) experience character assassination by the very members entrusted to their care.

But God sees.

And God understands.

Jesus got spat on, beaten up, mocked, flogged and crucified.

To fight back is relatively easy; to love back is Christlike.

Day 118: Don't lose your patience...

**Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord
– James 5:7**

James has had some strong words against the rich who abuse and oppress the poor. But what about the Christian poor who are being mistreated by their employers?

Well, let's just say his answer would not go down too well in South Africa (or many other parts of the world for that matter). In South Africa if you don't like your pay, you go on strike.

God says be patient towards those who mistreat you. This is not the patience in chapter 1 which has to deal with being patient under difficult circumstances, but a different type of patience because now we are dealing with people. The old English word would be long-suffering. In other words, we need to ensure that we are not easily provoked and lose our tempers (which seems to be a common feature of strike action). After all, as God's children, we know that our employer is just the tool of provision – it is God who provides.

As children of God we are called to respond differently: to bless those who persecute us.

It's how Jesus responded to you.

Day 119: Hopelessly Hopeful?

***Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.
James 5:7***

Why should we be patient under conditions of being mistreated?

Because we have the promise that one day every wrong will be made right. Jesus is going to be coming again, to collect those who love Him. This is our very real hope. Hope is a powerful sustainer of the soul through suffering. Zodiates puts it so beautifully: Man is a hopelessly hopeful creature.

We do not know when Jesus will be coming again, but, forgive me for stating the obvious: we certainly know that the Second Coming is closer than ever. And the simple question is whether we are ready to meet with Christ. What will He find us doing? Remember we will need to give account of our actions, and we give account to the One who knows our hearts and will not be fooled by the excuses by which we deceive ourselves.

May we be granted the patience to persevere to God's glory. To those who press on, a beautiful reward awaits.

Day 120: Patience is a virtue...

Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. James 4:7

It must have been hard for the early Christians to not have seen Jesus come again. There was an expectation that He would, and yet years had passed and nothing had happened.

We need to be patient says James. James was apparently a farmer, so he appreciated the value of having to fully trust God for the yield of his labour.

And we are obviously closer now to the Second Coming than ever before, but I do personally believe we need to steer away from trying to say when, and veer towards preparing our hearts and live with the expectation of it happening at anytime.

God's timetable is not our timetable (although ours should be His). From the first prophecy of the coming Messiah in Genesis 3:15 to the birth of Jesus, at least 4000 years had elapsed. It's only been 2000 years since Jesus ascended into heaven. I'm just saying...

The Second Coming is going to be huge: the entire universe will be aware of it!

In the meantime, let's simply live for Him and spread the loving gospel message around.

Day 121: Press on!

You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. James 5:8

Did you catch that?

Be patient...establish your hearts...

What powerful imperatives!

Like the farmer who can get discouraged when the crops do not appear at the right time, so children of God can very easily be prone to discouragement when it seems that God is not answering prayer.

But we are called to be patient. Remember, God's timing is not our timing.

And we are called to establish our hearts. I feel a sermon coming on – but I will spare you it 😊

Do not give in to discouragement, but go in the opposite spirit. Choose to believe, and do what you can in His strength.

To quote Churchill at a school prizegiving speech (I am apparently quoting the entire speech here):

Never give up – never, never, never!

Day 122: Knock knock!

Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. James 5:9

It's difficult enough for brothers and sisters to stand against and outside enemy, to bear up under difficult circumstances – so why go and add to it by having disunity in the family of God?

It is tragic but true that Satan also has workers within the church. It's sad how grudges can enter and cause disunity (the solution of many is to run away with their hearts to a new church). People may not say much on the outside, but the heart has plenty within it.

And our Lord is aware. He is standing at the door, which is often used to picture the human heart (see Rev 3:20). As Zodiates puts it:

“The Judge, who certainly is Jesus Christ, is standing outside the heart's door and is listening to its every heart-beat. He does not listen to the words of our mouths, but to the beats of our hearts.”

Given how common this is, it's obvious that this is a Scripture not taken too seriously.

May God enable our hearts to beat to His rhythm.

Day 123: Respond, don't react

As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord – James 5:10

If you're going to speak God's truth to the world, then understand that there is a key virtue you need to possess: the ability to patiently endure suffering.

The example to follow are the prophets says James, who endured much suffering at the hands of those they sought to serve.

People of the world just don't want to hear God's truth, and, so it turns out, neither do some people in the church.

When evil presses against us because of our love for Christ, do not retaliate, unless it is with prayerful love.

Because this is exactly how Jesus responded to us when we crucified Him: He said: Father forgive them – they don't know what they're doing!

What a Savior!

Day 124: Grab hold, hold on, and don't let go!

Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast...James 5:11a

If I were to try and answer the question of why the church is still around today (apart from the obvious reason of Jesus!), I think a primary reason would have to be because of the martyrs of our faith. A worldly church doesn't have to worry about persecution from the world.

And since Stephen in Acts 7, church history has an amazing heritage and legacy of children of God who remained faithful to death: and not a quick death either, but brutal, agonizing, torturous deaths at the hands of enemies who did not appreciate their loyalty to Christ.

Some Christians with bravado may wish to die such a death, and I know some without bravado who are humbly prepared to. To be honest, I simply don't know if I would survive such an ordeal because I know how weak I am. I hope I never have to find out.

And whilst I shudder at how God's children had to go through such things, I am also amazed at how they were clearly sustained by the grace of God – they had a vision of better things that surpassed this world.

And they deserve every ounce of glorious blessing for having endured and remaining steadfast. It is right to call them

heroes of faith, and it is right to emulate them as an example to follow.

And according to Hebrews 12:1, they're watching how we run the race.

Let's do so with honour.

Day 125: The Patience of Job

Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful...James 5:11

Job is truly an amazing example of patient, enduring faith. He is an example of utter trust in God, even though he definitely did not understand what he was going through. His 'friends' were not much help.

Our inability to see the unseen leads us to grumble in times of difficulty. Scripture is replete with promises that, for the child of God, suffering is NEVER wasted. There is always a purpose behind what God both brings into and allows into our lives. We have to be content with the truth that the purpose will only probably be seen in eternity.

But what God sends us through He also takes us through.

And that is good to know.

Day 126: Pinkie Promise?

But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” no, so that you may not fall under condemnation. James 5:12

When we’re going through a valley, we need to watch our tongues. It is so easy to complain against God! Imagine the outcome if Paul and Silas complained about being in prison instead of singing praises – the Philippian jailer wouldn’t have been saved (see Acts 16)!

We know from the 3rd commandment and the teachings of Jesus that we should not use God’s name lightly, and yet the name of Jesus and God flows so glibly from human mouths, even those of Christians. I get the impression sometimes that the name of Jesus gets used more as a Harry Potter incantation than in heartfelt prayer!

Finally, we need to be so careful of the pervasive habit of ‘promising’ something to be true. It’s an indictment of the human heart that we have to somehow give added credibility to our words in order to be believed: ranging from “on my mother’s grave” through to “God is my witness.”

We are called to walk in integrity, so that yes is yes and no is no. Anything else is hypocrisy.

Day 127: A Spicy Life is Good for the Soul...

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. James 5:13

Have you noticed how we crave diversity and loathe monotony? For example, we like to have a career that will challenge us, because the prospect of doing the same thing over and over (such as tightening bolt after bolt in a production line for 8 hours a day) will cause us to go crazy! There's a reason we say variety is the spice of life.

Except when it comes to personal circumstances. That's when we want the monotony. We want life to be all sunshine and no rain.

But God knows better. God brings both beautiful and difficult circumstances into our lives, to mould and shape us. We are invited, or rather commanded, to bring God into every aspect of our lives. If we're going through hardship...pray; if we're going through a good season...rejoice. Whatever we go through, don't leave God out!

This means that our lives can then become consecrated and sacred, because we are bathing ourselves in God's presence through intentional God-focused living. The result of that will be that even in hardship we will be able to rejoice, simply because, in the words of that hymn: it is well with my soul.

Day 128: The Reality of Sickness

Is anyone among you sick? James 5:14a

There weren't much in the way of punctuation marks in the original Greek, and this question can also be understood as a statement of fact – i.e: There are sick among you.

There exists within the church what I believe is a distortion of what the Bible teaches regarding sickness and healing. While illnesses are part and parcel of the general fallen condition of humanity, it is totally wrong to say each sickness a child of God encounters is a result of a particular sin in that person's life. Sometimes it is (we'll touch on that in a few days time), but I would argue that is the exception and not the rule. Those that believe that children of God should not be getting any disease or sickness need to explain why we still die. Personally, I'd rather be in eternity with a new resurrected body as opposed to the one I've got.

Christians still get flu. Rebuking it in the name of Jesus because it has no authority in the body is to me a little bit 'after the fact.' Surely if it really had no authority in the body it wouldn't have gotten in there in the first place? You really want to admit that germs and Satan had the one-up on you? The Scriptural reality is that sometimes sickness is there by the authority of Christ! So don't let anyone false-guilt you into thinking you don't have faith or there's something wrong and it's not God's will for you to be sick etc etc.

But what we can do, as we shall see, is ask Christ for healing. And it would be a bit silly not to, unless the Lord reveals to you otherwise.

What a wonderful privilege!

Day 129: Massage Ministry

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord – James 5:14

It really does help to take the time to study Scripture. So many misunderstandings can be resolved!

The word translated as sick comes from a word for a person who is physically weak. We can tell that this person was too weak to attend the assembly of believers, and instead of getting upset over how the pastor didn't visit him, he instead asks for a visit.

A further important point to note here is the word anoint. There are two Greek words for anoint – one is used for the sacred as in anointing a priest or a king. The other word is more mundane – it actually means to rub with oil. If you wanted to describe rubbing yourself with arnica oil for sore muscles or oiling parts of an engine for better lubrication, this is the word you would use to describe your action. It's the word James uses over here.

When your body is weak, having a good thorough massage with oil will go a long way in helping you to feel better! We can understand the verse as follows: "and let them pray over him, having rubbed him with oil, in the name of the Lord." This was not a tiny bottle of special anointing oil to drop on the forehead...rather there would have been a jug of it available to massage a person.

The elders were to do the practical application of helping the person feel better, and pray for the person. The lesson is simple: do what you can to relieve the pain (take medicine) and pray. To pray and not do what you can to help the person is to lack compassion.

Want to know what is tragically scary? Children have died because parents refused to give them medical treatment because 'they are offering a prayer of faith.' Those children could have been healed through the means of medicine and prayer. After all, who do you think enabled humanity to discover medicine?

Day 130: In the Name of Jesus

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. James 5:14

We have seen that if we are sick, we are to take medicine and pray. We can also minister to a person through doing what we can to alleviate their pain. I salute those who serve in hospice ministry.

The last phrase in the above verse is so important: in the name of the Lord.

All that we do needs to be done with the recognition that we do it as ambassadors of Christ on earth as unto Christ in heaven. As Paul says in 1 Cor 10:31 – So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.

But prayer also needs to be in the name of Jesus. I know I am stating the obvious here, but to hear some prayers today one would think that the name of Jesus is an incantation rather than the Lord of the universe to whom we submit our will.

To pray in the name of the Lord is to submit the prayer to the will of the Lord, giving recognition that our finite minds and knowledge are radically inferior to His Omniscience. It is the ultimate act of trust to be able to say: Thy will be done. Praying in the name of Jesus is not a means to get God to align His will with ours, but to align ours with His.

Let's not forget that.

Day 131: The Prayer of Faith

And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up – James 5:15

Let's dive straight in: does this verse mean that God is obligated to heal every single time the elders pray for healing? Somehow that sounds more like arrogance than humility.

One can imagine the Apostle James stating, under divine insight: There is a person sick among you – call the elders, rub the person down with medicinal oil, pray for him, and the Lord will restore him. Does this mean that each and every prayer for healing done with this formula must and always be answered, and if it isn't it means someone doesn't have enough faith?

Been there, done that, got the t-shirt. I've been on the receiving end of this logic on more than one occasion.

Does the text actually teach this? Let's see: we have already had one qualifier to the action of rubbing with oil and prayer: it must be in the name of the Lord. In other words, the prayer is submitted to the will of God. That sets the context for the verse above.

There is a further qualifier mentioned: the prayer of faith. Again, we need to note that the word used is not the usual word translated as prayer, but a word meaning "wish, vow,

prayer” and can be understood as, in this verse, expressing a wish before God for the healing of the sick brother.

It’s not a demand made of God, but a request. It is ‘a wish of faith,’ and the implication is clear: when this wish or request aligns with God’s will, there will always be an answer. Many treat faith as the entity, so that it becomes faith in faith. But Biblical faith is trusting and believing in God, and with that comes submission. It is the Lord who raises up.

I remember listening to a humble man who has a powerful healing ministry (from Hong Kong if I remember). He stressed that healing is in God’s hands, and we’re not to tell God what to do, but rather to ask. And I have seen this in my own life: there have been miraculous answers to prayers, and no answers to prayers.

And here’s the beautiful truth: we can ask God for healing and we’re instructed to ask God for healing. But we can also know that if healing does not take place, then God has a purpose for that, and we are promised glory in eternity that outweighs the temporary inconvenience.

Let’s pray, and let’s leave the results to God.

Day 132: Sin is the real sickness

And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

James 5:15

Now we come to the thorny issue of the relationship between sickness and sin. We need to note what James says here: and if...

Sickness is not always related to personal sin, but it does happen. The Apostle Paul taught that many are sick because they do not eat the Lord's Supper (communion) in a worthy manner: in other words they eat and drink of it while holding grudges against a brother or sister (1 Cor 11:17-30).

It is the mercy of God that we are not sick as often as we should be if sin and sickness are always related! By the same token, we cannot claim our good health is because we are sinless. And for those that pray and people don't get healed and want to blame lack of faith in the person being prayed for, it would help if they looked up Matthew 17:14-20 where the problem lay squarely with the pray-er!

But what is important, is to have an attitude of heart that continually examines itself. If we find ourselves sick, it won't hurt to examine ourselves and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal if He is trying to get our attention over a specific area of our lives.

The beautiful truth is this: if, for some reason, the sickness is due to sin, we are able to receive forgiveness and be set free.

I don't know about you, but forgiven is one of my favourite words.

Day 133: Inside Out

Therefore, confess your sins to one another...James 5:16a

Confession – it's a word that lies at the root of justice systems throughout the world, with dubious shades of meaning dependent upon your lawyer it seems.

But what does confession actually mean when we read about it in the Bible? I was fascinated to discover that the Greek word actually comprises of three words which make up our word confess.

The first part of the word means to bring something that is inside to the outside. The second part of the word means common or joint and has the meaning of two people agreeing or two opinions agreeing (so we can picture ourselves agreeing with the Holy Spirit when we are convicted of sin). The last part refers to the word or outward form used to express what is going on inside.

Bringing it all together, we can define confess as “to agree with someone else in the innermost recesses of one's soul and to speak out publicly about it”

Sometimes it will be sin (which we will explore) and other times it will be praise or thanksgiving (see Phil 2:11).

What is clear however is that to confess is not a superficial affair, but deals with deep issues of the heart. From my experience, it's a place not everyone wants to go to, but for those that do, a deeper experience of Christ awaits.

Day 134: No Booth Needed

Therefore, confess your sins to one another...James 5:16a

At the outset, let's be clear that this is not a proof text for going to a priest to confess your sins and to get forgiveness from a priest.

But why would we need to confess our sins to one another? At one level, if we are open and honest about our sins (the 'in' word is 'accountability'), it does provide motivation to pay closer attention to how we live.

But we are also in relationship with each other, and in the course of those relationships, we do sin against each other. And when we do, we need to humble ourselves and admit it to the person we have sinned against and ask for forgiveness.

Just remember that the forgiveness we receive from each other will be of an entirely different quality to that which we receive from God. The holiness and justice of God demands that the sin we commit against Him be punished, and Christ Himself has taken on that punishment so that we can receive forgiveness. If we demand punishment for our hurt egos, we have kind of missed the point. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Day 135: No Booth Needed

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another – James 5:16

It may surprise you to know that it seems James had in mind the confession of sins to one another during the course of gathering together (like in church or home group). We also need to obviously confess when we have wronged a brother or sister.

And with confession should come prayer. We are all weak, and what a tremendous blessing when we can have a brother or sister pray with us in our weakness. None of us deserve prayer, but we all need it.

Instead of criticising a person for their weakness, rather pray. This truth was really brought home to me a few years ago by a brother in Egypt. He spoke of Noah's drunkenness, and how the one son (Ham) displayed disrespect at seeing his father's drunken state and nakedness, whilst the other two (Shem and Japheth) took a garment and covered their father's nakedness without looking (Genesis 9:20-23). A powerful lesson emerges from this: cover the weaknesses of your leaders in prayer.

Let's do that – instead of criticising (which doesn't take intelligence), let's rather bathe each other in prayer (which takes character). Be warned: you may just find yourself developing a love for the person you're praying for, which is beautifully Christ-like.

Day 137: Don't Stop Praying

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. James 5:16

Confession and prayer: two elements guaranteed to deepen any fellowship of believers.

And a gentle reminder that Christians do get sick, otherwise we wouldn't be told to pray for each other. And a further reminder that the healing always comes from God, through His chosen means. I have seen miraculous healings in my life, and I have seen speedy recoveries when recovery should have been slower. I've also seen healing take longer than expected, but then I didn't know the extent of the damage. And yes, I have seen non-healings take place, because sometimes Jesus does say no for His own purpose. But He has never said no without providing sustaining grace to endure. I believe we're meant to leave the decisions to God.

I remember serving communion to an elderly lady on her deathbed. She had been a pillar servant of our church for years, quietly serving through children and music ministry. There were some in her family who believed there should be prayer for healing as her right as a child of God (because 'Satan has no authority here etc etc). I had no peace about that, but was rather led to pray that she would know the peace of God to envelop her. It was just such a powerful moment. There was no mistaking the presence of God in that room.

She went home to be with the Lord that night.

Talk about the ultimate healing.

Day 138: Clarity is Key

The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working...James 5:16

In the course of just 2 verses (15&16), James has used three different words for prayer which is translated by our one word 'prayer.' Each one has a different nuance to it.

In the above verse, the meaning attached is not a general prayer, but prayer for specifics from God.

It's beautiful that we can come before God with specifics. It's so easy to be general in our prayers, but how important it is to get down to specifics. We can pray specifically for people in specific challenges; we can pray for specific help in our own challenges.

My daughter will often ask if I can play with her, and of course I can. But then I get specific: what do you want to play? That is the beauty of a child parent relationship – the capacity to freely ask.

And we can freely ask God.

What specifically do you need help with? Who can you specifically pray for?

Now's a good time...

Day 139: Breakthrough Prayer

The prayer of a righteous man has great power as it is working...James 5:16b

The King James version translates the above verse as follows:
The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much...

Here is a 'good Baptist' devotion for this verse – it comes with three points!

This verse teaches us 1) the qualification of prayer; the 2) the qualification of the praying one and 3) the result of such prayer (Zodhiates p190)

If we are going to be effective in our prayer life, then the prayer needs to be in accordance with God's will, from a person who is righteous and then we shall see good answers.

Let's dig a little deeper. Prayer is effective when we allow God to pray through us (through His Spirit). We have no righteousness of our own that we can speak of, but we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ, which then means that we would desire our wills to be aligned with His will.

To know our true need and to bring it to the Father, to ask in accordance with the will of Christ, through the Spirit, means we shall see answers to prayer.

For many of us, it's time to rethink prayer.

And to re-pray.

Day 140: Imperfect pray-er; Perfect God

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth – James 5:17

There is a tendency amongst us to almost deify those whom God uses in a mighty way. Elijah was a prophet used mightily by God – he raised the dead, he survived 40 days on one meal, he called down fire from heaven.

He also got depressed, feared for his life (interestingly he never actually died!) and had to use the bathroom.

He was just like you and me – imperfect.

Yet he was used by God, and God heard his prayers.

That should encourage us.

Day 141: I'm Singing in the Rain

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

James 5:18

I remember once leading a carols by candlelight out in the open, and it started to drizzle. So I offered up a prayer to ask God to please hold back the rain...and it then came in a downpour. I remember thinking to myself "so much for the prayers of a righteous man-I clearly have a long way to go!:-)"

So when people pray to God and ask God for nice weather for their personal functions and tell me I just need to have faith...I usually respond with something along the lines of wouldn't it be more appropriate to see what God's will is regarding the weather and fit in with that?

But why did God listen to this prayer of Elijah? Because Elijah could hear the heart of God.

Being a prophet, his role was to speak forth God's will and word, and he must have known this was God's intention to discipline a nation and steer them back to Him from their idolatry. The drought would have taught them that their idol Baal was false, and that God alone has all authority and power.

To hear the heart of God – that should be the desire of us all...and then to pray and live the heart of God.

Day 142: Spiritual Wanderlust

My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth...James 5:19a

It happens...time and again...people wander from the truth. Some still stay in church, but others wander out of that too.

There are just so many competitors for our attention that seeks to distract us from our journey of conforming ourselves to the likeness of Christ who is the way to follow, the truth to obey and the life to live.

The competitors come from outside through many means, ranging from false teachers through to materialism, and also from within through false opinions (don't believe everything you think!) and temptations.

We really need to be on our guard.

Are you?

Day 143: Backsliders Anonymous?

My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. James 5:19

And so James ends his letter.

This is a verse that can be quite contentious and not the easiest to understand. Here, by God's grace, is how I understand it...

I do not believe anyone can lose their salvation, but neither do I believe that because we are under grace God glosses over sin.

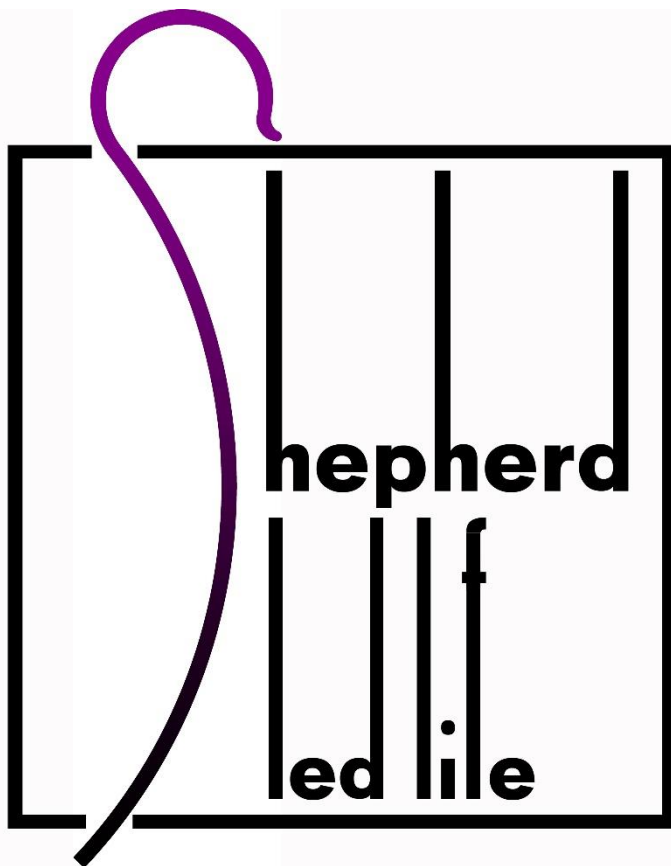
Sin in the life of the believer still has consequences. Death is a broad term to explain the effect of sin, which is ultimately a break in fellowship with God. So while we cannot lose our salvation, I do believe we can get malnourished and ultimately experience a loss of fellowship in terms of our experience of God and his love (but we will never know a ceasing of God's love for us – that is an objective truth which cannot change).

But we can also experience a loss of reward one day when we stand before God (see 1 Cor 3:12-15).

And if we can be an instrument in turning a brother or sister back to Christ, then we have done a truly blessed thing indeed, because instead of leaving the brother or sister on a

path of spiritual self-mutilation, we can bring them back to the Lord who restores.

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