

thought. People who “worry their prayers” are like wind-whipped waves. Don’t think you’re going to get anything from the Master that way, adrift at sea, keeping all your options open.

What should you do if you don't know what you're doing?

When you ask the Father for help, how should you do it?

God invites you to come to Him with your requests. If you need wisdom, he says, “Come to me, and I will give it to you.” He says we should come boldly, believing that he wants to help us. He loves you and wants to give you the wisdom you need.

Don't go to God in a wishy-washy way, though. In other words, don't go to God as one of your options. Make him your only option. If you treat him only as an advisor, you approach him as a source for information, rather than *the* source for direction. He is God, the Master. His wisdom is truth and his truth is final.

If you don't know what to do in the situation you are facing right now, ask God for wisdom. Tell him you will do anything he wants you to do. He will make his way clear to you.

July 2

James 1:9-12 (MSG) When down-and-outers get a break, cheer! And when the arrogant rich are brought down to size, cheer! Prosperity is as short-lived as a wildflower, so don’t ever count on it. You know that as soon as the sun rises, pouring down its scorching heat, the flower withers. Its petals wilt and, before you know it, that beautiful face is a barren stem. Well, that’s a picture of the “prosperous life.” At the very moment everyone is looking on in admiration, it fades away to nothing. Anyone who meets a testing challenge head-on and manages to stick it out is mighty fortunate. For such persons loyally in love with God, the reward is life and more life.

To what does the Scripture compare the "prosperous life"?

How do you show yourself as one who loyally loves the Lord?

What reward does a loyal servant of God receive?

What is the aim of your life? If it's to get rich, you are aiming for something that will never last. James compares the riches of this world to a wildflower that withers away when the heat of the sun hits it. Worldly riches don't last long at all.

There are a lot of people who had great wealth for a while, but they wound up losing it. They found out that money can't make you happy and that putting your hopes in riches will disappoint you every time.

Those who are rich and sustain their wealth throughout their lifetime will still lose it when they die. You can't take worldly riches with you into eternity unless you invested your wealth into the things that have eternal value. The only things that have eternal value are serving the will of God and ministering to the souls of men. These are the things you should give your life to.

Those who aim to please the Lord and serve his purposes in the world will be rewarded with life and more life. They are the ones who will obtain true riches. They will be able to face the difficulties of this

world and stand strong because they know the Lord is with them. They won't be dependent on their personal wealth or ability to sustain them because they have a heavenly Father.

What is the aim of your life--money or God? It will be one or the other. Choose God. Don't invest your life in something that will not last.

July 3

James 1:13-15 (MSG) *Don't let anyone under pressure to give in to evil say, "God is trying to trip me up." God is impervious to evil, and puts evil in no one's way. The temptation to give in to evil comes from us and only us. We have no one to blame but the leering, seducing flare-up of our own lust. Lust gets pregnant, and has a baby: sin! Sin grows up to adulthood, and becomes a real killer.*

What shouldn't you say when you struggle with sin?

Where does the temptation to sin come from?

Temptation doesn't come from God. God can't be tempted by sin, nor can he tempt any man. If you are tempted to sin, it's because of the lust within you. You can't blame anyone for your sin, but yourself. Here's how the process of sin develops in your life.

1. You see the opportunity to sin and how it could please your flesh.
2. You choose to disobey God believing that your sinful action will please you more than staying holy.
3. The sin becomes habitual and grows into something that takes over you.
4. The full grown, unrepentant sin eventually sucks the life out of you, killing your relationship with God and robbing you of your Kingdom inheritance.

This is not God's plan for your life. The Father has given you his word so you might resist temptation and live life to the fullest. Sin brings pleasure for a season, but in the end it leads to destruction. The next time you're tempted, who are you going to listen to: the seductive cries of your flesh or the love-motivated warnings of the Spirit?

July 4

James 1:16-18 (MSG) *So, my very dear friends, don't get thrown off course. Every desirable and beneficial gift comes out of heaven. The gifts are rivers of light cascading down from the Father of Light. There is nothing deceitful in God, nothing two-faced, nothing fickle. He brought us to life using the true Word, showing us off as the crown of all his creatures.*

Where does every desirable and beneficial gift come from?

What three things does James say are not found in God?

You can trust God. He doesn't play games with you. He isn't two-faced or fickle. He says his way is the blessed way to live life, and you can believe him. The things your heart desires are NOT going to be found in this world. All that you desire and is beneficial for you is found in God.

God wants to give you good gifts. He wants blessings to flow from his throne into your life. All you have to do is walk in alignment and obedience with his will and these gifts will be given to you.

Don't get thrown off course. The enemy is going to lie to you like he lied to Eve in the garden. He's going to tell you that God is "holding out" on you. Don't listen to him. He is the father of lies. The devil is a two-faced deceiver. He will tempt you to sin by telling you that sin will make you happy, and then he will turn around and shame you for it. Don't fall into his trap. Everything he offers you is "chocolate covered poison".

EVERY good gift comes from God and from walking in obedience to his ways. Everything else is a lie. It's bait on a hook. Don't let Satan take you down. Trust the Father of creation not the father of lies.

July 5

James 1:19-21 MSG Post this at all the intersections, dear friends: Lead with your ears, follow up with your tongue, and let anger straggle along in the rear. God's righteousness doesn't grow from human anger. So throw all spoiled virtue and cancerous evil in the garbage. In simple humility, let our gardener, God, landscape you with the Word, making a salvation-garden of your life.

What does James say should be posted for all to read?

What doesn't grow from human anger?

What word picture does James give us for the sanctification process in our lives?

What would life be like if we all lived by this principle that James gives us?

- 1. Lead with your ears (be quick to listen).**
- 2. Follow up with your tongue (be slow to speak).**
- 3. Let anger straggle along in the rear (be slow to anger).**

How many arguments would be avoided? How many relationships could be restored and healthy? You have the potential to change the world by just leading with your ears.

What if you focused your attention today on listening to people? What if you really listened to what people said and, instead of arguing your point, you asked a follow-up question first? What if we really sought to hear what people are saying before we respond to them? What if we responded in love instead of human anger?

Human anger doesn't help you grow in God's character. In fact, it does the opposite. It causes you to act in ways that are contrary to love. So what do you do?

1. Get rid of all the activities in your life that are planting seeds of selfishness and pride. Whether it is things you're watching, listening to, places you're going, or people you're with.
2. In humility, ask God to show you "weeds" in your heart that need to be "pulled". Confess it. Repent of it.
3. Spend time with the "gardener", Father God, who will plant beautiful, fruitful things of righteousness in your heart.

Beautiful gardens don't happen without a faithful gardener tending to it. The same is true for our souls.

July 6

James 1:22-25 (MSG) *Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear! Those who hear and don't act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like. But whoever catches a glimpse of the revealed counsel of God—the free life!—even out of the corner of his eye, and sticks with it, is no distracted scatterbrain but a man or woman of action. That person will find delight and affirmation in the action.*

How do you know if you are genuinely listening to the Word of God?

When you hear the Word, but don't act on it, what are you like?

What two things will you find when you put God's Word into action?

How weird would it be for someone to look in a mirror and see they have spinach in their teeth, and they just leave it there? What good is a mirror if you aren't going to act on what you see when you look into it?

God's Word is like a spiritual mirror for your soul. When you read it, you will see areas in your life that need to be cleaned up. But, if you hear it and then don't do anything about it, you're missing the point.

Knowing what the Bible teaches and doing it are two different things. Sometimes you can fool yourself into thinking that biblical knowledge is power. But, Spiritual growth is not measured by how much time you spend reading the Bible or how well you do at Bible trivia. True spiritual maturity is measured by how much of the Bible you're putting into action. In fact, James 4:17 says, “He who knows to do good and doesn't do it, is committing SIN”.

So what should you do? You should read the Bible like you're looking in the mirror. Ask God to show you any areas in your life that need to be addressed, so you can clean yourself up. When you submit to his truth and put it into action, you will feel his smile of affirmation.

Remember: revelation without application leads to frustration. Don't be deceived. Knowing and doing are two different things. Reading this devotion isn't going to change your life, but putting this devotion into action will.

July 7

James 1:26-27 (MSG) *Anyone who sets himself up as “religious” by talking a good game is self-deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world.*

What kind of religion is simply 'hot air' in the eyes of God?

What two characteristics will you always find in a Christian that reflect the heart of the Father?

There are a lot of self-proclaimed Christians in the world today, but not all “Christian talkers” rightly represent the core values of God's Kingdom in attitude and action.

The Father doesn't approve of everything that's done in his name. Some say they are Christian (meaning Christ-like), but they misrepresent the Father. That's why James focuses on two of the big attributes of a true Christian:

1. Charity: True Christians take care of the poor, the outsiders, the orphans and widows.
2. Purity: True Christians guard their hearts against the corruption that's in this world.

Many religious people talk about charity and purity, but God only approves of church communities who actually back up their words with action.

If your religious life was being inspected by the Father today what would he say? Would you flunk the inspection? If so, why? What do you need to change?

Would God give you His stamp of approval? Can you point to consistent examples of charity and purity in your life?

God clearly tells us what matters to him. We don't have to guess or debate over it. We can either live lives of charity and purity, or we can ignore God's instructions all together. God has left us without excuse.

Examine your heart and see if you're focused on what really matters to God.

July 8

James 2:1-4 (MSG) *My dear friends, don't let public opinion influence how you live out our glorious, Christ-originated faith. If a man enters your church wearing an expensive suit, and a street person wearing rags comes in right after him, and you say to the man in the suit, "Sit here, sir; this is the best seat in the house!" and either ignore the street person or say, "Better sit here in the back row," haven't you segregated God's children and proved that you are judges who can't be trusted?*

What shouldn't influence how you live your Christ-originated faith?

If you choose to bless rich people hoping to personally gain their favor, but disregard a street person because they can't benefit you, what does that prove about you?

Don't let public opinion run your life. It's a miserable way to live. If you're always trying to figure out what people are thinking, you're going to miss out on what Christ is thinking about you. Don't surrender the leadership of your life to people instead of God.

Jesus should be the focus and primary influence in your life. He is your source. He is your guide. He is the truth that will not fail you, so why concern yourself with what people are saying about you?

Don't look to rich people as your source. That's what James is talking when he talks about the rich guy coming to church. James tells us to not be extra nice to the wealthy man who walks in the door thinking he's going to give big offerings. Rich men aren't your source.

Don't show rich men to a nice seat thinking they may open up a whole new network for you. They aren't the key to your success--God is. Don't look to men for things you should only be getting from God. That's idolatry.

By the way, the point of this story isn't that we should be mean to rich people and extra nice to street people. James is telling you to love ALL people without "worshiping" them. If you allow people to hinder or negatively influence your full devotion to Jesus, you are giving your 'worship' to them.

God is looking for people he can trust. Those who want to promote his Kingdom purposes more than their own. God can't trust you with his Kingdom resources until he sees you are going to use what he gives you for the purposes he intended.

Can God trust you with true riches?

July 9

James 2:5-7 (MSG) *Listen, dear friends. Isn't it clear by now that God operates quite differently? He chose the world's down-and-out as the kingdom's first citizens, with full rights and privileges. This kingdom is promised to anyone who loves God. And here you are abusing these same citizens! Isn't it the high and mighty who exploit you, who use the courts to rob you blind? Aren't they the ones who scorn the new name—"Christian"—used in your baptisms?*

Who did God choose to be the Kingdom's first citizens?

To whom is the Kingdom of God promised?

The Kingdom of God is all about love, not status. In fact, Jesus said in Matthew 23:11, *"The greatest in the Kingdom will be the servant of all."*

How can that be?

God operates differently than the paradigms of this world. He doesn't value or label people based on their position or wealth. Every person on the planet matters to Him, because we're all people his Son died for. When you devalue people, you are acting in a way that is offensive to the Father. You are talking about one of his kids.

God has given us "outsiders" an invitation to be full-fledged members of his family with rights and privileges as sons and daughters. He did that for us, not because we deserved it, but because he chose to value us when no one else did. Now, he calls us to love others in the same way.

Remember: every time you lock eyes with someone, you are looking into the eyes of someone who matters to God, so they better matter to you. Love! Serve! Listen!

Treat people like Jesus has treated you.

July 10

James 2:8-13 (MSG) *You do well when you complete the Royal Rule of the Scriptures: "Love others as you love yourself." But if you play up to these so-called important people, you go against the Rule and stand convicted by it. You can't pick and choose in these things, specializing in keeping one or two things in God's law and ignoring others. The same God who said, "Don't commit adultery," also said, "Don't murder." If you don't commit adultery but go ahead and murder, do you think your non-adultery will cancel out your murder? No, you're a murderer, period. Talk and act like a person expecting to be judged by the Rule that sets us free. For if you refuse to act kindly, you can hardly expect to be treated kindly. Kind mercy wins over harsh judgment every time.*

What is the Royal Rule of the Scriptures?

How should we talk and act?

How will God judge people?

The royal rule of Scripture says, "Treat others the way you want to be treated."

Do you understand how this rule works? Those who show kindness in this life, will be treated kindly when they stand before the Lord in judgment. Those who judge others harshly will receive the same kind of harsh judgment from God. So, how should you talk and act?

You should treat people the way you want to be treated. If you love yourself, then love others. Those who are harsh and mean in this life may think they are getting away with it, but they are storing up a whirlwind of trouble for themselves when they stand before the Lord.

This is why Scripture says, "*Kind mercy wins over harsh judgment every time.*" Those who show mercy are going to get mercy when it matters most. Don't lose perspective on this. Don't be narrow-minded. Think long term. Love people, all people, the way you want God to love you. The Royal Rule allows you to store up mercy or judgment for yourself.

Be wise: let the rule work *FOR* you not *AGAINST* you.

July 11

James 2:14-18 (MSG) *Dear friends, do you think you'll get anywhere in this if you learn all the right words but never do anything? Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it? For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, "Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!" and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup—where does that get you? Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is*

outrageous nonsense? I can already hear one of you agreeing by saying, "Sounds good. You take care of the faith department, I'll handle the works department." Not so fast. You can no more show me your works apart from your faith than I can show you my faith apart from my works. Faith and works, works and faith, fit together hand in glove.

James says that God-talk without God-acts is what?

What does James say to people who say their works and faith are two separate things?

If you have faith in God and really believe the teachings of Christ, then it should be reflected in the way you live your life. If you believe, then you'll put the teachings of Christ into practice with great diligence. Your actions will be the clearest declaration of your true faith.

God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense. What good is all our Christian talk about love and grace if we don't show love to the hurting and grace to sinners? Our actions will always speak louder than our words.

Check out the true status of your faith by examining what parts of the Scripture you are actually living out. Faith isn't simply a matter of doctrine, but of action.

You don't really believe in the "beauty of his holiness" if you continue to fall prey to the seductive sins that only bring pleasure for a season and end in destruction.

You don't really believe in God as your provider, if you struggle putting him first with a tithe of your income. You will always obey him at the level of your faith (trust) in him.

You don't believe in the power of prayer if all you do is pray at mealtime. James isn't trying to be harsh or condemn you, he's simply giving you truth to examine your life by.

Take an honest look at your faith by examining your actions.

July 12

James 2:19-26 (MSG) Do I hear you professing to believe in the one and only God, but then observe you complacently sitting back as if you had done something wonderful? That's just great. Demons do that, but what good does it do them? Use your heads! Do you suppose for a minute that you can cut faith and works in two and not end up with a corpse on your hands? Wasn't our ancestor Abraham "made right with God by works" when he placed his son Isaac on the sacrificial altar? Isn't it obvious that faith and works are yoked partners, that faith expresses itself in works? That the works are "works of faith"? The full meaning of "believe" in the Scripture sentence, "Abraham believed God and was set right with God," includes his action. It's that mesh of believing and acting that got Abraham named "God's friend." Is it not evident that a person is made right with God not by a barren faith but by faith fruitful in works? The same with Rahab, the Jericho harlot. Wasn't her action in hiding God's spies and helping them escape—that seamless unity of believing and doing—what counted with God? The very moment you separate body and spirit, you end up with a corpse. Separate faith and works and you get the same thing: a corpse.

How did Abraham prove his faith?

What was Abraham called because of his combination of believing and acting?

What kind of faith makes a man or woman right with God?

A lot of people say they believe in God, but what does that mean? Believing there's a God in heaven doesn't save you. Demons are well aware that God exists, but that doesn't make them righteous. The faith that saves you is the faith that causes you to submit your life completely to Jesus.

Abraham believed in God so much that when the Lord asked him to sacrifice his son, Isaac, he put his son on the altar and lifted the knife. Abraham trusted God could raise his son back to life if need be. Abraham believed in God's promise. God had already told Abraham that the promise of his countless descendants would come through Isaac. Abraham didn't just say he believed in God and his promises; he proved it by his obedient actions (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Rahab, the prostitute, was redeemed and saved by God because of her faith in Him. She hid the Israelite spies and helped them escape. She put her life on the line believing that the God of Israel was the one true God. She literally had to pick a side in the war that was about to take place between Jericho and Israel. She chose God and God's people over her own. It doesn't matter what sin you've done or where you come from. What matters is your faith in God that leads to obedience (Hebrews 11:31).

Do you believe in God? Do your actions prove your faith?

Is there anything God is asking you to do that you're not doing? Submit to him and put your faith into action.

July 13

James 3:1-2 (MSG) *Don't be in any rush to become a teacher, my friends. Teaching is highly responsible work. Teachers are held to the strictest standards. And none of us is perfectly qualified. We get it wrong nearly every time we open our mouths. If you could find someone whose speech was perfectly true, you'd have a perfect person, in perfect control of life.*

Why shouldn't you rush to become a teacher?

How many of us are perfectly qualified?

We are all held to the high standard of truth as followers of Jesus Christ. He calls us to speak the truth and live the truth. This doesn't mean that all Christians have to be perfect in everything we say and do. We are all growing in our faith and character. You don't correct a 5-year-old thief the same way you correct a 25-year-old thief. The older you get, the more responsible you are for your actions.

That's why teachers are to be held at a higher standard. They are now taking on the responsibility of training others on how to follow Jesus. There is more to teaching than just giving knowledge. Teachers are modeling what the Christian life should look like. Their students aren't just learning lessons and principles. They are learning how to apply those lessons by watching their teacher live his or her life.

Remember parents: you can teach your children what you *know*, but you will reproduce in them who you *are*.

If everybody you influenced loved like you, prayed like you, talked like you, and lived like you....what kind of Christians would they be?

As a mom, dad, coach, teacher, or older sibling, you are held to a higher standard because your life and speech not only impact you, but others. Ask God for the grace to grow and to steward this responsibility well.

July 14

James 3:3-12 (MSG) *A bit in the mouth of a horse controls the whole horse. A small rudder on a huge ship in the hands of a skilled captain sets a course in the face of the strongest winds. A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything—or destroy it! It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell. This is scary: You can tame a tiger, but you can't tame a tongue—it's never been done. The tongue runs wild, a wanton killer. With our tongues we bless God our Father; with the same tongues we curse the very men and women he made in his image. Curses and blessings out of the same mouth! My friends, this can't go on. A spring doesn't gush fresh water one day and brackish the next, does it? Apple trees don't bear strawberries, do they? Raspberry bushes don't bear apples, do they? You're not going to dip into a polluted mud hole and get a cup of clear, cool water, are you?*

What two metaphors does James give for the directive power of your tongue?

What are the four examples James gives for what your mouth can do if it speaks careless or wrongly placed words?

Your mouth is incredibly powerful. Let's examine what the Scripture says about the power of your words:

1. Your words are a steering wheel—they set the direction for your life.

James says your words are like a bit in a horse's mouth. It's like the rudder that is small, but has the ability to turn a huge ship. Your words may seem small and of little consequence, but they have the power to set the course of your life. Your words can either cause you to accomplish great things or destroy your future altogether.

Listen to the words coming out of your mouth. What trajectory are they setting for your life?

2. Your words are a hammer- they impact everyone who hears them.

They have the power to build people up or tear them down. You can lift a spirit, encourage a heart, teach and instruct, or even restore a broken relationship. You can destroy people's reputations, turn harmony into chaos, bring confusion and conflict, or even ruin people's lives. That's a lot of power in such a small member of your body.

Listen to the words coming out of your mouth. Are they building people up or tearing them down?

3. Your words are fruit - they reflect the condition of your heart.

Trees bear fruit after their kind. Apple trees naturally produce apples. Evil people speak evil words and pure-hearted people speak life. Don't try to tame your tongue. Instead, focus on changing your heart. If you allow Father God to be the “gardener of your soul”, you can be completely changed from the inside out. Quit trying to deal with the symptom (bad speech) and get to the root of the problem (heart attitude). Your mouth is just speaking what's in your heart. Change your heart, and the fruit of your lips will automatically change.

Listen to the words coming out of your mouth. What do they reveal about the “garden” of your heart?

Ask God to come in and clean up your heart. Stop planting corrupt seed. Above all else, guard your heart; it is the wellspring of your life.

July 15

James 3:13-16 (MSG) *Do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here's what you do: Live well, live wisely, live humbly. It's the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts. Mean-spirited ambition isn't wisdom. Boasting that you are wise isn't wisdom. Twisting the truth to make yourselves sound wise isn't wisdom. It's the furthest thing from wisdom—it's animal cunning, devilish conniving. Whenever you're trying to look better than others or get the better of others, things fall apart and everyone ends up at the others' throats.*

What do you need to do if you want to be known as a person of wisdom?

What three things are not at all wisdom?

There are a lot of smart people who do dumb things. You see it all the time. Being wise takes more than just having a high IQ. Wisdom isn't just about knowing a lot of stuff; it's about understanding and applying truth in your life, calling, and relationships.

If you want to be known as a person of great wisdom, you need to live out a life that demonstrates holiness, humility, and hunger for truth.

You'll demonstrate holiness because you know God's way of living is the best life. People of wisdom don't have to worry about their sins being exposed and people seeing their foolishness and folly.

You'll demonstrate humility because you know that pride blinds us from seeing truth and listening to Godly counsel. Wise people are confident in what they know, but they don't try to get people to think they know everything.

You'll demonstrate a hunger for truth because you know that a wise man is always growing and learning. A person of wisdom listens to correction and is constantly trying to learn.

The focus of your life shouldn't be to *look* wise, but to *be* wise. Don't be like the Wizard of Oz who exhausted himself trying to create an appearance of wisdom. That kind of person will eventually be exposed as a fool. It's just a matter of time.

Don't focus on what people think about you. Live well, and your reputation will take care of itself. Reputations aren't manufactured, but they are built over time.

So, ask for wisdom:

Ask God for wisdom to a live holy, humble, and hungry life.

Ask a godly friend to point out blind spots in your life.

Ask your spouse for his or her honest assessment of your life.

July 16

James 3:17-18 (MSG) *Real wisdom, God's wisdom, begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, not hot one day and cold the next, not two-faced. You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honor.*

God's wisdom is characterized by what two things in a person's life?

The only way to develop a healthy and robust community of faith is by doing what?

How do you define wisdom? The world defines wisdom as someone who is smart enough to manipulate the system, so they can get everything they want. It's self-serving wisdom, and it's empty.

But God defines wisdom differently.

A person who has God's wisdom will live a pure-hearted life and will work hard at developing genuine relationships with others. They will treat people with dignity and honor because they know how much God values people. They also understand the kingdom principle of sowing and reaping.

Their wisdom will allow them to enjoy the results of being united with God and with their brothers and sisters in Christ. Their life will be filled with mercy, blessings, and compassion for others. In return, people will treat them in this way also.

The focus of Godly wisdom shouldn't be on serving yourself; it should be about having the wisdom to serve others knowing you will reap a huge harvest of grace and peace from God and people in return.

Be wise today. Live holy and love people.

July 17

James 4:1-6 (MSG) *Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way, and fight for it deep inside yourselves. You lust for what you don't have and are willing to kill to get it. You want what isn't yours and will risk violence to get your hands on it. You wouldn't think of just asking God for it, would you? And why not? Because you know you'd be asking for what you have no right to. You're spoiled children, each wanting your own way. You're cheating on God. If all you want is your own way, flirting with the world every chance you get, you end up enemies of God and his way. And do you suppose God doesn't care? The proverb has it that "he's a fiercely jealous lover." And what he gives in love is far better than anything else you'll find. It's common knowledge that "God goes against the willful proud; God gives grace to the willing humble."*

Where do wars and quarrels come from?

What are the two characteristics of someone who is God's enemy?

What does James say is "common knowledge"?

Have you ever seen a spoiled child in the grocery store grabbing for cookies, cereal, toys, and candy?

They scream and cry until they get what they want. It's sad, isn't it?

Do good parents always give their kids what they want? No. A parent is supposed to protect the child from their destructive, immature desires even when it makes the kid mad. Healthy moms and dads love their children too much to always give them what they want because nothing is worse than a spoiled kid (especially a spoiled kid in their 40's).

But, that's exactly what we look like when we choose to rebel against the Father. We look like spoiled children grabbing for everything we want. We scream, cry, and throw a fit. We think Dad is mean because we're too immature to see he's just being a good Dad.

When will we learn that our Father is always right? We, like children, need to trust him. He knows what we need and he isn't going to leave us empty-handed. He will give us what we need when we need it.

The only way to peace (true peace) is to humble ourselves before the Father and say, "All I want is you and your will, Father." If you humble yourself before the Father, you will receive great gifts that will thrill your soul. His gifts are better than anything else you could ever find on your own.

When you want something really badly, pray and ask the Father for it. If he wants you to have it, he will give it to you. If it's harmful or unhealthy for you, he will say, "No, that's not for you."

What are you going to do when you don't get your way? Are you going to act like a spoiled kid or are you going to humble yourself before the Father trusting he has your best interest at heart?

Is there something you want? Ask God for it and trust that whatever he says is good for you. Accept his word as final, knowing that he is a Father who loves giving gifts to you and if he doesn't want you to have something you can trust that "Father knows best".

July 18

James 4:7-10 (MSG) *So let God work his will in you. Yell a loud no to the Devil and watch him scamper. Say a quiet yes to God and he'll be there in no time. Quit dabbling in sin. Purify your inner life. Quit playing the field. Hit bottom, and cry your eyes out. The fun and games are over. Get serious, really serious. Get down on your knees before the Master; it's the only way you'll get on your feet.*

What does James say you have to do to truly get on your feet?

God has given you the ability to make your own decisions. You can choose to let him work his will in your life or you can choose to rebel against God's plans altogether. Just be careful how you choose because your choice comes with consequences.

Romans 3:23 says, "*The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*"

If you choose to reject God, you will not only die, you will be forever separated from God in hell for eternity. But, if you choose to receive the gift of God, which is God's plan for you, you will experience eternal life in him. It's simple. Choose God and get life, or reject God and choose death.

That's why James is so passionate in this passage. He is desperately challenging the people to get away from the things that will kill them, and he's inviting them to come close to God so they can experience

true life in him.

Listen to what James is saying: Tell the devil NO, and he will flee. The only reason he hangs around is because you let him.

Say YES to God, and he will come near to you. Say yes before you even know what he's asking because you know his plans are good.

Quit dabbling in sin. Purify your inner life. Repent of your sins. Tell God you are sorry and get serious about living holy.

Get down on your knees before the Master. The only way to really live is in submission to the Father.

Choose wisely today. Submit to whatever God wants. Let's get serious about living for God.

July 19

James 4:11-12 (MSG) *Don't bad-mouth each other, friends. It's God's Word, his Message, his Royal Rule, that takes a beating in that kind of talk. You're supposed to be honoring the Message, not writing graffiti all over it. God is in charge of deciding human destiny. Who do you think you are to meddle in the destiny of others?*

What takes a beating when we badmouth each other?

Who is in charge of deciding human destiny?

This passage gives us three reasons why we shouldn't badmouth others:

The first reason is that we should live by the Royal Rule. The Royal Rule is "Treat others the way you want to be treated," because that's exactly what's going to happen. If you judge people harshly, you'll be judged harshly. If you show mercy, God will show mercy to you. When you badmouth others you are actually storing up judgment for yourself (James 2:8,12,13).

The second reason is that the message of Christ looks bad when you live in contradiction to it. Jesus commands us to love each other in John 13:34,35. He said, "*This is how the world will know that we belong to Christ...because we love one another*". Don't dishonor the message and character of Jesus by tearing people down.

The third reason is that God is the judge of all mankind, and you are not. He is in control of man's destiny. God promotes and demotes who he wants. Who are you to put yourself in the place of God? Be patient. Don't try to make things happen. Trust God's timing and righteous judgment.

Listen carefully to the words you speak today. Are your words building up or tearing down? Don't gossip. Don't criticize. Give mercy and encouragement to others as Christ has done for you.

July 20

James 4:13-17 (MSG) *And now I have a word for you who brashly announce, "Today—at the latest, tomorrow—we're off to such and such a city for the year. We're going to start a business and make a lot*

of money.” You don’t know the first thing about tomorrow. You’re nothing but a wisp of fog, catching a brief bit of sun before disappearing. Instead, make it a habit to say, “If the Master wills it and we’re still alive, we’ll do this or that.” As it is, you are full of your grandiose selves. All such vaunting self-importance is evil. In fact, if you know the right thing to do and don’t do it, that, for you, is evil.

How does James describe the brevity of life? He says “You're nothing but a _____.”

What should you be in the habit of saying?

It is arrogant and unwise to think you know more than God. I'm sure you don't think that way consciously, but that is the attitude you project when you set out to do things on your own.

You should be starting each day praying, “Father, let your will be done in my life. Lead me, and make your way plain to me.” Any other way of thinking is evil.

If you aren't sure about the Father's will for your life, you should be spending time in prayer and in reading his word. God has made his basic will known to us in Matthew 22:37-40. You are to love him with all you are, and love others as you love yourself.

God's plan isn't for you to simply go off and make a lot of money so you can indulge yourself. He has way bigger and more fulfilling plans for you. Don't buy into the lie that wealth will make you happy. Listen to the leading of the Father who will lead you to true riches in him.

Your life is a vapor--a wisp of fog. In other words, it's really short in comparison to eternity. Don't focus your life on the pleasures of this life that are fleeting. Live for what brings eternal joy.

Submit yourself to the rule and reign of Christ and ask the Father to reveal his will to you. Take a few minutes right now and pray something like this: “Father, I will go wherever, I will do whatever, and I am yours. Make your will plain to me, so I can walk in it. I belong to you. I am not my own. I live to please your heart.”

July 21

James 5:1-6 (MSG) And a final word to you arrogant rich: Take some lessons in lament. You’ll need buckets for the tears when the crash comes upon you. Your money is corrupt and your fine clothes stink. Your greedy luxuries are a cancer in your gut, destroying your life from within. You thought you were piling up wealth. What you’ve piled up is judgment. All the workers you’ve exploited and cheated cry out for judgment. The groans of the workers you used and abused are a roar in the ears of the Master Avenger. You’ve looted the earth and lived it up. But all you’ll have to show for it is a fatter than usual corpse. In fact, what you’ve done is condemn and murder perfectly good persons, who stand there and take it.

The arrogant rich think they are piling up wealth, but what are they really piling up?

God is the Master Avenger. With what sound are his ears roaring?

God isn't against money or people having money. This passage is addressing the arrogant rich who don't care about anybody beside themselves. James gives the rich a stern warning concerning the judgment they will face when they stand before the Lord.

Before you disregard this warning as something that is for others because you don't consider yourself to be rich, you need to recognize that if you:

* make \$37,000 a year or more you are in the top 4% of wage earners in the world.

* make \$45,000 a year or more you are in the top 1% of wage earners in the world.

That means that a lot of Americans are among the wealthiest people on the planet. We are rich whether we consider ourselves rich or not.

What will the rich (we) be judged for?

1. Greedy luxuries. There is nothing wrong with having nice things, but if all you do is store up for yourself and you don't learn to give and help people, you are piling up judgment for yourself.

2. Exploiting and cheating workers. There is nothing wrong with expecting employees to work hard, but if you are not giving them a fair wage or cheating them out of what is rightfully theirs, you are piling up judgment for yourself.

Be careful how you live. Don't be selfish. Don't store up everything for yourself. Serve people. Love people. Give generously when it's in your power to do so.

Don't let your greed be a cancer in your gut. Love and give like Christ has done for you.

July 22

James 5:7-9 (MSG) *Meanwhile, friends, wait patiently for the Master's Arrival. You see farmers do this all the time, waiting for their valuable crops to mature, patiently letting the rain do its slow but sure work. Be patient like that. Stay steady and strong. The Master could arrive at any time.*

Friends, don't complain about each other. A far greater complaint could be lodged against you, you know. The Judge is standing just around the corner.

For what are we to wait patiently?

How are we to wait?

Why shouldn't we complain about each other?

Jesus is coming back soon. He's coming back for all who are looking for his appearing. James admonishes us to wait patiently like a farmer praying rain will come and cause his crops to grow. The farmer looks to the sky believing that the rain will come. He has no control over the weather. He simply does what he can do and waits for God to do what only he can do.

In the same way, we've been charged by the Father to stay steady and strong in our faith trusting he will come back for us.

If Christ came back today, would you be ready?

James tell us to not be distracted by others. He tells us to not complain about the way they talk or act. Instead, we should treat people the way we want to be treated when we stand before the judge. Show mercy. Give grace. Stay focused on what you've been called to do. Christ is coming soon. Look to the sky; it might be today. Live like it.

July 23

James 5:10-12 (MSG) *Take the old prophets as your mentors. They put up with anything, went through everything, and never once quit, all the time honoring God. What a gift life is to those who stay the course! You've heard, of course, of Job's staying power, and you know how God brought it all together for him at the end. That's because God cares, cares right down to the last detail.*

And since you know that he cares, let your language show it. Don't add words like "I swear to God" to your own words. Don't show your impatience by concocting oaths to hurry up God. Just say yes or no. Just say what is true. That way, your language can't be used against you.

Who should you allow to mentor you?

What four attributes does James highlight concerning the prophets of old?

Life isn't easy. There are plenty of opportunities to give up, but it's in those times of discouragement that you must look to the Father and remind yourself of his love and faithfulness. He cares about you, all the way down to the details. He isn't an absent Father; he knows what's going on and he's monitoring the situation fully.

Let the testimonies of the old prophets be an encouragement to you. They were imprisoned, beaten, threatened and the whole time they endured and trusted in the Father. They honored the Lord in all they said and did even when times were tough.

Think about Job losing everything--his family, his farm, and his health. He trusted in God even when all his friends gave up on him. He was faithful to the end, even though his wife told him to curse God and die. In the end, look what God did for him! God restored everything Job lost and then some.

Don't lose courage today. Don't let the situations of life make you feel like God doesn't care or that he's abandoned you. He loves you. You are his child and he will not allow you to go through anything he doesn't grace you to handle. He will never waste your pain. Everything will work together for your good if you love him and live according to his purpose (Rom 8:28).

Don't lose hope. He will not let you down. Take a few minutes and reflect on the goodness of God and all the times he came through for the old prophets. He's going to do the same thing for you.

July 24

James 5:13-15 (MSG) *Are you hurting? Pray. Do you feel great? Sing. Are you sick? Call the church leaders together to pray and anoint you with oil in the name of the Master. Believing-prayer will heal you, and Jesus will put you on your feet. And if you've sinned, you'll be forgiven—healed inside and out.*

What are you supposed to do when you are hurting?

What should you do if you're sick?

The Scripture encourages us to engage with the Father through every emotion of life.

If you are hurting, go tell the Father about it.

If you are feeling good, sing a song of praise to the Father.

If you are sick, go ask the elders of the church to pray for you so you can be healed inside and out.

The Father loves you so much he wants to be with you in every situation. He wants to share your pain and joy. Don't let your emotions keep you from God. Let them be part of your conversation with God.

There are many times in life that you don't feel like praying or singing to God. Life may be going so good that you don't feel the need to pray. You may feel so depressed that you've lost the motivation or strength to spend time with God. That's when you have to make the decision to pray whether you feel like it or not. Here's how you do it:

When I don't feel like praying, I tell God about it.

I say, "Father, I don't feel like talking to you right now. I am so frustrated with all these things that I just don't have the strength to pray today. I'm mad about this. I'm angry about that. My emotions are all over the place."

I just simply tell him how I feel. I pray about not wanting to pray. Sometimes, I'll put worship music on and just sit with the Father. I just want to be with Him, but I don't know what to say. Other times, I pray in the Spirit (tongues) because I need his help to pray. But, in all things I choose to BE WITH him.

The point is that you shouldn't let your emotions determine whether you are going to be with God. Go to the Father with every emotion...and when you are sick and you struggle to pray for yourself, call the elders to pray for you. In everything--pray!

July 25

James 5:16-18 (MSG) *Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with. Elijah, for instance, human just like us, prayed hard that it wouldn't rain, and it didn't—not a drop for three and a half years. Then he prayed that it would rain, and it did. The showers came and everything started growing again.*

What two things should be common practice among believers?

What does James say is powerful and something to be reckoned with?

God never meant for you to face the struggles of life alone. He made you to need others. Your spiritual success is dependent not only on the Father but on your brothers and sisters. It should be common practice among the family of God for us to confess our sins and pray for each other.

Is this common practice for you?

If it isn't, you need to:

1. Start proactively building relationships with Christian friends. Don't wait until you need a friend to cultivate friendship. Do it now, so when you need a friend, they are there for you.
2. Take the initiative to be a trusted friend to someone. Don't start by looking for someone to meet your

need. Look for someone you can be a friend to, and God will bring friends to you. You will reap what you sow.

3. Be trustworthy. Don't gossip. Don't judge. Don't reject people when they confess their sins to you. Love them in the same way you would want to be loved.

4. Pray for people. Pray for them when you are with them. Pray for them when you aren't with them. God will give you Scriptures to send to them. He will give you an encouraging word or warning for them. He will even tell you when they are struggling so you can call them and check on them. Don't shrug off the promptings of the Spirit. Do what God tells you to do.

This should be common practice for the people of God. We should all be standing together, helping each other fight the good fight. Who can you encourage and pray for today? Do it.

July 26

James 5:19-20 (MSG) *My dear friends, if you know people who have wandered off from God's truth, don't write them off. Go after them. Get them back and you will have rescued precious lives from destruction and prevented an epidemic of wandering away from God.*

What are you to do with people who have wandered off from God's truth?

If you get people back into the faith, what will you prevent?

God has called you to lovingly go after people when they wander from the faith. You aren't just responsible for yourself. You are responsible for your brothers and sisters in Christ as well. Confront them in love. Challenge them with grace and truth. Don't give up on them. Look what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13:

I wrote you in my earlier letter that you shouldn't make yourselves at home among the sexually promiscuous. I didn't mean that you should have nothing at all to do with outsiders of that sort. Or with crooks, whether blue- or white-collar. Or with spiritual phonies, for that matter. You'd have to leave the world entirely to do that! But I am saying that you shouldn't act as if everything is just fine when a friend who claims to be a Christian is promiscuous or crooked, is flip with God or rude to friends, gets drunk or becomes greedy and predatory. You can't just go along with this, treating it as acceptable behavior. I'm not responsible for what the outsiders do, but don't we have some responsibility for those within our community of believers? God decides on the outsiders, but we need to decide when our brothers and sisters are out of line and, if necessary, clean house.

If you know a brother or sister is going back into their old life of sin, you have to love them enough to call them out. Go talk to them. Get them back into church and back into right relationship with Christ. You must do whatever you can do to save them from destruction, and prevent others from being influenced by their rebellion as well.

Don't let people live in secret sin without reaching out to them and reminding them of the grace of God and the destructive power of sin. Don't judge them harshly or condemn them, just do everything you can to remind them of the truth.

Who do you need to reach out to today? Don't shrug off the prompting of the Lord. Call them. Go see them. Talk to them. It may save their life from destruction.

