

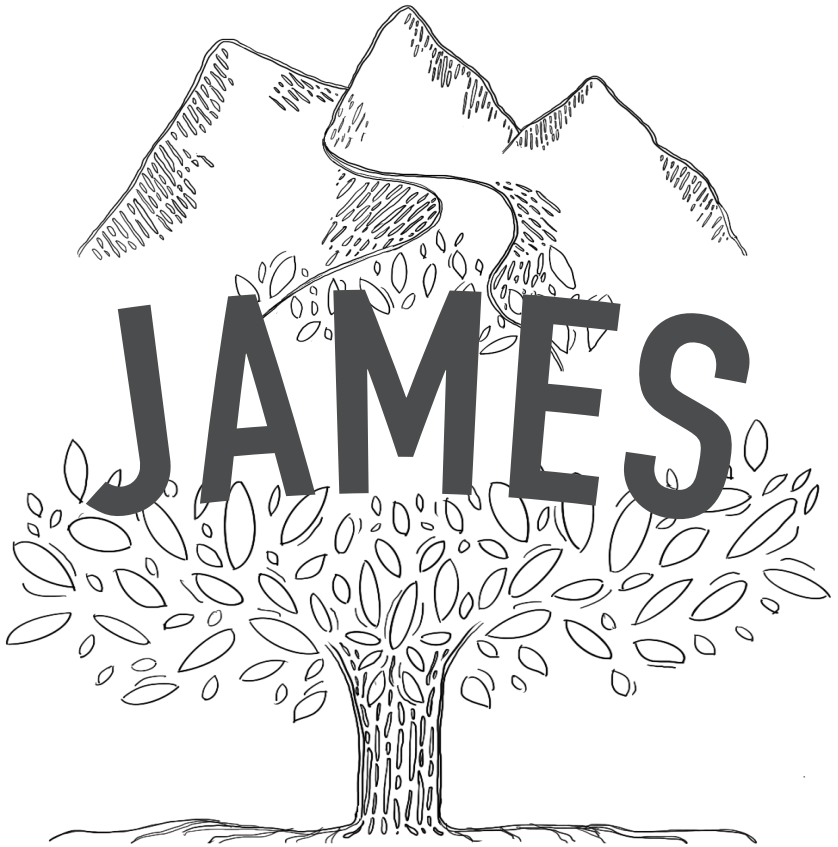
A line drawing of a landscape with mountains and a winding path, overlaid on a large tree silhouette. The mountains are in the background, and a path winds through the middle ground. The foreground is dominated by a large tree with many leaves. The entire scene is rendered in white lines on a dark green background.

# JAMES

## THE WALK OF FAITH

A 4-WEEK DEVOTIONAL BY CHAD POE

YM360



## THE WALK OF FAITH

A 4-WEEK DEVOTIONAL BY CHAD POE

PUBLISHED BY YM360

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Here are a few things you need to know to make this book meaningful for you.

### **Make This Book A Priority**

Pretty much every Christ-follower, no matter how old they may or may not be, struggles to spend meaningful time with God every day. If you're going to learn from this book and be impacted by it, you have to decide that it's important to you. The truth is that you really can learn and grow from reading this book. But it has to matter. So commit to spending at least 5-10 minutes each day with this book.

### **Have Your Bible Open**

Resist the urge to ignore the spots where this book will tell you to read a passage of Scripture. This book is only a guide for THE Book (your Bible). The spiritual growth and the close relationship with God that you want only happens by reading and doing what's in the Bible. So have your Bible or a Bible app open and a pen or pencil available as you go through this book.

### **The Book Is Designed To Help You Stick With It**

This devotional study through the Book of James was designed to be completed in four weeks. For the first five days of each week, you'll read through a few verses or a chapter in James, and an insightful breakdown of those verses that will help you better understand their meaning, significance, and application. After that, each day will provide you with some questions for honest reflection and prayer prompts to guide you in responding to what you learn. There is even a dedicated page at the end of each daily devotional to journal your thoughts, jot down things from that day's study or Scriptures that stuck out to you, and note any follow-up questions you might have. The last two days of each week are left open on purpose. Life is busy and full of unforeseen surprises that pop up out of nowhere. Use these days as a time of further reflection, rest, and worship. Or use them to catch up on a day of study you missed due to one of those surprises that popped up.

### **What If I Miss A Day of Reading? Or Three?**

Don't give up! Take this at your own pace! The goal is your spiritual growth and for you to grow closer to God. If you miss a day or two . . . or four . . . don't throw in the towel. Instead, pick this book back up and start where you left off. You can do this!

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

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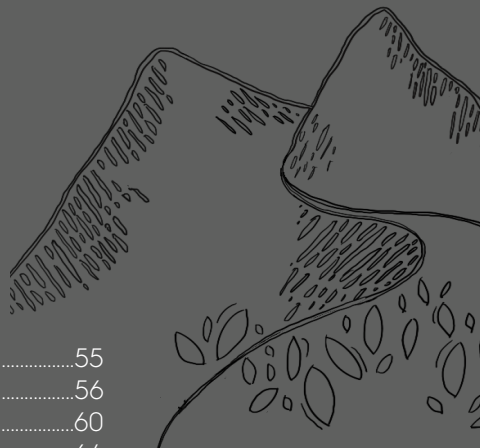
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# INTRODUCTION



My favorite passage in the whole Bible is found in the gospel of Matthew (that probably sounds strange since the cover of this devotional says that it's about James). There are three chapters in Matthew called "The Sermon on the Mount," which have some of the most well-known passages in the whole Bible. Jesus teaches about many things, like love, forgiveness, wisdom, and how the people of God should live among the rest of the world. He talks about things like loving your enemies, caring for the poor, not worrying about worldly possessions, and focusing on living a righteous and holy life toward God.

So where does James come into all of this? Well, that's where it gets kind of complicated. For a long time, James didn't believe that Jesus was who He said He was. John tells us that Jesus' brothers didn't believe He was the Messiah (John 7:5), and at one point, Jesus' family actually thinks He's gone bonkers (Mark 3:21)! To be fair, I don't know about you, but it would be hard for me to believe my brother is the Savior of the world.

To be clear, James would eventually come to believe in Jesus as God's Son and the promised Messiah. But in my mind, whenever I read the Sermon on the Mount, I see James standing on the outside. I like to think that he was there, even if he was skeptical at the time. We obviously can't know that for sure, but I believe he was there because when we read this letter that he wrote



after Jesus' resurrection, we see the words and themes of the Sermon on the Mount funneled through him.

Throughout his letter, James repeatedly almost directly references what Jesus taught on that mountain. He writes this letter to Jewish Christians, who are spread throughout the known world due to persecution and exile, and encourages them to continue living out what they learned from Jesus. In many ways, James' letter tells us how to practically live out the Sermon on the Mount.

Now, instead of moving through James in order, each week of this devotional will focus on a specific topic that James addresses. So, if you notice we're jumping around James' letter, don't worry. That's on purpose. As we spend some time reading and thinking through what James has to say, let's see if we can hear the voice of his brother. There's no doubt James would want you to...



# WEEK 1 INTRODUCTION

In our first week together, we will focus on how trials, temptations, and suffering can actually make us look more like Jesus. There are a lot of troubles and trials that come with living in this world, but God has promised to be for His people.

In the first several verses of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus goes through what's now called "The Beatitudes," which is a word that means something like "supreme blessedness." So it would make sense that in these verses, Jesus uses the word "blessed" over and over again, right? But the people Jesus says are blessed might surprise you because He doesn't use "blessed" like we would use it today.

When we say "blessed," it's about getting a good parking spot, having our food come out before everyone else's, or our crush saying yes to going on a date. Modern "blessed" is about us getting what we want when we want it exactly how we want it. But Jesus, and James, use it in a way that means deep God-given joy. It has nothing to do with life being easy and everything to do with Jesus being who you need. When Jesus uses "blessed," He's saying that even if your circumstances are bad, you can have overwhelming joy just because of the simple fact that God is with you. This week, we'll look at how James says we should think about, approach, and endure trials, temptations, and suffering so that we can come out the other side looking more like Jesus.



# WEEK 1 | DAY 1

Count It All Joy

**James 1:1-4**

Begin this week by opening your Bible or Bible app and reading James 1:1-4.

Have you ever had to go through something that was really difficult emotionally, mentally, spiritually, or physically? What about a time when you felt like you didn't belong? Maybe you and your family have faced difficult money problems. You might have even been made fun of, hated on, or criticized for your faith before. Whatever it may be, we all know what it's like to struggle. In verse 3, James says this kind of testing will produce endurance. Going through difficulty prepares you to stand strong in what you believe, who you know you are, and what God has said. Tests, trials, and struggles strengthen us.

One of the most difficult things about trials is that they come from so many different directions, and all of them can prove to be difficult. Sadly, we don't always see where they come from. You may be facing a trial because:

- Of a bad decision you or someone else made
- You are being mistreated, attacked, or hurt by someone else
- You are facing an attack from Satan
- Our world is sinful and broken and is causing you pain

Whatever the situation, the Bible reminds us of two things: trials will be here, and God will use them for your good and His glory. In the church of Jerusalem, where James ministered to

the people, we see that the church faced persecution from the Roman government. The church also dealt with financial hardships and poverty, both as a church and as individual families. Furthermore, the beliefs of these early Christians caused them to be oppressed, alienated, and excluded from nearly every area of their world. At one point, the church was forced to completely relocate.

The church that James led struggled in so many ways because of their faith. The Christians he's writing to suffered nearly every day. The world around them did not make life easy for them. However, James tells them that those trials were doing something special. Those trials and tests were growing their faith, strengthening them to withstand trials in the future, and would ultimately lead to them being perfect and complete in Christ. Now that's saying something!

So whenever you face a trial, test, or struggle, count it all joy because Jesus will strengthen your faith, transform you, and give you everything you need.

## REFLECTION

1. What are some examples of trials you personally have gone through? How do you think they could've been used to strengthen your faith?
2. Why do you think God uses trials, tests, and struggles to strengthen you? Do you believe that He will give you everything you need in the midst of it? Why or why not?
3. If you could have a redo for one of the trials in your past, how would you walk through it differently?

## PRAYER

Pray today that you would feel God's presence close to you during trials. Ask Him to reveal the purpose behind any trials you are currently walking through, and ask that He would give you the strength to be faithful through it. If you feel like you can't do it, pray that He would give you everything you need to persevere.

# MY THOUGHTS FOR TODAY





# WEEK 1 | DAY 2

## Desires and Temptation

### **James 1:12-15**

Begin today by opening your Bible or Bible app and reading James 1:12-15.

I live in a community where fishing is really popular, but I am not at all a fisherman. I actually own more fishing shirts than the number of times I've been fishing. However, my kids do go fishing with some of their friends from church and their dads, and while they spend hours in the sun, I eat shrimp, fish, and chips at a nearby restaurant. They learn to fish and I eat fish. Win-win.

I may not know a lot about fishing, but I do know that you're banking on tricking the fish. You put some bait on a hook and try to lure the fish in and make it think your bait is real food. You're trying to make that fish think that this food is safe for them to eat. The fish thinks it's getting something awesome when, in reality, it's getting something that will lead to its death.

When James talks about temptation, he points out the fact that when we're tempted, we think we're getting something good when, really, we're getting something terrible. We're being tricked into thinking that all of our desires are safe when, in reality, some desires only lead to death.

Do you remember when Jesus was tempted by Satan after His baptism? In that instance, Jesus was tempted by an external force. But James says that we are tempted by an internal force – our own evil, sinful desires.

James makes sure to emphasize this because, to a certain extent, we're all "the devil made me do it" people. And what I mean by that is that when we sin, we look for anything or anyone to blame that isn't ourselves, so we blame the devil, stress, our parents, someone who made us mad, or any other number of things. But by doing that, we deflect from the real reason we struggle with sin...ourselves. While it's true that the devil is working hard to destroy us and make us sin, sin isn't so much of an "out there" problem as it is an "in here" problem. Our hearts are deceitful, and we still have sinful, selfish desires that rear their heads from time to time.

For a follower of Jesus, giving into temptation and sinful desire isn't a small matter. It's not just a one-off thing. If it's not dealt with and put down, it grows. Desire gives way to sin, and that sin will lead to death.

You may be wondering why we still have these sinful desires if we've put our faith in Jesus. One day, when we reach Heaven, we will be perfect and sinless, but while we still live on Earth, we will still struggle against our old selves and old ways of living. And to be clear, even after we've put our faith in Jesus, we will still sin. It's a constant battle that we all must face every day. But that's what James is talking about in verse 12. If you remain steadfast against temptation and don't give in to your sinful desires (and repent when you do mess up and give in), you'll be rewarded that crown of eternal life that Jesus promises to all those who put their faith in Him. Growing into a mature Christian isn't about being tempted less but giving in to that temptation less and less.



## REFLECTION

1. If you had to put today's devotional in your own words, how would you say it? What would you want to emphasize as most important?
2. What desires and temptations do you currently struggle with? Why do you think that desire is such a fight for you? How can you remain steadfast against it?
3. If you were offering advice to a friend in a tempting situation, what would you say?
4. What do you think about the fact that everyone will still struggle with sin, even if they've put their faith in Jesus? What do you think is the difference between struggling with sin without Jesus vs. struggling with sin with Jesus?

## PRAYER

Today, pray that God would reveal any sinful desires in your heart. Ask Him to show you where you have sin in your life that you need to repent for, and then ask His forgiveness for those sins. Pray that He would give you the strength to fight against your sinful desires so that you can faithfully follow Him. Thank Him for forgiving you and promising you a crown of eternal life.

# MY THOUGHTS FOR TODAY





# WEEK 1 | DAY 3

Exclusive

**James 4:4-6**

Begin today by opening your Bible or Bible app and reading James 4:4-6.

My first venture into the world of dating took place when I was in 7th grade. In Tennessee History and World Geography, a girl named Jennifer sat in front of me, and we passed notes back and forth. I got her phone number, and we started to talk on the phone (audibly...texting was not an option yet). Eventually, the two of us decided we were going to “go together.” We didn’t really have anywhere to go...“Going together” was just a figure of speech. But in October, the talk of East Ridge Middle School was the Halloween Dance. Lo and behold, we finally had a place to go together.

On the night of the dance, my mom dropped me off, and I was dressed as Jason from the Friday the 13th movies. If you’re not familiar, Jason wears a mask in all of the movies, so you never see his face. Jennifer was also wearing a costume that involved a mask, and this made it very difficult to find one another. We both danced with so many people that were not each other... by accident. Eventually, the phone calls, the notes, and the walking together in the hallway just stopped. We were no longer “together” - we were no longer exclusive.

In today’s verses, James says that believers have to see their relationship with God as exclusive. We can’t go back and forth between following God and indulging in the sinful things of the

world. You may think that you can be on the fence and play both sides, but in reality, you can't. Just as you wouldn't cheat in a relationship with your boyfriend/girlfriend, you can't cheat on God by still being friends with the world. You have to make a decision on who you want to follow - who you want to be exclusive with.

The fact of the matter is that God longs to have an exclusive relationship with you. Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice to show us how much He loves us and wants to be with us, but we still struggle with saying no to the world and our sinful desires. Deep down, we're afraid that God won't be enough, provide enough, or come through when we need Him. So, we seek security and happiness in what we can see, feel, and touch in the world.

I want to be clear: being a friend of God instead of the world is not about only having friends who act like you and think like you. What it does mean is that a follower of Jesus should be more aligned with Jesus' life than the way the world functions. And Jesus' life was all about humbling Himself before His Father and living according to His will. Being a friend of God is about committing to following Him, turning from the things of the world, and knowing that when you do mess up, God will give you grace if you humble yourself and ask for forgiveness. Living in this way requires us always to be working through how we can want God more than anything that is not God. When we do that, we are trusting that God is more than enough for us, even when our society says He is not.

## REFLECTION

1. What are some of the things of the world you have a tendency to turn to? What do you think you're really seeking from that thing? How can you find that in God?
2. What does it look like to live a life of humility? How can you practice this?
3. In your life, how has God shown you that He is enough for you? Is there a particular moment or story? Write it down and read through it whenever you're struggling to believe He's enough.

## PRAYER

Today, pray that the Lord would reveal areas in your life where you need to be more exclusive with Him. You may find that your priorities include far more of your own desires than God's. Ask God to give you humility so that you can live as He wants you to live. As you pray, seek the Lord's purpose and plan for you, and ask Him to help you focus on Him alone.

# MY THOUGHTS FOR TODAY





# WEEK 1 | DAY 4

The Resistance

**James 4:7-10**

Begin today by opening your Bible or Bible app and reading James 4:7-10.

Most people love a classic “David vs. Goliath” when they see it in sports. We want to see the underdogs win. We love it when we see a basketball team overcome all odds and defeat a team that they have no business defeating. We love the story of a kid standing up to a bully and the bully fleeing. Backing down from insurmountable, overwhelming odds is not an option!

In the actual story of David and Goliath, you have the small nation of Israel against the Philistines, who were big in number and size. Israel is outmatched and does not have a chance. When David shows up and boldly challenges Goliath, the Israelite army is reinvigorated and defeats the Philistine army. David’s faith inspired them, but the real hero of the day was God. David knew that he couldn’t defeat Goliath on his own. He needed God’s strength to overcome his enemy, and God gave an awesome display of how powerful He is.

This is very similar to what James talks about in these four verses. Left to ourselves, we don’t have the strength to overcome sin or death. We need God’s strength to overcome our enemy. This is why James tells us to submit ourselves to God. He is the only One capable of keeping us safe from sin and its penalty. We don’t “resist the devil” under our own strength; we resist the devil by submitting ourselves to God and admitting that we are not

strong enough on our own. And how do we submit ourselves and draw near to God? By cleansing our hands, purifying our hearts, humbling ourselves, and asking for His forgiveness.

The story of David and Goliath was like a miniature example of how Jesus would save the whole world. In that story, we are Israel, cowering away from the battlefield, and Jesus is the greater David, the ultimate Hero. Jesus has stood as our Champion. He has defeated the enemy and invited us to share in His victory. We can now be brave when we should be cowards.

If you haven't noticed thus far, being humble is key when it comes to trials, temptations, and suffering. That's because it's through our humility that the world can clearly see God's strength. When we acknowledge to the whole world that we are weak and unable to save ourselves, God shows His strength through us so that He can get all the glory He deserves. That may sound like we get the short end of the stick, but go back and read verse 10. When we humble ourselves in obedience to God, He will exalt us. Just as all of the Israelites, even the one farthest away from the battle, got to claim the victory over the Philistines, all of us can claim the victory Jesus has won over sin, death, and the enemy.



## REFLECTION

1. Is it hard to accept the fact that you aren't strong enough to overcome your sin? Why do you think that is? Why do you think it's hard to rely on God's strength to get you through it?
2. What are your initial thoughts about being humble so that God can receive the glory? How have you seen examples of this in your own life? What do you think it looks like for God to exalt you?
3. In your own words, explain what it means to resist the devil. What does this look like in real life?

## PRAYER

Pray today that God would give you strength to admit that you aren't strong enough and that you need Him. Pray that God would draw near to you and help you draw near to Him. As you think about resisting the devil, ask God to help you resist the temptations that draw you away from Him. If a specific temptation comes to mind, consider asking a trusted friend to pray with you. You don't have to tell them specifics, but it can be helpful to share your struggles with fellow believers.

# MY THOUGHTS FOR TODAY





# WEEK 1 | DAY 5

Patience

**James 5:7-12**

Begin today by opening your Bible or Bible app and reading James 5:7-12.

Waiting is hard. Especially when you're waiting for something awesome to come. But it's even more difficult when you're waiting for something not so awesome to end. When you're going through a hard time and can't see the light at the end of the tunnel, it can feel like there's nothing worse than waiting. Being patient in the midst of trials and suffering isn't easy, and it can make us question and doubt everything we believe in.

As James writes to believers who are being persecuted for their faith every day, he encourages them to remain patient in their suffering because the Lord has always been faithful. He points that out in this passage with three examples: A farmer, a prophet, and Job from the Old Testament.

I live in the suburbs, so I am by no means an expert on farming... or plants in general. I occasionally have to take care of the flower bed in my front yard and the tomato plant on my back porch, but I'm quickly reminded that I'm not really made for that. But the farmer in James' example knew exactly what he needed in order to produce a good crop. The farmer depended on God to bring the rain. Early rain prepares the ground, and the late rain makes the harvest fruitful. All he could do between those times was be patient, trusting that God would bring what he needed.

And James doesn't stop there. He tells us about the prophets who suffered as they faithfully declared the Word of the Lord. The prophets were given the task of declaring God's message to Israel, whether it was good, bad, or really bad. It was not uncommon for prophets to be hated if they brought a message of judgment from God, but they remained faithful to what God called them to and would not back down from the truth. This is why James commends them for remaining steadfast in the midst of suffering.

Finally, James calls to mind the story of Job, who lost literally everything he had. He lost his money, his possessions, his children, his home, and even his good health. He's in such bad shape that his wife tells him just to curse God and die, but he doesn't. For 42 whole chapters, until Job's trials are taken away, he remains faithful to God. He trusts that God will be who He's always been - compassionate, trustworthy, kind, and merciful.

Maybe you're going through something right now that's really difficult. You might feel exhausted, depressed, and at the end of your rope, but know this - what you're walking through is not the complete story. Be patient, remain steadfast, stay faithful, and be confident in the fact that our God is compassionate, full of mercy, and always takes care of His children. He has displayed that to us in His Son, Jesus.

Christ died.

Christ rose.

Christ will come again and make all things new.

For that return, we patiently wait.

## REFLECTION

1. What struggle are you currently walking through or have most recently walked through? How hard is it to be patient in suffering? Why do you think that is?
2. What emotions do you feel when thinking about waiting for God to act? Do you trust that God will be faithful to you? Why or why not?
3. In what ways do you find refuge in the Lord when things are hard? Why do you think He makes us be patient and steadfast through suffering instead of immediately solving the problem?

## PRAYER

Today, pray that the Lord would give you patience in your times of suffering and trials. Ask Him to remind you of the hope that you will always have in Him. Allow Him to show you the beauty in waiting for Him to move and act rather than taking matters into your own hands. Ask Him to remind you of when He has been faithful to you before so that you can be confident in Him for the future.

# MY THOUGHTS FOR TODAY



# WEEK 1 RECAP

## Things I Want To Remember About What I Studied This Week

So, how was your first week? Even though the topic for this week was hard to think about and process, you, hopefully, learned something about God that encouraged you to take steps toward living more like Jesus. James helped us walk through some of the more difficult aspects of what it means to live out our faith. We talked about patience and trials. We talked about the difficulty of resisting evil and remaining exclusive with God. And we talked about remaining humble and not following the ways of the world. When you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you're putting your old life to death. It will not always be easy or joyous. Sometimes, you'll have to make changes that feel very big, and other people won't understand why you've changed. You may find that to keep your focus on Jesus and how He wants you to live, you need to remove yourself from situations that pull your attention away from Him.

Now, let's be clear...just because we've talked about these things doesn't mean that anyone expects you to do them perfectly. These are hard things to do, and we need God's help to do them. But if you continue to follow God and live out the walk of faith, these things will become more and more natural for you because Jesus is making you look more like Himself every day.

Take to heart what James is telling us. Not just this week but in the following weeks as well. This life that you're committing to comes with big changes. But if you can keep your focus on God, you will see Him display His love, mercy, and faithfulness in wondrous ways.