

Walking With the Father Through James

Over the years, I've found my life changing and my faith deepening as I meet with our heavenly Father in His word. This has been especially true as I've been writing these devotionals and having to live what I write.

I long for you to be able to say the same as you read through this letter.

As I've gotten to know Paul, James, Peter, Jude, and John through their letters, I'm overwhelmed by how they were changed by knowing and walking with their Lord. How much they must have longed for us to know Him as they did.

As John wrote in 1 John 2:3-6, he wants us to walk as Jesus did and believed that it was absolutely possible to do so. So how did Jesus walk? That's one secret our Father shares with us.

Blessings on your time as we take another walk with the Father,

Margie Martin

Walking With the Father Through James

James' letter to Jewish believers was the very first to be written, probably around A.D. 45, within 15 years of Jesus' death and resurrection, and probably written while James lived in Jerusalem. We see in the Gospels that James and his brothers (and sisters and their mother) were embarrassed by Jesus' preaching and wanted Him to come home with them (John 7) but so much happens after that: Mary watches her son die on the cross; Jesus visits his brother James personally after His resurrection (1 Corinthians 5:7); and when the Spirit comes to the believers, Mary and her sons were with them (Acts 1:14). What a change happened in this family in just a short period of time, not only in how they thought about Him, but also in their own hearts.

Within these 15 years, James became a leader in the church in Jerusalem and headed up the first church council. He wrote this letter before the Gentile believers began to affect the Jewish look of Christianity, but when Paul met with the Jewish leadership during his last time in Jerusalem, James warmly greeted him and applauded all he had done.

James is thought to have been martyred in Jerusalem in A.D. 62 or 63.



New Testament World

As you spend time in this letter, please take the time to talk with our Father about what He's showing you so you're not just gathering information. As you pray, you can use the space on each page to journal your thoughts or write Him a note.

Walking With the Father Through James

James 1:1

“To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations . . .”

If you’ve been reading through Paul’s letters with me in my other devotionals, you’ll immediately notice the difference in how James introduces his letter. I think this difference is because James wrote to Jewish believers rather than to the Gentiles Paul wrote to. If this observation means something to you, great. If not, here’s my thinking.

First century Gentiles lived primarily in the western part of the world. They were known for their more logical way of thinking (remember Socrates?), and their lifestyles followed how they viewed the world. Epicureans had the philosophy of “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you may die.” The philosophies of the day created numerous gods, and their gods were selfish, demanding, distant, angry, and capricious. Gentiles didn’t have any consistency or confidence in their gods or in their lives.

On the other hand, Jewish believers all shared a cultural and religious heritage. Their eastern mindset focused on stories, parables, and rich imagery. They had one God, and they had learned through the Scripture (our Old Testament) and experience what would happen if they went chasing after foreign gods. But I think they had gotten a little complacent in their thinking, like children do with loving parents; they were used to being taken care of and looked after and so didn’t want to grow up and be responsible.

But then Jesus came, and James and the others had their lives turned upside down. They began longing for the same to happen for their friends. James found he had to rethink everything he knew in terms of the cross, and he wanted his countrymen—and us—to do the same.

James, as a Jew and half brother of Jesus, could have thought that his future was settled and he could just ease on into heaven. But in this introduction, he calls himself a *“servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Are we—you and me—servants of God and Jesus Christ? Regardless of how others are living and treating us, a servant does what his master says. In his letter, James is going to give us multiple examples of what a servant of God really looks like. We need his perspective because, if you’re like me, we limit our serving to what *we’re* comfortable with.

I’m ready to start our adventure with James, and I’m ready to have my life turned upside down by someone who grew up with Jesus. You too? Then this letter is for us.

Walking With the Father Through James

James 1:2-8

“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given him.”

This verse describes my experience yesterday. Without going into detail, I received an angry email blaming me for a breakdown in communication. I felt attacked. I began to type a reply but fortunately didn't click Send. I was so angry and hurt that I knew I had to get rid of my excess emotions or I'd be fuming for hours (days?). On the way to the gym, I rehearsed possible responses, but I knew that none would further God's way of living in my challenger or in me. I knew that I wanted God to be honored, that I wanted to be an adult in the conflict, that I wanted to be gracious, and that I wanted my brother to feel loved by God through me. I wasn't there yet, but I told God that this was where I wanted to be, and I needed His help and wisdom to get there.

As my husband and I left the gym almost an hour later, he gave me the response I needed but didn't want. I knew he was right, even though my emotions still hadn't caught up to the truth of his words. When we got home, I pulled up the original email, clicked on Reply, and told my husband to tell me what to write. I had to *choose* to act out of what was true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8). While I was at the gym I had asked God for help, and He gave me His wisdom through my husband. Waiting for my emotions or motives to catch up wasn't an option. I had to do what was right and expect God to do what only He can do—change me on the inside.

And today? Well, last night I had the best night's sleep I've had in a long time, and I'm experiencing a sense of humility and calmness that's beyond what I've ever known. I'm reading through a study on Job by Chuck Swindoll, and today's chapter was on integrity—a value I grew up with but don't often see today. What is integrity? I think it's our thoughts agreeing with what we say. Integrity is what I want for myself.

How are your faith and your walk being tested today? Are your words and responses furthering kingdom life in you and those around you? Do others feel loved by what you're saying and how you're saying it?

What do you want to be like in 20 years? Certainly not the same as you are now. Do you want to be mature and complete? Then embrace perseverance. Do you want to be a port in a storm for others? Then ask God for wisdom in the midst of your storm, hear His voice as He chooses to speak to you, and act in faith to what He says. Period. Sound too simplistic to you? Perhaps like my experience yesterday, you need to humble yourself and begin the process. Do you really want the alternative?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 1:9-11

humble circumstances = high position one who is rich = low position

It's amazing to me how God uses daily circumstances to make an idea in Scripture come alive. This weekend my husband and I joined some friends at a cabin in the mountains. It was built as a rental, and the charges for it are more than our annual entertainment budget could begin to cover. But we're getting to stay here as a gift from our friends and from God.

In comparison to the builder who rents out three of these beautiful cabins and to our friends who can afford to stay here, my husband and I are in humble circumstances. But here we are, rocking on one of the back porches and overlooking the rapids on the river. The God of the universe gave us this experience because of His great love for us. We're getting to freely enjoy the beauty of His world. We are rich.

On the other hand, our grade-school-age grandson thinks we're rich because our house is bigger and newer than his. While we've worked hard over the years, much of what we have came from our inheritance from parents who have passed away. Even though we have much from the world's perspective (and our grandson's), none of it means anything when we stand before God. All of our wealth could disappear quickly because it could burn or break. Before God, we have nothing to offer and so are in a low position.

Doesn't having God's perspective speak volumes to how we relate to God, think about others, and view our own lives? Here are some possibilities that come to mind:

- Now when I wish that I had more of *whatever*, I want to actually look at what God's created and value Him and what He's already provided.
- Now when I begin to get smug about all I have, I want to remember that it can disappear quickly, and I can't take it with me.
- Before God we're all equal and we're all loved. What He provides *satisfies* the soul and *brings peace* to the mind.

What are you rich in today?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 1:12

Perseveres under trial + loves God = receives God's crown of life

I am in no way a math person (in fact I went to a college where I didn't have to take any math to graduate), but sometimes a simple equation, like the previous one, helps me remember truth.

Recently I was struggling over a notice I had received in the mail, and for me struggling usually means tears. As I was crying before the Lord, I thought about turning to this passage since it was the next one I'd be looking at. How perfect. Are you struggling (crying or raging?) through an issue? Maybe the observations I made today will help you also.

Blessed is the man [and woman]: Oh the bliss, the joy, freedom, sense of well being, full, no voids

who perseveres: keeps on going no matter what the cost or the effort; eyes are on the goal, not the process

under: stays *under* the problem, limitation, or conflict; doesn't try to squeeze around or short-circuit the process

trial: an event from God to show us how real and powerful He is in our lives; an event that God wants to use for eternal purposes; a difficult opportunity

because when he [she] has stood the test: an end is in sight, the test won't go on forever; our responsibility is to learn *how to stand* instead of letting ourselves be tossed around

he [she] will receive: a promise that isn't a *maybe*; a reward that more than fits the intensity of the test/trial

the crown: crowns are proof of royalty for family members; we are sons and daughters of the King; our reward is to be honored publicly when He returns so we can take our rightful place in the kingdom

of life: real life that doesn't have limits of time or space or quality; the kind of life that Jesus always experienced with His Father

that God has promised: the promise has the character of God behind it; no ifs, ands, or buts are associated with it

to those who love him: **not to those who obey Him or follow him or who are loved by Him,** but to those who *do* have a love relationship with Him, who have taken the time to pursue a friendship with Him so they have learned to see life through his eyes.

Tomorrow I'll share my last observation and how this section helped me. How has it helped you already?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 1:12

Perseveres under trial + loves God = receives God's crown of life

Here's the final observation that I made from this section:

Staying under the trial, persevering. When I received the disappointing notice in the mail, I had a choice: bemoan what I didn't like *or* remind myself of God's love and character and remain under the trial of disappointment. His promise to me isn't the resolution of the disappointment but a changed character that brings glory to Him.

God is doing so much behind the scenes of our lives that we'll never get to see this side of glory. The question is, are we going to trust Him for what we don't see?

What test is in front of you today? Are you being tempted to give in to disappointment, discouragement, or despair? Our goal isn't to learn how to put a spin on what is happening as we speak with others, but to honestly work through the issues with God that He's allowing to happen and then be honest with others.

Sometimes I think that honesty is the hardest trait to build into our lives because we have to humbly be willing to be seen as weak. Is the goal of receiving God's crown of life worth the effort to you?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 1:13-15

Tempted by evil desires → dragged away and enticed → desire is allowed to grow → desire gives birth to sin → sin full-grown gives birth to death

Have you ever wondered about the difference between a *trial* and a *temptation*? James clarifies the difference in this section: it's how *we* respond. In every situation we have the choice to persevere or give in.

Over the last couple of days, we have looked at the topic of trials and seen that a crucial part of persevering is to choose to love God in the midst of the onslaughts. I don't think loving God during such times involves the warm, fuzzy feelings we have at church when we're singing praise songs. I think loving God means choosing to bring Him into the situation, obeying Him (John 15:10), and bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5-6)

In today's section we have an example of what happens when we *don't* invite God into the temptation. I've heard that as men struggle with lust, women struggle with food. Whatever you struggle with—anger, self-righteousness, addictions, poor self-image—the truth of today's verses should help you see the process of what's happening:

1. All of a sudden a thought pops into your mind of something you'd like to have or do.
2. You continue to think about it from all directions—seeing only the pleasure of the experience.
3. Eventually all you can think about is having what you want.
4. Thinking leads to action.
5. Action results in despair, a broken relationship, a baby, a divorce, bankruptcy, or _____.

Temptation never shows its *ugly* side; it always looks good.

Are you caught in this downward spiral? Once started, it's hard to break the process, but not impossible. My suggestion is to figure out where you are in the process and get God involved. Only He can give you freedom, but the battle for how you think is going to be fierce.

Do you want the crown of life or do you want death? The choice is up to you— moment by moment, day by day. Your future depends on your decision today. What are you going to choose?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 1:16-18

“Every good and perfect gift is from above . . .”

The truth in this paragraph has been rolling around in my head this past week, especially as it expresses the difference between walking through a trial and being tempted. My conclusion? *It all depends on how we react.* Read through this chart, add the trial perspective, and see if you agree.

Every Good Thing	Temptation	Trial
speech	attack verbally	speaking truth in love
ability to think	scheme to get ahead	evaluate and do what's best
sex	sex outside of marriage	love spouse
work	too much or not enough	
free time	not taking advantage of time off	
food	overeating, poor eating habits, binging	
money	over spend or be stingy	
drugs that heal	overdosing	
alcohol	alcoholism	
healthy bodies	obsessing	
growing old	negative image of self	

If you're already struggling in one of these areas, you might find these conclusions helpful:

1. *Think*, don't react.
2. *Identify* the good gifts that God wants to give you.
3. *Choose* to see your situation through God's eyes.
4. *Persevere* in thinking thoughts that are honest and true, not just emotional. Persevere. Persevere.
5. *Bask* in your approval from God.

Last week when preparing for a Bible study, the study's author asked some penetrating questions that I'd like to pass on to you:

- When you give into sin, how do you feel?
- When you persevere and don't give in, how do you feel?
- Which set of feelings do you like better?

In light of your struggle, how would you answer these questions?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 1:19-21

“... *the righteous life that God desires.*”

Take a minute with me, please, and observe your life and relationships. Does “*the righteous life that God desires*” describe what you see? Today in me I’m seeing anger, frustration, criticalness, apathy, and a need to control. How about you? Let’s see what help James gives us in this short paragraph. We can have:

- | This | <i>or</i> | This |
|--|-----------|---|
| 1. Get rid of all moral filth and evil that is around you | | 1. Evaluate, judge, and deal with others based on what I like |
| 2. Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you | | 2. Do what feels comfortable |
| 3. Be quick to listen | | 3. Refuse to listen |
| 4. Be slow to speak | | 4. Use 50 words when 5 work |
| 5. Be slow to become angry | | 5. Let anger control me |

I guess what we really need to do is decide what kind of person we want to be. Do we want “*the righteous life that God desires,*” or do we want to stay as we are but let a veneer of Christianity cover us as we live life, never letting the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ change us?

I’ve found that this question is exactly what I need to be asking myself as I walk into work, enter into conversations, live with my husband, and talk on the phone with family members. But I’ve also found that I need to regularly let God soften my heart by spending time with Him in His Word because then I can see as He sees. For example, the phrase “*humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you*” has spoken volumes to me today. Here are some other thoughts I’ve had today while writing:

- God planted His truth in me as a farmer plants corn. The sun’s heat of hard times and the earth’s rain of my tears make the truth grow into reality.
- I can choose how I accept the process: humbly or with resistance.
- This truth can save me, not in the sense of initial salvation but by letting salvation work its way through my life (sanctification).
- Then I will have the “*righteous life that God desires.*”

As I’ve been writing, various relationships and situations have been flittering through my mind that need some course correction on my part. How does today’s section affect you?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 1:22-25

“a forgetful hearer” or “an effectual doer” NASB
“. . . not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it” NIV

Does either of these phrases strike you? All too often we hear a message at church or on the radio or read a book and think, “I need to remember that truth and put it into action.” But then life intervenes, and we continue doing what’s in front of us, not changing anything. Is this true for you? Do you tend to just gather information from the Bible, or do you consciously put the truth into action and make it your own?

James is telling us that this was a problem in his day too. So what does he mean by being a *doer of the word*? Does he mean we should all be missionaries or Bible teachers? Does he mean we should witness to all we meet? Does he mean we should go here or there, do this or that?

I don’t think this is what James means at all. I think he means that when we read “*putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness*,” we stop telling dirty jokes, we stop talking about subjects that demean people, we confess anger and bitterness, and we own up to what we do that causes barriers or puts burdens on others. Then we stop doing it. I think he means that we’re to take what we hear and put it into action; we’re to take truth seriously rather than evaluate it and dismiss it through inaction.

We were with a group of believers the other night for our weekly community group meeting when the dinner conversation turned to nudist camps and the toilet situation in Europe. When I posed a question to help us get back on track, the men got defensive, and the women said, “Well, men will be men,” and half of the group hadn’t done the study, which was about how to live in the body of Christ. As a group, were we being “*forgetful hearers*” or “*effective doers*”?

How would you evaluate the groups you’re involved with? How would you evaluate what you say when you’re with any group of believers (or nonbelievers) in a social or business setting? Are you part of the problem or contributing to the solution? Since our times together with other believers are to be a message of who Jesus is to the world around us, I think we should determine what our message really is and then live it.

James finishes this section by telling us that we’ll get a reward for being an effectual doer: “*we’ll be blessed in what we do*.” When was the last time you felt God’s pleasure because you did what He wanted you to do? Wasn’t it great? Don’t you want to experience that pleasure more often? We can, you know, if we’ll do what He says, even in the little things of life.

Walking With the Father Through James

James 1:26-27

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

We’ve looked at a lot of paragraphs so far in James’ letter, and I’ve been wondering how they all fit together. James’ style of writing is so different from Paul’s that it’s taken me awhile to adjust.

But I think that this is what James wants his readers (and us) to do: adjust. Often after being a Christian for awhile, we need to adjust our thinking so we can see life the way God does. So what adjustments does James want us to make so we’ll be living a *pure and faultless religion*?

- 1:1 Our role is to be a servant of God—what He wants, we do. We’re to know our heritage (for his Jewish readers, our Old Testament is their spiritual background). We’re part of a community that we’re to live with and worship with.
- 1:2-8 We’re to see a difficulty as an opportunity from a loving heavenly Father, or we can expect instability.
- 1:9-11 We’re to accept where we are financially and not envy those who have more or look down on those who have less because God gives us what He wants us to have—for His glory. I don’t think this means we shouldn’t work hard or train to get ahead, but we should evaluate our motives and attitudes in doing so. After all, we never know when a business will collapse, the stock market will fall, or a health issue will drain us financially.
- 1:12-18 If we see difficulties as opportunities from God, we’ll see good gifts in the same way. If we groan and complain, giving into sin, life won’t be the way we want it.
- 1:19-21 We’re to let the Word live in us, remove filth from our thoughts and lives, and listen rather than talk.
- 1:22-25 We’re to be effectual doers, not forgetful hearers.
- 1:26-27 We’re to reign in our tongues; care for those who don’t have someone caring for them; and keep our thoughts, words, and actions pure and without an *oops* in them.

Which of these adjustments do you need to make today? Tomorrow I’ll share how this section has affected me.

Walking With the Father Through James

James 1:26-27

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

This verse just came alive for me. For a number of years I worked for a nonprofit organization that helps ministries with their prayer team, board of directors, ministry model, administration, and fundraising. Originally most of our support came from investors who invest \$20,000 a year.

At a fundraising gala, most of our investors were there, and we heard from some of our board members. These men and women are extremely successful from the world's point of view. But the ministries we work with, and who our investors and the board members wholly support, are primarily geared to inner-city children, youth going the wrong direction, men coming out of prison, and women who have been used and abused.

As I watched and listened, I began to see our leadership from a new perspective: while experiencing wealth and success themselves, their hearts were looking for those in need. And I think our Father accepts their religion as pure and faultless.

My heart hasn't been this transformed, but I want it to be. I'm asking the Lord where He wants me to be involved. Where are you in this process? Which part of "pure religion" do you need to concentrate on?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 2:1-7

“My brothers [and sisters], as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism.”

Have you ever watched yourself as you’ve entered a room, whether it’s at a party, a Bible study, a meeting, or church? Do you tend to look for friends and ignore strangers? If the room is full of strangers, whom do you gravitate toward? What would James say about your choices? If you’re like me, I bet James would have some blunt words for us. So, what’s our alternative?

Know our identity: As part of God’s family, we’re to imitate our Father’s actions and treat other believers as co-sons and daughters.

Know our worth: Jesus loved us so much that He would rather die on the cross for us than live without us. His sacrifice was so complete that His Father accepted it and then restored His Son to fellowship with Him. Jesus now sits in His rightful place in heaven. His newness of life is in us if we’ve acknowledged our sinfulness and His sacrifice, asked Him to be in charge of our lives, and allow the Spirit to live out His life through us.

Live out our identity and worth: The more I’ve been in the Scripture while writing these devotionals, the more I’m convinced that living as a Christian is a learned behavior. Nothing in our culture teaches us to live this way. We may have examples from family members and history to show us how to live, but we rarely learn *how* to put their examples into practical action. Only the truth in the Scripture tells us *how* we should choose to think so we can act as we should.

Value what God values: James says God wants us to be *rich in faith* and looking to *inherit the kingdom* He promised to those who love Him. These characteristics are what we should be developing in ourselves and encouraging in others. All the externals of beauty, fine clothes, cars, and possessions are of this world. Our Father wants us to be mindful of His kingdom.

Do you know your real identity and your real worth? Do you live out this identity and worth as you interact with those around you? Do you value what God values?

I challenge us to watch ourselves over the next week as we enter rooms filled with friends and strangers. Let’s ask the Lord to let us see ourselves as He sees us because His perspective is the true grid through which we need to view ourselves. If we don’t like what we see, then let’s review our real identity and worth, and then let’s begin to value what God values. Ready for the challenge?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 2:8-13

“If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right.”

THE ROYAL LAW

Doesn't that phrase produce a regal picture? The royal law: a command given by the king, full of pomp, dignity, and majesty. But do we give this type of importance and value to God's directives? We do only if we see Him high and lifted up in majesty and honor but yet always available to give help and mercy in times of need. However, if we keep Him at a distance or see Him as a buddy, we'll take His commands as suggestions and do what we want to do.

I was talking with a friend the other day who had fallen into this trap. He had translated the command to honor his father (Ephesians 6:1-2) as “Honor your father if he's a believer and walks closely with God.” I had done the same thing for too many years and now regret the time I wasted when my parents were still alive. I hadn't taken God seriously in this area and ended up acting like a selfish, ungrateful, critical adult daughter. My friend and I talked about this perspective for a few minutes.

Today as he was leaving the office, he told me he was looking forward to spending time with his dad over the Thanksgiving weekend. He was starting to take seriously the command to value his dad as much as he valued himself. His countenance reflected the peace with God he was enjoying because he's taking God's words seriously.

What would happen if you loved these people as much as you love, think about, spend money on, pamper, excuse, and justify yourself?

- spouse
- parent
- child
- roommate
- boss
- coworker
- neighbor
- friend
- sibling
- relative
- in-laws

Would you listen differently? Use a more pleasant and respectful tone of voice? Spend your time and money differently?

Who comes to mind right now? I bet this is the person the Lord wants you to love as you love yourself. After you put Jesus Christ back on the throne by taking His words as the ROYAL LAW, what changes do you need to make concerning how you think about and talk to this person?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 2:14-19

“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such a faith save him?”

I think the only way we could answer yes to the second question in today’s verse is if someone is on his or her deathbed and has no time to do any good deeds. But I think the real issue is this: why should we *expect* someone who says he or she has faith to do good deeds? What do you think? Here are two ideas you might want to add to your list:

- Real faith is based on God, who He is and what He does
- Real faith should reflect the object of the faith (who the faith is in)

If we concentrate on *how much* a believer believes, then we’re only looking at the believer. But if faith depends on the character, power, and ability of the one who is being depended on (God), that one is being honored, valued, and appreciated. Let’s see how this could work out.

What good is it if a man or woman claims to have faith but:

- Has no love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control? (Galatians 5:22)
- Is critical of a spouse in front of others?
- Ignores or aggravates his/her children?
- Is fearful or complains about others?

Our faith is to be practical, other-oriented, and helpful, not just based on knowledge or pointing to ourselves. Our faith should be changing the way we’ve always been and then taking us into new ways of behaving that we’ve selfishly ignored.

So what about our example in the first paragraph? The person who is dying and comes to faith will probably offer forgiveness, ask for forgiveness, be caring of others, and be at peace—these are good deeds that are appropriate for that time and place.

How is your faith being seen? Are you more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, and kind? Are you exhibiting goodness, faithfulness, and control of self? Are you caring more about the needs of others than your own?

If you can’t answer yes to these questions, perhaps your faith needs to be centered on God Himself instead of on your own abilities. To begin, you could start listing alphabetically the qualities of God that you see in His Word. For example, God is available, better than, consistent

Walking With the Father Through James

James 2:20-24

“. . . and [Abraham’s] faith was made complete by what he did . . . and he was called God’s friend.”

The timing of events that James uses to describes Abraham’s faith and deeds has been wandering around my head and heart for a while. Moses tells us that Abraham was declared righteous when he chose to *believe*. (Genesis 15) But James says that Abraham was declared righteous when he chose to *offer* up his son. (Genesis 22) So when are we declared righteous—when we choose to believe, or when we act on that belief?

I think the answer is *both* because God is not limited by time. To Him our choice to believe early in our walk of faith *flows* into what He wants to do and will do through us here on earth. And He knows what we need to experience and learn from so we can be ready for what He has planned.

Abraham had no idea that God wanted him be an example of a life of faith. All that Abraham saw were his day-to-day choices of believing and acting upon his choices *OR* not believing and having to live with the consequences. For example, Abraham had to choose whether or not to:

- Leave Ur.
- Introduce Sarah as his wife or as his sister—3 times.
- Keep the spoils of war after rescuing Lot.
- Have a child by Hagar at his wife’s insistence.
- Keep Hagar and her son in the camp.
- Circumcise the adult males, including himself (ouch).
- Plead with God for Lot’s life (bargain with God?).

When Abraham chose to believe God and acted on each choice, he was blessed, but I’m not sure anything *happened*. Perhaps the blessing was just a sense of God’s pleasure. But when Abraham chose *not* to believe, he and his family had to live with those consequences. So when faced with God asking him to sacrifice his son, all these memories must have raced through his mind—and he chose to believe.

How are you doing with your opportunities to believe? One friend thinks our greatest contributions to kingdom life start in our 50s; until then our humility and character are being developed and deepened. If this is true, all of *your* choices are leading up to some amazing things God wants to do through you. Are you going to be ready like Abraham was?

James’ words are meant to prepare us for what God has in store. Let’s take him seriously and watch our attitudes, speech, and actions. Let’s learn from our lack-of-faith decisions and so be ready for whatever God has planned. What choices do you have in front of you today?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 2:1-26

“ . . . I will show you my faith by what I do.”

It's taken me quite a while to work through this chapter because I kept wondering how it applied to me. Today's verse, however, has really challenged me: how *do* my actions show my faith? God hasn't been asking me to go somewhere new or take on a big project. My life is filled with everyday activities and relationships. Sound familiar? So after writing about Abraham, I asked the Father to show me how my faith was to be seen in my actions. All of a sudden three events came to mind.

I was in the middle of putting away Christmas decorations and bringing the house back to normal, usually a day and a half job. I'm a project-oriented person, and when I get going, I don't want to stop. Two phone calls came in during the day, one from a friend and another from a son. Both times I knew I was polite, but I couldn't wait to get back to work.

So when I asked the Father how my actions can show my faith, it was as though He was saying to me, "Margie, if you believe that I order your days [and I do believe that], then you are to treat such interruptions as phone calls as holy appointments from Me. You are to lay aside whatever you're doing and concentrate on what and who I bring along." Oh.

I called my friend and then my son to apologize for not treating them the way God wanted me to. Humbling myself by sharing this truth with them has cemented it in my mind and heart. *My faith is to be seen in my actions.*

Then on Sunday one of the sermon points was that since Jesus loved the lost, the sinners, and the tax collectors and they loved Him, we're to love the same people, and they should love being around us. Oh, was I challenged by this thought. I want this depth of love to be true of me, but I'm afraid it isn't.

Then the next day as I was preparing for a meeting that I was going to lead, I ran into a conflict with a woman on the leadership team. From the tone of her emails, I sensed that she was upset with me and telling me how to do my job. Inwardly I began building my arguments against her. As I told my husband about the situation, the sermon came to mind. I realized that I was to love (not be defensive) and reach out (not be self-protective). The women in the group needed to know that I cared for them.

Tomorrow I'll share with you my conclusions about how my actions are to show my faith. But meanwhile, has something happened lately that indicates your actions need to reflect what you say you believe?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 2:1-26

“ . . . I will show you my faith by what I do.”

So what did I learn from these episodes that came together in yesterday’s writing; what is the truth I need to live by? Here’s what I’ve come up with.

Truth	Determines	My Response
If I believe that Jesus loves me so much that He was willing to give up all He had in heaven to come to earth and die for my sins . . .	→	Then I am to see interruptions as holy appointments from God
If I believe that God accepted His Son’s sacrifice and so raised Him from the dead . . .	→	Then I am to love rather than be defensive or self-protective
If I believe that the resurrected Jesus lives in me through the Holy Spirit . . .	→	Then the power to live this way is already available to me; I just have to put it on like I put on the right weight coat for that season. As I begin to act, I’ll experience the power to do. God will change my motives and attitudes as I walk with Him.

My conclusion? I must humble myself and let Jesus love me and love others through me. My faith is to be seen in my actions.

How would you fill in this chart? If you’ve been wondering how James’ words are to be true for you, ask the Father. I bet He’ll show you as He’s shown me. Here’s an empty chart to work with.

Truth		My Response
If I believe _____	→	Then _____
If I believe _____	→	Then _____
If I believe _____	→	Then _____

Walking With the Father Through James

James 2:25-26

“In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?”

I love the Old Testament. Its stories of actual men and women encountering God encourage and challenge me because of how their actions agreed with their words. These men and women were as real to the New Testament writers as their own neighbors.

Today we get to look at Rahab, a woman of questionable background but who James and the writer of Hebrews single out for praise. Her story is in Joshua 2-6. Why don't you read about her and then fill in the blanks about who she is, where she lived, and how she lived.

Joshua 2:1-24	_____
Joshua 5:13-6:27	Fall of Jericho _____
Joshua 6:17	_____
Joshua 6:22-23	_____
Joshua 6:25	_____
Matthew 1:4-5	_____
Hebrews 11:31	_____
James 2:25	_____

What about you? Do you have a questionable background? If so, what *hope* do you get from Rahab's story?

On the other hand, if you've lived as a straight arrow, what *encouragement* do you get from Salmon, Rahab's husband, who looked at who she was becoming and not who she had been?

Does someone around you need to hear about your hope or encouragement?

Tomorrow we'll look at Rabah's choices.

Walking With the Father Through James

James 2:25-26

“In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?”

Who would have guessed that:

- Rahab’s choice to fear the God of the Israelites instead of the gods of her heritage, to hide and then lie about the spies instead of turning them in, and to love her family would save her family’s lives instead of letting them die with their friends?
- Her choices would earn her a place within the camp of the Israelites, not just be an outsider?
- She would marry Salmon (perhaps one of the spies) and become the mother of Boaz who took Ruth, a Moabitess, as his wife?
- As Boaz’s mother, she would be in the lineage of David, the greatest king in Israel’s history, and so in the lineage of Jesus?
- She would be an example of faith to all future generations?

For forty years the people of Jericho had feared the God of the Israelites because they had heard of the parting of the Red Sea and the death of the Egyptian soldiers, but only Rahab acted on her knowledge of the Israelites’ God.

What do you know of God? How do you act out what you know about Him in your thought life and how you process information? How about in how you speak and interact with your spouse, parents, children, co-workers, tennis team members, and vendors? Is the word “*whatever*” said with an attitude show how you react to life?

If Rahab hadn’t known of God, she couldn’t have made the choices she did, but God made sure that she *did* know about Him. With her choices came a new lifestyle, a new people to be involved with, a new history, and a future.

We have no idea what results will come when we act on our faith in God, but He does. And He wants to bless us through our sons and daughters and their sons and daughters and their sons and daughters, whether they are part of our physical family or our spiritual family.

What choices are in front of you today?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 3:1-2

“If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.”

What an interesting thought: *what we say determines our actions*. James illustrates his point with three very different examples, but first let's look at how speaking too many words will get us into trouble.

Do you remember the rhyme, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me”? Nice thought, but I don't think it's true. Words can hurt and heal, discourage and encourage, stop us from trying and raise us to new levels.

Words reflect a speaker's thinking and feelings, the part of us that needs to be redeemed and made pure just as God, our heavenly Father, is pure. If we let Jesus do His work in us through the Spirit living within us, our thinking and our speech will reflect who we *really* are.

Have you started listening to your words yet? If you haven't, you're probably in for a shock. After you've been listening to your words for awhile, start listening to your thoughts. If you don't like what you hear, there's hope! God doesn't speak and think the way we do, and if He's living in us and we're allowing Him be in charge, then we can change our thoughts. We can choose to think what is “*true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy*” (Philippians 4:8) and think the thoughts that God thinks. This is learned behavior.

Need some examples? The pastor of my singles group used to tell us how he'd stop lustful thoughts when he saw a beautiful woman in a short skirt: he'd thank God for making such a beautiful woman. Likewise, when a co-worker takes credit for an idea, we can ask God to intervene and also *bless* this person who is in need of love and acceptance, letting go of the limelight. It's impossible to sin when asking God to bless someone.

Need help in knowing how God thinks? Look at His actions. Need help in *wanting* to start this process of thinking God's thoughts after Him? Begin to look honestly—and without rationalizing—at your own thoughts and words, evaluate them and their results, and decide if you want to continue following them.

So, what's the outcome for walking with God this way? Humility, sense of peace, love, acceptance, and a sense of rightness with the God of the universe. This way of living isn't easy and it is a lifetime process, but do you really want the alternative?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 3:3-8

Bits, rudders, and sparks

Like a bit in a horse's mouth that controls the horse, a rudder that controls a ship, or a spark of fire that gives light and cooks food, the tongue (what a person says) can be wonderfully beneficial and give direction to life when it does what it was created to do. However, without boundaries or controls, the tongue can create all kinds of damage and chaos, just like a bit wrongly used can injure the horse, a rudder in the hands of an untrained person can sink a boat, and a spark of fire can burn down a town.

Today I'm living in a pit of emotions created by another's tongue not being under control. For the first time in my life when I went to bed last night, I thought about how taking a handful of pills would solve being misunderstood and accused of not being a safe person. I went to sleep crying, and I woke up this morning wanting to cry again. Amazing how one person's words could send another normally "up" person into such a state!

Before I go on to share what I learned from this experience (no, I didn't take the handful of pills—but I had to think about it), I'd like for you to take some time to:

- *Stop*
- *Listen* to what you're saying today
- *Evaluate* whether your words are saying that God is in control or you're in control

Are you willing to take these three steps? What could happen if you don't? What about if you do?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 3:3-8

Bits, rudders, and sparks

Because of my strong reaction to another's words that I described in yesterday's section, I realized that God wanted to teach me something equally strong. This experience wasn't one I could just walk away from. Have you had such experiences?

Perhaps you've been on my side of being verbally attacked. What are to we do?

First, I found that I need to look at my own words and how they affect others. Since I had experienced the depth of pain that comes from another's uncontrolled words, I want to stop my own sin patterns from affecting others.

Second, I want to stop nursing my hurt feelings because if I don't, they'll become like arson's spark that sets off a forest fire.

Third, I want to start saying words of blessing to the one who has hurt me:

Lord, bless her, love her.

because it's impossible to sin when we ask God to bless someone. I may need to set up some safety space between us, but that's on down the line when I'm not hurting so much myself.

**But what if you're the one who attacks?
What do you do?**

First, stop it.

Second, ask God to heal you way down deep
in the areas that prompt you to attack.

Third, bless instead of lash out.

When attacked, Jesus blessed, forgave, and died for a purpose. How can we do otherwise?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 3:9-12

“With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse [speak negatively about] men, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers [and sisters], this should not be.”

Have you seen this tension in yourself yet: blessing one minute and being critical the next? I actually saw it for the first time this week. I’m doing Henry Blackaby’s study, *Experiencing God*, again and have been struck by how much God has changed me since the first time I did it five years ago. Then I came to the paragraph where he said that we were created for eternity, not for this world, and that the experiences of this world are preparing us for eternity. Great thoughts, nothing new for me, but I did find myself writing this question in the margin.

When I don’t do what I should or want to do, what does that say about which person I’m operating from: my old self that was passive and lazy, or my redeemed self that reaches out to others in love?

All of a sudden, numerous conversations raced through my mind of rehearsing how *someone else* had behaved (really, misbehaved), as well as memories of when I *chose* not to write a note or make a phone call just because I didn’t want to. Suddenly I was overwhelmed with how my old self had been in control of my words and actions while at the same time I loved to tell others about our wonderful heavenly Father. I was undone.

But hope began flowing into my heart because I realized that I didn’t have to continue down this road that may seem smooth and straight but eventually becomes rough and full of switchbacks. My goal now is to listen to what I’m saying and watch what I’m doing, evaluate which *self* my words and actions are revealing, and choose to go with my new, redeemed self. God had just given me a gift through this insight.

What do your words and actions reveal about your view of time? Are you centered here on earthly pursuits and all of the joys—and pain—they bring? If so, your words probably reflect this perspective. Or are you looking toward eternity, letting God get you ready for your destination and purpose, changing your character to match Jesus’ through your experiences? What we look at and how we look at it makes a world of difference.

Walking With the Father Through James

James 3:13-18

“Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.”

Born-With Wisdom

- Harbors bitter envy and selfish ambition
- Proud of being this way, or covers up the pride
- Earthly, unspiritual, of the devil
- Produces disorder and every evil practice

Heaven-Given Wisdom

- Pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, sincere
- Produces a good life and deeds done in humility that come from wisdom

Which side of the line do you find yourself living? Probably we all want hearts that comes from heaven-given wisdom but see way too much of the born-with wisdom. After all, we were born with it, we're comfortable with it, and it's the way most of the world operates—just look at history. We may try to cover it up by putting on a veneer of peacefulness and goodness. But just wait until someone gets in our way or hurts us; which wisdom shows up then?

The gap we need to bridge is how to get *from* born-with wisdom *to* heaven-given wisdom. If we've asked Jesus to be our Lord and Savior, then this heaven-given wisdom is available, but it's not like ooze covering us like an oil spill coating everything it touches. It has to get *into* our inner beings, way-down deep, changing us from the inside out. But how?

I've been struggling with a challenging relationship for about nine months now. No matter how often I try to change, I stay the same.

Yesterday while working on a Bible study, the Lord showed me a step I hadn't been taking. I hadn't been admitting that what I was doing was wrong, that it was sin, that God wasn't pleased with how I was acting, and that I was wrong. Period. What the other believer was doing was between him and God. In my thought life I had to stop demanding that he change first. I had to humble myself and agree with God that I'm wrong.

As God's forgiveness has been pouring over me, the anger and hurt have been washing away. I'm sensing mercy toward him that is sincere. I now want to be considerate rather than exercise my passive aggressiveness.

Perhaps you've already discovered this step and have been regularly putting it into practice. How wonderful! However, if this is a new step for you too, I invite you to join me at the foot of the cross for a while. Then we can stand up together and be peacemakers who enjoy the bounty of a harvest of righteousness in ourselves, in those around us, and in our world.

Walking With the Father Through James

James 4:1-12

“a friend of the world” or a friend of God’s?

This section contrasts the choice we all have: are we going to be a friend of the world (and reap its consequences) or be a friend of God’s and enjoy the redeemed life He’s provided. Today we’re going to look at the good news so tomorrow we can see how bad the bad news really is.

- The Spirit that God allows to live in us jealously longs for us to be a friend of God’s. 4:5
- God provides all of His resources (grace) to those who walk humbly with Him. 4:6
- The devil will flee from us. 4:7
- God will come near to us. 4:8
- As we humble ourselves, God will lift us up. 4:10
- God is the only one who can save us at the judgment. 4:12
- We can have harmony in our relationships. 4:1
- Our desires won’t overcome us. 4:1
- We’ll be content. 4:2
- We’ll know that God hears us. 4:2
- We’ll get what we ask for. 4:3
- We’ll love and be loved by God. 4:4
- We’ll be on God’s side. 4:4
- We’ll see life from God’s perspective. 4:8
- Our laughter and joy will be full and complete, not hollow. 4:9
- We’ll speak well—and truthfully—of others. 4:11
- We’ll agree with the law. 4:11
- We’ll look forward to our final evaluation time because we’ve been living in accordance with God’s desires. 4:12

What other motivation could we possibly need so we can live as friends of God’s?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 4:1-12

“a friend of the world” or a friend of God’s?

This world provides some great opportunities for us all. Last week my husband and I were able to spend three days at the Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs. It’s a beautiful five-star hotel, its views of the Rocky Mountains are breathtaking, the food is delicious, and the service is impeccable.

But what if we had been arguing, what if we couldn’t have afforded to stay there (his business paid) but did so anyway, what if our neighbors had been noisy? A potentially wonderful experience could have been ruined by conflict, concerns over money, or selfishness of others—all results of being a friend of the world.

So let’s look at the “bad news” that comes from being the world’s friend:

- Fights and quarrels, internal battles 4:1
- Unmet desires, murder, coveting 4:2
- Wrong, selfish motives 4:3
- Adultery, enemy of God 4:4
- Sinning, being double-minded 4:8
- Grief, mourning, and crying out in anguish 4:9
- Slander, setting ourselves above the law and judging it 4:11
- Judging others 4:12

The choice is clear. Based on what we’ve seen yesterday and today, whose friend are you? If you’re like me and see too much of yourself in today’s results, James says we’re to:

submit → resist → come near to →
clean hands and purify hearts → grieve →
change → humble ourselves → be lifted up

Where are you in this process?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 4:13-17

“Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.”

Again, James hits us right where we live: in our thinking and in our choices. How often we say:

Next year I’m going to finish this and start that. Then I/my family/business can . . .

Do you notice that this future planning tends to be all about us and how great and wonderful we are? We assume that all of our plans will work out perfectly for us and those we love. We believe we’ll end up at the top of the heap like a senior in high school. But we’re ignoring what *can* happen even within the next hour: a car accident, downturn in the economy, a sick child or parent, cancer. So how do James’ words challenge you today? Are you counting on the future or living today?

Want an example? I love the lifestyle my husband and I are living right now. Our sons are married and growing their families, our parents are all with Jesus, we’re healthy, I work part-time at a job I enjoy, we have a business together, and I get to write my devotionals and have wonderful times with the Father. Barney works four days a week so we have Fridays off. I get to join him on business trips so can see new places and meet new people.

But Barney’s job isn’t a good fit for him. So what are we to do? He’s looked at other jobs, but nothing’s worked out. We can plan, scheme, and dream, but the conclusion that we’ve come to is to say, “We will live where He’s placed us and do what He’s given us to do; God’s in charge.”

Only God knows what’s around the corner that He has prepared for us to face and walk through, and Barney and I want to be ready for what He has in store for us. We’ve set aside money for retirement and gratefully don’t have any debt. We’re ready to go in any direction He leads. Life is to be about Him, not about us and our boasting and bragging, planning and scheming.

What are you looking at and counting on these days? How is Jesus making a difference right where you are today and how you think about tomorrow and next year? Have you brought Him into your thinking and so enjoy the freedom that comes from walking with the Father?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 5:1-6

“The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.”

At first glance, this section makes me glad that I’m not rich. But in contrast to the rest of the world, you and I *are* rich. So what is James telling us? From the viewpoint of the *last days* (v. 3), here’s what we’re experiencing:

- Wealth rots.
- Moths eat our clothes.
- Gold and silver corrode; their corrosion will testify against us and eat our flesh like fire.
- While hoarding our wealth, the fair wages we should have given to those who have worked for us are crying out against us.
- We live in luxury and self-indulgence, fattening ourselves on feasting days (holidays).
- We condemn and murder innocent men [and women] who haven’t done anything against us by ignoring them.
- *Therefore*, we should *weep and wail* because of the misery our choices will bring us.

Do you see the common thread in James’ statements? What rots is what’s alive, probably food stuffs that have been stored for too long. Moths eat clothes that aren’t being worn much and just filling up closets. Metals corrode when they’re exposed to air (so they can be seen?) and not cared for properly. When we amass and store food, clothes, and metals rather than use them, they lose their value. Amassing wealth of any kind and self-indulgence lead to greed and selfishness.

I’m not sure James was seeing this condition among the believers he was writing to because of that he says in the next section, but I know the Spirit is using his words to speak to us. If so, what are we to do? James says we’re to *weep and wail*. Is this what you cry over? Jesus said:

- Don’t store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.
- But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . . for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
- Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. Matthew 5:19-34

Years ago as young Christians, we used to say that we held lightly to our earthly treasures because we knew they’d all burn eventually. As I’ve gotten older, this viewpoint has gotten harder to cling to but has become even more important. How are you viewing your car, home, and other earthly treasures? How tight is your hold?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 5:7-12

“Be patient, then, brothers [and sisters], until the Lord’s coming . . . and stand firm.”

Now we can see yesterday’s section in context. Wealthy people were taking advantage of and abusing their Christian brothers and sisters, and James is putting this situation into perspective.

Do you need perspective today in your circumstances? Perhaps James’ words are those the Lord wants you to hear.

The farmer plants his seeds and waits. While waiting for his valuable crop to mature, he lives life. He watches the rains come and go, but he doesn’t dig up the seeds to see how they’re doing. He waits and stands firm. Finally he’s rewarded with his crop.

The prophets of old spoke and then suffered the consequences that came with their words—often torture. They didn’t waiver and wonder; they spoke the truth and waited for the final harvest. They were blessed because they persevered.

Job lost his family, his wealth, and his health. All he had left were his wife, his friends, and his God. Job stayed in his circumstances and counted on his God, waiting out his wife’s and his friends’ “encouragement.” Then God met him in a new and deeper way that has blessed all of us who have read his story. Job got more children, more wealth than he had had before, and health to enjoy his later years. And while he learned first-hand that God is full of compassion and mercy, he also learned that God is God.

What encouragement James is giving us! But if we’re going to stand firm while we wait for God’s timing to make all things right, James also warns us about two behaviors that will trip us up:

- Grumbling against others
- Being people who can’t be counted on to do what we say

Does either phrase describe you? Both indicate that we’re giving into the stress around us instead of standing firm and waiting with God to act.

The Lord *is* coming back. He *will* reveal motives and hearts. He *will* reward those who have persevered. Choices and actions *do* have consequences. Do you need to stand firm today, waiting with God until He chooses to act?

Walking With the Father Through James

James 5:13-19

“The prayer of a righteous man [and woman] is powerful and effective.”

I've heard this verse so many times, but reading it now at the end of this letter helps me understand what James means by a *righteous person* and why this person's prayers would be powerful and effective. This person is living the life Jesus died to make possible. So what does a righteous person look like?

- Lives as a servant 1:1
- Is part of a community 1:1
- Welcomes trials because of how God can use them in own life and another's life 1:4
- Depends on God's wisdom and not his own 1:5
- Believes God's wisdom and doesn't waiver 1:6-8
- Gets worth from God and not from a social position 1:9-11
- Endures now for then, not giving into what's easy or tempting 1:12-18
- Humbly lets the truth of the Word save him or her, letting go of the evil and filth he or she has known 1:19-25
- Knows that his actions, not his words, show what a person believes 1:26-27, 2:14-26
- Treats everyone the same—no favorites; keeps the royal law of love 2:1-13
- Has tamed his or her tongue 3:1-12
- Practices God's wisdom with humility 3:13-18
- A friend of God's, not of the world 4:1-12
- Leaves the future to God 4:13-17
- Lives today since God knows and cares and because Jesus is returning 5:1-12
- Prays— this life is too much to handle on one's own 5:13-19

This is our standard, and it's a standard that James thinks is possible to live by. But how? God has done all that He needs to do by having Jesus die on the cross so we could have a new nature through the Spirit living in us. So let's look at James 4:7-11 again to see what our part is:

submit → resist → come near → wash hands → purify hearts → grieve → mourn
→ wail → humble ourselves before the lord → be lifted up → treat others well →
then your prayers will be powerful and effective.

Where are you in this list? James longs for us to be righteous men and women. Let's long for this too and do what's necessary to get there.
