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**A ten part Quiet Time series on the letter of James**

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**Authentic Christian Living according to the half-brother of Jesus**

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**Port Elizabeth Church of Christ**

[www.pecoc.co.za](http://www.pecoc.co.za)

(some material taken and adapted with permission from the Fox Valley Church of Christ)

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## Lesson 1 : Trusting through Trials

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The fastest growing “churches” in the world push an agenda of prosperity and health, claiming that God promises His people freedom from poverty, sickness and difficulties in this Age. But the Bible says something very different, making it clear that suffering and difficulties are part and parcel of the life in Christ, and are there for good reason – to build our reliance on God and to grow us in our faith and character to become more like Jesus, the ultimate suffering servant. This is a main theme in the book of James.

### James 1:1

- James wrote this letter to Christian Jews who had been dispersed throughout the known world by a succession of defeats and being taken into exile by other nations over hundreds of years
- His readers were undergoing severe hardship and persecution from their Roman rulers as well as from unconverted Jews and even fellow Christians, and were starting to return to their Hebraic ways in order to avoid such trials
- In his letter James calls his readers to live authentic lives in Christ, and he describes what such a life looks like
- *Take time to think of some ways in which Christians nowadays can compromise the standard of discipleship of Jesus that we are called to*
- **As you go through these Bible studies, allow the Word of God to help you identify areas of compromise in your own life and undertake to commit or recommit fully to the Lordship of Christ, with the help of God and His people**

### James 1:2-4

- James “cuts to the chase” with this challenging passage on how to think about trials
- Notice the three words in verse 2 that are essential to accepting this challenging teaching – because we know for certain that God will use trials for our benefit
- James presents two truths about trials: (1) they are inevitable and (2) they have a purpose
- *What can we expect based on the statement that we will have “various” trials?*
- *What is the purpose of trials?*
- The word translated “testing” means “approved” – it was a word used for pottery that had gone through the furnace without cracking and so been proven strong
- *How does this knowledge help you to understand the value of trials/tests?*
- Trials are opportunities rather than pointless sufferings - the heat of the furnace is not to make us crack but to solidify God’s strength in us
- God’s purpose in every trial is for us to develop endurance which brings completeness in the life of Christ
- *Can you become mature and complete in Christ if you avoid trials rather than undertaking to persevere through them?*

### James 1:5-8

- James provides two reasons why tests often get the better of us: (1) lack of wisdom and (2) lack of faith
- We may not be fully prepared for every test that comes our way, and that’s OK
- *How does James say we should then respond (vs 5)?*

- James is not talking about general wisdom but about **wisdom as the ability to view a test from God's perspective**
- Without this kind of wisdom, we will find it very hard to endure through tests and even harder to mature as Christians
- A lack of faith also causes tests to get the better of us (vs 6-8)
- James calls for faith that abandons our own will to God's and trusts His purposes in our trials
- *What does James call a person who wants to do their own will and God's will at the same time? (NIV 2011 & ESV = "double-minded"; HCSB = "unstable")*

### **James 1:9-12**

- Both the rich and the poor are called to let the trials/tests go on regardless of circumstances and to not cut short the process that will bring about maturity
- *What is the promise for those who respond to trials with Godly faith and commitment to God's purposes?*
- "Blessed" means the fullness of Godly joy that comes from fulfilling God's purpose
- In the ancient world crowns were worn to depict four distinct things: Joy, Royalty; Victory and Honour. All of these are probably in view as James speaks of the "crown of the life" of the Age to Come that we wear both now and as a guarantee of its fullness in the Resurrection

### **Psalm 34:19**

- Even righteous people will be tested by troubles, but God will "deliver" them
- This does not mean God will prevent troubles from coming our way, but He will give us the strength to endure and even thrive through them
- *Do you see how this promise links up with James' view of trials?*

### **Romans 5:1-5 and 1 Peter 1:6-7**

- Paul and Peter also taught about the value of trials
- *What are the similarities between these views of trials and those of James?*
- You will notice, for example, that while James uses pottery language to describe the refining aspect of trials, Peter uses the refining of gold at high temperatures to make the same point
- Also notice how each Apostle speaks of the sure hope of the Resurrection as a motivation to persevere through trials

#### **Build conviction**

- **Think of a test or hardship you have been faced with in recent years. What approach best describes how you approached them: (1) you tried to avoid them or you prayed that God would take them away, or (2) you embraced them as opportunity to mature and become more complete in Christ?**
- **What would you mainly like to change about how you view trials in future?**
- **Share these thoughts and what you have learnt from this study with a brother or sister in Christ**
- **Memory scripture : James 1:2-4**

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## Lesson 2 : Topping Temptation

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Trials and temptations often go hand in hand – whenever we face severe trials there is a temptation to find a way out of them rather than to persevere through them. The Christians that James wrote to were giving in the temptation to avoid the persecution and difficulties they faced. We also are in a spiritual warfare in which we are continually tempted to blend in with the ways and culture of the world, and the cycle of temptation described by James as a warning to the early Christians can also help us to stand firm.

### James 1:13

- James presumes temptation will come; He writes “When tempted ...” not “If tempted ...”.
- Temptation is part and parcel of life. We can’t be blamed for the presence of temptation, but we are responsible for how we respond
- *Have you ever blamed God or someone else when you have fallen to temptation?*
- It is important to realise that God does allow us to be tempted but He is not responsible for the temptation itself which comes from a combination of a world in rebellion to God and human desire to do our own will.

### James 1:14-15

- Temptation follows a consistent process:
- First, the bait is laid out: The word “enticed” is a fishing term – in the same way that bait used by fishermen needs to be very attractive to fish, so Satan ensures that we are tempted in alluring ways
- Second, our inner desire is attracted to the bait: We are attracted to the bait when we are hungry for fulfilment of our physical and spiritual needs and do not go to God to meet those needs. Satan knows how to promise fulfilment in alluring ways that lead us away from true fulfilment in God
- Third, sin occurs when we yield to the temptation: We fall to temptation when we allow temptation to meet up with the sinful desires in the recesses of our minds
- Fourth, sin results in death: sin often brings temporary periods of pleasure but it ALWAYS leads to spiritual death
- *Good fishermen know what bait to use in different conditions to catch different species of fish. What temptation/s are you particularly susceptible to?*
- *Recall a time when the process described by James has played out in your life. At which step in the process do you think you should have resisted Satan? How would that practically play out when you are tempted again with your particular “bait”?*

### James 1:16

- The word “deceived” literally means “to be led down the wrong path”
- Temptation will have us exchange a truth for a lie that never leads to contentment
- Read **Proverbs 27:20** – the eyes of man are never satisfied. Each time we say yes to temptation we believe a lie, start living that lie and it becomes harder to say “no” the next time.

### James 1:17-18

- Victory over temptation comes through dwelling on the truth that true contentment comes from God (vs 17) and living that truth (vs 18)
- We cannot achieve victory over temptation with knowledge alone. We must constantly sow God’s word into our daily living through obedience and only then will temptation begin to lose its foothold

- *Many Christians are able to withstand temptation by quoting passages of scripture that address their particular struggle/s. Think of a few scriptures that you can regularly sow into your life to help you stand firm when Satan tempts you with your peculiar "bait".*

### **Ephesians 6:10-18**

- We are in a spiritual battle whether we like it or not, and the battlefield is our minds
- God gives us the tools to defeat Satan but we still need to take up those tools and use them
- Satan's flaming arrows come in the form of Thoughts, Ideas and Conclusions (TICs)
- Every action that we ever taken is a result of our TICs
- Being aware that our spiritual battle is going to take place in the mind should help us to be properly prepared

### **Genesis 3:1-7 and 2 Corinthians 11:3**

- *Can you see the 4 step process described by James in play in Satan's temptation of Eve and how the battle against sin is waged in the mind?*
- Temptation starts in the mind and there is a saying "Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny."
- If we don't control our thought life we will reap a destiny of destruction

### **Ephesians 4:22-24**

- Every sin starts with wrong thinking about God, about ourselves, and about the truth of the thing that is tempting us
- To be Christ-like involves controlling our thoughts
- *What is the connection between dying to self and putting on the life of Christ and the way that we think and control our mind?*

### **Philippians 4:8**

- *Take a while to think about some things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy (NIV translation)*
- *Why is it so important to let our thought dwell on such things?*

### **Psalm 119:9-11**

- *What is the truth contained for us in this passage?*
- We cannot achieve victory over temptation with knowledge alone
- We must constantly sow God's word into our daily living through obedience - only then will temptation begin to lose its power

### **Build conviction**

- **What areas of your thought life can be the most difficult or tempting for you: anger, bitterness, lust, envy, critical thoughts, others?**
- **What can you do differently in future to be better prepared for temptations in these areas?**
- **Read 2 Corinthians 10:5 – How might you apply this scripture help you to stop temptation from developing into sin?**
- **Memory scripture: James 1:13-15**

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## Lesson 3 : Head, Heart and Hands

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In the first two studies, we looked at what James had to say about trials and temptations. In this lesson we will look at another of James' main themes - the importance of **behaving in line with what we claim to believe**. Put differently, ensuring that our thoughts (head) are aligned with God's word and that this translates into our choices (heart) and actions (hands).

### James 1:19-20

- We need to be quick to listen: One reason that our lives are often divorced from God's truth is that we don't really hear what God says
- *Have you ever known someone (a child perhaps) that heard what they wanted to hear? Have you ever done this?*
- We can know the Bible very well without ever really hearing it and letting it change our behavior in the way that God wants to
- We should be slow to speak: It is impossible to speak and learn at the same time - before we can learn we must learn to control our own opinions and tongues
- *Would people who are close to you call you a good listener and learner? If you are not sure, ask a few people*
- We should be slow to become angry: God's word cannot take root in our hearts if our hearts are already filled with our own feelings, emotions, opinions, resentments, etc
- We must learn to control these things to make room for God's word
- *Can you recall a time when your emotions got in the way of you living out God's Word?*
- *In hindsight, what could you have done differently?*

### James 1:21-22

- The phrase "moral filth" actually referred to ear wax that keeps you from hearing properly
- The "evil that is so prevalent" refers to hidden sins and attitudes of the heart
- We cannot embrace biblical actions if we are so set on other things that we cannot really hear what God's word is calling us to do
- *What part does having a proper attitude play in being successful in anything?*
- Having an attitude of humility is essential in hearing and receiving the truth
- James doesn't just say be "doers" without knowing the word of God, or knowing why we are called to put the word into practice
- *Why does God want us to be both hearers and doers of His word?*
- Many Christians confuse agreeing with the word with obeying it, but those who live authentic lives in Christ apply the word that they hear – they don't look for the "minimum requirement" of discipleship but fully live it out

### James 1:23-25

- James compares God's word to a mirror. *How is the Bible like a mirror?*
- Unlike a mirror that only reflects the outward appearance, the scriptures reveal our inner character and motives
- The one who only hears the word of God quickly forgets what the scriptures reflect
- The doer, however, gives careful attention to what he hears, responds actively, and applies it
- It seems stupid to look at yourself in the mirror and then forget what you saw and that is James' point exactly - it's just as stupid to hear the word of God and not actively obey it and put it into practice
- *What does this passage say will happen to those who continue to do what the word says?*

### **James 1:26-27**

- For the authentic “doing” Christian there is no divorce between the truth and the tongue (vs 26)
- Widows and orphans were the two most prevalent symbols in the ancient biblical world for the helpless and disempowered that Christians were to lay down their lives for
- James is saying that someone who claims to be a Christian but does not control his tongue so that it matches his life, and does not live in such a way so as to lay down their life for others (especially those in most need), then their Christianity is a “hearing” one only rather than a “hearing and doing” one

### **Mathew 7:24-27**

- There are many parallels between the book of James and Jesus’ so-called Sermon on the Mount which provides the most comprehensive and challenging teaching on life in the Kingdom of God.
- Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount with this truth – it is only possible to live according to Kingdom principles and values if one is solidly grounded in the word of God
- *How would you summarise the similarities between what Jesus’ said and the teachings by James on putting the word into practice?*

### **Psalm 119:97-106**

- Notice how similar James’ view of the word of God is to that of the Psalmist
- *List and meditate on the benefits that the Psalmist associated with studying and obeying God’s word*

#### **Build conviction**

- **What are some glaring examples in our world today where people say they believe one thing but act differently?**
- **How would you describe your walk as a Christian:**
  - **Have you made enough effort to know God’s word?**
  - **Have you made effort to know God’s word but have not allowed it to bring about change in your heart (choices and will) and actions?**
  - **Or can you honestly say that your active reading of God’s word brings about changes in your choices and actions, resulting in a life that is aligned with the scriptures?**
- **James makes a case to help the disenfranchised in society as an outpouring of our knowledge of the Bible and our desire to put it into practice. How have you been doing in this regard? If you feel you can do more to help people in need, prepare a plan to make it happen. Share your plan with someone close to you who can hold you accountable.**
- **Memory scripture: James 1:27**

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## Lesson 4 : Pride and Prejudice

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*Can you think of a time when you made a judgment about someone or something and turned out to be completely wrong?*

The truth is that no one can determine the heart of another person by their outward appearances. Any prejudice of that sort is a community killer in the family of God and is totally opposed to the values we are called to live by. This is precisely what James addresses in the opening half of chapter 2

### James 2:1-4

- The word “favouritism” here means “judging with respect to outward appearances or circumstances”.
- James is not talking about necessary discernment of another’s character or actions but about making judgments based on external factors
- Faith in Christ and favouritism or human partiality are simply incompatible
- *Why do you think that is true?*
- In our context, James’ example would probably be that of a rich and famous person walking into our fellowship followed by a poor homeless person
- *What would it indicate if the rich and famous person was welcomed by many and invited over to many houses while the homeless person was barely noticed and not invited to anything by anyone?*
- *How would you respond if you saw two such people walking into our church service? Who would you gravitate towards and why?*
- James makes it clear that this kind of partial treatment is discrimination and it does not belong in the family of God

### James 2:5-7

- In Biblical times, social problems were closely connected to religious issues – poverty and piety normally went hand-in-hand and wealth and wickedness belonged together
- *Is it true that all poor people are guaranteed their salvation and that all rich people are doomed?*
- James speaks in general terms – it is true that poor people generally see their need for God more than wealthy people do, but it is also possible for rich people to become disciples if they are generous and willing to share (e.g. **1 Timothy 6:17-19**)
- The real issue for God is the heart and not the wallet or any other external factors

### James 2:8-11

- Prejudice is inconsistent with God’s word
- We are called to love our neighbours (rich and poor alike) as ourselves
- *What are some ways that we can show prejudice in the family of God nowadays?*
- It might be easy to think, “Okay, so we’ve got a few shortcomings when it comes to prejudices but we’re not as bad as others, at least we’re not murderers !”, but James rejects that line of thinking in vs 10-11

### James 2:12-13

- The word of God alone and not the values of the world should determine our actions
- Love and mercy is our language - we are not to act in judgment and prejudice but are to show God’s mercy to all, regardless of outward appearance or worldly standards
- *Can you think of one example of Jesus showing partiality to anyone?*
- *Have you ever shown favouritism to someone based on their external appearance or position in life?*

## 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

- Some disciples in Corinth were starting to view things from a worldly perspective – in particular they were adopting the Corinthian culture of idolising intellectual skills and were starting to associate with people who they regarded as important based on worldly standards
- Paul reminds them that most of them weren't from powerful or wealthy families and that their worth was found only in Christ – the only thing they should boast about was that they knew the Lord
- *Have you ever wanted to spend time with or to be seen with someone based solely on their importance in the world?*
- *What is the main motive for wanting to be associated with such people?*

## Acts 10:34 and Colossians 3:11

- God does not show favouritism – He accepts people from all nations and backgrounds into His family
- This reality results in cultural diversity in the true family of God and there may be a tendency to form close friendships only with people who are like us
- *Do you clearly see how this attitude is a form of favouritism that is not aligned with values by which we are called to live in God's family?*

### Build conviction

- **Have you formed close friendships with disciples from a variety of backgrounds, or do you tend to spend time mainly with disciples who are similar to you?**
- **When you look at other disciples do you primarily see followers of Christ who are maturing into his likeness, regardless of their race, wealth, qualifications, career, etc (Galatians 3:27)?**
- **If this study has helped you detect any pride or prejudice in your heart, confess it to God and a disciple who is close to you, undertake to be more merciful and less judgemental in future, and be accountable to someone who can help you to change**
- **Memory scripture : James 2:12-13**

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## Lesson 5 : Belief and Behaviour

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Biblical faith starts with belief but also goes way beyond that. It also includes obedient action and a determination to persevere. This understanding is the foundation of James' teachings on faith and deeds.

### John 8:31-32

- *What principle can we learn from this passage about what we say and what we do?*
- A Biblical principle is that if someone says they believe something then it will show in their actions - if not, then they have not really believed it in the first place
- Our actions reflect what we really believe, and this is at the core of what James writes about faith and deeds

### James 4:14-16

- It's important to remember that James was writing to Christians who had already been saved through their faith in Jesus and entering into his life – in other words he was not speaking about earning salvation through good works
- James is saying that the faith of Christians needs to be reflected in the lives that they live
- Poverty was a real issue for many of the Christians that James wrote to and he stresses that words alone are not enough to help those in need
- Poverty is still an issue in the church today and we too are called to practically look after brothers and sisters in need and not just wish them well
- The principle of this passage can be extended to each area of our life in Christ
- *Think of an area where your beliefs could be better backed up by practical action. What could you change this week to ensure your faith is fully reflected in action?*

### James 4:17-19

- Authentic faith is accompanied by deeds - faith without action is no faith at all
- Vs 19 is best translated as "You believe that God is one" (e.g. Holman Bible) and is a reference to a foundation of the Jewish faith captured in the beginning of the Shema: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." (**Deuteronomy 6:4-5**)
- James is warning his readers that merely mouthing their core beliefs is not good enough – they needed to live in a way that reflected their obedience and love for God
- *Are there any Christian sayings that have become mere clichés for you? Things that you easily say but which you do not always put into practice?*
- That mere belief is not enough is also clear from the fact that Satan and his demons also believe in God and they clearly do not have authentic saving faith

### James 4:20-25

- James uses Abraham and Rahab as examples of people who displayed authentic faith i.e. faith accompanied by action
- Abraham was willing to do one of the most difficult things imaginable – kill his own son
- To make it even more difficult, Isaac was the one through whom God's promises would be realised. Abraham clearly had faith that God would raise Isaac from the dead, and was willing to act on this faith in a radical way
- Rahab risked her life to hide a group of Israelite spies and had enough faith in God to take this risk

- The lessons from these stories is that authentic faith is displayed in situations that are difficult and dangerous – acting on our faith only when it's easy to do so is not displaying authentic faith

### **James 4:26**

- Just as the body without a spirit is not alive, faith without deeds is dead
- Claiming to have faith without living a life that is aligned with that faith is like seeing someone without a pulse and claiming that he is alive

### **2 Corinthians 5:7**

- The context of this chapter is the resurrection of believers
- Living by faith does not mean that everything is going to work out fine – it means we believe in the coming Resurrection Age (something we do not see yet) and we live according to the values of that Age now
- Faith causes us to live in a completely different way to the world around us, in anticipation of God's presence and ways filling the earth one day

### **Matthew 9:1-2**

- Jesus could see their faith, meaning that their faith was demonstrated in their visible actions
- They believed in Jesus and took action on that belief
- *If Jesus had to spend a week with you, would he be able to say the same about you, based on the life that he observed?*
- *Or would he see somebody who claims to be his disciple but who doesn't live as though he is Lord of their life?*

#### **Build conviction**

- **Do you believe that disciples of Christ are called to help people in need? Is your belief reflected in the amount of time you spend assisting and encouraging the poor?**
- **Do you believe that prayer and reading God's word are essential to the life of discipleship? Is your belief reflected in the effort you put into praying and reading the Bible?**
- **Do you believe that discipleship involves being ambassadors of Christ? Is your belief reflected in your announcing of the Kingdom of God?**
- **Do you believe that you were baptised into God's family with responsibility towards your brothers and sisters? Is your belief reflected in how you prioritise your time and relationships?**
- **Do you believe that discipleship involves sacrificial giving? Is your belief reflected in the percentage of your income that you give to the church?**
- **Do you believe that disciples of Christ are called to live in the light? Is your belief reflected in how openly and regularly you confess sin?**
- **If your beliefs and behaviour do not match up in any of these areas of discipleship, prayerfully undertake to make changes that will help your faith to be clearly shown by what you do (James 2:18)**
- **Memory scripture: James 2:26**

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## Lesson 6 : Taming the Tongue

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The ability to communicate verbally can be used in support of, or in opposition to, God's purposes. A major theme in James is that the authentic life in Christ is characterised by the careful use of the tongue. This study starts with a brief background to the role that languages play from God's perspective, and then considers James' teachings on this topic.

### Genesis 11:1-9

- In those times there was only one language, and mankind united to rebel against God - they tried to become like God by building an extra high tower
- God decided he had enough of their wickedness so he confused their language – he slowed down the evil that mankind could get into by slowing down their ability to communicate with each other
- The fact that we have many different languages and cultures in the world are a reminder to us that mankind is in a longstanding rebellion against God

### Acts 2:5-8

- The disciples announced the Kingdom of God on the day of Pentecost by miraculously speaking in different languages so that everyone who was present from various nations could understand
- *Do you see how was this a reversal of what God did in Genesis 11?*
- God unified people to do His will by effectively removing the language barrier to communication
- This was a powerful symbol that God was transforming language to be a powerful medium to take His Kingdom message throughout the world, and that He was creating a people that would not rebel against Him

### Proverbs 18:21

- This does not literally mean that the tongue as an organ can kill someone or bring them back to life
- But there is great power in our speech - how we speak is important and has an effect on our hearers

### James 3:1-6

- The context of this passage is teaching and the main point is that those who teach need to be very careful about what they say since their words can affect the destiny of those that they teach
- However, this is also a general truth that applies to all disciples – we all need to choose our words carefully
- *What three images does James use to describe the impact of the tongue? How does each relate to the dangers of ungodly speech?*
- *What do you think of the saying: "Sticks and stones may break your bones but words will never hurt you?"*
- *Think of a time when you have said something and then regretted saying it because of hurt or damage that it caused. How could you have better handled the situation that led you to say what you did?*

### James 3:7-12

- In referring to the tongue being evil and full of deadly venom, James probably has **Psalm 140:3** in mind
- James is primarily concerned about the impact of the tongue on the community of believers - praising God and cursing people with the same tongue would be totally out of place, like a fresh water spring producing salt water or a fig tree bearing olives
- In what ways can an individual disciple's speech "poison" the local congregation that they are part of?

### James 4:11-12

- Slander is defined as making false statements that are damaging to a person's reputation
- Rabbis in Jesus' day referred to slander as the "third tongue" because three people were hurt by it – the speaker, the person spoken to and the person spoken about
- A person who slanders is clearly in sin and therefore his or her relationship with God will be affected. But how can slander hurt (a) the person who is spoken to and (b) the person who is spoken about?
- *What do you think is your responsibility if someone speaks to you about someone else in a slanderous manner?*
- We are also not to judge a brother or sister, meaning that we are not to make a value statement about others e.g. that he is a bad person or has a bad heart. Speaking like this about others is in the same category as slander

### Ephesians 4:15

- It is clear for verse 14 that the context is false teaching –we need to speak to each other about areas in our lives that we see do not match up with the word of God
- We are to speak to one another to help make sure our doctrine and life match up, and to do it in love

### Hebrews 3:12-13, 10:24-25

- We mainly encourage and spur each on through the spoken word
- The root of the Greek word translated "encourage" means to "walk alongside". What does this say about how we should encourage one another?

### Acts 1:8, 1 Peter 3:15

- Disciples of Jesus are called to be his witnesses
- *What is the role of a witness in a court case and how does this relate to how we are to use our ability to speak to help expand the Kingdom of God?*
- *As a disciple, you should be willing to share the hope that YOU have in Christ. How would you describe this hope in your own words?*
- *Why is it important to witness with gentleness and respect?*

### Build conviction

- **Can you recall any times when you have spoken badly about a brother or sister in his/her absence?**
- **If so, consider apologising to him or her as well as to the person you spoke to, and undertake to be more aware of slander and judging others in future**
- **How willing are you to point out to other disciples areas in their lives that are not aligned with the word of God? How should you go about doing this, in love?**
- **Think of someone in the church who needs encouragement and encourage him/her this week**
- **Prayerfully ask God to open doors to allow you to share the hope that you have in Christ with non-believers in the course of next week, and that you will do it with gentleness and respect**
- **Memory scripture: James 3:9-10**

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## Lesson 7 : What is Wisdom?

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Ancient Hebrews understood the meaning of wisdom very differently to how most people nowadays understand the concept. Greek philosophers going back to the third century BC had much to do with the change in understanding. They placed great emphasis on knowledge for knowledge sake. For example, the Greeks introduced a form of debate that elevated oratory skills over the content of what was being discussed. This contributed to the strong association of wisdom with cognitive or intellectual ability rather than with living a life of obedience to God which is the understanding of wisdom that we find in the scriptures.

### James 3:13-18

- In characteristic style, James cuts to the chase in his very first sentence on the topic – those who are truly wise will demonstrate it in lives that please God
- “Wisdom” that is based only on knowledge and which is accompanied by sinful attitudes such as envy, boasting, falsehood and selfish ambition is a worldly form of wisdom
- *Where does James say that this form of wisdom ultimately originates from? (vs 15)*
- Wisdom from God, on the other hand, is accompanied by fruits of the Holy Spirit and righteousness
- *Take a few minutes to prepare two lists of the elements of worldly wisdom and Godly wisdom respectively, and carefully take note of the differences*

### Job 28:12-20

- Job starts this passage asking the question where wisdom can be found and he then considers various possible worldly sources and worldly ways to achieve wisdom
- *What is his final conclusion where wisdom is found?*
- Only God knows the way to true wisdom (vs 23) and provides it if we fear Him (vs 28)

### Proverbs 9:10

- To attain Godly wisdom requires a reverent fear of God
- *Think for a while about what it means to have a reverent fear for God and why is this essential to achieve true wisdom*

### Proverbs 2:1-6 and Psalm 111:10

- These passages show a clear link between knowing the word of God, obeying it and becoming wise
- A reverent fear for God helps us to take His word seriously and to obey Him, and this in turn leads us to true wisdom
- Wisdom can be defined as knowing and obeying the word of God or, put differently, as doing the will of God
- True wisdom is far more valuable than any earthly treasure and therefore is worth pursuing

### Proverbs 2:7-15

- Some results of attaining wisdom are provided in these verses
- *Take a while to list the various benefits associated with being wise*

### 1 Corinthians 1:24,30

- Paul referred to Jesus as the wisdom of God
- Do you see how this truth derives from the fact that Jesus knew God’s Word and did His will perfectly? (e.g. **John 4:34, 6:38**)

### **Ephesians 3:10**

- Paul also referred to the church as the embodiment of God's wisdom to the world
- *What is the link between the church and Godly wisdom, based on the Biblical understanding of wisdom, and the example set by Jesus?*

### **James 1:5**

- According to James, we can pray for wisdom and God will answer our prayers
- *Based on the Biblical understanding of wisdom, do you see how praying for wisdom needs to be accompanied by effort on your part to understand the will of God through His Word and to put the scriptures into practice?*
- Passively praying for wisdom would be like not studying for an exam and praying just before the time that God will fill your head with the knowledge so that you can pass

#### **Build conviction**

- **Would you rate yourself as being wise in the sight of God?**
- **What would you need to do to become wise or wiser than you currently are?**
- **Spend some time praying for true Biblical wisdom, and make a commitment to God to learn more about His word and to put it into practice – this will demonstrate a willingness to partner with God in becoming wise**
- **Memory scripture : James 3:17**

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## Lesson 8 : Wrong and Right Relationships

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As explained in the first lesson, the Christians that James wrote to were starting to compromise with the culture around them in order to avoid severe persecution. This worldliness spilled over into their relationships with one another, something that can easily happen nowadays too.

### James 4:1-3

- It's difficult to believe that James is writing to Christians here – they were quarrelling and fighting, coveting what others had and praying for selfish things for their own pleasure
- *Would you agree with the statement that the world culture can be summarised as "It's all about me!"? Do you see how having such a view of things could easily lead nowadays to the type of behaviour that James addressed?*
- James also mentions murder but it's likely he is referring to attitudes of the heart rather than actual murder, in line with Jesus' teachings in **Mathew 5:21-22**. Under the New Covenant in Christ we need to watch our thoughts and attitudes as much as our physical actions.

### James 4:4-6

- Not only does compromise with the world affect our relationships with one another - it deeply affects God since He is a jealous God
- Compromising with the ways of the world is the same as being a friend with the world, and that sets us up as enemies of God – we cannot be friends of God and the world at the same time
- When we side with the ways of the world when we know God's will for us, it boils down to pride but we can always rely on God's grace if we humbly repent
- Read **2 Timothy 3:1-5**. The people that Paul is warning about are also behaving in ways totally opposed to God's values. In verse 5 we read that they will have a form of godliness, suggesting they will come from the church
- *Do you see how easily we can slip back into the ways of the world if we are not on our guard?*
- *What precautions can you take to ensure you consistently reject the culture of the world and stay focused on living according to God's values?*

In the next four verses (4:7-10), James mentions six things we should do to avoid compromising with the world and behaving towards each other in ways that are detestable to God. Try to identify these on your own before reading the commentary below.

### James 4:7-10

- Firstly, we must be willing to submit completely to God – Jesus needs to be Lord of every area of our lives
- Secondly, we must resist the devil who is the "Prince of this world" (e.g. **John 16:13**) responsible for the worldly culture that stands so opposed to God. To resist the devil means to resist the values and culture of the world. If we are a friend of the world then we are a friend of Satan
- Thirdly, we should draw near to God, meaning we need to individually and collectively embrace God as our loving Father even as we submit to Him as our King. God exercises His rule through relationship with a strong communal element - our relationship with God should be reflected in our relationships with one another

- Fourthly, we need to be willing to sacrifice- “Wash your hands and purify your hearts” is Old Testament language associated with sacrifice. Rejecting the behaviour that characterises the ways of the world requires sacrifice – it is simply impossible to live as an authentic disciple of Christ committed to Godly relationships with one another without being willing to sacrifice/ taking up our cross daily (**Luke 9:23**)
- Fifthly, we need to take our sin seriously (“grieve, mourn and wail”). James is quoting from the second beatitude in **Matthew 5:4**, where the mourning refers to an attitude of brokenness over sin.
- Finally, we need to humble ourselves before God. Choosing to behave according to the patterns of the world is an act of pride (vs 6), while doing the will of God takes humility.

### **Ephesians 4:1-3, 25-26, 29-32**

- *List the various ways we are called to behave towards one another in God’s family (you should be able to list at least 10)*
- *Think for a while about how these are completely opposed to the unrighteous behaviour described in James 4:1-4*

### **Philippians 3:20**

- Authentic Christians have their citizenship in heaven – they live according to the values of the Age to Come, anticipating the time when only God’s ways and values will fill the earth
- *What will relationships be like in the Age to Come? How does this challenge you to work on your relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ?*

#### **Build conviction**

- **It is easy to be critical of the behaviour of the Christians that James wrote to and say that we will NEVER behave like that towards others in the church. However, as you read in Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus made it clear that having wrong attitudes of the heart are as serious as physically acting out anger and hatred**
- **Can you think of a time when you had a negative attitude towards a brother or sister? How did you get resolved?**
- **Read Matthew 5:23-24 – What does this challenge you to do if you did not get resolved? How would you handle such situations in future?**
- **Are you deeply convicted of the need to be completely unified with your brothers and sisters in Christ?**
- **What could you perhaps do to strengthen the unity in the church that you are part of?**
- **Memory scripture : James 4:6b-8a**

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## Lesson 9 : Patience and Perseverance

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A recurring theme in James is that trials and hardships are part of the authentic life in Christ and have value in developing and proving faith through perseverance. Christians are called to trust and patiently wait for God to fulfil His promises through such trying times.

### James 5:1-6

- This passage of scripture provides the background to James' teaching on patience
- Much of the persecution that the early Christians experienced was economic – they were oppressed by rich merchants and farmers

### James 5:7-8

- Faithful followers of Jesus were wondering if and when Jesus would return to bring justice and vindicate his people over the rich who oppressed them
- James commands them to be patient and to stand firm since the Lord will come again to bring judgement – just as farmers expect crops while waiting patiently for the rains, so the righteous can expect God's judgement but are to wait patiently for Him to bring that about
- *How would you rate your level of patience with God? Do you easily stop praying for things when God does not answer as quickly as you like Him to, or do you faithfully continue to pray?*
- James also exhorts his readers to "strengthen your hearts", meaning that they are to be steadfast and resolute in their will to be obedient to God
- Read **1 Thess 3:13** and **2 Thess 2:16-17**. *How are disciple's hearts strengthened and what is the outcome of such strengthening?*

### James 5:9

- James then warns against the temptation for the church to turn against itself during their oppression and in their impatience
- *Have you ever taken your frustrations out on people who are closest to you? Can you see how damaging this response would be to the church if you vented your frustrations on brothers or sisters?*
- The judgement of God faces those who sin in this way, and in this regard they would be in the same position as those who oppress God's people/enemies of the church

### James 5:10-11

- Prophets were chosen by God to speak on His behalf – their message often brought them suffering and during that suffering they waited patiently for God's vindication (e.g. **Jeremiah 20:7-9**)
- Read **Matthew 5:11-12**. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus prepared his followers that they would suffer as the prophets did
- *What is your response when you are insulted or treated unfairly? Are you able to rejoice through those times because you have your sights set on heaven/the Age to Come?*
- Job is cited as an example of perseverance through suffering and of God's compassion and mercy, and God rewarded Job's endurance with restoring his fortunes in duplicate (**Job 42:7-17**)
- *What can we learn from God's treatment of Job? What can you look forward to in the Age to Come if you endure through trials and tests?*

## 1 Peter 2:18-23

- Jesus is the ultimate example of someone who endured unjust suffering, and serves as our role model
- *What is the key verse in this passage which explains how Jesus was able to endure suffering?*
- *Do you see how this links to what James wrote in 5:7-8?*

### God's people and waiting ...

God's people have had to learn to wait - His plans for restoring His relationship with mankind (salvation) span thousands of years. In Genesis 3, soon after the Fall, God promised He would crush the head of Satan. And the waiting began. Much later, God made a covenant with Abraham - He would take his small family and turn it into a great nation through which the whole world would be able to receive salvation. 450 years later Abraham's descendants are found in Egypt, still waiting on God and His promises. In the Promised Land the waiting continued. Despite warnings and great patience from God, His people disobeyed Him and Israel was split into two nations, both of which were defeated and taken into exile. The single great nation that God had promised Abraham seemed a long way away. With no land and no temple, it took great faith and patience to believe that God would be loyal to His promises. The waiting continued ...

By the time Jesus came, the Israelites had developed different approaches to deal with all the waiting for God to fulfil His promises. Five main groupings had developed :

1. The **Sadducees** basically gave up waiting for God and threw their lot in with the Romans
2. The **Pharisees** tried to move God to act through their own morality and religion, and ended up calling others to a standard that they themselves could not attain
3. The **Zealots** stopped waiting for God and tried to take matters into their own hands, losing sight of the Kingdom of God and using the ways of the world to fight against their occupiers
4. The **Essenes** dealt with waiting by withdrawing from the culture around them and creating their own protected communities
5. The **Herodians** used religion for their own selfish desires and to gain favour with those in power

## Luke 2:25-32

- Simeon took Jesus into his arms and declared that God had fulfilled all His promises – the waiting had been worth it!
- Simeon is a sharp contrast to the five groupings above: (1) he was devout, meaning he lived according to the will of God, (2) he waited patiently for God to act, not taking matters into his own hands, (3) he was guided by the Holy Spirit, and (4) his satisfaction was based solely on God's action, not his own

### Build conviction

- **Extrapolate each of the five main attitudes described above to waiting in our modern day world. For example, modern day Sadducees would give up waiting devoutly for God and trusting in His promises and would instead compromise with the ways of the world. Repeat this for the other four**
- **Which of these attitudes or responses to waiting best describes how you have lived your life?**
- **Or can you honestly say that you have the attitude of Simeon, patiently and devoutly waiting on God?**
- **What changes would you need to make to be more like Simeon?**
- **Memory scripture : James 5:7-8**

## Lesson 10 : Sermon Similarities

As mentioned upfront, James wrote his letter to teach and exhort Jewish Christian communities on how they ought to live as people of God rather than as friends of the world while they wait for the Lord's return. The letter contains many echoes of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5-7. Jesus was teaching and defining kingdom living for his listeners and this is essentially what James does for his audience.

The final lesson in this Quiet Time series provides an opportunity to read through the entire book of James once more to identify the main connection points with the Sermon on the Mount. As you read through James, be on the lookout for the selection of lessons taught by Jesus in his famous sermon provided in the following table. For each lesson, provide the equivalent passage in James.

Lesson	Matthew	James
There is a reward for those who persevere through persecution and difficulties	5:10-12	
Peacemakers (those committed to righteous relationships) are blessed by God	5:9	
The desire for worldly treasures corrupts	6:19	
God calls for an attitude of mourning over our sin	5:4	
We are not to judge one another	7:1-2	
The Word of God is to be understood and obeyed	7:24-27	
God answers prayer	7:9-11	
We are to show mercy towards others as God shows mercy towards us	5:7	
True faith is visible and goes hand in hand with good deeds	5:14-16	
Genuine disciples of Christ are recognised by their fruit	7:15-20	
We should be completely honest and trustworthy in what we say	5:36-37	
God's people humbly submit to His authority	5:5	
The ways of the world are at conflict with the ways of God	6:24	
We should live one day at a time, aligned with God's will and trusting Him	6:33-34	

### Build conviction

- **Of all the elements of an authentic life in Christ covered by James, what challenges you the most to change?**
- **Share your insights about yourself with your discipling partner and invite them to tell you what they see in you that you can change**
- **Prayerfully ask God to help you to make the needed changes in your life and undertake to make some changes this week. Offer to be accountable to your discipling partner for specific actions**