

**Episode:** James Series No. 01

**Narrator:** James

**Primary Scriptures:** James 1:19-27; 2:8-26; 3:1-12; 4:11-12

**Story Summary:** Verses with content about faith and faithfulness

**Location:** Kingdom of Judea (Israel)

**Time:** Circa 50 AD

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** James 1:19, 22, 27; 2:8, 14, 17; 3:1

In modern times, one of the most hotly debated Bible verses is found in James 2:17, best known as, “Faith without accompanying deeds is dead.” It is not the purpose of this video episode or study guide to examine this verse in detail, nor to compare and contrast it to Paul’s writings. However, since the verse is so crucial to James’ thought process, it is our intent to put context around what he wrote.

It is crucial to understand what James means by the word “faith.” The Greek word he uses is *pistis*, which, according to at least one scholar, can also be translated *faithfulness*, *reliability*, or *loyalty*. It can mean *belief*, but it can also point to the personal commitment that accompanies any genuine belief.<sup>1</sup> As shown by all of the surrounding verses, James is clearly using the word in the latter sense. When used that way, almost by definition “faith without works is dead.”

Why is this point so crucial to James? *James* is possibly the first written book of the New Testament. He writes it not as a theological treatise, but as practical instructions for early Christians trying to cope with a fast-changing world. James is the leader of the church in Jerusalem, and the people in his church are struggling to survive, ravaged by famine and economic punishment from the Jewish leaders.

More than any other Christian leader, James knows it is one thing to say you theoretically believe in helping poor people, but another thing entirely to actually help them. He knows that if surrounding churches don’t act on their belief by helping his church members, then some of them will likely soon be dead. He is not making a theoretical theological statement; he is making a statement of fact.

With those things in mind, verses such as James 1:22, 1:27, and 2:14-25 might be statements of fact, in addition to theological observations, that support his conclusion in James 2:26: faith without accompanying deeds is dead.

Accompanying deeds don’t just mean physical actions but can also include the words that people use. James spends much of his letter emphasizing the importance of controlling our speech.

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<sup>1</sup> N.T. Wright, “Paul, A Biography” page 90

### Discussion Questions:

1. Explain two ways the word “faith” can be understood. Using the weather, give a simple example of how both meanings could be used.
2. Why was James so concerned about the welfare of his church in Jerusalem?
3. In James 1:22, James cautions against hearing the word, but not doing anything about what you hear. What does James say that accomplishes?
4. According to James 1:26-27, what are some things truly religious people do?
5. What good does it do to tell a hungry person to go in peace and be well fed?
  1. *Faith* can mean *belief*, or it can mean *belief accompanied by deeds that confirm belief*. You could say that you believe it will snow a lot tomorrow, but you don’t believe it enough to take precautions; or, you could say that you believe it will snow a lot tomorrow so you actually act by changing to snow tires and stocking up on food.
  2. His church members were very poor and were in danger of starving due to famines and persecutions from the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem.
  3. It causes us to deceive ourselves if we don’t do what the word says.
  4. Control what they say, take care of widows and orphans, keep from being polluted by the world.
  5. It does no good.

### Application Questions:

1. It is common for people to beg for money. What sorts of things should you consider before reacting to their requests?
2. What does it mean to look after orphans and widows in their distress (James 1:27)? Is there a practical way you could do that in the near future?
3. Consider James 2:17. Using that verse literally, which aspects of your faith life would you prove to be alive, and which would you prove to be dead?

### Applications Questions for Teens:

1. James 3:9-10 indicates that we have the ability to say good things and bad things, that we can praise God and curse those around us. How could you change the way you think and act so that you don’t do that?
2. James 4:11 says not to slander our brothers and sisters. In the modern world, that loosely translates into not saying bad things about those around us. In the last week, did you do that? How can you wean yourself from this type of behavior?
3. Christians are often criticized for being hypocritical. By that, most critics probably mean that Christians don’t act in accordance with what they say they believe. Do you find that to actually be true, or do critics misunderstand Christianity? Use a current hot button topic as an example, and use actual facts to support your answer.

**Episode:** James Series No. 02

**Narrator:** Jude

**Primary Scriptures:** James 1:22-25; 2:8; 3:17-18; 5:12

**Story Summary:** Verses with content about obedience

**Location:** Kingdom of Judea (Israel)

**Time:** Circa 50 AD

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** James 1:22-23; 2:8; 3:17-18, 5:12

True or not, the generations since World War II are often considered to be much more self-centered than previous generations. The 1950s beatniks and 1960s hippies led the charge of “doing my thing.” Since then, the notion of leading lives of obedience to people in authority seems to be receding further and further in the distance.

From start to finish, the Bible has the consistent theme that people are to be obedient to God and his chosen authoritative figures. People very often have chosen not to do this. In *Genesis*, Adam and Eve had only one prohibition...and they chose to break it. *Revelation* concludes with commands not to add or take away from the prophecy. Based on humans’ tendency to disobey, God adds some horrible warnings for those who disobey those simple commands.

James personally observed three obedient people: Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. The New Testament portrays them as being perfectly obedient. Joseph and Mary obeyed completely and immediately every time they got a message from God, while Jesus’ childhood was described as one where he was obedient to Joseph and Mary. As an adult, Jesus obeyed God so completely that he summarized his life in a prayer to God this way: “I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.” (John 17:4)

As the leader of the church in Jerusalem, James was intimately familiar with issues of obedience to God and to his chosen leaders. He recognized that problems often started with people choosing not follow God’s word.<sup>1</sup> Problems could also start when people chose to follow the letter of the law while simultaneously trying to avoid God’s desires. He recommends this solution: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>2</sup>

James recognizes that people try to disguise their actions through their words. His solution is to use simple, clear language. Both James and countless mothers through the ages recommend the same thing: let your “yes” be “yes,” and your “no” be “no.”

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<sup>1</sup> James 1:22-25

<sup>2</sup> James 2:8

### Discussion Questions:

1. Name some obedient people in the Bible.
2. Name some people in the Bible who had instances of disobedience. Were these people disobedient or did they just make a mistake?
3. In John 14:15, Jesus told his apostles that they will obey his commands if they love him. What commands was he talking about? Does your level of obedience to Jesus reflect how much you love him?
4. According to James 1:22, how can you deceive yourself?
5. Was Jesus obedient?
  1. Jesus, Joseph, Mary, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Paul, Barnabas, James. 2. David, obedient. Saul, disobedient (?). Peter, obedient. Solomon, disobedient (?). 4. By listening to the Scriptures but not following what they say. 5. Yes. John 17:4 shows how obedient Jesus was to his Father.

### Application Questions:

1. James 2:8 says to love your neighbor as yourself. Choose one of your next-door neighbors and explain how you could literally do that.
2. James 5:12 says to let your “yes” be “yes” and your “no” be “no”, without adding any swear words. What kinds of words do you add to your statements to lend them emphasis or authority? Are words like “darn” and “crud” just mild forms of swear words? Read Matthew 5:33-37. How does this passage influence your answer?
3. How can you teach your children to be obedient? What should you do when they are disobedient? Does it matter if they are disobedient in “little” things or just “big” things? Can you teach your children to be obedient if you don’t have an obedient attitude toward God?

### Application Questions for Teens:

1. Do you want to be an obedient type of person or would you rather be independent from people telling you what to do? What kinds of obedience do you anticipate you will have to exhibit when you reach adulthood?
2. Do you get in trouble at school or home for being frequently disobedient? If so, what drives that behavior?
3. When you are asked by an adult to do something, what is your typical attitude toward the person who asks you? Should you be more obedient to a parent or to your boss at work?
4. In what ways does social media influence your level of obedience?

**Episode:** James Series No. 03

**Narrator:** Peter

**Primary Scriptures:** James 1:2-8; 5:7-11

**Story Summary:** Verses with content about suffering

**Location:** Kingdom of Judea (Israel)

**Time:** Circa 50 AD

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** James 1:2-3, 5; 5:8

Most people in the modern world try very hard to avoid suffering. It is unpleasant, and few of us want to endure things that are unpleasant. Yet the Bible presents suffering not just as something that is unavoidable but also a condition that might be sent from God, something that can result in enormous benefits if endured properly.

Suffering is a major theme in the New Testament. Jesus promises his followers they will encounter it, and Paul and Peter both write about suffering for the cause of Christ. They all say that overcoming suffering has a multitude of benefits. They never said, “What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger,” but they do seem to share that sentiment.

Most English translations soften James’ opening statement, but he begins his book by saying he is a slave of God and Jesus. He is a voluntary slave, but a slave nonetheless. And slaves expect to suffer. This would not come as a surprise to his ancient audience, since up to one-third of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves.

James writes his letter to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations. This description probably means he is writing to Jewish Christians who had left Israel due to persecution from Jewish leaders. At the time this letter was written, the majority of Christians were formerly Jews. As the leader of the church in Jerusalem, James was probably acquainted with many of the Christians who had left Israel.

Our modern ears might find it surprising that James does not encourage his audience to evangelize by teaching the Gospel. Instead, he focuses on telling them how to live as Christians wherever they go. And one thing James is sure of is this: they will face temptations and tests, and will suffer. So, he opens his letter with one of the most puzzling of all greetings: “Count it all joy when you face trials of many kinds.” You can only imagine how the early, persecuted Christians who heard this must have reacted.

Much later in the letter, James encourages Christians to be patient in the face of suffering. Be patient, wait, stand firm, don’t grumble, don’t judge. In coming years, Christians will cling to these words as the Romans begin their persecution and as some succumb to their trials, recant their faith, and betray their fellow Christians.

What can those who successfully endure persecution expect to receive as their reward? Mercy and compassion from the Lord, the judge who is standing nearby.

### Discussion Questions:

1. How do you define suffering? How do you think God defines suffering?
2. What does the New Testament tell you about suffering?
3. How does James say to react when facing trials?
4. What relationships are there between trials (James 1:2-4) and wisdom (James 1:5-8)?
5. Does James 1:7 apply only to the subject of wisdom?
6. Does James 5:7-9 apply only to the subject of patience in the face of suffering, or patience in all things?
7. What is one possible implication in James 5:7-8?
8. Who does James point to as examples of perseverance while suffering?
9. What does James 5:11 tell about the nature of God? Will knowing that help you while you suffer?
  1. To expect it, especially if you follow Jesus. That suffering can produce many benefits. That Jesus suffered, so there you will suffer if you imitate Jesus.
  3. To count it as *pure* joy.
  7. That James was expecting Jesus to return in his life time.
  8. The prophets and Job.
  9. He is full of compassion and mercy.

### Application Questions:

1. James 1:2 says there are trials of many kinds. Name some of the trials you and your friends face. Which is the most difficult? How do you face that trial with pure joy? How do you define joy in that circumstance? Does James 1:3-4 help explain why you should count it joy?
2. James 1:5-8 says to ask God for wisdom if you lack it. Do you lack wisdom? Would you admit it if you did? Do you ask God for more? Why would you want to be wiser than you already are? Which book of the Bible would you turn to in an effort to learn more about wisdom? (Proverbs)
3. James 5:9 says not to grumble against your fellow Christians. What does that mean? Search the NIV for the word *grumble* and see what happened in the Old Testament when people grumbled.
4. Many people refuse to believe in God because of all the suffering and pain in the world. James 5:11 doesn't refute or give a reason for suffering, but it does maintain that God is full of compassion and mercy. Can you reconcile those things? If you cannot reconcile them, can you still believe that God is full of compassion and mercy?

### Application Questions for Teens:

1. Do you think modern media and schools teach people to avoid suffering or to endure it and grow through it? Does the saying, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger" make any sense to you?
2. How do you define *suffering*? Where do you think you got that standard?
3. Does suffering come from God, Satan, or consequences of people's behavior? Or all three?

**Episode:** James Series No. 04

**Narrator:** Last Deacon

**Primary Scriptures:** James 1:1, 9-11; 2:1-16; 3:13

**Story Summary:** Verses with content about community

**Location:** Kingdom of Judea (Israel)

**Time:** Circa 50 AD

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** James 1:9; 2:14; 3:13

The book of *James* was written about two decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus. During that time, the majority of Christians were Jews. Since Peter converted Cornelius, efforts had been made to convert more non-Jews, but the majority were still Jews. The Jews in Israel and throughout the world tried to separate themselves from other people groups through their synagogues, religious rituals, and attitudes.

The leader of the church in Jerusalem was James, and he could see how church life in Jerusalem had changed from the first years of explosive growth and excitement. Two decades later, his church was showing the effects of economic persecution from the Jewish leaders, and his members were still abandoning the city for strange new communities. The very nature of Christian communities was quickly changing.

How would a local church community change when most of the members had no concept of good behavior as set forth in the Old Testament? Who would have authority and knowledge to lead each congregation? How would Christians co-exist with non-Christian Jews in a Roman society where Jews had special privileges from the government? How would local churches relate to other local churches?

That was certainly a time when all church leaders would have to rely on guidance from Holy Spirit. In many ways, the early Church was a social experiment that had never been tried before. Christian leaders were intent on building communities that crossed national boundaries, local religions, ethnic groups, and cultural borders. And they were trying to do this in a climate where the Roman Empire was intent on establishing worship of the Roman Emperor, to the point of suppressing anything that opposed that goal.

From personal experience, James knew an essential element of building a church community was eliminating “respect barriers” based on economic factors. Poor people were equally valued in God’s eyes as rich people, and that same standard had to apply in local churches. Juxtaposed with that standard was the equally important fact that wealthier Christians needed to help poor people both inside and outside of the church. What a challenge!

Rather than proposing a large number of rules to follow, James extolled the importance of exhibiting virtues like humility, generosity, wisdom, consistency. Community was not going to happen because of rules, but because of Godly hearts.

### Discussion Questions:

1. The first Christians were Jews, and they continued to live as Jews for many years. What do you know about Jewish communities of that time? Based on that knowledge, what would James easily predict as they scattered to countries outside of Israel?
2. What were the economic circumstances of individual Christians in the early church? Did wealthier Christians receive special treatment?
3. Looking at James 3:13, how do you demonstrate good deeds in humility at your church? Read Matthew 6:1-4.
4. Should you treat fellow Christians differently than people who are not Christians?
  1. They were insulated from other people groups as much as possible. This was achieved through their synagogues, religious rules, dietary rules, and by choice. This separation became more difficult as they left Israel. They would likely become subject to ridicule and persecution whether as Jews or Christians.
  2. Some were rich, but most were poor. Many were probably free, but many were slaves. From the passage in James 1:9-10 and 2:1-7, it appears the rich Christians were maybe a little arrogant and were receiving special treatment.

### Application Questions:

1. Do the wealthier people at your church receive favorable treatment? How much of that is due to the nature of having more money (i.e. more choices of time usage, giving more money, better education) versus the special treatment actually given to them? Do you think rich people should be more humble, and that it is harder for them to live a life like Jesus wants? Are there other types of people who should be very careful? (for instance, teachers as discussed in James 3:1-2)
2. As you have aged, have you changed the types of people you admire? For instance, do younger people tend to admire wealthy and famous people, whereas older people might admire joyful, healthy and wise people?
3. Which types of people do you show favoritism to? How do you show it?
4. Which types of sin are more dreadful than others? (James 2:8-11)

### Application Questions for Teens:

1. What types of people do you admire? How do you know whether you admire someone? Do you show favoritism to them? Do you reward celebrities by buying the products they endorse even when they lead lives God probably doesn't approve of?
2. Would you rather be rich, poor, or somewhere in between?
3. What are spiritual dangers that rich people face?
4. What does it mean to be humble? Can you be humble while striving to be good at something?



**Episode:** James Series No. 05

**Narrator:** Barnabas

**Primary Scriptures:** James 1:5-8, 17-18; 3:13-18; 4:5-10; 5:7-20

**Story Summary:** Verses with content about wisdom

**Location:** Kingdom of Judea (Israel)

**Time:** Circa 50 AD

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** James 1:17; 3:13, 3:17-18; 4:7; 5:8, 12, 13-15

Barnabas was well known for being an encourager. He very likely was just as well known for being wise, sent to take care of Paul after his conversion, becoming Paul's tutor and sounding board for more than a decade. When there was a problem in the early church, he was likely called on for his advice and influence.

Barnabas was unwise in two events. Not necessarily sinful, but unwise and costly. The first was when Peter and he stopped eating with the Gentiles in Antioch,<sup>1</sup> an action he came to recognize as a mistake. The other instance happened at the advent of the Second Missionary Journey, when Barnabas wanted to take Mark but Paul refused because of Mark's previous abandonment of the First Missionary Journey. Barnabas and Paul had a sharp, harsh disagreement which caused them to part ways. It would have been to everyone's benefit to have had an amicable parting.

There is no doubt that Barnabas had a high regard for wisdom. You can imagine the number of hours he and the other church leaders spent trying to find the wisest solutions to the church's problems and opportunities, as well as the hours spent in prayer asking for wisdom from God.

James wrote that wise people should demonstrate their wisdom by doing good deeds with a spirit of humility. He said that selfish ambition and envy are evil practices and not to boast about them. James could have been thinking about Barnabas when he wrote those things. Barnabas is introduced in *Acts* when he generously sold land to support the local church and humbly gave all of the money to the apostles.

Think of all the other wise people James got to be around and learn from. Joseph and Mary. Jesus. All the apostles. The people in his church. An unending number of people to teach him about wisdom and its benefits.

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 2:13

### Discussion Questions:

1. What is the source of wisdom? How do you get it?
  2. How can you demonstrate that you are wise and have understanding?
  3. Is there anything wise about being envious and having selfish ambition?
  4. What are some characteristics of heavenly wisdom?
  5. How does God deal with proud people? How does he deal with humble people?
  6. Name one aspect of how we should relate to God and to Satan.
  7. Is it wise to go to extremes to avoid suffering? Is that wise?
  8. Describe one reason why Job was wise.
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1. It is a gift of God. You get it by asking him for it. 2. By humbly doing good deeds 3. No, it is unspiritual and demonic. Do not boast about it. It causes disorder. 4. It is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, merciful, impartial, sincere. 5. He opposes the proud. He shows favor to the humble, and lifts them up. 6. We should submit to God, and we should resist Satan. 7. When suffering comes, it is wise to be patient and persevere through it. 8. Even though he could not understand the reason why he suffered, he continued to have trust in God.

### Application Questions:

1. What are some ways you can gain knowledge? What about wisdom? What's the difference between the two?
2. How do you handle your own envy and selfish ambition?
3. Would your friends describe you as humble? If not, does that mean they think you are a proud person?
4. How can you oppose Satan when it comes to the digital distractions of our modern age?
5. What type of suffering do you go to extreme lengths to avoid?

### Application Questions for Teens:

1. How can you oppose Satan when it comes to the digital distractions of our modern age?
2. When it comes to the people who are popular at your school, are they more typically proud or humble? Do you tend to admire proud people or humble people?
3. Can you think of any celebrities who are humble?
4. Is being wise important to you?
5. Compared to the past, knowledge is now almost infinitely available to us through the internet. Does that cheapen the importance of wisdom, or does it make wisdom much more valuable?

**Episode:** James Series No. 06

**Narrator:** King Solomon

**Primary Scriptures:** James 1:6-16; 2:1-7; 3:14-16; 4:1-17; 5:1-6

**Story Summary:** Verses with content about foolishness

**Location:** Kingdom of Judea (Israel)

**Time:** Circa 50 AD

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** James 1:6, 12; 4:1, 3; 5:1-3

King Solomon is reputed to be the wisest man who ever lived. While this may have been true for a period of his life, he also acted as foolishly as any man who ever lived. Through his five hundred wives and three hundred concubines, he introduced and instilled idol worship in Israel, which became the initial impetus for the nation's downfall and destruction.

From the writings of King Solomon, it is undeniable he had knowledge of what constituted wisdom and what constituted foolishness. Whenever he acted foolishly, it was by his own informed choice, and as his distant relative, James almost certainly knew all of King Solomon's writings and actions.

One of James' biggest problems was the persecution of the Jerusalem church by the Jewish leaders. He surely wished they had taken Gamaliel's advice to leave the church alone, since it would flourish if God wanted it to and would perish if it was human-based. If they persecuted the church, they might be fighting God, which was a foolish thing to do.<sup>1</sup>

One of the outcomes of the foolish behavior of the Jewish leaders was that it inadvertently helped spread Christianity. James may have recognized it as a bittersweet thing, since it shrunk the size of the Jerusalem church and led to many Christians giving up under the stress of persecution.

Watching the many members of his church, James surely became an expert in the wide variety of things people can do to be foolish. But no matter how foolishly they behaved, he possibly thought he had no room to criticize them. After all, he was around Jesus his entire life and was unable to recognize Jesus as the Messiah until after his death.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 5:33-40

### Discussion Questions:

1. After you ask for wisdom, it is foolish to do what?
  2. What makes a person unstable?
  3. Is it wise or foolish to treat rich people with favoritism?
  4. What causes fights and quarrels among Christians?
  5. Why doesn't God give us what we want?
  6. Can you be a friend of the world and a friend of God?
  7. How should we treat business opportunities?
  8. Is it a sin to choose not to do a good deed?
  9. Is it foolish to be rich?
1. Doubt that God will give it to you. 2. Unbelief and doubt. 3. It is foolish to treat them with favoritism, but it is wise to treat all people with the respect due them. 4. Desires and coveting. 5. We don't ask God, we ask with the wrong motives. 6. No. 7. As possibilities that only come to fruition if it is God's will. Otherwise we are boasting. 8. James 4:17 says, "if anyone knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them." 9. It is foolish to act foolishly whether rich or poor. The rich have many opportunities to acts foolish by mistreating poor people or people who depend on them.

### Application Questions:

1. Name something foolish you have done. How could you have avoided that foolishness?
2. Do you treat anybody with favoritism? What makes you want to do that?
3. Do you treat the advice of a celebrity, politician, or pundit with more validity than wisdom from the Bible?
4. Read James 5:1-6. Do you think that means rich people should be condemned Christians? What does the New Testament say about rich people?

### Application Questions:

1. When you follow the advice of a celebrity or purchase items because of their endorsement, are you treating them with favoritism? Why do you care what a celebrity thinks?
2. What is the last foolish thing you did? Why did you choose to do that? Do you tend to be foolish because you don't have knowledge or because you are not wise?
3. Who are the wisest people you know? Who are the most foolish people you know? How can you be more like the wise people, and less like the foolish people?