

FEBRUARY 2019

TODAY IN THE WORD™



Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:4

MATURE FAITH: The Book of James

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WELCOME MBI PRESIDENT DR. MARK JOBE

Dr. Mark Jobe began as Moody's 10th president in January. We are rejoicing at the Lord's provision of a visionary Christian leader to shepherd Moody Bible Institute in the years ahead. The son of missionaries, he grew up in a rural village in Spain. At age 17, he left to attend MBI. After experiencing culture shock, he considered leaving Chicago after graduation but was challenged by a pastor's words: "If we reach the city, we are reaching the nations."

For the past 32 years, Dr. Jobe has served as the lead and founding pastor of New Life Community Church in Chicago. He and his wife, Dee, have seen the church grow from a handful of people to some 7,000 people meeting at 27 locations throughout the Chicagoland area and in eight cities internationally.

Mark and Dee Jobe have been married 32 years and have three adult children. Dr. Jobe ('84, '98) and his son Josiah ('16) are MBI graduates, where they found a solid foundation in Bible and theology balanced with practical ministry experience. "Moody Bible Institute is filled with people who want to make a difference for Christ and who keep evangelism at the forefront."

Dr. Jobe is the author of *Unstuck: Out of Your Cave and Into Your Call* (Moody Publishers) and the host of *Straight*



Dee and Mark Jobe

Talk, a program heard on Moody Radio. God has captured his heart with a vision for the future of Moody's education and media ministries. "I know this ministry in the heart of Chicago has the power and ability and potential to impact not only Chicago but the world in some incredible ways."

He recalls the example of founder D. L. Moody. "I look at this place and I think, This place was started 132 years ago by a simple man who loved Jesus and could barely pronounce *Jerusalem*. He loved to reach people who were far from God. His heart was full of a simple faith that said, I want to reach as many people with the gospel as possible." ■

FROM THE EDITORS

by Jamie Janosz

Do You Know *Your* Love Language?

February is a good month to celebrate the love we have in Christ—and the love we have for one another. Dr. Gary Chapman, author of *The New York Times* bestselling book *The 5 Love Languages*, says we each experience love in different ways. How do you feel loved? How do you express love to others including your spouse, your children, and your friends? Dr. Chapman breaks down our preferred love language into five categories. Do you recognize yours?

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION—You appreciate hearing kind and loving words that build you up. Whether it is a loving inscription on a Valentine’s card, a phone call “just because,” a scribbled note left on the kitchen counter, or a message on Facebook, words make you feel loved and appreciated.

RECEIVING GIFTS—You feel loved when someone picks out a gift especially for you. For you, “it’s the thought that counts” is especially true. You don’t care whether the gift is large or small but that it was selected with you in mind. It means that the person was thinking about you and cared enough to show you a token of appreciation.

ACTS OF SERVICE—Your heart is warmed when someone does

something for you. Maybe they offer to cook a meal, unexpectedly wash the dishes, or do a load of laundry. All of these acts—especially when done without prompting—can be felt as an act of love.

QUALITY TIME—You love when someone gives you their undivided attention. You love doing things together with the person you love. Especially when they shut off their cell phone or have a heart-to-heart conversation over a cup of coffee. Talking and listening make you feel appreciated.

PHYSICAL TOUCH—You are someone who loves the nearness of those you love. Nothing speaks more deeply to you than appropriate touch. It can be as simple as a hug or maybe holding hands. Being near to those you love fills your heart to overflowing.

The newly constructed Chapman Center on Moody Bible Institute’s Chicago campus has a hands-on exhibit that helps visitors understand and appreciate their love language. If you are in Chicago, be sure to visit! You can also take a free online assessment to discover your love language and begin improving your relationships: 5lovelanguages.com. ■

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by Dr. John Koessler

Faith and Works

The most famous verse in the book of James may be the assertion that faith without works “is dead” (2:17). What is the relationship between faith and works in the Christian life? Does James contradict Paul’s teaching that we are saved by faith apart from works (Rom. 4:6; Eph. 2:9; Titus 3:5)? In fact, James and Paul agree. James assumes the priority of faith, and Paul acknowledges that those who are saved by faith have been “created in Christ Jesus to do good works” (Eph. 2:10).

We do not add our actions to faith in order to be saved. Faith expresses itself in action. For this reason, James speaks of action as the evidence of a faith that already exists. James affirms what Paul teaches by contrasting true faith with false or “dead” faith. Works or actions are the fruit of a faith that saves, not the basis for our salvation. We are saved by faith in Jesus Christ apart from any effort of our own. Yet those who are saved in this way are enabled to put their faith into practice by the transforming work of Christ and the power of His Spirit.

When considering the relationship between faith and works, the order is critical. In the Christian life faith always

precedes works. If we reverse the order, the relationship between the two becomes toxic. Our acts of obedience are grounded in the knowledge that Jesus earned our righteous standing by His own obedience, and He paid the penalty for our sins by shedding His blood on our behalf. This is the only work sufficient enough to reconcile us to God (Heb. 9:14; 1 Peter 3:18).

Consequently, our good works are not an attempt to earn salvation after the fact. Instead, they are expressions of gratefulness for a salvation already received. The believer’s good works belong to the realm of sanctification, the progressive work of God’s Spirit by which He makes us holy. Sanctification follows justification, God’s declaration of our righteous standing based upon the finished work of Jesus Christ. We contribute nothing to our justification, but we cooperate with the process of sanctification. As Martin Luther observed, before we take Christ as our example we must first receive Him as a gift. ■

FOR FURTHER STUDY

To learn more, read *James: Faith that Works* by R. Kent Hughes (Crossway).

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MANAGING EDITOR

Heather Moffitt

SENIOR EDITOR

Elena Mafter

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Jamie Janosz

John Koessler

WRITER

Brad Baurain

ART DIRECTOR

Lynn Gabalec

GRAPHIC DESIGNERS

Larry Bohlin, Rachel Hutcheson

MARKETING & PRODUCTION

Paul B. Currie

MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

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TODAY IN THE WORD™

Mature Faith: The Book of James

Ukrainian poet Vasyi Stus, member of a dissident movement and fighter for Ukrainian independence, died in a Soviet labor camp for political prisoners in 1985. He called on his fellow Ukrainians to pursue truth, justice, honesty, and love until the end. Stus stayed true to the principles he set forth in his poems and articles to the point of death—he died in prison as a result of a hunger strike. And he never gave up hope for his native land. In 2005, the president of the new, independent Ukraine awarded Stus the highest national honor: Hero of Ukraine.

At the very beginning of the book of James, we read about trials and testing that produce perseverance, which leads to maturity. Mature faith, as a gift from God to believers, is our topic this month in *Today in the Word*. As we read through this letter, we'll look at maturity in its connection with good deeds, wisdom, prayer, and self-control. We'll see that mature faith seeks not worldly justice but God's, that it's patient and expectant, and that it submits humbly to God.

In our world today, described by many as post-Christian and post-truth, the call for Christians to follow “the way and the truth and the life” with mature faith is a matter of life or death. We pray this month's study will help you on this road, “so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:4). ■

—Elena Mafter, Senior Editor

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To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

James 1:1

Greetings

The Epistle of James was written by a brother of Jesus. James did not believe in Jesus during His earthly ministry (see John 7:5) but responded in faith when Jesus appeared to him after His resurrection (see 1 Cor. 15:7). He was a leader in the Jerusalem church and made a key speech during the Jerusalem Council of A.D. 49 (Acts 15). Though he felt called to evangelize Jews, he affirmed Paul's call to evangelize Gentiles (see Gal. 2:9). He was executed for his faith in A.D. 62.

His epistle was likely the first book written in the New Testament! Since it doesn't refer to the Jerusalem Council, it was probably written before that key event. Many scholars date it in the mid-40s or earlier, prior even to Galatians.

James addressed his epistle to Jewish believers scattered throughout the Roman Empire—no doubt including those who had been persecuted and

fled Jerusalem after the martyrdom of Stephen (see Acts 8:1). Given the Jewish audience, it's no surprise that in his letter James refers or alludes to 22 books of the Old Testament.

His tone and purpose are pastoral, and the letter focuses on practical matters about how to live the Christian life. Topics include obedience, good works, speaking and listening, favoritism, and the temptations of wealth and worldliness; but the main theme is persevering through trials in order to grow to mature faith (vv. 2–4).

This epistle includes a mix of other genres. It often reads more like a collection of proverbs or aphorisms (its most common literary technique) than a letter, and thus it has much in common with wisdom literature. Several passages also feature prophecy-style condemnations of sin or sermon-style exhortations to righteousness.

APPLY THE WORD

As you prepare your heart and mind for our study of James, we encourage you to prayerfully request from the Lord a spiritual openness to what He has to teach you this month. Don't decide ahead of time what that might be. Be ready for anything, agreeing with the psalmist: "Your word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens" (Ps. 119:89).

PRAY WITH US

Please join us in prayer for Moody's Facilities Maintenance team as they work diligently on various repair and painting projects on campus. We are grateful for the service of Paul Heggeland, Thomas Addison, and Vincent Camera.

Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete.

James 1:4

SATURDAY
FEBRUARY

2

Testing Leads to Mature Faith

Pastor David Gibson wrote in his book *Destiny*: “There is one, undivided God—‘the LORD our God is one’—and because God is like that, then he must be approached and worshiped by one undivided person: all your heart, all your soul, all your strength. In other words, all of you. Every single bit. God is not pulled in different directions. So neither should we be in our worship of him.”

To worship God with an undivided heart is a mark of spiritual maturity. The way that we grow to such maturity is by persevering or enduring through trials (vv. 2–4). The term *trials* indicates the difficulties or troubles of life that we should expect in this fallen world. Scripture doesn’t say “if” they happen, it’s “whenever” they happen. But trials are not merely “bad stuff that happens”—they can also be tests sent by God to refine us and burn away our impurities. The phrase “mature and complete, not lacking anything”

indicates a spiritual wholeness or completeness. This purpose is the only reason we can consider the process to be “pure joy.”

Thankfully, we don’t have to persevere or endure on our own. If we lack wisdom about how to do so, we can ask God and He will answer (v. 5). Furthermore, He will do so “generously” and “without finding fault,” meaning that there’s no shame in asking.

The key to this prayer is expectant faith (vv. 6–8). Faith is not a magic key. The point is that prayers asking for God’s will to be done in our lives will always receive a “yes” answer. To think otherwise is to be “double-minded and unstable” or to have divided loyalties, a kind of hypocrisy. Responding to trials like “a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind” is immature (see Eph. 4:14) and misses the blessing of standing firm in faith (James 1:12).

APPLY THE WORD

Verse 5 offers today’s application. Are we puzzled about how to “count it all joy”? Life’s troubles are, well, troublesome. Difficulties are difficult. Trials are painful. If we lack the wisdom to consider these things joy in light of eternity, we can ask God for help. He will give us eyes of faith to see His good purposes in the struggles of our lives.

PRAY WITH US

Please add the rest of Facilities Maintenance team to your prayer list: John Addison, Carl Bierga, and Matthew Morris. Our prayer is that the Lord would protect them as they sometimes have to climb high ladders and operate heavy equipment.

For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant.

James 1:11

Mature Faith Understands What Is Eternal

“What a tragic waste,” wrote John Piper in *Don’t Waste Your Life*, “when people turn away from the Calvary road of love and suffering. All the riches of the glory of God in Christ are on that road. All the sweetest fellowship with Jesus is there. . . . All the deepest discoveries of God’s Word. All the most earnest prayers. They are all on the Calvary road where Jesus walks with his people. . . . On this road, and this road alone, life is Christ and death is gain.”

Followers of Christ should live lives that prioritize and pursue eternity! Today’s passage underscores that mature faith understands what is of eternal value. It does so by treating poverty or “humble circumstances” as one of the trials of life (v. 9). To persevere or endure the suffering that poverty brings is therefore an opportunity to grow toward mature faith (v. 4). For this reason, the trial of poverty can be considered “pure joy”

(v. 2) and poor believers can “take pride in their high position” spiritually. This is true despite the fact that poverty can be a result of sin, for example, when the rich exploit the poor (see Feb. 22).

Continuing the reversal, rich believers are to “take pride in their humiliation” (v. 10; see 1 Tim. 6:17–19). Whereas worldly people boast in their wealth and social position, followers of Christ instead rejoice that the first have become last, and the last first, in the eyes of God (see Luke 13:30).

James puts earthly wealth and poverty into proper spiritual perspective. Riches are temporal and thus ultimately worthless (v. 11). As even the world says, “You can’t take it with you.” To pursue such things is to head for “ruin and destruction” instead of toward mature faith (see 1 Tim. 6:8–10; Matt. 6:24).

APPLY THE WORD

Some preachers and teachers call themselves Christians and convince many people to think that faith is primarily a means to material blessings in the present life. According to God’s Word, whether we are rich or poor, our best life is *not* here and now. Instead, believers live with eternity in view and pursue far more lasting treasures.

PRAY WITH US

Please uphold in prayer another campus maintenance team at Moody—Exterior Maintenance Services. The landscaping work of Ryan Yoder and Nathan Detwiler is evident as soon as you enter MBI’s beautiful campus in Chicago.

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial.

James 1:12

MONDAY
FEBRUARY

4

Testing Is Not the Same as Temptation

When C. S. Lewis wrote *The Screwtape Letters*, many were impressed by his insights into the dynamics of temptation. They assumed he had done many years of theological study. He responded by referring to Psalm 36:1: “They forget that there is an equally reliable, though less credible, way of learning how temptation works. ‘My heart’—I need no other’s—‘showeth me the wickedness of the ungodly.’”

God sends testing and trials, but He only allows temptations. He Himself is utterly holy and righteous. He cannot be tempted and so does not tempt us to sin (v. 13). While testing comes from outside, temptations come from within. The fact is that our own sinful desires entice us to disobey God (v. 14). When we give in, we’re “dragged away” by them. This is forceful and even violent language—the language of prey pursued and caught by a ruthless hunter.

Yielding to temptation is contrasted with enduring testing and troubles. On the one hand, evil desires result in sin, and the consequence is death (v. 15). Ironically, James used the language of growth, namely conception and childbearing, to describe the genesis of sin. On the other hand, perseverance or endurance results in spiritual growth leading to mature faith (vv. 2–4). This is a very different growth process!

For those who persevere under trial, God has promised the special blessing of a “crown of life” (v. 12). James was likely picturing the victory laurel presented to a winning athlete or a conquering general. But God promises an eternal reward, far more valuable than earthly riches. Part of gaining wisdom (v. 5), then, is understanding the clear-cut choice we have between one path that leads to death and another that leads to life.

APPLY THE WORD

The “two paths” motif occurs often in Scripture. As an example, read Psalm 1. The first three verses describe the path of a righteous person, while the next two describe the path of the wicked. Verse 6 summarizes the outcomes: “For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.”

PRAY WITH US

Praise God together with us for Moody’s new president! Support Dr. Mark Jobe in prayer as he hosts Moody Founder’s Week 2019 on our Chicago campus. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide Dr. Jobe on this first day of Founder’s Week.

Every good and perfect gift is from above.

James 1:17

Mature Faith Is God's Gift

In 1885, a Russian czar commissioned Carl Fabergé and his family jewelry business to create a special Easter gift for his wife. They designed a beautiful white egg, inside of which was a gold “yolk.” Inside of that was a golden hen, and inside of that was a miniature diamond crown and a tiny ruby egg. Known as the “Hen Egg,” this was the first of 50 such jeweled eggs created over a span of 32 years as royal gifts.

Gifts from God are much more beautiful and valuable than Fabergé eggs! As James wrote, “Every good and perfect gift is from above” (v. 17; see Matt. 7:11). Thus far in the epistle, we can see that His gifts include the ability to persevere under trial, wisdom to take an eternal perspective on trials, the process of growth whereby trials can lead to spiritual maturity, and the crown of life awaiting those who successfully endure trials.

By starting today’s reading with “Don’t be deceived,” James underscores that we shouldn’t misunderstand God’s character (v. 16). He doesn’t tempt us to sin, for that’s contrary to His holy nature. He’s not trying to trick us into falling. He’s on our side. When He sends trials, it might not feel that way, but He truly has our best interests at heart. This is an unchanging reality. The sun and moon wax and wane, but He is their Creator and “does not change like shifting shadows.”

God’s best gift is, of course, salvation in Christ: “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth” (v. 18). The “birth” is spiritual rebirth, that is, being born again. The Jewish believers to whom James wrote were indeed “firstfruits” in that they were the first believers in Jesus—the early (earliest!) church. From saving faith to mature faith, it’s all a gift of our loving Father!

APPLY THE WORD

If you’ve never accepted God’s gift of salvation, do so today! Read the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3. That’s the context for the most famous summary of the gospel: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

PRAY WITH US

Please lift up in prayer the rest of our leadership team who work closely with Moody’s president in charting the direction for our ministries. Please also pray for the speakers and participants of Founder’s Week as it continues on campus.

Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent.

James 1:21

WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY

6

Mature Faith Accepts God's Word

In *Redeeming How We Talk*, Ken Wytmsa and A. J. Swoboda write: “Next to prayer, listening is perhaps the best way to create a positive context for conversation. Listening forces us to exchange hats with others, to walk in their shoes. When we exchange hats, we develop empathy and understanding. Then we can more tenderly voice our concerns or offer our advice.”

No wonder James exhorted us to be “quick to listen” (v. 19)! This admonition draws on the tradition of wisdom literature (see, for example, Prov. 10:19). In this context, several questions are also implied by today’s reading: What is appropriate behavior for those of us who have received God’s good and perfect gift of salvation? Exactly how can we endure trials and troubles in order to grow to mature faith?

To be “quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry” is the

beginning of James’ answer, which extends over most of the rest of the book. To listen more than to speak demonstrates self-control, as opposed to hasty words and actions that characterize ungodly anger. That behavior does not “produce the righteousness that God desires” (v. 20). Listening and self-control are part of godly perseverance and lead toward the righteousness and spiritual maturity that God desires.

The principle here is to “get rid of all moral filth”—including rash words and unrighteous anger—and instead to “humbly accept the word planted in you” (v. 21). Doing so will be countercultural, for evil is “prevalent” in the world. This will require humility or meekness. The verb “accept” enlists our wills and actions while keeping God’s will and actions primary. He, not us, did the planting and He, not us, is the One who accomplishes our salvation.

APPLY THE WORD

As often happens in the book of James, today’s passage contains the application: “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry” (v. 19). God gave us two ears and only one mouth for a reason! We encourage you to go through your day asking for the Holy Spirit’s help in listening well and speaking wisely.

PRAY WITH US

Doug Hastings, vice president of Moody Radio, welcomes your prayers for his teams in various areas of Christian broadcasting ministry at Moody. Give praise to the Lord for Moody Radio’s wonderful new studios and offices at the Chapman Center.

Mature Faith Obeys God’s Word

A 2014 survey of “The Bible in American Life” found that only 48 percent of Americans reported reading any Scripture at any time during the previous year. Among those who did, the percentages were significantly higher for women, older people, Southerners, and African Americans. Just 9 percent of Americans, however, said they read the Bible daily.

To obey God’s Word, one must at least read it! Mature faith is characterized by obedience to Scripture. Accepting the Word (v. 21) means allowing it to influence all parts of your life. This isn’t some abstract or esoteric process—it’s straightforward. “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (v. 22). The listening must be active rather than passive; that is, a response is needed. This idea is consistent with what we read throughout the Old Testament. The command “Hear, O Israel” was not

merely an invitation to listen but an exhortation to obey.

To do anything else is self-deception. It would be like a person who gazes into a mirror and then forgets what he looks like (vv. 23–24). James’ example is both funny and tragic. The information received from the mirror is useless. It made no impact. He didn’t do anything with it. In the same way, Christians who hear God’s Word and then continue to live as before are tragic fools.

When an obedient person looks into the mirror of Scripture—the “perfect law that gives freedom”—they see a true reflection of self in relation to God (v. 25). A maturing follower of Jesus does not forget this truth but lives within and by it. This person “continues in it,” a phrase that highlights the link between obedience and endurance. That’s why such people “will be blessed in what they do.”

APPLY THE WORD

If you desire a deeper study of the book of James, one practical commentary you might find helpful is *The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing*, by Zane C. Hodges. Another option is *The Letter of James*, by Douglas J. Moo, with more detailed explanations and analyses. Ask the Lord to help you put knowledge into action.

PRAY WITH US

Would you include in your prayers Joe Gonzalez, Chris Wright, Scott Carlon, and Deborah Massey, the staff of KMBI, Moody Radio station in Spokane, Wash.? We thank the Lord that their ministry has touched thousands of lives to make a difference for eternity.

*I urge you to live a life worthy
of the calling you have received.*

Ephesians 4:1

FRIDAY
FEBRUARY

8

Mature Faith: Contrasting Examples

The mission statement of the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago is to “serve with the compassion of Christ and minister with the transforming message of the Gospel.” For over 140 years, America’s oldest rescue mission has reached out to the hungry and the homeless with food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and biblical preaching. Last year they were able to help more than 1,100 people every month.

Serving the poor is a blessed and godly activity (v. 27; see Ps. 41:1; Prov. 14:21). Today’s reading offers one negative and one positive example related to obeying God’s Word in this area. The negative example is the self-deceived person. Such people can’t remember what they look like in the mirror (v. 26). They “do not keep a tight rein on their tongues,” they lack self-control in the area of words and communication (see also James 3:1–12). As a result, while they consider themselves religious,

actually “their religion is worthless,” meaning futile or hypocritical. What’s the point of claiming to be a Christian if you don’t act like one?

The positive example is the person who hears the Word, obeys, and is blessed (v. 27). They “look after orphans and widows” and stay away from worldliness. Helping the poor and the powerless is selfless, because no possible advantage can be gained. God Himself evaluates it as “pure and faultless.” For the epistle’s Jewish readers, this was consistent with what they already knew about the Lord’s love for the poor (see Ex. 22:22–23; Deut. 10:18; Isa. 1:17). God even goes so far as to say that serving the poor helps us know Him better (Jer. 22:16).

Spiritual devotion must have practical effects on observable behavior. James continues to emphasize that our study of the Word must be accompanied by “Do what it says” (v. 22)!

APPLY THE WORD

How are you doing in the area of self-control with words and communication? Undertake prayerful self-examination, especially in the area of social media. Are your words meaningful, reasonable, empathetic, and kind? It’s God grace that teaches us how “to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives” (Titus 2:12).

PRAY WITH US

The last day of Founder’s Week 2019 is designated as Moody Alumni Day. It’s an opportunity for all of us to pray for our alumni, asking God to bless their visit on campus for alumni events and reunions and praising God for their ministry.

SATURDAY
FEBRUARY

9

*Has not God chosen those who are poor
in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith?*

James 2:5

Mature Faith Does Not Show Favoritism

Symbols of social status in America tend to be material goods. The person at the wheel of the sleek sports car is powerful. The one wearing expensive designer clothing is wealthy. The individual with the latest piece of pricey technology is ahead of the curve. The people seated in box seats or first class need not mix with ordinary folks.

These are worldly standards and ways of thinking. James would have none of it in the body of Christ! For us who have received God's "good and perfect gift" (1:17) of salvation in Christ, worldly favoritism is not appropriate (v. 1). For example, what if two men came to your church, one in fashionable clothes and one in rags (vv. 2–4)? The worldly response would be to pay more attention to the rich man and usher him to a good seat while ignoring or giving minimal attention to the poor man. In that case, James emphasizes, you've

"discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts."

Worldly favoritism goes against biblical principles (vv. 5–7). God has chosen the poor to be "rich in faith" and to "inherit the kingdom." The rich who exploit the poor and commit other injustices should not be honored for such behavior. Their actions blaspheme God's name. To show favoritism toward them, therefore, is hypocritical and worldly, the opposite of looking after widows and orphans (1:27).

We tend not to see favoritism as a serious sin, but God does. To Him it is a perversion of justice (see Lev. 19:15). Peter even cited this principle in the context of sharing the gospel with Cornelius and his Gentile household (Acts 10:34–35). In His sovereignty, "God does not show favoritism" based on fallen human standards.

APPLY THE WORD

What measures of social status do you seek? Do you try to feel better by acquiring material things or exotic experiences? Ask the Lord to search your heart for any inclination toward the sin of favoritism. Renew your focus on things of eternal significance, and remember that your true value lies in your relationship with God, not your position in society.

PRAY WITH US

Vice President Debbie Zelinski leads a group of Human Resources professionals on Moody's Chicago campus. Please commit to prayer this team as they oversee many aspects of our faculty and staff employment, including benefits and compliance.

Mercy triumphs over judgment.

James 2:13

SUNDAY
FEBRUARY

10

Mature Faith Knows Love and Favoritism Can't Mix

In Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*, one character pleads in court for another to be forgiven of his debt: "The quality of mercy is not strained; It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. It is twice blest; It blesseth him that gives and him that takes. . . . It is enthroned in the hearts of kings, It is an attribute of God himself; And earthly power doth then show likest God's when mercy seasons justice."

As James wrote, "Mercy triumphs over judgment" (v. 13). At the beginning of chapter 2, he argued that favoritism is sinful and not to be practiced by mature believers. In today's reading, he points out that favoritism violates the "royal law" of loving your neighbor (v. 8). The phrase translated "royal law" indicates the Mosaic Law's greatest commandment and its two dimensions of loving God and loving your neighbor.

The law is an organic whole. To break any part of it is to break all of it (vv. 9–11). One study Bible explains: "The law is the expression of the character and will of God; therefore to violate one part of the law is to violate God's will and thus his whole law." This means that since showing favoritism breaks a commandment, it is thus rebellion against God and therefore a complete breakdown of our Christian identity and discipleship.

Mature faith, with its disposition to obey the Word, does not show favoritism. What we should do instead, in following the law of love, is to be merciful (vv. 12–13; see Prov. 21:13; Matt. 5:7). This is the "law that gives freedom." We to whom God has shown mercy should in turn show mercy to others. Since James was addressing believers, the "judgment" here relates to rewards received from God, not salvation.

APPLY THE WORD

Jesus' parable of the unmerciful servant and God's forgiveness in **Matthew 18:21–35** is a wonderful portrait of God's perspective on how we should be merciful. The Psalms also make many prayerful references to mercy, especially **Psalms 57 and 116**. Review these passages to help incline your heart toward mercy.

PRAY WITH US

We invite you to keep praying for our Human Resources staff. We ask the Father to guide and encourage Joseph Bolz who provides compensation analytics as well as Peter Miller and Rachel Paul who oversee employee benefits.

MONDAY
FEBRUARY

11

Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

James 2:17

Mature Faith Is Seen in Good Deeds

Commentator Zane C. Hodges described the relationship between faith and good works: “[W]orks are in fact the vitalizing ‘spirit’ which keeps one’s faith alive, in the same way that the human spirit keeps the human body alive. Whenever a Christian ceases to act on his faith, that faith atrophies and becomes little more than a creedal corpse. . . . Faith remains vital and alive as long as it is being translated into real works of living obedience” (v. 26).

Mature faith is seen in good deeds. This is the simple point of today’s reading. Yet these verses have long been debated; indeed, this passage is why Martin Luther once called James an “epistle of straw.” But is James preaching salvation by works? No. The controversy is based on a misunderstanding.

James was writing to believers, as we can see from his repeated address

to “brothers and sisters” (v. 14). This passage is not about salvation at all. James is describing how we as believers should live out our faith. From this practical perspective, faith without good works is “dead,” that is, worthless or useless (v. 17). As some have said: “We’re justified by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone” (see Eph. 2:8–10).

The example in this passage makes it clear (vv. 15–16). If a fellow believer is in need of clothing or food and one responds with kind wishes, “what good is it?” Talk is cheap. John makes precisely the same point that genuine Christian love for those in need is demonstrated in action (1 John 3:17–18).

James’s response to a rhetorical objection drives home the point (vv. 18–19). Faith without deeds is inconceivable; the idea is nonsense. Living faith always acts in ways that fulfill the “royal law” of love (v. 8).

APPLY THE WORD

Are you aware of a believer with material needs? Do you have resources that could help? Then today’s application is clear. You might give directly or go through the deacons or benevolence fund at your church. As Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40).

PRAY WITH US

Please include the remaining Human Resources employees in your prayer time today. May Lud Anderson, Darric Obinger, Michelle Hughes, and Mia Gale walk in God’s love and reflect it to those with whom they interact daily at Moody.

*His faith and his actions
were working together.*

James 2:22

TUESDAY
FEBRUARY

12

Mature Faith and Good Deeds: Example of Abraham

How do we know Abraham had faith in God? Scripture tells us we know it by what he did (Heb. 11:8–19). He left his home to go to an unknown country. He trusted God to keep a humanly impossible promise to give him and Sarah a son. He was willing to sacrifice that son at God’s instruction. His works didn’t save him—salvation comes only by faith. But his works were the evidence of his faith!

James stated that “his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did” (v. 22). One demonstrated the other. The phrase “made complete” means “made mature” or “brought to maturity.” James illustrated the point he had been arguing throughout this letter, to which only a “foolish person” would object (v. 20).

If it was true for Abraham the Patriarch, then it was true for all Jews and all

followers of Jesus the Messiah. Furthermore, if God’s testing of Abraham (by asking him to sacrifice Isaac) had helped bring him to maturity (v. 21), then persevering in trials could do the same for James’s readers (1:2–4).

Interestingly, Paul used the same example to argue that Abraham was saved by faith not works (see Romans 4), while James used it to illustrate the necessary connection between faith and works. They both quote Genesis 15:6 (v. 23; Rom. 4:3)! Their points are not in conflict but in harmony with one another.

James maintained that Abraham’s faith was verified or shown to be authentic by his actions (v. 24). He was “considered righteous” by others because they had external evidence of his internal faith. Or as Paul put it, “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Gal. 5:6).

APPLY THE WORD

Is your faith seen in your actions? Gospel words without a gospel life will not be listened to. Americans tend to think of spirituality as a private matter with mainly internal effects. James and Paul thought of it quite differently! Saving faith is not just a ticket to heaven but a powerful reality to be lived out in the real world.

PRAY WITH US

Dr. Bryan O’Neal, VP and interim dean of the Undergraduate School, will be grateful for the prayers of the *Today in the Word* family for our undergraduate faculty who devote their lives to teaching our students God’s wisdom and truth.

WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY

13

*As the body without the spirit is dead,
so faith without deeds is dead.*

James 2:26

Mature Faith and Good Deeds: Example of Rahab

We know Rahab had faith in God because her actions revealed her faith (see Joshua 2; 6:22–25; Heb. 11:31). She hid the two Israelite spies from her own government, then misdirected their pursuers and helped them escape. She thus saved her entire extended family and ended up in the genealogy of Christ (Matt. 1:5)!

In today’s reading, James presented Rahab as a second example of the fact that faith will have deeds that demonstrate it is living and genuine. In many ways, Rahab was Abraham’s opposite—a woman, a Gentile, and morally unrighteous. So this principle of faith-in-action is true for an honored patriarch, a foreign prostitute, and everyone in between!

Rahab verbalized her faith with clarity (Josh. 2:9–11). She believed God had rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt, including the parting of the Red Sea.

She believed He had given Israel the land. She believed He had given them victories over Sihon and Og. She went beyond fear to faith in a sovereign God who ruled over heaven and earth.

Rahab expressed her faith most clearly through her actions (v. 25). That’s why James compared faith and deeds to body and spirit (v. 26). The body is faith, absolutely real; but deeds are the spirit, what animates it and makes it into what we recognize as a person. This analogy likely alludes to God’s creation of Adam (Gen. 2:7).

Again, it’s important to note that it’s not salvation under discussion here. When the verb is translated “justified” (as in the ESV and CSB), it’s technically correct but confusing, because that English word now has a specific theological meaning. That’s why the NIV translates it “considered righteous” and the NLT “shown to be right with God.”

APPLY THE WORD

Scripture tells us that God has prepared good works “in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:8–10). Pray that the Lord will make clear what you can do that is evidence of your faith in Him. He might not ask you to risk your life as Rahab did, but there might be needs among the people or pastors in your church that you can help meet.

PRAY WITH US

As you pray, please mention our Communications faculty: Karyn Hecht, Kelli Worrall, Matthew Moore, Robert Gustafson, and Rosalie de Rosset. Their prayer is that their students “would delight in their God-given gifts and use them for His glory.”

*Consider what a great forest
is set on fire by a small spark.*

James 3:5

THURSDAY
FEBRUARY

14

Mature Faith and Self-Control in Speech

The Yik Yak app, now thankfully defunct, allowed users to post anonymous comments and to agree or disagree with other users' comments within a five-mile radius. For example, students on a university campus could share opinions about teachers, courses, or classmates. The app's anonymous posts degenerated into many instances of gossip, bullying, harassment, racist and sexist slurs, and threats of violence.

The Yik Yak app revealed some of the nastier uses of language. Mature faith expresses itself in good deeds, such as helping fellow believers in need. Another example of faith in action is self-control with words—a common topic in wisdom literature.

James is circling back to a topic he already raised (1:19). In fact, controlling our speech is such an important and challenging example of faith that he

writes that those who can control their tongues are “perfect” or mature (vv. 1–2). Self-control with words is a valuable measuring stick for spiritual maturity.

James gives three pictures of the tongue's power. First, it's like a bit in a horse's mouth (v. 3). Though small, it controls a large animal. Second, it's like the rudder of a ship (v. 4). Though small, it steers a large vessel. Third, it's like a spark that starts a fire (v. 5; see Prov. 26:21). Though small, it affects a large area. The tongue is such a small thing, yet it can make “great boasts” and cause large problems.

The negative implications are made explicit (with a vengeance!) in the next verse: “The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell” (v. 6; see John 8:44).

APPLY THE WORD

Our culture is filled with words that wound, distract, and destroy. Our speech—whether spoken in conversation or posted online—is never “just words.” This Valentine's Day, use words that demonstrate faith and reveal love. Prayerfully resolve to let your spoken and written words bring nourishment and healing to others (Prov. 10:21; 12:18).

PRAY WITH US

Pray for Moody's Practical Christian Ministry team—Catherine Christopher, Donald Martindell, Nathan Strand, Roberto Rivera, and Unity Ostercamp—who oversee students' ministry at churches, nursing homes, and Christian organizations across the city.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

by Dr. Winfred O. Neely

Chair of the Division of Applied Theology and Church Ministries

Q **Is the Hebrew word for *man* in Genesis 1:26–27 a personal name or a generic term for humanity?**

A In Genesis 1:26–27, the Hebrew word, which is translated as *man* in our English versions, is *adam*. *Adam* is sometimes used as the name of the first man (Gen. 5:1, 3-5). But in Genesis 1:26–27, *adam* is used in the generic sense for humanity, including male and female. *Adam* also underscores man’s connection with the ground, since the Hebrew word for “ground” is *adamah* (see Gen. 2:7). As careful readers of Scripture, we can use the context to determine whether *adam* is a personal name or a generic term for humanity, as in both Genesis 1:26–27 and 5:2.

Q **Since God is spirit (John 4:24), and in His essential being does not have a physical body, in what sense do people bear the image of God?**

A God created humanity in His image, according to His likeness, bestowing on humanity immense dignity, worth, and value (Gen. 1:26–27; Psalm 8). The specifics of what constitutes the image are not explained in Scripture, however. Since God in His essential being does not have a physical body, some

interpreters have limited the image of God in people to merely the immaterial and artistic aspects of humanity: our ability to reason, our aspirations for God, our longing for permanence, our capacity to create, and so on.

While all of the above may be constituent elements of the image of God, Genesis 1:26–27 does not restrict the image of God to merely the spiritual or artistic side of people. Instead, the emphasis in Gen. 1:26 is on the embodied unity of humankind. As originally created, human beings in the totality of their embodied life represent God. God does not have a physical body, but He created humanity to express and represent Him in the totality of their embodied life. Our physical and embodied lives matter!

Q **Why did God create humanity as male and female (Gen. 1:26)?**

A One key question of the 21st century is what does it mean to be human. According to Gen. 1:26, God created two biological and anatomically distinct sexes, male and female. God created male and female with complementary biological and anatomical distinctions. (The details of their creation are given in Genesis 2). These distinctions are God’s gift. When God evaluated His creation as

*Male and female equally bear
the image of God as originally created.*

a whole, including human maleness and femaleness, He declared that it was very good. Moreover, male and female together are the image of God; male and female *equally* bear the image of God as originally created. Male and female together, with their complementary divinely created distinctions, are designed to give a fuller picture of the character and nature of God.

Male and female together as image bearers demonstrate that God is a relational and social being. Also, maleness and femaleness constitute the objective, verifiable, biblically sanctioned, anatomical and biological distinctions that are the basis for marriage (see Mark 10:2–9).

Q **After the Fall of humanity in Genesis 3, do people still bear the image of God?**

A Yes! Certainly sin has marred the image and defaced it, but the Fall did not erase the image of God in humanity. Even though we live in a fallen world, the value of human life persists to this day—because of the reality that people still bear the image of God. This abiding fact is the basis for the supreme value and dignity of all human life today (Gen. 9:6). James insists that the way we speak to people should reflect their value as

image bearers of God (James 3:9). The implications of God creating Adam and Eve in His image continue to this day.

Q **Since fallen people still bear the image of God, does this have some practical implications for us as Christians?**

A All people have worth before the Lord. We must reject racial supremacy, ethno-centrism, and sexism, and stop assessing people based on skin color, level of education, or class distinctions. We must endeavor to see people the way God sees them. We cannot impart dignity to any person. Since all human beings bear the divine image, our responsibility is to recognize the inherent dignity that people already possess.

Q **If humanity has fallen and the image of God is marred, how do we know what God is doing in the lives of His people today?**

A God's purpose is to conform us to the *icon* or "image" of His Son (Rom. 8:29). Through the act of justification (Rom. 5:1–2; 2 Cor. 5:21), and in the process of sanctification (Rom. 12:1–2), God is conforming us to the image and likeness of His Son (2 Cor. 3:18). God will complete His redemptive purpose for us at Christ's Second Coming (1 Cor. 15:49–53).

FRIDAY
FEBRUARY

15

Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?

James 3:11

No Human Being Can Tame the Tongue

Luci Shaw's poem, "What James Didn't Say About the Tongue," ends with this amusing and alarming description: "Restless, a blind, amphibious animal, / ceaselessly testing the limits of its porcelain cage, / cunning in shaping breath into word: half-truth / or proverb, benediction or blight. / As original as Eden. As unmanageable."

As James put it: "No human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison" (v. 8). We can tame practically any animal, but not our own tongues. It's like a wild animal is loose in our mouths! No wonder Proverbs reminds us that "the tongue has the power of life and death" (18:21).

Using words sometimes for good and sometimes for evil is not the way it should be (vv. 9–10). Praising God is one of the highest purposes of language; cursing people, who are made in His image and whom we're

commanded to love, is very wrong. It's as though fresh water and salt water are coming from the same spring, or as though a certain kind of fruit tree is producing different kinds of fruit (vv. 11–12). How can we speak both "benediction" and "blight"? It should be impossible. It's morally self-evident that "this should not be."

Jesus also used the metaphor of a tree bearing fruit. "Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit" (Matt. 7:17–18). In the context of James's epistle, we see that only mature faith can practice self-control with words. Only spiritual rebirth and growth in holiness can produce control of the tongue. It is impossible to achieve this on our own. The fact that "no human being can tame the tongue" means that only God can!

APPLY THE WORD

If the secret to controlling our tongues is growing toward spiritual maturity in Christ, the secret to growing in Him is "abiding" or "remaining" in Him. He is the vine and we are the branches. If we don't abide in Him, we're unable to bear fruit. These images are drawn from John 15; take time this weekend to read and reflect on abiding in Christ.

PRAY WITH US

Please add Ken Heullitt, Moody's chief financial officer, to your prayers today. As Ken and his teams fulfill their responsibilities at Moody, may they experience God's sovereign guidance, abundant wisdom, and unconditional love.

*The wisdom that comes from
heaven is first of all pure.*

James 3:17

SATURDAY
FEBRUARY

16

Mature Faith, Good Deeds, and Godly Wisdom

What is wisdom? It dwells with God, meaning that our wisdom depends upon our relationship with Him. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Prov. 9:10). The phrase “fear of the Lord” signifies reverence, worship, and obedience. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding” (Ps. 111:10).

Mature faith, the result of persevering through trials and troubles, does good deeds, and these good deeds should be “done in the humility that comes from wisdom” (v. 13). There are two kinds of wisdom. One is worldly and demonic (vv. 14–16). It’s characterized by bitter envy, selfish ambition, pride, and self-deception or suppression of the truth. The consequences are “disorder and every evil practice.” In other words, this sinful kind of “wisdom” will be clearly revealed by how it does

things and what happens as a result (as in the story of Ananias and Sapphira; see Acts 5:1–11). Just as living faith is evident by its actions, so also the source of worldly wisdom is revealed by its qualities and outcomes.

The second kind of wisdom is godly and heavenly (vv. 17–18). The contrast couldn’t be greater! James described it as “first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate [or gentle], submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” “Submissive” here means mature wisdom does not cling stubbornly to one’s own opinions but is “open to reason” and “able to be persuaded.” “Impartial” reminds us that God does not show favoritism.

The result of this kind of wisdom is a “harvest of righteousness.” Even better, this wisdom, as James has already told us, is available as a gift from our generous God (1:5, 17).

APPLY THE WORD

Ask God today for His wisdom, just as James recommended near the start of his letter. Another way of praying about this same topic would be to ask God to help you grow in one or more of the qualities listed in verse 17. The Lord not only tells us how to grow in mature faith but also promises to be with us on the journey.

PRAY WITH US

Join us in thanking God for Brianna Weight, Moody’s education marketing manager. She oversees decisions regarding what content prospective Moody students will see online and in print. Praise God for her diligence and attention to detail!

Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

James 4:1

Mature Faith Does Not Pursue Selfish Pleasures

The first sermon in American history was preached at Plymouth, Mass., on December 9, 1621 by Robert Cushman, a deacon and Puritan leader. His text was 1 Corinthians 10:24, “No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.” In his sermon he warned against “swelling pride, self-love and conceitedness,” and he condemned certain jealousies and quarrels among the settlers.

Mature faith does not quarrel or pursue selfish pleasures. There’s a flow or logic in James’ letter, though it isn’t organized like Paul’s epistles. James draws in part on the genre of wisdom literature, with its tendency to use aphorisms and sudden changes in topic. That seems to be the case here. The mentions of “peace-loving” and “peacemakers” at the end of chapter 3 apparently prompted James to return to the topic of fights and quarrels (1:19–20). Where do

these originate? Sinful or self-centered desires (v. 1).

These desires are defined by lack or absence (v. 2). “You desire but do not have. . . . You covet but you cannot get what you want.” The verb “kill” can be understood in both a literal and a figurative way, so that James is identifying both murder and hatred as the end result of selfish desires.

These desires could be filled by God if we would ask, but they would not be filled in the ways we think (v. 3). If we don’t ask at all, we’re failing to trust our generous Father (1:5, 17). But God does not grant our petitions when we ask with selfish motives or for self-centered pleasures. Our needs and desires might be real, but we often try to fill them with the wrong things in the wrong ways. We need God’s wisdom to pray for the right things in the right ways.

APPLY THE WORD

When we bring our desires to the Lord, He brings them in line with His desires (Ps. 37:4). Only then can we pray as we ought for the things we ought. Whatever “dream” you’re chasing now, it’s the wrong one if it’s more important to you than your relationship with God. Let the prayer of your heart today be to want what He wants.

PRAY WITH US

Dr. Larry Davidhizar has worked faithfully at Moody for over 30 years. He serves as the VP and associate dean of faculty but also often takes time to minister and to care for students individually. Will you pray for him and thank God for his service?

Don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God?

James 4:4

MONDAY
FEBRUARY

18

Mature Faith Does Not Pursue Worldliness

“What a friend we have in Jesus,” a classic hymn rejoices, “all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer! Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh, what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!”

Who wouldn't want our loving Savior and His Almighty Father as friends? In our reading today, James tells us how. The key is to refuse to pursue worldliness (v. 4). Friendship with the world and friendship with God are mutually exclusive. We cannot play both sides. Unfortunately, as Old Testament history reveals, God's people are often “adulterous” or unfaithful. This theme would have been familiar to James's original Jewish readers, because the prophets frequently employed marriage and prostitution as metaphors for God's relationship with His people (for examples, see Jer. 3:1; Hosea 3:1).

Selfish pleasures and worldly pursuits are a form of idolatry. They take the place of God in our hearts. God has always longed for His unfaithful people to return to Him, and in this sense He is “jealous” (v. 5). He continues to call His people to the joys of a close relationship with Him, which is worth the cost of any suffering or rejection by the world.

Despite our sinfulness and divided allegiances, God's grace never runs out (v. 6). There is always more of it, and ultimately it will win the day. The pursuit of selfish pleasures and worldliness is rooted in pride, which is the core of what makes one an enemy of God. The pursuit of friendship with God, on the other hand, must be rooted in humility (see also 3:13). We can only know ourselves in relation to Him, and the more we grow toward spiritual wholeness, the more we find humility to be the only appropriate posture.

APPLY THE WORD

Like the Israelites, we can be religious while our hearts are far from God (Isa. 29:13). We can give Him lip service on Sundays while pursuing our own agendas the rest of the week (Jer. 12:2). We can even study Scripture in order to boast rather than to learn more about our Savior. Thankfully, we can also receive grace when we repent and return to Him.

PRAY WITH US

Today, let's praise God for our Student Services. Jeremiah Hill, Janet Gibbs, and Kathryn Passon provide students with speedy answers to any school related questions. Please join us in thanking God for their hard work and invaluable service.

TUESDAY
FEBRUARY

19

*Come near to God and
he will come near to you.*

James 4:8

Mature Faith Submits Humbly to God

The narrative climax in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is the choice made first by Eve and then by Adam to give in to the serpent’s temptation and disobey God. In Milton’s *Paradise Regained*, the story’s climax is Jesus’ perfect resistance to the Devil’s temptations in the wilderness (Luke 4:1–13). Christ’s victory over temptation signaled that Adam and Eve’s fall to temptation was on the verge of being undone.

James 4, indeed the entire epistle, has been building a set of contrasts. On one side we find the Devil, selfish desires, worldliness, spiritual unfaithfulness, quarrels, pride, and enmity with God. On the other side we find God, love for our neighbor, a focus on eternal values, wholehearted worship, peacefulness, humility, and friendship with God.

We are to imitate Jesus in resisting temptation, which requires submission

to God’s will and is the key to staying on the right side of this contrast (v. 7). Submission means obedience, which in turn means resisting the Devil and his temptations (see 1:13–15). Resisting the Devil will move us in the direction of drawing near to God, and God reciprocates the move toward a closer relationship (v. 8a).

Since we are not yet perfect, this all requires confession and repentance (v. 8b). Confession of sin is the opposite of pride, which never admits it’s wrong. The mourning referred to in verse 9 is grief over sin—the laughter and “joy” indicate a casual attitude to sin—and how it creates barriers in our relationship with the Lord (see Ps. 24:3–4). When we humble ourselves before God in this way for these reasons, He is always faithful to lift us up, that is, to forgive us and restore the relationship (v. 10).

APPLY THE WORD

The people of Nineveh dressed in sackcloth and called out to the Lord (Jonah 3:5–9). Peter wept bitterly over his three denials of Christ (Matt. 26:75). The tax collector “beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner!’” (Luke 18:13). Take time to draw near to God through confession and repentance!

PRAY WITH US

Will you pray for our financial aid team? Navigating the intricate trail of forms, taxes, and students’ financial aid applications is not easy. Ask the Lord to give Daniel Auzenne, Timothy Krug, and Eloisa Romero sharp minds to handle their work.

*Brothers and sisters,
do not slander one another.*

James 4:11

WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY

20

Mature Faith Is Not Judgmental

Two award-winning television shows with similar formats have been running for decades. Civil litigants can bring their cases to *The People’s Court* or *Judge Judy* to be settled. The judges ask penetrating questions, demand evidence, and render verdicts that cannot be appealed.

These television shows are popular because we tend to enjoy judging others. Sometimes this is motivated by a love of justice or fairness, but often the truth is that we judge others because of our pride and self-righteousness.

That’s why James commands believers not to be judgmental, which is equated here with slander (v. 11). Doing so is a violation of the ninth commandment against bearing false witness (Ex. 20:16), as well as the “royal law” of loving our neighbor (2:8). Slander is one way the tongue gets out of control and does

damage (3:3–12) and is doubtless part of what causes fights and quarrels (4:1).

The primary reason to avoid being judgmental is that “there is only one Lawgiver and Judge”—God (v. 12)! Only He judges with perfect accuracy and justice. We must not put ourselves in His place, which is the definition of pride.

This verse is often quoted out of context. We bristle with defensiveness and say, “Who are you to judge?” using this verse as a way to dismiss fellow believers’ rebukes or exhortations even when they are true, constructive, and loving. Many New Testament passages encourage us to exhort one another in the church (1 Cor. 5:12; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:13). Our rule and practice in this regard must be the rule and practice of Christ, who taught that with the measure we use it will be measured out to us (Matt. 7:1–5).

APPLY THE WORD

To learn more about some of the themes we’ve studied so far in James, including the power of the tongue, read *Redeeming How We Talk: Discover How Communication Fuels Our Growth, Shapes Our Relationships, and Changes Our Lives* by Ken Wytsma and A. J. Swoboda, available from Moody Publishers.

PRAY WITH US

As we continue praying for our Financial Aid Office, will you mention Heather Shalley, Nathan Grubb, Tammy Easter, and Vanita Francis? We praise God for their consistent service and kind patience here at Moody!

THURSDAY
FEBRUARY

21

*You do not even know
what will happen tomorrow.*

James 4:14

Mature Faith Makes Plans in Humility

Jesus once told a parable about a rich man whose economic endeavors were going quite well—so well, in fact, that he didn’t have enough room to store all his wealth. He made plans to build more barns and congratulated himself: “Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” God evaluated the situation differently: “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you” (Luke 12:13–21).

The rich fool in Jesus’ story failed to understand what James taught in today’s passage. Mature faith makes plans, but remains in a posture of humility and submission to the sovereignty of God. To think our plans are indestructible is foolish because we’re not in control of all (or even very many of) the variables (vv. 13–14). This is hard to hear, because in American culture we usually like making plans. They indicate confidence, creativity, and purposefulness. But making plans in a spirit of pride will lead us to

forget the fleeting nature of human life. Assuming our plans will dictate future events ignores the fact that it is God who rules over everything.

Today’s passage is almost a parable itself. It begins with a kind of story (v. 13), unmasked as foolish, which leads to warnings (vv. 14, 16) and advice on wiser choices to make instead (vv. 15, 17). We don’t have to stop making plans, but as believers we’re to make them from an entirely different orientation. To make plans in the way initially described is boasting and prideful. We’re trusting in our plans and abilities rather than in God. We should instead say “if it is the Lord’s will” and mean it.

Sins of omission are real sins (v. 17). To know the good but not to do it is wrong in God’s eyes. Now that James’s readers understand the truths he’s teaching, they have no excuse for not doing them.

APPLY THE WORD

Prayers of confession include repentance for sins of omission. Here’s an example: “Heavenly Father, we lower our heads before you and confess that we have often forgotten that we are yours. Sometimes we carry on our lives as if there was no God and we fall short of being a credible witness to You. For these things we ask your forgiveness.”

PRAY WITH US

Bruce Everhart is the vice president of donor development and channel strategy. Will you pray for God’s continued blessing on his life and work as he leads several teams at Moody? We are thankful for his steadfast leadership.

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

James 5:4

FRIDAY
FEBRUARY

22

Mature Faith Understands God’s Justice

In his commentary on James, Douglas J. Moo explained that today’s verses condemn a sinful use of wealth. “We cannot avoid the serious reminder about money and possessions that we confront in this text. One of the sins for which God condemns these people is their selfish accumulation of money and things (vv. 2–3). In the Western world, where amassing material wealth is not only condoned but admired, we Christians need to come to grips with this point in James and ask ourselves seriously: When do we have too much?”

Mature faith understands God’s justice. The rich oppressors in today’s passage were likely unbelievers, condemned because many believing readers were victims of their exploitation. “They won’t get away with it,” James reassures the church in a prophet’s tone.

The fact is that for rich, prideful oppressors, misery is coming (vv. 1–3).

Temporal things will pass away. Their ill-gotten wealth will rot. Their gold and silver will corrode. All the things in which they placed their trust will let them down and will even “testify” that they made the wrong choice (see Matt. 6:19–21).

Where did they go wrong (vv. 3b–6)? They greedily hoarded their money. They cheated their workers out of their wages. While they exploited their workers’ labor, they themselves lived in “luxury and self-indulgence.” They “condemned and murdered the innocent one”—probably a way of saying that they manipulated the court system. They fattened themselves while starving others. But in God’s divine irony, they are fattening themselves for the “day of slaughter.”

The cries of the poor have reached the ears of God. The perfect Judge will see to it that justice is done!

APPLY THE WORD

Make time to review your budget to see whether it reflects godly priorities. How much spending reveals a desire for luxury or convenience? How much is spent on maintaining appearances or social status? How much is dedicated to God’s ministries and helping the needy? Ask God to help you to realign your budget if needed.

PRAY WITH US

Join us in prayer for Moody’s Food Service. Brianne Dueck, Hoa Lam, Jeffery Williams, and Jonathan True all serve in the Student Dining Room, making sure meals are always served on time. Thank the Lord for their diligence, grace, and humility!

SATURDAY
FEBRUARY

23

*Be patient and stand firm,
because the Lord's coming is near.*

James 5:8

Mature Faith Is Patient and Expectant

What will Judgment Day be like?

Popular culture and media have answered this question in many colorful ways. Nuclear bombs will destroy us in a series of radioactive mushroom clouds. A computer system meant to defend us will become sentient and attack humanity. A pandemic or modern-day plague will sweep across the globe and wipe us out. Zombies will devour civilization.

James uses the picture of a harvest to describe the Second Coming of Christ and Judgment Day (v. 7). It was also Jesus' picture (see Matt. 13:37–43). Unlike events in a zombie movie, however, these events will happen, and we're eager for His return and accompanying events such as divine justice being served on rich oppressors (5:1–6). But we can't hurry history along, any more than a farmer can hurry along his crops or the seasonal rains.

Like a farmer, our response to this truth is to work hard and wait patiently (v. 8). Godly patience means that we “stand firm” or “take courage.” We persevere through trials and troubles on the road to mature faith (1:2–4). This is not a passive mentality of waiting to see what happens—we know what's going to happen! This is waiting in faith and expectancy, with “confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1).

Christ's return is “near” or imminent, that is, it could happen at any time—“the Judge is standing at the door” (v. 9). We're living in the last days, the biblical period of time that began with Christ's Ascension and continues until His Second Coming. Being on the watch for His return and living for eternity should give us the perspective to avoid petty and self-centered issues such as grumbling against fellow believers (see also 4:1–2, 11).

APPLY THE WORD

The topic of eternal rewards is implied in today's reading. While unbelievers will reap God's wrath, the image of a harvest is positive for believers. Faithfulness will earn rewards such as the “crown of life” in James 1:12. If you would like to do a deeper Bible study on this subject, a good place to begin is 1 Corinthians 3:10–15.

PRAY WITH US

Continue praying for Moody's Food Service team today and add Gonzalo Garcia, Joseph Timmer, Martin Rios, Nathaniel Brumbaugh, and Paul Houk to your list. These faithful servants work hard to provide meals for Moody's 1,600 students.

*We count as blessed those
who have persevered.*

James 5:11

SUNDAY
FEBRUARY

24

Patience: Two Examples

With God’s permission, Satan destroyed Job’s wealth, killed his children, and attacked his health. Job ended up on a garbage heap scratching painful sores. Yet, “In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing” (Job 1:22). To his wife’s despair, he responded, “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” (Job 2:10).

No wonder James presented Job as a prime example of perseverance in trials (v. 11)! Job is the second example of patience. He stood firm “in the face of suffering”; he also endured the misguided and theologically false accusations of his friends in addition to his other troubles. He never stopped believing in God’s love and justice, even though his sufferings confused him and his “miserable comforters” angered him. God “finally brought about” Job’s vindication and restoration (Job 42). James is the only book in the New Testament that

explicitly mentions Job; the Jewish believers who originally read this epistle would have been well-versed in the story and encouraged to endure their own trials.

The other example of patience is the prophets (v. 10). They had the privilege of speaking in the name of the Lord, but their ministries were often unsuccessful by human standards. They were ignored, mocked, and persecuted. Jeremiah lamented, “the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long” (20:7–18). Yet they obediently persevered.

Saying that those who persevere are counted as “blessed” gives us an eternal perspective on our circumstances. The examples of Job and the prophets exhort and encourage us to godly patience and endurance of hardship and demonstrate that “the Lord is full of compassion and mercy” (v. 11).

APPLY THE WORD

Many believers have suffered and even died for their faith in Jesus. Their stories are told in classics like *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* and Corrie ten Boom’s *The Hiding Place*, as well as by contemporary organizations such as Voice of the Martyrs. These stories can inspire your own witness for Jesus as well as remind you to pray for suffering Christians.

PRAY WITH US

As we wrap up our prayers for Food Service, include Gregory Dickson, Peter Bernstrom, Rachel Campbell, and Seth Mendez. We are so thankful for the team in the Student Dining Room and for their diligence in providing Christlike service and wholesome meals!

MONDAY
FEBRUARY

25

*All you need to say is
a simple “Yes” or “No.”*

James 5:12

Patience: A Key Command

As many scholars have noticed, the epistle of James is deeply influenced by the teachings of Jesus during His earthly ministry, often alluding to His words and addressing similar issues.

The *Moody Bible Commentary* points out 24 parallels between James and the Sermon on the Mount. Today’s verse brings to mind Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:33–37: “All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”

How is this command connected to the theme of patience? The vows to which both Jesus and James referred were often hastily made but not kept. As Ecclesiastes reminds us, only fools make rash vows (5:1–7). This indicates a lack of integrity, a failure to take words and promises seriously. It’s also connected to the theme of humility, reminding us that we cannot control the

situation—we can’t even control the hair on our own heads!

While some Christians have taken this command to mean, for example, that they should not swear to tell the truth in court, that’s not the point. Jesus, after all, answered under oath at His trial (Matt. 26:63–64) and Paul on occasion called God as his witness (2 Cor. 1:23). The point is that we’re to tell the honest truth in all cases, with or without an oath. What is forbidden is speech that is flippant, untruthful, or profane.

Again, mature faith is seen in self-control with words (3:2). When enduring trials and troubles, it might be easy to let our tongues run wild. But mature faith allows perseverance to finish its work in us so that we can resist temptations to respond with rash promises. Instead, we’re to “consider it pure joy” and press on in faith (1:2–4).

APPLY THE WORD

If you don’t swear oaths, here’s an exhortation from James that you’ve heeded, right? But many of us hastily agree to or refuse commitments without prayerful consideration. We speak rashly in response to frustrations rather than enduring patiently. Ask God to give you a spirit of patience and humility to guard your words.

PRAY WITH US

Today, will you pray for Frank Leber, VP of Moody’s Information Technology Services? Ask the Lord to give Frank wisdom as he continues to lead his team in facilitating a learning environment enhanced by quality uses of technology.

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

James 5:16

TUESDAY
FEBRUARY

26

Mature Faith and Prayer

A classic Christian prayer for healing reads: “O Lord God of our salvation, to whom no sickness is incurable, we pray that in your compassion you will drive away from your servants, who look for your heavenly medicine, all illness; show forth in them the might of your healing power, and make them whole both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Mature faith prays boldly within the will of God (see 1 John 5:14–15). The questions and answers that open today’s reading convey the tone that this is the right and obvious thing to do (vv. 13–14). When we’re in trouble, we should pray. When we’re happy, we should sing. When we’re sick, we should call the elders to pray and anoint us with oil.

In that context, oil had both a practical medicinal and a spiritual symbolic

value. While in our culture we tend to separate the physical and the spiritual and thus see sin and sickness as separate issues, Jewish culture did not. From a biblical perspective, the two can be intermingled (see Mark 6:13; 1 Cor. 11:29–30). James has in mind here a situation in which an illness may have been caused by sin, though this does not imply that all illness is caused by sin (vv. 15–16).

In such a case, sins should be confessed. God will forgive, and healing may take place in response to the prayer of faith if God so chooses. The spiritual principle at work is that the “prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” As one study Bible puts it: “Prayer is not a magical incantation or a guarantee of healing, but when offered fervently by a righteous person, God will respond in a way that best fits his good purposes.”

APPLY THE WORD

“Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise” (v. 13). If you’re in good spirits today, let music be part of your praise! You might choose to sing a hymn or worship song, or listen to some praise music on the radio or recordings. Use this time of playing, singing, or listening to music as an intentional offering of thanks and praise to the Lord.

PRAY WITH US

Please include Moody Aviation in your prayers today. James Conrad and Jan Seiersen provide administrative service so the Moody Aviation team can train students in missionary aviation. May the Lord always be a shining light in their lives.

WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY

27

*Let it be known today that you are God
in Israel and that I am your servant.*

1 Kings 18:36

Prayer: Example of Elijah

On the morning of September 11, 2001, Rick Rescorla was on the 44th floor of the World Trade Center’s South Tower when a large jet rammed into the North Tower. Officials told everyone to stay put, but Rescorla ignored them. A Vietnam veteran in charge of corporate security at Morgan Stanley, he aggressively evacuated the company’s 2,700 employees to safety—six died, but the rest made it. He himself died when the South Tower collapsed.

Rick Rescorla sacrificed his life saving others. Elijah was also a true hero, putting his life on the line to call the Israelites back to the Lord. He’s also a perfect illustration of yesterday’s principle, “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (v. 16).

In saying that Elijah “was a human being, even as we are” (v. 17), James didn’t mean to say that he was just an

average guy. James was emphasizing that the amazing miracles were the work of God, not Elijah. God had control of the three-year drought and the rains that finally came. Elijah simply prayed (v. 18). As we recall the story, as doubtless James’ Jewish readers did, this miracle took place immediately following the dramatic confrontation with the priests of Baal and Asherah on Mount Carmel. Elijah had also prayed there, and God had answered him with fire. The people had responded, “The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!” (1 Kings 18:39).

If God is in control of all that happens in nature and human history, how can prayer make a difference? Because our Lord delights in the prayers of His people. We might not understand the ways that God’s sovereignty accommodates our prayer, but we can believe His Word and obey His command to pray.

APPLY THE WORD

We admire Elijah but might think, “I could never be like him.” Think again! He didn’t possess any superpowers. He was simply faithful in prayer. God is the One with the superpowers, and prayer is our direct line to Him. In other words, James was saying, “You, too, can accomplish great things in prayer, because our God is above all!”

PRAY WITH US

In your prayers today, please mention members of the Moody Aviation Shop: Joel Powell, the production mechanic and instructor, and Neal Bachman, the director of maintenance operations. Will you praise God for the vital training they provide?

*Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.*

Psalm 84:5

THURSDAY
FEBRUARY

28

Help One Another on the Path to Mature Faith

In “Pilgrims to the City of God,” musician and writer Michael Card sang: “Pilgrims of passion, we follow the One / Who holds out a cross and a crown. / We travel a dark road that has but one Light, / For we have here no lasting town. / And sometimes we run by the power of His might. / On our own at the best we can plod. / What we hopefully look for is just beyond sight. / We are pilgrims to the city of God.”

As pilgrims, we’re not alone. We’re on this journey with a worldwide community of believers. To conclude his epistle, James encourages us to help one another on the path to mature faith. The path is not an easy one. It’s filled with trials, troubles, and temptations. The pleasures of the world beckon. Satan tries to use our sinful desires to entrap us. We continually need wisdom, humility, and self-control. Yet through perseverance and endurance

our faith can grow to wholeness and completeness.

There are many ways we can wander from the path. When someone does, it’s up to the rest of us to “bring that person back” (v. 19). A believer who has left the right path and taken the wrong one—indicating habitual sin—must be turned from the error of their ways. They can be restored to fellowship with God and others. To speak of covering over a multitude of sins is basically to call doing this an awesome and amazing act of love (see 1 Peter 4:8).

Doing this in fact saves the erring brother or sister from “death” (v. 20). These are erring believers, so James does not mean they will lose salvation. Rather, he emphasizes the stakes in helping one another persevere toward mature faith.

APPLY THE WORD

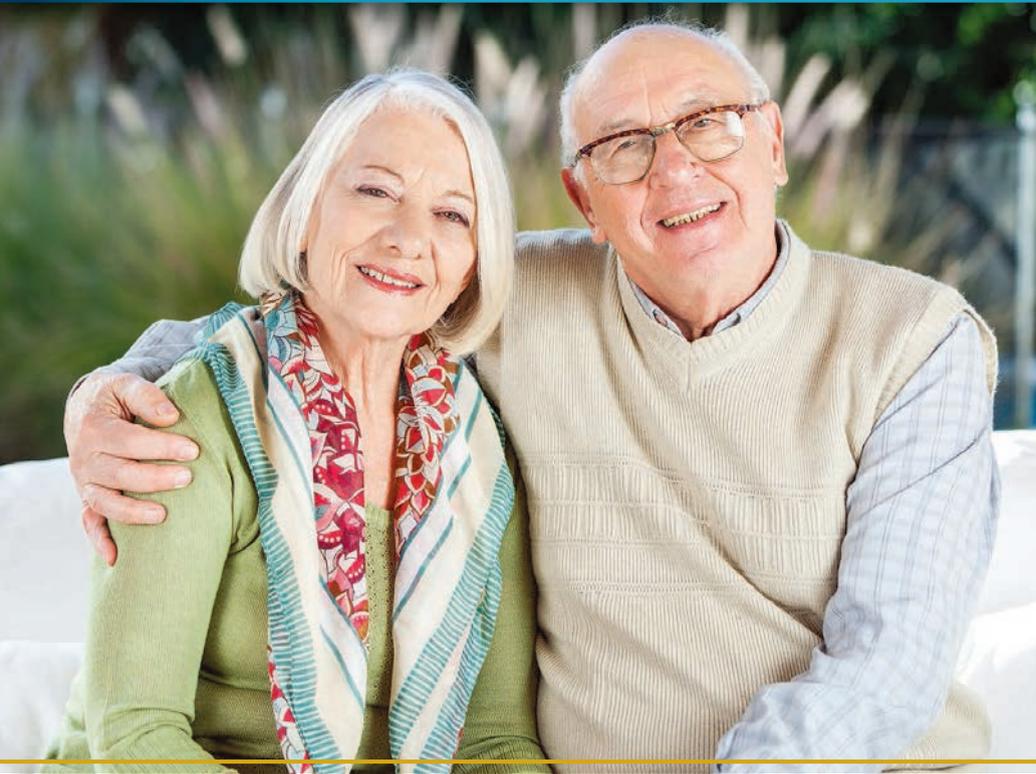
What verses or themes from our study encouraged or convicted you? Be sure to underline those verses or make notes in your spiritual journal. You might also share them with a friend or small group, inviting them to help you persevere in spiritual growth. As you reflect, pray based on James 1:5, asking the Lord for His wisdom as you follow Him.

PRAY WITH US

As we conclude our study this month, thank God for the journey of Christian maturity He gives each one of us. Living according to the truth of righteousness in Christ can be a struggle, but God is there with us each step of the way.

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