

DEEP DIVE

A Daily Devotional
on the Book of James

*55 Day Devotional
by Peter Hallett*



Glow

Embark on a transformative 55-day journey through the powerful teachings of the Book of James. This devotional of the Book of James offers daily reflections that challenge and inspire believers to live out their faith with authenticity and purpose. Each day, you'll explore themes such as perseverance, wisdom, faith in action, and the power of prayer, all grounded in the practical wisdom of James' epistle. Whether you're facing trials or seeking spiritual growth, this devotional will encourage you to deepen your relationship with God and align your actions with His word.

With faith-building reflections, scripture readings, and actionable prayers, this devotional invites you to not only hear the Word but to live it out daily. Start your journey today and discover the joy and strength that come from walking in true faith.

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DAY 1 - THEN HE WAS SEEN BY JAMES

READING

After that, he was seen by more than five hundred of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died by now. Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles.

1 Cor 15:6-7 (NLT)

REFLECTION

Welcome to the first Deep Dive into the book of James. I trust that the next 55 days of sharing God's word together will bring strength and life to your day.

Before we get to James' letter, let's remember that even though James grew up with (his brother) Jesus it was not until he had a personal revelation of the risen Christ that his life was transformed and he was able to enter into the new promise of salvation that Jesus offered.

Just as you could spend the next week in a garage and it won't make you a car, we can spend our lives surrounded by church and Christians but not have a personal relationship with God. The good news is Jesus seeks out each one of us personally, just as he did his doubting, sceptical brother James. We will be brought to a place of decision and the promise is, if we believe and receive Jesus, we are given the power to become the sons and daughters of God.

FAITH & ACTION

Thank God that he personally sought you out and have renewed faith that he will do the same for your family and friends. Pray for them now and pray for yourself - ask for a fresh revelation of Christ's resurrection power by His Spirit this very day.

DAY 2 - CONSIDER IT PURE JOY

READING

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations. Greetings. Consider it pure joy my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds.

James 1:1-2 (TNIV)

REFLECTION

To be a servant of God is to make Christ your Lord. There is no way to God apart from Jesus, and James reminds his readers of this from the opening sentence of his letter. He describes the early Christians with the Jewish language of “12 tribes scattered among the nations” (the dispersion). The church is now the spiritual “Israel of God” (Gal 6:16) and though we Christians can at times seem to be many tribes, we are definitely one “holy nation” united under Jesus. This greeting reminds us that though we are found among the nations, our faith in Jesus draws us together and identifies us as God’s children.

Being in the world ensures we will still face various kinds of trials but we do so as servants of God, which means we are not alone. Perhaps being able to consider our trials as “pure joy” comes because they drive us closer to God in prayer and each other in love and support. For those in Christ, trials are not just the random chaos of a mad world - they are challenges on our journey to a better place and to being better people. We can find joy even in trials because we are servants of Jesus who has been tested in every way with us, and meets us especially in those times. The joy of the Lord is our strength.

FAITH & ACTION

Take two minutes to talk to God about trials you face right now. Ask him for the pure joy of knowing his closeness and receive it with faith. And as you pray ask God to remind you of a fellow believer who may be in difficulty and find a simple, practical way to reach out to them.

DAY 3 - BE READY FOR ANYTHING

READING

For when your faith is tested your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything.

James 1:3-4

REFLECTION

The Scouts have a motto, “be prepared” and for James it is “be ready for anything”. As simple as it sounds, it is extremely hard to put into practice. How do we ready ourselves for the unknown? Even familiar situations can throw up unexpected twists and turns. And what about the unexpected emotions that rise up in our own hearts? “Where did that come from?” we often ask ourselves. That’s why James gives us a process of becoming “ready for anything”.

First is the testing of our faith. It is one thing to have faith, and another to hold fast to that faith when it is challenged. Second is endurance. This is not “passive acceptance” of trials but “active steadfastness” where we make decisions designed to bring us through the difficult time. The outcome of this process is strong character, as if each of the decisions we make to stand in faith feed our inner person, making us more Christ-like. The person of strong character is the one most likely to be ready for anything. When trials come they confront a mature, experienced, humble, God-dependant person who has found a place of refuge in Christ that is not easily shaken. The ultimate goal is that as Christians, we would be better placed to serve God and bring Him glory.

FAITH & ACTION

Take your trials to God in prayer. Thank Him for them (that’s right - be thankful) and acknowledge that within these tests is the potential for stronger character. Ask for the power of endurance. Think about a time recently when you weren’t “ready for anything”. Ask God to show you what you can learn from that experience.

DAY 4 - KNOWING WHAT GOD WANTS

READING

If you need wisdom - if you want to know what God wants you to do - ask him, and he will gladly tell you. He will not resent you asking. But when you ask him, be sure that you really expect him to answer, for a doubtful mind is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

James 1:5-6

REFLECTION

Today James defines wisdom as knowing what God wants us to do. If strong character makes us ready for anything, then prayerful wisdom makes us aware of what that “anything” might be. Wisdom is not the mysterious domain of gurus living in a cave, it is daily spiritual insight with practical application provided by God to those who ask. Our asking might simply be getting up each day and being humbly determined to do things God’s way. Or it might be a more specific prayer in a difficult, complex or new situation. Either way, God will only be too pleased we asked.

There is one condition to asking - ask in faith, with an expectancy of being answered, without a double mind. The original Greek is literally “two-souled”. It describes conflicting desires at work - part of us wanting to follow God’s will and part wanting to do things our own way (and not really hear from God). This is a powerful insight because it reminds us that before anything, we should settle the issue of Lordship in our life. Whose slave are we? When this is settled, we put ourselves in a place to receive freely from a generous God.

FAITH & ACTION

Confess Jesus as your Lord again today. From your heart, turn your life over to Him, surrendering all your hopes, dreams, fears, preferences and dislikes. Give him authority over every sphere of life. Now ask him for wisdom - for your workplace, family, finances, church-life - any area big or small where you want to know what God wants you to do. And take a moment to listen...

DAY 5 - CLARITY OF BELIEF

READING

People like that should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. They can't make up their minds. They waver back and forth in everything they do.

James 1:7-8

REFLECTION

Again James warns against doubt. In his oh-so-direct manner, he says we should not expect anything from God if we are double-minded in our asking. Doubt is defined as mistrust, hesitation to believe, sick faith. It is being on the verge of making a decision but holding back, which, in essence is making a different decision. So when we come to God in prayer we are simply asked to make a decision - to let go of the reservations, the questions, the feelings of dread or anxiety, and give ourselves to faith. Clarity of belief has great spiritual benefits but confusion of belief separates us from God's supply.

The good news is God understands the challenge we often have in simply believing. He has given us His Word to inspire our faith (faith comes from hearing the word of God) and given us His Spirit to gift us with faith (faith is both a fruit and gift of the Spirit). We can deal with doubt and the feelings of doubt by giving ourselves to God's word and immersing ourselves in God's Spirit.

FAITH & ACTION

Make a plan to read God's word everyday and the plan should include the kind of environment in which you can concentrate and hear the voice of God. For some that is a silent room, for others it is a busy cafe. Even five minutes spent this way will release faith through your life. If you are facing a difficult situation and struggling with doubt, take time to write down your thoughts and feelings and then write down what you know God is saying to you. Begin to pray his word into the situation.

DAY 6 - WISDOM FOR RICH AND POOR

READING

Christians who are poor should be glad, for God has honoured them. And those who are rich should be glad, for God has humbled them. They will fade away like a flower in the field.

James 1:9-10

REFLECTION

Having urged us to ask for wisdom with faith, James now gives an example of how godly wisdom can be applied. Remember, we defined wisdom as knowing what God wants us to do - spiritual insights with practical applications. So James applies this to our socio-economic status or more personally, our own relationship to wealth. For poor believers - those with few material resources - wisdom tells us that they can be glad because God has honoured them. In other words, he is not prejudiced or limited by their poverty and gives them the gift of his Son and new life that money can't buy.

Perhaps their poverty has helped them be more open to receive God's grace. As a consequence of this "gladness" there is no doubt life will improve for them, spiritually but also materially. For rich followers of Christ - those with an abundance of material resources - wisdom tells us they can be glad because God has humbled them. In other words, God has broken through the facade of material comfort and shown them their need for Him. In doing so he has rescued them from a false sense of security that wealth can bring. As a consequence of this "gladness" they will be better able to view their wealth as an opportunity to serve God and others. In the long run, we all stand naked before God and it is not our wealth, status or achievements that will matter but whether we have humbled ourselves to be honoured with the gift of Jesus.

FAITH & ACTION

Thank God for your needs of any kind - they send you closer to God. Thank God for your blessings of any kind - they are your opportunity to serve God. If you are allowing any need or any riches to keep you from trusting in God, turn away from that place and commit yourself to God again. This is true wisdom. Because most of us in the western world are rich by world standards, assess whether you are really more occupied with money and possessions than is wise in God - the best test is not how much you have, but how much you are willing to give...

DAY 7 - CROWN OF ETERNAL LIFE

READING

The hot sun rises and dries up the grass; the flower withers, and its beauty fades away. So also people will fade away with all of their achievements. God blesses those who patiently endure testing. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

James 1:11-12

REFLECTION

James continues to assault the false sense of security we draw from material things. He focuses on that human tendency to try and give our lives meaning by accumulating money, possessions, power, position, fame, and accomplishments. These things aren't necessarily wrong in themselves, but if we use them as a substitute for God then we are in serious danger. We are reminded that "people will fade away with all their achievements" just like the grass dries up and the flowers wither and fade. Secretly we all know this, even if we do tend to buy into this materialistic approach to life. Something deep inside yearns for eternal things. The good news is that God offers a "crown of [eternal] life" to those who love him and stay faithful to him, regardless of the opposition we may face. This is an offer that does not depend on our works because in the long run, nothing we can do will earn us a spot in heaven. Instead we are encouraged to enter into a relationship with God through Jesus - a relationship built on life-long love. Rich or poor, we can look forward to our earthly lives being crowned with eternal life if we make loving God our first priority...

FAITH & ACTION

Put all your good deeds on one side, and all your bad deeds on the other. Now walk away from them both and put your life in God's hands by accepting Jesus as your Lord, your rescuer. If you have done this before, affirm it again today. If you have never done this, now would be a great time... Just pray this: "Dear God, thank you for making peace with me through the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus. Forgive all the good and bad things of my life that I have allowed to keep me away from you. Today I give you my life, all of it. Please come and take control, teach me how to live with you and for you. Fill me with your Spirit that I might know new life. In Jesus Name. Amen (so be it).

DAY 8 - TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

READING

And remember, no one who wants to do wrong should ever say, "God is tempting me". God is never tempted to do anything wrong, and he never tempts anyone else either. Temptation comes from the lure of our own evil desires.

James 1:13-14

REFLECTION

One of the strong themes of the Bible is personal responsibility for our own decisions. While it is fashionable to shift responsibility for our choices to family background, societal pressures, other people's abuse, our genetic makeup or even God, James insists that temptation to wrongdoing "comes from the lure of our own evil desires." Responsibility can be diminished or affected by all kinds of factors but the moment we let go of ultimate personal responsibility, we also relinquish the opportunity for change. We become victims waiting for someone else to do something to fix it. God's way is different. He confronts us with our personal responsibility for wrongdoing (sin) and offers us the choice of receiving forgiveness and new life through the sacrifice of Jesus. We become partners with God in building a strong, healthy new life, little by little, day by day. When we understand this we refute the idea that Christianity is a crutch for the weak. Actually it removes the crutch, forces us to face our weakness and meets us with genuine healing so we don't need crutches anymore!! But stay humble, God tends to tackle one area of change at a time... he knows us better than we know ourselves!

FAITH & ACTION

If there is temptation to do wrong in your life at present, acknowledge now that it is not from any outside factor but ultimately is carried within you. This will give you the faith to turn to God and ask for his overcoming help.

DAY 9 - DESIRES LEADING TO LIFE OR DEATH

READING

These evil desires lead to evil actions, and evil actions lead to death. So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters.

James 1:15-16

REFLECTION

In some ways, these early verses of James have been torrid going as he calls us to accountability in our praying, our giving and our dealing with temptation. But there is some light at the end of the tunnel today - and bit more tunnel as well! James continues to challenge us by describing a basic principle of life - desires lead to actions lead to consequences. Evil desires produce sinful behaviour resulting in death. We can assume the opposite is true as well - godly desires produce righteous behaviour resulting in life. Note that desire is the starting point, not intellect, reason, law, etc. The final consequence of our lives will ultimately flow from the deep issues of our heart. And while we can educate and legislate to try and change people, the only way we will truly see changed lives is through transforming encounters with Jesus. Not just once, but ongoing. Now James reveals why he has been so direct and challenging - "don't be misled my dear brothers and sisters". He is aware how easy it is to be confused and misled by the many voices that claim to know the way. Words, beliefs, ideas are like seeds that can be planted into our soul and produce good or bad fruit which is why James is so determined to plant God's Word in his readers' hearts (and ours). And his motivation is love - "dear brothers and sisters". James writes with real affection, speaking the truth in love. In this he reflects God's own motivation in reaching out to us with the Living Word - his Son Jesus.

FAITH & ACTION

Spend time today thinking about the messages/voices you listen to regularly and whether they are really consistent with God's message for you. And take time today to read God's word, asking him to plant it deep in your heart.

DAY 10 - WHO WE ARE IN GOD'S EYES

READING

What ever is good and perfect comes to us from God above, who created all heaven's lights. Unlike them he never changes or casts shifting shadows. In his goodness he chose to make us his own children by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his choice possession.

James 1:17-18

REFLECTION

Having faced challenging truth about our ability to be led astray by our own evil desires, James shifts focus to the character of God and who we are in God's eyes. He assures us that if we find good in the world, it has come from God. This God is the same one who created the stars and planets that fill the sky with light. While the sky is constantly changing (from our perspective), God is unchanging and can be relied on to be always good. That is why we need a relationship with God as the cornerstone of our lives. We find perfect security in his unchanging goodness which allows us to enter human relationships with our most important needs - love, value, acceptance - already met. Without this, we are always asking people and material things to fill this God-shaped vacuum but because they are changeable and imperfect like us, they let us down, as we do them. It is incredibly good news that out of his goodness, God wants to "make us his own children" and "choice possession". He does this by simple faith in "his true word" - Jesus came from God, died for our wrong-doings and rose again in victory over sin and death. While James has emphasised the importance our actions, this remind us that the starting point is simply to receive the gift of God - Jesus.

FAITH & ACTION

Thank God for his goodness, the gift of Jesus, forgiveness through the cross, and new life through the resurrection. Remind yourself of what God says about you - "his own children, choice possession" - and ask him to fill the longings of your heart with his unchangeable love.

DAY 11 - ANSWERS FOR ANGER

READING

*Dear brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.
Your anger can never make things right in God's sight.*

James 1:19-20

REFLECTION

Just as a double-minded person could not expect to hear from God (vs 6,7), so to the angry person should not expect to accomplish God's will. We are constantly exposed to expressions of anger everywhere from the media to traffic jams and at the same time are confronted with our own feelings of anger - perhaps directed at ourselves as much as anyone else. No doubt there are times we feel justified in our anger so it is a challenge to hear God's word say that our anger "can never make things right in God's sight". It is one thing to feel anger and another to act on it. Like any emotion, it is impractical to say "don't feel angry" however we do have a choice where we take our feelings. James gives us two simple steps to slow the march of anger in our life - be quick to listen and slow to speak. By really listening to a person or situation we may better understand the facts and so find our anger is misplaced or overdone. By being slow to speak, we will more likely avoid the temptation to indulge our angry feelings and, rather, respond in a life-giving manner - with a better outcome for all. No matter how justified we feel, our anger will not force things to be right, especially in God's sight.

FAITH & ACTION

If God's opinion matters to us, then we owe it to him to take these practical steps of anger management on board. Ask God to forgive wrong usage of anger in the past and pray for his help to be quick to listen and slow to speak. Find some time this week to reflect on any feelings of anger you have. You may recall some that flared up in a specific situation. Where did they come from? What can you learn and what could you change? You may identify some on-going areas of anger. Again, what is the source? How can you use the listen quickly, speak slowly advice to change this.

DAY 12 - LIFE TRANSFORMATION

READING

So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the message God has planted in your hearts, for it is strong enough to save your souls.

James 1:21

REFLECTION

The first word in today's reading - "so"(or "therefore" in other translations) - links these verses to yesterday's which spoke about being slow to anger. Not giving way to anger is clearly part of a larger life transformation in which we put aside all kinds of offensive thinking in exchange for the message or word God planted in our hearts when we became Christians. Note the order of events here - 1. God "plants his message" in our heart (the initial act of believing and receiving Christ). 2. We "get rid of filth and evil" (saying no to those things that oppose Christ). 3. We "humbly accept the message"(-saying yes to Christ's presence in our lives). You could say God initiates relationship with us, and then we partner with him in keeping it going. We don't choose Christ once and then go on in life unchanged. That would be like saying yes at the wedding and leaving for separate honeymoons afterwards... The clear message is that we can't receive the Christian message and remain unchanged in thought, word and deed. God calls us to a life of consistency (holiness) in which our inner world, our words and our actions line up. And doesn't that sound like the best way to live?!! We even have the guarantee that this message - the good news of Jesus which James points to - is strong enough to save our souls.

FAITH & ACTION

Reaffirm the planting of God's word in your heart by confessing Jesus as Lord once again. Surrender to him any areas of "filth or evil" that have built up in your life. Turn once again to "humbly accept" his plan and his way in your life. Pray for someone you know who has fallen back from following Christ, that they might remember the beauty and wonder of his gracious offer of relationship and be willing to put all aside to follow him.

DAY 13 - BALANCING BELIEF & BEHAVIOUR

READING

And remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to. If you don't obey, you are only fooling yourself. For if you just listen and don't obey, it is like looking at your face in a mirror but doing nothing to improve your appearance. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like.

James 1:22-24

REFLECTION

James focuses in on his main theme for his entire letter - the balance and consistency of belief and behaviour. This is a significant theme for our generation. In our pluralistic society it is all too easy to say, "I believe in Jesus" but then make life choices that contradict his teaching (hating others, lying, greed, sexual immorality - for example). Or we may say "I believe in Jesus" and then say "I believe in Buddha or crystals or karma" as if there is no absolute opposition in these beliefs. James knows that what we really believe is seen in what we actually do. If we say we believe in Jesus but don't obey him, we are "fooling" ourselves. We find it too easy to relegate "belief" to an intellectual or pseudo-spiritual state that is divorced from our daily lives. But God's intention is to make his home, his throne and his temple in our lives, 24/7. This brings every word and action to account. Not in a condemning way, but a saving way - we get to find God's best plan for every thing we do. Using James analogy, we look into the mirror everyday and God says, "you're looking great and here are some more healthy tips!" And what's more, he gives us the strength to put them into action.

FAITH & ACTION

Is there an area in your life God has been challenging you about? Have you dismissed it as unimportant? Maybe something in today's reflection touched on something in your life... Don't shy away from God in shame or guilt. Bring those issues to him so that his gracious love might set you free and make you more available to serve his great cause on the earth.

DAY 14 - SOMETHING PERFECT

READING

But if you keep looking steadily into God's perfect law - the law that sets you free - and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it. If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are just fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.

James 1:25-26

REFLECTION

We all know we live in an imperfect world, and perfectionism is a sure way to be burnt out and frustrated. And yet there is something perfect in the world - God's law as embodied by the perfect life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This "law of the Spirit" leads to life and freedom in contrast to the "law of sin and darkness" which makes us slaves and kills us. Too often we pursue various pastimes, pleasures and plans because the world holds them up as expressions of freedom. And yet again and again these so-called freedoms bring us into bondage because they are not the perfect and complete ways of God. But those who will begin a steady relationship with God through Jesus, gazing into his law of grace and truth, will find their body, mind and soul breaking into peace and freedom. This is no casual glance at Christ, it is eyes fixed, ears listening, and will ready to obey. In that stance, we are daily candidates for the blessings of God. Even our pesky tongues will come into line ensuring we don't render our faith "worthless" in the eyes of others and ourselves by saying one thing and doing another. As the hymnist wrote, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace".

FAITH & ACTION

Look steadily into God's perfect law today - say hello to Jesus, spend some time talking to Him, open God's word and allow it to speak to you. Order your priorities to make room for meeting with other believers. Give thanks for the freedom we have that will last forever.

DAY 15 - PURE AND LASTING RELIGION

READING

Pure and lasting religion in the sight of God our Father means that we must care for orphans and widows in their troubles, and refuse to let the world corrupt us.

James 1:27

REFLECTION

The word religion means many things to many people. For some, it is on the list of taboo topics, along with politics. For others it is a world of ritual and tradition. And for others it suggests empty, man-made attempts to reach God. But there is a pure and lasting religion in the sight of God, James explains. It is when we give of ourselves to care for the most vulnerable in our society such as orphans and widows. The Message Bible paraphrases this as “the homeless and loveless”. This activity, motivated by the love of God, is pure (unpolluted) and lasting (of eternal consequence). While religious temples will eventually crumble and fall and religious figures fade into obscurity, one life loved in the kingdom of God will change the world forever. Alongside this, we must not ignore the vitality of our own personal purity and faith - James reminds us again to stand apart from the corruption of the world. Commitment to serve those in need and also pursue a life set apart for God, go hand in hand. And over all of this, James identifies God as “our Father” reminding us that we too are caught up in his loving embrace.

FAITH & ACTION

Ask God to show you “pure and lasting religion” for your life. A good place to start is with members of your own family or circle of friends who are homeless or loveless. Then find out more about the projects occurring in your local church and find a way to contribute by giving, praying or going. Ask God to fill your heart with his compassion for a broken world.

DAY 16 - AVOID THE APPEARANCE TRAP

READING

My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim that you have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favour some people more than others? For instance, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewellery, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in shabby clothes.

James 2:1-2

REFLECTION

It is easy to be star-struck in a society almost obsessed with celebrity. James could not have conceived of the multiple forms of mass media we contend with today with people becoming famous and recognisable through everything from You Tube to Big Brother. Emphasis on appearance has never been so important and even scruffy has its designer labels. This only makes James' rhetorical question even more relevant for us (funny how the Bible just never goes out of date). To rephrase, he asks us "how can you avoid judging by appearances when appearances are so important in our culture?" The implication is that the church is one place where people are measured at a deeper level and at the same time, accepted regardless of appearance, background, income level etc. He adds "glorious" to the title "Lord Jesus Christ" almost as if to remind us where real beauty, wonder and significance is to be found. And this is the answer to our question... To avoid falling into the appearance trap, stay focused on, aware of and enthralled by the splendour of the Lord and we will see the human trappings of "fame and glory and wealth" for what they really are - superficial. Rich or poor or in-between, we stand naked before God and in need of his true clothing of grace.

FAITH & ACTION

Practice considering people "no longer from a worldly point of view"- see past their expensive clothes or their dirty, smelly ones and see a priceless person who our glorious Lord died for out of his great love. Pray - "Dear God, fill my eyes with a vision of your glory that I may not allow my faith to fade amidst all the lesser lights that fill our world. Help me to see myself and others as you see us. Help me to live in the world but not of it. In Jesus name, Amen."

DAY 17 - MOTIVES TESTED

READING

If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor " - well, doesn't this discrimination show that you are guided by wrong motives?

James 2:3-4

REFLECTION

Our motives are tested, not by what is easy, but by what is hard. It would be easy to show respect and interest in a well-dressed wealthy person and put this down to your usual practice of Christian kindness. But if the next person through the door is a smelly, shabby, uncertain looking person, James makes it clear that our real motives begin to show. If we don't treat this person with the same level of respect and interest, then there was something other than kindness at work in our motives. It's a tough, uncompromising message from James (as usual) and behind it is his desire that Christians not be self-seeking but God-seeking. Also, that we practice what we preach. If we preach that God loves everyone and wants to come into their life with grace and healing then, the wake-up call is, we are the conduit of that love, grace and healing. So if we carry it along when it is easy and shut it down when it's hard, we rob God and rob people and, most of all, ourselves.

FAITH & ACTION

Ask God to fill you with his love, grace and healing once again today. And specifically ask him for an overflow that will bless those with whom you come into contact. Ask God to reveal your true motives in various areas of life and be ready to humbly acknowledge your need for forgiveness and change. Thank God for his patient perfecting of our lives.

DAY 18 - TWO WAYS TO LIVE

READING

Listen to me dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the kingdom of God he promised to those who love him? And yet, you insult the poor man! Isn't it the rich who drag you into court? Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?

James 2:5-7

REFLECTION

We are offered a stark choice in this passage. As James describes some specific situations the church faced in the first century we see presented two ways of living. We can be among those who are rich in faith, love God, receive his promised Kingdom and bear his noble name. Or we can insult others, be contentious and unjust, blaspheme God's noble name and receive nothing more than the temporary riches this world has to offer. James has seen that the poor are more likely to be among the first group and the rich among the second based on the receptivity of their hearts. This is the lesson we need to draw - that whether rich or poor we have a choice to live by faith and love in the Kingdom of God, trusting in the name of Jesus above all else. Or we can live a life of cynical self-gain, tearing down anything that seems to threaten our self-interest and live in the kingdom of darkness, with little trust at all. Sounds extreme, but is it? Think corporate takeover and redundancy, family splits over lottery wins or inheritances, neighbours waging war over fences, red faces over car spaces, children bitter over parental favouritism... the list goes on. By choosing "poor" in this world's kingdom for the sake of "rich" in God's, we are set free from so much bitter angst.

FAITH & ACTION

Set aside any offence you have been carrying over some perceived hurt or injustice. Just do it. You have a better kingdom and more noble name to carry. Ask God to help you live "poor in spirit" which means being spiritually receptive and dependant on God in all things regardless of material circumstances.

DAY 19 - GOD'S ROYAL COMMAND

READING

Yes indeed, it's good when you truly obey our Lord's royal command found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbour as yourself". But if you pay special attention to the rich, you are committing a sin, for you are guilty of breaking that law.

James 2:8-9

REFLECTION

We may feel a bit chuffed, along with James' original audience, when we are commended for being good when we obey the royal law of loving our neighbour. But then he challenges us that to pay special attention to the rich is a breach of that law and leaves us guilty of sin. Jesus taught in the parable of the Good Samaritan that our neighbour is anyone who comes into contact with us and affects our world. We are commanded to love these people, regardless of status, race, religion, or wealth. To favour some because they have some earthly advantage is to bring some people near and push others away, making them bystanders to our lives. As Christians, we don't have that choice. The command is to love any person that God chooses to bring near. That love may be expressed in different ways, depending on what is possible and appropriate, but it is not an option to just love those we find easy to love. In that case, love your neighbour would cease to be royal law and become a weak preference. And if the royal law falls, then human relationships are at the mercy of all kinds of greed, self-interest and dishonesty. As Christians, we are humble and fragile examples of a higher way of living.

FAITH & ACTION

Grab a piece of paper, and write the title "Circle of Influence" at the top. Then draw a big circle and write the name of every person you relate to in some way for at least 30 mins or on two or three occasions in a week on average. Obviously family will be there, work colleagues, but maybe some unexpected names will pop up such as a neighbour, bus driver, store owner, etc. Under the circle write "Love my neighbour". Now commit to praying for these people regularly and looking for opportunities to show love and bring the influence of God...

DAY 20 - SAVED IN ABSOLUTE TERMS

READING

And the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as the person who has broken all of God's laws. For the same God who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder". So if you murder someone, you have broken the entire law, even if you do not commit adultery.

James 2:10-11

REFLECTION

There is no grey area between perfect and imperfect, complete and incomplete. You can't be partly perfect and so James, in moving to a more general discussion of right and wrong and our standing before God, reminds us that there is no pecking order of sinners in God's eyes. God, forever perfect, is completely separate (holy) from all of creation which is forever imperfect. We might arrange wrongs in order of severity, but in the long run they are all just wrong. Perhaps James is challenging the tendency for us to attempt to justify our "small sins" by referring to the "big sins" of others. The adulterer might defend themselves by saying at least they haven't murdered anyone. And the one showing favouritism to the wealthy might say at least I'm faithful to my spouse. When we get into this kind of legalism (your sin is bigger than my sin) we ignore the real issue - that God has no sin and just as light and dark will never be the same, we can never be the same as God or on the same level or in the same place... unless... we accept our separation from God and ask him to make us right through the cross of Christ. On this basis, we move away from judging people in relative terms and turn around to be saved in absolute terms.

FAITH & ACTION

Jesus warned us against pointing out the speck in our brother or sister's eye, and ignoring the log in our own. It is hard to see with a log in your eye... With honest appraisal, think about the "judging" you have been doing of others and try and spot the log in your own eye at that point. Ask God for his forgiveness and for grace for your brother or sister too.

DAY 21 - REMEMBER THE LAW OF LOVE

READING

So whenever you speak, or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law of love, the law that set you free. For there will be no mercy for you if you have not been merciful to others. But if you have been merciful, then God's mercy toward you will win out over his judgement.

James 2:12-13

REFLECTION

Can you remember everything you do or say in a day? Sometimes we can't remember what we did or said five minutes ago but can recall clearly words or actions from years ago. These tend to be moments when what we have done or said is highlighted by the importance of the outcome. We remember saying yes to a marriage proposal; saying harsh, cruel words to a friend; failing to act when we saw a need; reaching out and changing someone's life. James asks us to live in the knowledge that every word and deed is highlighted with importance in the eyes of God. He asks us to choose God not just in our beliefs, but in every word and action. We too easily fall short of such a requirement which is why we are to fill these words and actions with mercy because we are aware that we too require mercy. God has instigated a law of love through his Son which replaces the law of sin and death. To be judged by the law of love that sets us free (because Jesus died in our place) we are asked to judge others with the law of love. Let God's mercy win out in your life by being merciful. And as Jesus taught us, let God's forgiveness find you just as your forgiveness finds others. What an amazing place we have in creation that our act of mercy releases mercy from God to us; that our word of forgiveness, releases God to forgive us. All this is possible because Jesus invoked a new law of love by satisfying forever the requirement of the old law on the Cross.

FAITH & ACTION

"Our Father in heaven, may your name be honoured. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven. Give us our food for today, and forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Mat 6:9-13

DAY 22 - FAITH THAT COUNTS

READING

Dear brothers and sisters, what's the use of saying you have faith if you don't prove it by your actions? This kind of faith can't save anyone.

James 2:14

REFLECTION

The cornerstone of the Christian message is that we are saved by what God has done and not by what we do. This was the new and better promise from God that Jesus spoke of as being brought in through the breaking of his body and shedding of his blood on the cross. What James is highlighting here is that it is possible to have a superficial belief in Jesus which is different to the life-transforming encounter that is on offer. "What's the use of saying you have faith..." James asks. If it is just words then something is wrong. We can apply this in a few different ways: 1) Nominal (name only) Christianity where it is convenient to wear the tag but inconvenient to live the life. 2) Misunderstood Christianity where we skew faith and grace to excuse us from any attempt to live godly lives on the basis that our works (or sins) don't really count. 3) Impersonal Christianity where we reduce faith to knowledge which progressively becomes removed from our daily lives. These all became major issues and in some cases grew into heresies that damaged the church and still do damage today. It is unlikely James had these in mind as his focus was much more intimate. However the answer is the same. He calls Christians to an ongoing, deep, personal faith encounter with the "glorious Lord Jesus Christ" that springs up with new life, love and action.

FAITH & ACTION

We are never that far removed from being "name only", "cheap grace" or "ivory tower" Christians. James insists we take a closer look at our faith to make sure we haven't rendered it "useless". Consider today - are their times I'm at risk from these counter-faiths? Thank God for his excellent grace towards you, ask him to fill you with fresh revelation of his kingdom on earth and surrender yourself again to his holy ways.

DAY 23 - THREE STEPS TO ACTIVE FAITH

READING

Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, and you say, "Well goodbye, and God bless you; stay warm and eat well" - but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?"

James 2:15-16

REFLECTION

James gives us three steps to active faith. Firstly, we see the need - "suppose you see a brother or sister who needs..." Too often we are so preoccupied with our own needs that we don't register the needs of others. But faith tells me that "God supplies all my needs from his glorious riches" allowing me to take my eyes off myself and look up to see how I can serve God. Secondly, we speak life to the needy person. Rather than platitudes that are meaningless, or promises that are empty, let us speak from faith words that are backed up by God. These words might carry a revelation of God's love for this person and his ability to change their world. Thirdly, we take action to become part of God's answers. Now we are really in the faith realm because having seen the situation, spoken God's truth we are believing that God can supply through us. To stop with just words is to doubt that God can come through. We rob ourselves of a faith encounter and rob our brother or sister of a miracle God has for them. When we get involved in seeing, speaking and doing, our faith "does good". The key here is to see with faith what God is doing, and what he asks us to do. We get in over our heads when instead of faith, we are prompted to help another by guilt, fear or pride. And remember the greatest need we encounter daily is for people to know Jesus Christ.

FAITH & ACTION

Ask God to show you how he wants to act to meet needs in your own life and in those around you. Pray for these situations and his love will begin to prompt you to word and action. Remember, he is the supply, not you. And it is for his glory, not ours. We also need the sensitivity to know the right time to speak and act so first we must look and listen.

DAY 24 - FAITH DOES MORE THAN SKIM

READING

So you see, it isn't enough to just to have faith. Faith that doesn't show itself by good deeds is no faith at all - it's dead and useless. Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith, others have good deeds." I say, "I can't see your faith if you don't have good deeds, but I will show you my faith through my good deeds."

James 2:17-18

REFLECTION

When James says it isn't enough to have faith, he is really speaking of counterfeit faith which we have previously identified as "name only" or "cheap grace" or "ivory tower" faith. These are faith substitutes that don't really engage with Jesus in grace and truth. He says these kinds of "unfaith" will never be enough. They are not enough because they do not penetrate the surface of our life - they can be worn like the ubiquitous cross on a chain with no meaning or feeling at all. Instead a heart-felt trust, acceptance, belief and receiving of Christ will always produce action. In other words, you can't know Jesus and not show it in your thoughts, words and deeds. Faith produces repentance - a turning from wrong doing. Faith produces calm in the midst of trouble. Faith produces miracles as we expect God to move with mercy and power in our midst. Faith produces great works of compassion as we believe God cares for those in need. Faith does many things because it makes us a living, breathing conduit of the very Spirit of God. What a great gift we have received - the Holy Spirit leads us to faith in Father and Son and Father and Son then fill our faith with the Spirit. No wonder James is so strident in his opposition to skin-deep faith. He wants a deep reservoir in our lives for the Spirit to fill and overflow - with God's goodness splashing out everywhere.

FAITH & ACTION

Ponder for a minute - do you ever let God's word just skim across your life? Do you ever give just lip service to the promptings of the Spirit or the practice of Christian disciplines? Turn from those ways and ask God to delve deeply into your life that you might spring up with his works on the earth.

DAY 25 - MORE THAN JUST BELIEF

READING

Do you still think it is enough just to believe that there is one God? Well even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror! Fool! When will you ever learn that faith that does not result in good deeds is useless?

James 2:19-20

REFLECTION

It is good to know the demons tremble at the thought of God but James seems concerned they are showing more faith than some Christians! He refers to belief in “one God” and has in mind the Jewish custom of daily reciting the Shema: “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and will all your soul and with all your strength.” Deut 6:4-5. Imagine fiery James who carries the vivid memories of his older brother Jesus touching the leper, healing the demon possessed, embracing the unclean, setting free the sinner, praying all night in the wilderness, weeping for the lost, being mocked and scourged, paraded through Jerusalem, nailed to the cross, hanging naked in excruciating pain for all to see, forgiving all. Then imagine how James felt when he came to the realisation that this was not just his brother experiencing these things but the spotless lamb of God. Now, some years later, as he hears Jews and Jewish Christians continue to recite their creed, often rote like, is it any wonder he strikes out against mere lip-service Christianity. He can’t reconcile faith in his Lord with loveless, passionless Christianity. Can we really have faith in Jesus, and do nothing?

FAITH & ACTION

Take some extra time to read some accounts of Jesus life from the gospels. Ask God for fresh love and faith in Jesus. Speak the Shema over your life but pray into what it means to love God with everything and allow him to stir your faith, courage, and passion.

DAY 26 - WHATEVER GOD ASKS

READING

Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was declared right with God because of what he did when he offered his son at the altar. You see, he was trusting God so much that he was willing to do whatever God told him to do. His faith was made complete by what he did - by his actions.

James 2:21-22

REFLECTION

Four phrases stand out in our passage today - “declared right with God”, “trusting God so much”, “whatever God told him to do” and “faith was made complete”. Starting with the last first, our faith is made complete or perfect by the action we take as a result of our faith. This action is to be whatever God tells us to do. We can only do whatever God tells us to do if we live in a position of trust, and, as James adds, “so much” trust. Finally God declares us right with him because of our faith. And our faith is declared to God by our works. James knew that his Jewish readers already claimed Abraham as a racial ancestor but he is more interested in us inheriting Abraham’s life of faith-deeds and credited righteousness. This kind of inheritance is open to believers of all races. Abraham’s faith allowed him to trust God even as he offered up his only son in unconditional obedience. Of course, Abraham was not required finally to sacrifice his son and we know that in Jesus, God offered his own son instead.

FAITH & ACTION

What is the “whatever God asks” in your life right now? Make your faith complete by obeying his word to you. It might be putting end to a sin in your life, responding to a call to serve God in a particular ministry, being generous and faithful in giving, loving your neighbour, or hoping and trusting again.

DAY 27 - FRIEND OF GOD

READING

And so it happened, just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, so God declared him to be righteous." He was even called "the friend of God". So you see, we are made right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

James 2:23-24

REFLECTION

James is not the only New Testament writer to use Abraham as an illustration of relationship with God. When Paul discusses Abraham being credited with righteousness in Romans 4:5, he concludes that, "... people are declared righteous because of their faith, not because of their works." We may be tempted to see a contradiction between

James and Paul when really we see a clarification. Paul teaches us that we cannot work our way into right relationship with God, we receive it by faith as a free gift. James teaches us that the same faith that receives God's gift of grace, also activates our life to good works. Our faith declares us righteous before God, our deeds declare this new righteousness to the world. Perhaps the phrase that we should settle on today is "friend of God". God describes Abraham as his friend in Isaiah 41:8. We too are offered a life of friendship with God and like any friendship, this is an interactive, two-sided, relationship in which we give and receive. But more than anything, it's a friendship that carries the promise of God. Let's see how God describes his friendship with us in Isaiah 41:9-10: "I have called you back from the ends of the earth so you can serve me. For I have chosen you and will not throw you away. Don't be afraid for I am with you. Do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my victorious right hand." That's the kind of friendship all of us need today.

FAITH & ACTION

Take a few minutes today to have a friendly chat with God. I encourage you to find a place where you can speak out loud, in a conversational way, with God. Tell him how you are feeling, what has been happening, what your concerns are and listen to his response. Read out loud Is 41:9-10 as his promise of friendship over your life.

DAY 28 - FAITH DRAWS US NEAR

READING

Rahab the prostitute is another example of this. She was made right with God by her actions - when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. Just as the body is dead without a spirit, so also faith is dead without good deeds.

James 2:25-26

REFLECTION

James concludes his passionate teaching on faith and works with a theological statement and a story. Faith and works are as inseparable as is the body and spirit. When you say faith you imply action, and when you say action, you imply faith. His final illustration is the Old Testament character Rahab, a prostitute in the city of Jericho in the days of Joshua. As the chosen people of God advance on the immoral nations of Canaan, they send in spies to the gateway city of Jericho. Arriving at Rahab's home, which may have been a kind of inn, she is faced with the choice - hand over the spies and put her trust in the gods of her people or protect the spies and put her trust in the God of the Israelites. She has a faith revelation which people of all nations and all religions are still having today "...for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below" (Josh 2:11). She believed that the God of Israel was in fact the God of the Heavens and the Earth and as such she is a forerunner of all who come to God on the basis of faith, not race - no doubt the reason James chose her as an example in writing to the early church which consisted of Jewish and Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians. Matthew 1:5 tells us that Rahab became a direct descendent of King David and eventually Jesus Christ; and the writer of Hebrews includes her in a list of the heroes of faith (Heb 11:31).

We can find great hope in Rahab's story as it shows that it is not our race, gender, social status, physical strength, intelligence or wealth that gives us standing before God. Rather it is faith in Jesus, guiding and fuelling our actions. The promise is, that not only will God accept us, but he will draw us into the heart of his plans and purposes on the earth.

FAITH & ACTION

What decisions are at your door today? Write down a few decisions you are trying to make and apply Rahab's revelation - that the God you serve is God of everything - and make your decision on the basis of this faith and wisdom.

DAY 29 - WHAT WE SAY COUNTS

READING

Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged by God with greater strictness. We all make many mistakes, but those who control their tongues can also control themselves in every way.

James 3:1-2

REFLECTION

Having pressed home his point regarding faith and action, James turns his attention to our words. He begins by turning the spotlight on himself and others who teach in church life. They will be “judged by God with greater strictness” and “all make many mistakes”. James is saying that not only should our actions be consistent with our faith, but our words as well. This is an even greater challenge because it is so easy for words to flow out of our mouth for which we feel no accountability. But, using himself as an example, James makes it clear that God does hold our words to account. Teachers will be asked to match what they say with what they do. Because their words have a position of greater influence, God will apply a more exacting standard. God does not take kindly to people who get up and teach people one thing, and do another. Perhaps James is recalling the many confrontations Jesus had with the Pharisees and religious teachers, “They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely” said Jesus in Luke 20:47. James knows our words have great creative potential, for good or evil; and that they are not disconnected from the rest of our life. To master our tongue is an indication that we have brought our whole self under control (a fruit of the Spirit).

FAITH & ACTION

What do you speak about? Where do your conversations head? What things do you say about yourself? About others? If you can think of a situation at home or work etc where your conversation is unduly negative, critical, crude, untrue - think about how God would want you to speak and ask for his help in putting this into practice.

DAY 30 - THINGS HAPPEN WITH FAITH & WORDS

READING

We can make a large horse turn around and go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. And a tiny rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot wants it to go, even though the winds are strong.

James 3:3-4

REFLECTION

I remember the evening I proposed to my wife. We had discussed marriage and felt confident of our love, but it was when I spoke the words, "Will you marry me?" and she responded with "Yes", that our entire lives changed forever. We were very young, naive, with little money and few possessions but God saw fit to put within our beings the creative ability to speak words that forever affected our destiny and that of many others (notably our children!). When God created the universe he spoke and when he moved to redeem his creation he sent the Living Word, Jesus. We are made in the image of God and so when we believe in our heart and speak with our mouth, things happen. We become Christians this way (Rom 10:9 "believe in your heart... confess with your mouth... you will be saved") and help others come to Christ this way (Rom 10:14 "how can they believe... if they have never heard... how can they hear... unless someone tells them.") James is telling us that our tongue, or more accurately the words our tongue speaks, may seem insignificant but they have the power to bring great change "even though the winds are strong..." Your words count. For good or evil. Make the most of them today.

FAITH & ACTION

Do you say things about yourself, your life, your friends or family, your workplace, your leaders, your nation that are not in keeping with what God says? Make the choice today to speak blessings not curses, life not death. Help shape a godly reality in your life by believing and speaking godly words in truth and love.

DAY 31 - WORDS CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE

READING

So also the tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do. A tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is full of wickedness that can ruin your whole life. It can turn the entire course of your life into a blazing flame of destruction, for it is set on fire by hell itself.

James 3:5-6

REFLECTION

Our words can seem very small and insignificant, especially in these days when we are constantly chatting on the phone, instant messaging, emailing and texting - not to mention those occasions when we actually talk face to face. Dozens of television and radio stations blare out words 24/7, internet sites carry the latest news and trends, our letter boxes fill with catalogues, newspapers and offers... words become the wallpaper of life. But James reminds us that our words can “ruin your whole life” and “turn the course of your entire life”. This happens in two ways - “turning point words” that dramatically end or begin major aspects of your life (“I never want to see you again,” “I hate you”, “I love you”); and “layer upon layer” words that over time take your life in a specific direction. Sometimes the words that change our life are very deliberately chosen, even though we may later regret them. Other times we are not even conscious of the impact of our words or how they are perceived by another. In the context of today’s reading, James highlights the destructive nature of our speaking and that when we live apart from the Lordship of Christ, our speaking is actually tinged by the fires of hell. This reflects our fallen nature which we cannot change through will power, education or legislation. Ultimately only the transforming grace of God can change our inner person and so set our speaking on the path to life-giving change. Then our tongues can spark fires of great good on the earth, burning down injustice and bringing light and warmth to those in need of God’s touch.

FAITH & ACTION

Pray with me: “Dear God, thank you for giving me access to your creative power through faith and words. Forgive me for using this gift selfishly, carelessly and cruelly. Redeem the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart that I might walk humbly with you. Fill my with your Word by your Spirit and give me the love and the courage to speak the truth in love today. In Jesus name. Amen.”

DAY 32 – CROSS CONQUERS EVIL DOMINION

READING

People can tame all kinds of animals and birds and reptiles and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is an uncontrollable evil, full of deadly poison.

James 3:7-8

REFLECTION

At first glance at today's verses, there does not appear to be great deal to work with to provide an inspiring daily devotion!! But we do learn something of James' and the Bible's world view. People taming creation clearly refers to Genesis 1:28 where God gives human kind dominion over the earth: "Be masters over the fish and birds and all the animals." James knows God has shared with us his authority on this earth. For better or worse, that continues today. Likewise, James describes our tongue as "uncontrollable evil" reflecting the Bible's view that we cannot change or save ourselves, we have been corrupted by rebellion against God. James may have in mind the very account of the Fall in which Adam's first words after disobeying God were to attack God and his wife, recanting responsibility: "...it was the woman who you gave me who brought me the fruit..." Gen 3:12. A deadly combination - authority and uncontrolled evil. Living in such a world there is only one place to go, the foot of the Cross where the blood of Jesus breaks the hold of evil, begins to forgive, heal and restore the person we were intended to be. In Jesus, there is even hope for our tongue!!

FAITH & ACTION

Don't try and be good today, ask the Source of all goodness, Jesus Christ, to fill your life, your words, your actions with His presence, His power and His purpose.

DAY 33 - BLESSINGS AND CURSES

READING

Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it breaks out into curses against those made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!

James 3:9-10

REFLECTION

We continue to glean details of James' and the Bible's view of the very nature of Creation. Yesterday we learnt that God has delegated authority on earth to human kind and that, tainted by the corruption of sin, we are unable to make ourselves right. Today we learn, that despite the "uncontrollable evil" in humanity, we are all made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). This explains why we are capable of praising God like angels and cursing people like demons. We at once carry potential for magnificent beauty and love countered by horrific destruction and hate. Humanity is accustomed, but not comfortable, with this dilemma. Much study in the fields of theology, psychology, philosophy, biology and art are directed to understanding the complexities of human personality. James cuts through all of this and simply says, "It should not be this way." If we love God we should love people. Again, we immediately know this is not possible in our own strength. Perhaps, in all this, James recalls his own failings in comparison to His Lord (and older brother) who was perfect in thought, word and deed. Having shared with One who never spoke a wrong word, no doubt James is all the more passionate in his desire to see this worked out in his and our lives. When confronted with our own sin, we can try and blame and explain, or simply acknowledge our need and let Christ's mercy cover us and raise us up anew.

FAITH & ACTION

Think about what might constitute words of "blessings" and words of "cursing". Ask God to help increase the "blessings" from your lips and decrease the "curses".

DAY 34 - YOU CAN'T FAKE FRESH FOR LONG

READING

Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? Can you pick olives from a fig tree or figs from a grapevine? No and you can't draw fresh water from a salty pool.

James 3:11-12

REFLECTION

When it comes to our words (the sum total of our comments, conversations, self-talk, imagined conversations) we can only speak of that which our hearts are full. We may fake “fresh” for a while, but if “bitter” fills us then it will be on our lips soon enough. Likewise, if we are filled with the freshness of Jesus, we may have times of oppression, tiredness, pressure or struggle where we find bitter words on our lips but these will soon be followed by words of repentance and “times of refreshing” will return. Daily our society grapples with problems and most of the so-called answers deal with what is said or done, not who we really are. James echoes the words of Jesus (“you will know them by their fruit” - Matt 7:16) when he reminds us it is the kind of tree that determines the fruit; the kind of pool that determines the quality of water. As he concludes his teaching on the tongue, James asks us to consider if we have allowed God to change us from the inside out, or are we putting on fair-weather religion. “Turn from your sins and turn to God”, “call on the Lord and be saved”, “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” - all New Testament words that remind us that Jesus is the only path to a new you, and a new you is from where right words and deeds will spring.

FAITH & ACTION

Read and memorise 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 which tells us that we are new creations in Christ and that part of this is to share this message with others. Ask God for the opportunity to do just that this week.

DAY 35 - WHY YOU DO WHAT

READING

If you are wise and understand God's ways, live a life of steady goodness so that only good deeds will pour forth. And if you don't brag about the good you do, you will be truly wise. But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your hearts, don't brag about being wise. That is the worst kind of lie.

James 3:13-14

REFLECTION

Not only what you do matters, but why. A life of steady goodness is wisdom. And steady goodness not tainted by pride is even greater wisdom. If we think we do good, but to do good out of a need to be recognised, to compare favourably to others, to feel secure, then we fool ourselves. Having spent some time urging us to good deeds James pulls the carpet from beneath us and challenges to exam the motives for our actions. Our lives need to be based on an understanding of God's ways, not bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. God's ways are always motivated by love and the supreme example of this love is Jesus, who gave his life for ours. Again we are brought back to the fact that we can't separate our outward lives - even good deeds - from what's in our heart. God knows them both - better than we know ourselves.

FAITH & ACTION

Is there someone or something that you are jealous of? Think through your week and try and recall if jealousy, bitter resentment, envy or covetous raised their ugly heads at any point. Could it be that any of the things you do are motivated by these emotions? Ask God for insight, forgiveness, healing and restoration.

DAY 36 - SUBTLE POISON OF JEALOUSY

READING

For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual and motivated by the devil. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition there you will find disorder and every kind of evil.

James 3:15-16

REFLECTION

There is apparent wisdom on the earth which is actually born of jealousy, selfishness, and even demonic influence. It leads to disorder or confusion and all kinds of evil practices. That James would need to warn the church of such things seems a surprise as we might think it would be obvious they are not of God. Which is the point: jealousy and selfish ambition are usually subtle. We don't tend to just come out and say "I'm jealous of you" or "I'm only doing this for what I can get out of it..." Rather we hide these feelings (often from ourselves too) and cloak them with more acceptable behaviour.

This is why confusion so often follows because when we do or say something that appears innocent, but is laced with jealous or selfish venom, an after-taste of doubt, fear and uncertainty remains. The devil loves this kind of atmosphere and gladly turns it into a stronghold of his influence. It's enough to make you shudder at the thought!

Praise God that we have been shown a better way - to be as little children, to prefer others before ourself, to trust God with our advancement, and to recognise that any gift a person has is from God. Don't hide from feelings of jealousy or selfishness - that just gives the devil room to move. Bring these thoughts before God and allow him to lovingly cleanse and restore you. Allow his word and Spirit to build you securely in the love of God so you can rejoice in the success of others and trust God with your own.

FAITH & ACTION

Affirm someone today - from the heart.

DAY 37 - WISDOM OF THE PURE

READING

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure. It is also peace-loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no partiality and is always sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness.

James 3:17-18

REFLECTION

In sharp contrast to earthly wisdom - shaped by jealousy and selfish ambition (F&A36) - heavenly wisdom brings the rule of heaven to earth. Attributes of heavenly wisdom include purity, peace, gentleness, submission, mercy, good deeds, impartiality and sincerity. This is not unlike Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit and we can see that for James, wisdom is virtually synonymous with the Holy Spirit, with whom we are filled when we follow Christ. How amazing that with all humanity's complex attempts to be wise, it is as simple as receiving wisdom as a gift from God - nothing less than relationship with His Son. The first attribute of this wisdom is purity. We often think of purity as the driven snow or sparkling spring water but for us it means being undivided, not mixing our faith with anything. We are pure when we are whole-hearted - God's way or no way. We fight so hard to dilute God's wisdom, thinking that if we could just add a bit of our self to it, it would be more palatable. But eventually we will surrender and say with Jesus, not my will but yours be done. The harvest that springs up is right and good and full of eternal peace.

FAITH & ACTION

Christian, choose the wisdom of God. Instead of justifying yourself, hand everything back to God; where there is strife, make peace; where there is frustration, spread gentleness; where there is rebellion, choose submission; where there is hatred, plant mercy; where there is apathy, do good; where there is prejudice, be impartial; where there is cynicism, give sincerity. The world will change around you!

DAY 38 - RECOVERING FROM CONFLICT

READING

What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Isn't it the whole army of evil desires at war within you? You want what you don't have so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous for what others have, and you can't possess it, so you fight and quarrel to take it away from them. And yet the reason you don't have what you want is that you don't ask God for it.

James 4:1-2

REFLECTION

Whenever people come together in any kind of group or organisation (and even churches), conflict is usually not far away. Initial “honeymoon” periods in which “you can do no wrong”, give way to differences of opinion, personality clashes, office politics, and, as James dramatically asserts, outright “war”. Uncomfortably, he directs responsibility for these conflicts not at other people, but our own “army of evil desires”. Rather than feeling helpless in the face of this we should acknowledge that conflict is a way of developing true honesty and love in relationships - providing we take responsibility for our part, which is what James is helping us do. We do get jealous, we do scheme, we want what others have, but as we humble ourselves before God and each other we can move to a much better place. There is a great key to life hidden in the verses. We can never possess what other people have - which is why our attempts to be like others are so frustrating and damaging. On the other hand, we can have what God has - if we only ask. And what does God have? Love, acceptance, belonging; a perfect plan for us; an unhindered view of our strengths and weaknesses; forgiveness, restoration and enrichment. Why covet what you can't have when God is giving away the best gifts of all for those who ask through His Son, Jesus.

FAITH & ACTION

Identify those situations where you “want what other people have”. Lay these desires down and ask God to give you what he has for you - you will always end up better off!!

DAY 39 - CAN'T SERVE TWO MASTERS

READING

And even when you ask, you don't get it because your whole motive is wrong - you want only what will give you pleasure. You adulterers! Don't you realise that friendship with this world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again, that if your aim is to enjoy this world, you can't be a friend of God.

James 4:3-4

REFLECTION

Yesterday we learned that we can't have what others have (their life, their gifts, their opportunities) because everyone person is unique and so jealousy and coveting is fruitless and frustrating. Instead, we are encouraged to have what God has because he will give it to us freely if we ask. True security in life is not trying to be like someone else, but allowing God to show us who we are. Today James qualifies his "you have not because you ask not" statement by saying "you have not because you ask for the wrong reasons" (my paraphrase). He gives his readers a fiery rebuke for thinking they can pursue God, not for His own sake, but for what material gain they might get from Him. In other words, we aren't pursuing God at all, but worldly pleasures, and we foolishly believe that somehow God does not discern our motives. This kind of duo-discipleship is rampant in western culture. Too often the favour of God is reduced to material prosperity; the grace of God becomes a guarantee of continual comfort; the peace of God becomes a promise that we won't be disturbed by a broken world. But "Faith & Action James" will not stand for this and, pushing aside all false pluralism, he warns us that if we are friends with the world (where we put the pleasures and priorities of earthly living first) we cannot be friends of God (where we seek first His kingdom and its righteousness). We are made for so much more than being comfortable... our destiny lies in the dangerous, risky, no-guarantee realm of faith and friendship with the God of the universe.

FAITH & ACTION

Live for more today. More of Jesus, more of unconditional love, more of hilarious giving, more of daring prayers, more of honest words, more of wild praise, more of passionate pursuit of God in all his glory...

DAY 40 - NOT DISTANT, GOD WADES IN

READING

What do you think the Scriptures mean when they say that the Holy Spirit, whom God has placed within us, jealousy longs for us to be faithful? He gives us more and more strength to stand against such evil desires. As the Scriptures say, "God sets himself against the proud but he shows favour to the humble."

James 4:5-6

REFLECTION

Against the back drop of selfish ambition, jealousy, conflict and evil desires, we find the silhouette of God. Not distant from his fallen people, he has waded in, placing his very Spirit in those that have placed their faith "in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" (James 2:1). While our spirit finds itself unable to break free from the cycle of destructive desires, God's Spirit in us yearns and hungers for oneness with God. As we begin in Christ to respond to the promptings and pleadings of the Spirit we find a way of grace has been laid down for us. Whatever struggle with sin and this world we might face, James says simply, "he gives us more grace" (vs 6 NIV) or "he gives us more and more strength". Clarifying this further, James quotes Proverbs 3:34 to show this favour (grace) is accessed by the simple stance of humility. In contrast, staying proud, envious and insecure sets us in opposition to the ways of God - the proverbial hitting your head against the wall. James no doubt recalls the words of his older brother Jesus, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3)

FAITH & ACTION

Today, whatever struggle you face with yourself or your circumstances, speak this truth: "God gives more grace". This declares that no matter how challenges, troubles and battles escalate, God's grace is always more. Apply it to others too, especially those who seem so far from faith in God. God's grace is always bigger than their separation from him... Believe it.

DAY 41 - OVERCOMING WITH INTIMACY

READING

So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw close to God and God will draw close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, you hypocrites.

James 4:7-8

REFLECTION

Today's passage includes one of James' best known verses. Most Christians, in times of spiritual challenge or temptation, have prayed, "resist the devil and he will flee from you." It is truly good news that the devil - with his deception, confusion and accusation - will flee before a Christian who steadfastly resists. Of course we must take the phrase in context to gain its full benefit. The authority and power to resist the devil comes from first submitting to the authority and power of God. And God has said the way to do this is to believe and receive Jesus as Lord. We don't resist the devil out of human arrogance but in godly humility. The word resist means to withstand, to be opposite. So we do not pursue the devil - making him the centre of attention. Rather when he attacks with greed, we "resist" with generosity; when he comes with hate, we respond with love; when he comes with fear we meet him with faith and trust; and when he lingers with apathy, we rise up with passion for God. In each case we draw close to the character of God who draws near to us. Our great victory over the devil is intimacy with the One who loves us, made us, saves us and dwells with us. And even when we feel oppressed, weary and a failure, Jesus is much closer than we realise or could possibly understand and victory is already at hand.

FAITH & ACTION

Consider what it means to "wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, you hypocrites". Allow God to sanctify your inner and outer life by his word and Spirit. Put your hands to good use and set your mind on noble things.

DAY 42 - MOMENT OF TRUTH RELEASES FAITH

READING

Let there be tears for the wrong things you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. When you bow down before the Lord and admit your dependence on him, he will lift you up and give you honour.

James 4:9-10

REFLECTION

I recently heard a prominent Australian who is a recovering alcoholic describe how he was able to stay free of drink. He described the pivotal moment as being his decision that he could not set himself free. "I know it sounds strange for me, an atheist, to speak this way, but it was when I realised a greater power outside myself was necessary, that I begin to recover. I find this really difficult to express." In other words he saw himself as a man of no faith and yet it was faith that saved him - no wonder it was hard to express.

James makes it clear for us, in today's passage, that faith in God can only really begin its work when we make a sincere, honest assessment of the depravity and weakness of our life. That's why he emphasises tears, sorrow, deep grief, gloom and bowing down.

This sounds overdone to us only because we can't discern how far removed we are from God and the perfection he intended for us. But the Holy Spirit leads us to places of deep repentance where all we can do is fall on the ground before God. Instead of rubbing our face in the dirt, Jesus gets down besides us, writes words of destiny in the dust, and raises us up, saying, "Now we can begin..." We do this when we become a Christian but we will do it many times again as we stubbornly grab our lives from his grasp only to come to the end of ourselves again. And James finishes with an astounding truth. When God picks up the broken mess of our lives, he doesn't just put us back where we were, he elevates us to a place of honour...

FAITH & ACTION

Right now God may be showing you the need to bow down before him and give back areas of your life or maybe your whole life for the first time. Don't waste a moment, admit your dependence on him, and rest in his elevation.

DAY 43 - DON'T HATE WHO GOD SAYS TO LOVE

READING

Don't speak evil against each other, my dear brothers and sisters. If you criticise each other and condemn each other, then you are criticising and condemning God's law. But you are not a judge who can decide whether the law is right or wrong. Your job is to obey it. God alone, who made the law, can rightly judge among us. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to condemn your neighbour?

James 4:11-12

REFLECTION

James earlier introduced us to the “royal law” - “love your neighbour” (2:8) and now he challenges us to keep it. He highlights three potential breaches of this law - speaking evil, criticising and condemning our neighbour. Speaking evil is to lie, exaggerate negatives or spread evil innuendo (or fail to correct lies and innuendo). To criticise is to complain about, cut down or belittle a person’s words and behaviour. To condemn is to impose a guilty verdict on a person or to remain passive when such a verdict is aired. James says that in doing these things, we put ourselves in God’s place as judge. When we condemn a person God has commanded us to love, we make ourselves higher than God, a position we cannot sustain and so we quickly fall under the same heavy wheels of judgement with which we crushed the other person. Does this mean we should never challenge a Christian brother or sister whose life is clearly leading away from God? Not at all. James only asks that we love them and when you love another you will often speak hard words that you hope will heal. It’s the hard words that you hope will hurt that he is addressing. It’s the lazy pose of the critic, with no relationship commitment that he cannot abide. Without love, we too easily condemn those that God has the power to save; and criticise those that God has asked us to help grow. Let us submit then to the One who commands us “love your neighbour” for we too are protected and favoured by this royal law.

FAITH & ACTION

The world tells us we have a right to criticise and condemn those that fail us, annoy us, are different to us, bother us, or hinder us. But in the home, workplace, church or neighbourhood, God tells us that our responsibility is to love them. Make a decision not to speak negatively until you can show the same grace to that annoying person as you would to a dear friend.

DAY 44 - FAITH, NOT PRESUMPTION

READING

Look here, you people who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit." How do you know what will happen tomorrow? For your life is like the morning fog - it's here a little while, then it's gone.

James 4:13-14

REFLECTION

Right through his letter, James has relentlessly challenged us to ensure our faith is alive through action. These Holy Spirit inspired words have been seeking out every area of inconsistency and hypocrisy in our lives that we might have the wisdom of God, sharing a pure spiritual intimacy with God and each other. Today's challenge addresses almost the opposite - action without faith or action with presumption. It is not that we should live life in fear, never making plans. It is that we so easily drift from a place of dependence and interaction with God to a place where our heart is filled with our busy plans and projects as if that is all there is. We begin to take each day for granted and stop looking for God's guidance and sustenance. A holy fear of the greatness of God and an honest realisation of our own frailty are healthy perspectives in our forward thinking as they cause us to build with confident humility on the rock of God's word, rather than with ignorant arrogance on the sand of this world. Humans so easily presume things will stay the way they are because we desperately seek comfort and safety. And yet if we are truly living by faith, we know that God uses change to grow us; that despite our best plans there are many things beyond our control - but not God's; that we are only visiting this planet, like a morning mist, and that the deepest part of our heart is set on eternity.

FAITH & ACTION

Don't take today for granted. Value the people around you. Be really present in important conversations. Submit your plans and dreams to God. Rest in the assurance that he loves you and sees what you can't see. Be in the world but not of it. Be like Jesus who was willing to sacrifice everything for the reward set before him.

DAY 45 - SETTLE THE BATTLE OF WILLS

READING

What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that. Otherwise you will be boasting about your own plans, and all such boasting is evil.

James 4:15-16

REFLECTION

Our perspectives and attitudes are as important as our words and actions. It is possible to pursue great careers, achieve high levels of education or do wonderful acts of Christian ministry but with an attitude of independence and arrogance. We work for God without serving him, we talk to him without listening, we do "good" works without obeying. James is not asking for a suffocating paralysis in not being able to act without a bolt of lightning from God. Rather, he is insisting we settle the issue of Lordship in our life - not just when in church but more importantly when we are making life decisions in the home, business, school or neighbourhood. It's easy to say, "If it is the Lord's will..." when in a church gathering. But James wants to know if that is our perspective at our kitchen bench, work desk, lecture room or company boardroom. At the heart of this is the realisation that we cannot even extend our lives by one day without the willingness of God. "If the Lord wants us to, we will live..." How searching are the Scriptures?! They cut through the spiritual facade we so easily put up and show that when we do what we want with no reference to the Lordship of Christ, the real source of our actions is pride. We forget we have been bought for a price and appropriate the gifts of God as if they were our own invention. In this way, our actions become nothing more than boasting in the ears of God.

FAITH & ACTION

Join me in falling to our knees and praying, "Holy God, we have breath in our lungs today because it is your will for us. Thank you for the gift of this day. We give it back to you. Fill our day with your plans and purposes, your grace and generosity. Take us where you want us. Equip us for your service. Thank you for the joy and peace that come from living in the freedom you give."

DAY 46 - KNOWING IS NOT ENOUGH

READING

Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not to do it.

James 4:17

REFLECTION

Knowing is one thing, doing is another. This summarises James' entire message (faith without action is dead faith) and again it gives us a shake and forces us to grow up. Christianity can easily deteriorate into a talkfest where we feel blessed and anointed because of the wonderful spiritual truths we are learning. James reminds us that the more we know in Christ, the more we are responsible to act. If we know people outside of Christ are going to hell and we don't share Christ's love... If we know God answers prayer and we don't offer to pray for people... If we know giving even a cup of water to the least person is serving Christ and we keep our resources to ourselves... You get the picture. Jesus said that hearing his words and not doing them was like building a house on the sand. Even the greatest teaching - the words from Jesus' own lips - become unstable and unproductive if they are not converted into obedient action by those that hear. Listen and learn, by all means, but do so with a holy fear that God holds you responsible to put truth into action.

FAITH & ACTION

Take some time this week to go over any revelations from God you may have received from reading the Bible, a sermon, conference, book, or DVD. Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to act and make a heart decision to do so.

DAY 47 - BREAKING THE MATERIALISTIC TRANCE

READING

Look here, you rich people, weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. Your wealth is rotting away and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags.

James 5:1-2

REFLECTION

With the steady stream of media attention on the rich and famous, these verses jar and clang in our ears. It sounds like James has a real chip on his shoulder when it comes to the wealthy. In these verses he is not so much addressing Christians but the rich and powerful of society and he seems intent on spoiling all their fun. But the Bible is not against money or wealth - it is regularly shown to be important in the service of God and can be an aspect of the blessing of God on someone's life. What James is really doing is using strong, exaggerated language to break the materialistic trance we so easily fall into and remind us that as wonderful as all the trappings of wealth may seem, they are "rotting away". James is really acting out of love and concern for those that would sell their souls for the stuff of this world which will one day disappear and be replaced by an everlasting kingdom. We are worth so much more than money and clothes and yet how many young people's lives are devastated because they don't fit the designer image thrust at us constantly. The "terrible troubles" the rich will face is discovering that no amount of wealth and fine clothing can control their eternal destiny, or even tomorrow. If we have less materially, but have learned to put our trust in the everlasting word of God, we are richer by far. This is James message and whether we have a little or a lot, we are called to love, trust and worship God alone.

FAITH & ACTION

As the names of the rich and famous are paraded before you today in the media, pray for them, that they would realise that this is not their true home, and that they would fall out of love with material things and find the love of God through Jesus. Ask God to help you be an effective witness to those who are pursuing wealth as if it is all that matters. Ask God to help you to have a godly view of wealth in your own life.

DAY 48 - JUSTICE AND JUDGEMENT

READING

Your gold and silver have become worthless. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh in hell. This treasure you have accumulated will stand as evidence against you on the day of judgement. For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The wages you held back cry out against you. The cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Almighty.

James 5:3-4

REFLECTION

Having previously warned that reliance on material riches is false security in the face of an eternal, spiritual kingdom, James proceeds to show that our decisions regarding money and possessions are issues of justice in this life and judgement in the next. When we accumulate for ourselves but ignore the cries of those in need our money becomes 'worthless' and our wealth becomes 'evidence' of our sin. Western culture could apply these scriptures this way: "If we keep consuming and accumulating as if the millions living in poverty don't even exist, we will be held to account. Our very accumulation of 'things' will testify against us because the cries of the poor reach the ears of God." For too long western Christians have led blinkered lives as if what we do with our money in Australia or America or Europe has no bearing on the needs in Africa or Asia or the Pacific. Praise God that Christians across the globe are remembering James' words and finding a powerful synergy between faith that brings salvation, spiritual gifts, miracles and healing; and faith that brings food for the poor, clothes for the naked, shelter for the homeless. Let us follow the example of the first Gentile Christian, Cornelius (who James' may have known) whose generous giving became a 'memorial' before God and a key to answered prayer (Acts 10:31) rather than allowing our prosperity to become 'evidence' that we have missed the heart of God.

FAITH & ACTION

Eternity ChangeMakers provides a perfect opportunity for giving, going and praying as it involves us in projects in inner Sydney, Bali, China, Africa, India and outback Australia. Each of these projects combine practical aid with the Christian message. Review your giving, your praying and your attention to ChangeMakers (or whatever avenue you have for acting justly) so that together we can make a world of difference.

DAY 49 - ADDRESS TO THE NATIONS

READING

You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every whim. Now your hearts are nice and fat, ready for the slaughter. You have condemned and killed good people who had no power to defend themselves against you.

James 5:5-6

REFLECTION

It would be difficult to find two verses less suited for writing an uplifting daily devotion than these from the pen of James. Just as well we don't follow Christ to be comfortable and have our ears tickled! With these words, James is lifting his aim above the heads of the scattered Christians of the first century and is addressing the governments, societies and cultures of the world through every generation - and we know his words are true. Time and time again human kind has made life nothing more than "luxury" and "whim" at the expense of "good people who had no power to defend themselves". Perhaps James has in mind early Christians persecuted and killed at the hands of those who could not comprehend the radical message of God's grace and truth. Perhaps he has in his mind's eye, his own brother and Saviour, Jesus, bleeding on the cross after being tortured, unwilling to defend himself, so that by his wrongful death we might be made right. His dramatic words bring to a climax his challenge to materialistic, unbelieving culture and leave us with no doubt where our loyalties must lie. We either die with Christ and live by His Spirit, or we die with this world and live a meaningless, condemned existence, making luxury and whim our god.

FAITH & ACTION

Take a deep breath and reflect on just how radical the Kingdom of God is. It is not a polite alternative to worldly living, it is a militant contradiction to the demons of greed, lust and envy. But it is a militancy of humility, servanthood, kindness and faith. Consider how much of your life is ruled by "luxury" or "whim" rather than the priorities of God.

DAY 50 - PATIENCE IN TRIALS

READING

Dear brothers and sisters, you must be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who eagerly look for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They patiently wait for the precious harvest to ripen. You, too, must be patient. And take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near.

James 5:7-8

REFLECTION

After a “withering” series of verses that have challenged us at every level, James changes focus and with a note of comfort, encourages us to be patient. Most of us would not put patience at the top of our list of fruit of the Spirit but James has in mind a more transcendent theme. We are to be patient, and take courage, for the Lord’s return is near. The very early Christians had a strong belief in the imminent return of Christ and although this did not occur in the time frame they may have imagined, it remains today as an important part of Christian experience. Faced with the injustices and evil of a fallen world, which James has spoken about in the previous passage, we may well look to the return of Christ with hope and anticipation. But this is not a forlorn retreat away from people and society, but a forward gaze that fills us with courage. Remember, James is the champion of faith and action and the last thing he would want is for us to sit in holy huddles, wringing our hands at the state of the world, and hoping it will all be over soon. Rather we are like the farmer, busily sowing, watching for the life-giving rains and ready to spring into action when the harvest is ready. We too must delight in sowing God’s word where ever we are, praying and watching for the rain of the Spirit and ready to bring to Christ the precious harvest of his children, saved from destruction, made ready for the return of the King.

FAITH & ACTION

Step outside today and take a look at the clouds. One day Jesus will appear there so be glad and hopeful. Then take your hope and plant it in somebody else’s life.

DAY 51 - BEING POSITIVE GROWS PATIENCE

READING

Don't grumble about each other, my brothers and sisters, or God will judge you. For look! The great Judge is coming. He is standing at the door! For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

James 5:9-10

REFLECTION

James, in the final chapter of his letter, addresses several key issues that assist with living full and productive lives regardless of our circumstances. Later he will encourage us towards prayer and healing but today he continues to encourage us to develop a patient life. The two go hand in hand because, although we know God is always good and that the Bible clearly expresses God's promise to heal and deliver, we often find our faith tested as we wait for answers to come and be understood. A good first step to a patient life is to be patient with the perceived shortcomings of others. "Don't grumble about each other" James says, and then equates grumbling with judging. When we grumble we place ourselves in a superior position when in fact we have been commissioned as servants. Our master, the great Judge, is at the door, James reminds us, and as he extends mercy, we are to do likewise. In practical terms, grumbling about people and situations only makes patience harder. Finding reasons to be thankful and positive is much more likely to generate a patient spirit. A second step to patience is to consider the example of others who have had to practice patience in far more difficult circumstances than we may be facing. James suggests we consider the prophets - people such as Jeremiah and Daniel who were imprisoned and threatened for their obedience to God; Hosea and Ezekiel who suffered family breakdown and bereavement; John the Baptist who was imprisoned and beheaded... It is not so much finding someone worse off than ourselves that helps, but reading Scriptures that give voice to faith, hope and love in the midst of difficult times.

FAITH & ACTION

Think of a person or situation about which you have grumbled recently. Repent, and ask God to help you find reasons to be thankful. Watch patience grow. Turn to a passage of Scripture that tells of faith and patience in the midst of trouble and allow God's word to guide your praying for your own challenges.

DAY 52 - FULL OF TENDERNESS AND MERCY

READING

We give great honour to those who endure under suffering. Job is an example of a man who endured patiently. From his experience we see how the Lord's plan finally ended in good, for he is full of tenderness and mercy. But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned for it.

James 5:11-12

REFLECTION

I stood in a hospital room wishing I could leave. The semi-comatose, elderly man was fighting for every breath and the combination of smells, sounds and sights; the injustice and hopelessness of his suffering seemed overpowering. I stayed, and prayed, and later I looked for words to strengthen my faith and re-focus my vision. I picked up a Christian book on my desk, opened it randomly (great scholarship in evidence...) and hungrily looked for any scrap of hope I could find. The book spoke of the goodness of God, that he is always good and is never allied with evil. I felt strength returning to my spirit as my grasp of God's grace renewed. I knew what I would do next time I was in that hospital room - simply exalt the goodness of God. James' words must have been greeted likewise by the early Christians who evidently were facing much suffering. Not only do the Lord's plans end in good, as Job's story reminds us, but God himself is full of tenderness and mercy. There is something powerful about our faith reaching out to find the blessed character of God. It is as if our spirit is fed and our inner person finds new strength and resilience - like having a good meal when faint from hunger. We can be tempted when suffering or facing suffering, to make rash promises such as, "If you answer my prayer God, I'll do such and such..." James warns against oaths and promises that try and find something higher and stronger than God's goodness. Better to look to the tenderness and mercy of God and stand in simple faith. By the way, the man I visited was awake, talking and reaching out to Christ with a Christian friend within two days of my visit...

FAITH & ACTION

Exalt the goodness of God where ever you go today. When confronted with the world's busyness, greed, petty conflicts, injustices, fears, prejudices and unbelief - tap into the fullness of God's tenderness and mercy. It is more than enough.

DAY 53 - HEALING FOR TODAY

READING

Are any among you suffering? They should keep on praying about it. And those who have reason to be thankful should continually sing praises to the Lord. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. And their prayer offered in faith will heal the sick and the Lord will make them well. And anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.

James 5:13-15

REFLECTION

James began his letter urging us to pray to a willing God for wisdom (1:5). Later he encouraged us to ask for the things we need with right motives (4:2-3). Today he instructs us to keep on praying as a patient response to suffering and to give thanks and praise as an appropriate response to good times. He then gives directions for ongoing healing in the life of the church through the prayers of the elders. These verses confound the view that says miracles such as healing were only for the age of the first Apostles because here it is elders who will give healing prayer and eldership is a Biblical role clearly meant to carry on down through the ages. Combine this passage with 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 where we see any member of a church congregation may receive a supernatural gift to benefit another and we have a picture of church life where the supernatural graces of God flow over and around those bedrock principles of the Christian life such as faith, endurance, patience and wisdom. Even more, we have in James, memorable passages calling for social justice sitting comfortably next to anointing the sick and seeing them healed and raised up. I see three great strands of faith here that are a fullness we can live by too: 1. Personal faith for daily living, characterised by enduring prayer and a steadfast trust in God and his word; 2. Social faith impacting the world, characterised by care for the poor and a call for justice; 3. Supernatural faith, characterised by the gracious intervention of God to heal, deliver, provide, forgive and restore. Too often the church has camped in one corner or another but James moves comfortably between all three. This convergence is seen in Jesus, the early church and many manifestations of church over the centuries. It is also the prophetic call for the church and Christians today.

FAITH & ACTION

Are you suffering in some way - keep praying. Has something great happened in your life - stop and thank God. Are you or a loved one troubled by sickness - "call for the elders" in your church community to stand with you.

DAY 54 - EXPECT ANSWERS TO PRAYER

READING

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results. Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for the next three and a half years. Then he prayed for rain, and down it poured. The grass turned green, and the crops began to grow again.

James 5:16-17

REFLECTION

“I’m only human” is an excuse used to justify all manner of shortcomings, weakness and sin. But for James it is a reason to expect great answers to prayer. “Elijah was as human as we are” he reminds his readers, and yet his prayers were answered. In fact Elijah suffered a serious bout of depression immediately after his prayers for rain and it took the “still, small voice of God” to restore him. We too go through trials and struggles - some of our own making, some imposed upon us by sickness, accident or evil. These do not disqualify us from answered prayer, but rather put us in that place where faith is activated. James has already encouraged a stance of patient faith in the face of the troubles and in this passage he has another prescription for dealing with sin and sickness. Firstly we are to confess our sins to each other which means to lead an open, vulnerable life before our Christian brothers and sisters. Secondly to pray out of the forgiveness God gives so that healing may flow. Thirdly these prayers should be earnest - passionate, persevering, sincere. With great simplicity, God’s word tells us to expect the rain of God’s Spirit to bring refreshing, new life and fruitfulness when we pray with honesty and sincerity...

FAITH & ACTION

Make an effort to stay in genuine relationship with other Christians by meeting together regularly (church, prayer, small group attendance). Remember God in the midst of the challenges you face and believe that the “earnest prayer of a righteous (forgiven, justified) person has great power and wonderful results.”

DAY 55 - TURNED BACK FROM DEATH

READING

My dear brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back again, you can be sure that the one who brings that person back will save that sinner from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.

James 5:19-20

REFLECTION

For the 12th and final time, James writes, “my dear brothers and sisters”... Whether issuing a stern rebuke or stirring encouragement, James does not lose his affectionate tone - acknowledging that before anything else we are children of a loving God. But in keeping with his no nonsense approach to life, James moves to give us one last call to faith and action and at the same time explains the reason for his letter. Perhaps he has someone particular in mind when he says, “if any among you wanders away” or maybe he is aware that across the churches, as persecution and pleasures rob people of their precious faith, some are gradually lost from the church. The consequences are serious and so are the rewards if such a person is turned back to Christ - they are saved from “death” and receive “forgiveness of many sins”. No wonder James is so forthright about living a life consistent with the faith we profess. He is in a battle to save people from dying without Christ. He knows that if we tolerate superficial, words-only Christianity, “wandering” is the next step. It is a thorny question as to whether a person truly saved can in fact fall from grace but James, practical as ever, simply reminds us that life lived apart from Christ is marked by unforgiveness and a fear of death. Like James, we do a good thing if we lovingly look to our Christian brothers and sisters, notice any who are wandering away, and draw close enough to turn them back again. James’ whole letter has been such an attempt, and so too these devotions. God bless you.

FAITH & ACTION

Who is that Christian brother or sister who you keep thinking about because they have been absent from church or seem distant in their relationship or are filling their lives with anything but God. Who will turn them back if you don't?