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Living Faithfully: A Journey Through James

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LIVING FAITHFULLY
A JOURNEY
Through James

DARLENE SCHACHT

TIME-WARP WIFE MINISTRIES

 Time-Warp Wife
MINISTRIES



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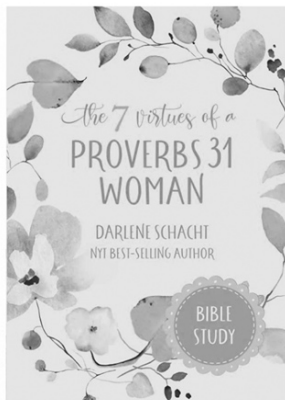
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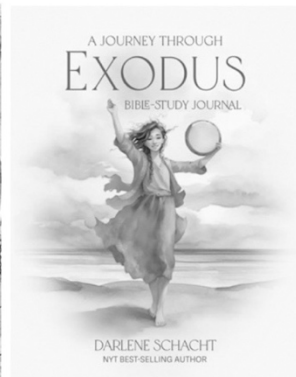
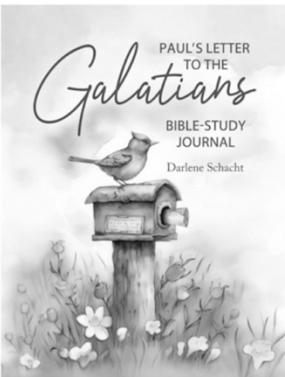
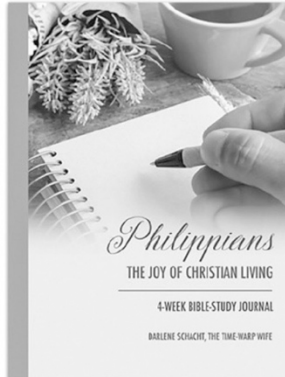
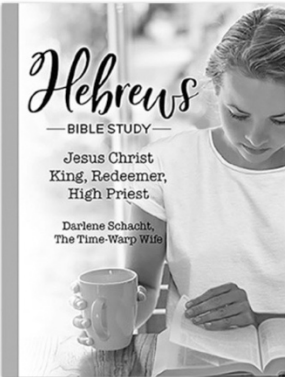
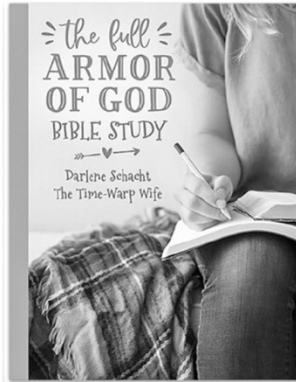
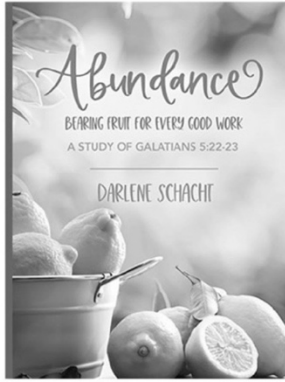
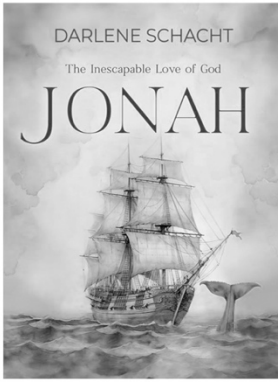
She began her publishing journey in 2011 working alongside actress/author Candace Cameron Bure to publish *Reshaping it All: Motivation for Spiritual and Physical Fitness*.

With a passion for Jesus, Darlene continues to write, sharing the gospel with countless women around the world.

Visit Darlene's blog at TimeWarpWife.com to find Bible studies, devotionals, and daily marriage prayers.

Other Bible Studies by Darlene Schacht:





We're delighted to offer supplemental videos for many of our Bible studies. To discover if this study is one of them, please visit YouTube and search for "Time-Warp Wife Bible Studies."



LIVING FAITHFULLY



Only through faith in Christ does a man learn to do righteously, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God; and only by the power of the Holy Spirit sanctifying us to that end do we fulfill these three divine requirements. These we fulfill perfectly in our desire; we would be holy as God is holy, if we could live as our heart aspires to live, we would always do righteously, we would always love mercy; and we would always walk humbly with God. This the Holy Spirit daily aids us to do by working in us to will and to do of God's good pleasure; and the day will come, and we are pining for it, when, being entirely free from this hampering body, we shall serve him day and night in his temple, and shall render to him an absolutely perfect obedience, for 'they are without fault before the throne of God.'

Charles H. Spurgeon



Introduction



Our first house is what you'd call a starter home. It had charming hardwood floors, French doors that made you feel just a little bit fancy, and a kitchen with black and white checkered flooring that looked like it was straight out of a 50s diner. The bathroom had an old clawfoot tub that added a bit of nostalgia, and there was a faux fireplace that made you feel warm even though it wasn't lit. It had a galley kitchen that sounds far more extravagant than it actually was, and a Dutch door leading out to the back porch—an absolutely adorable little spot to start our life together.

Now, when I tell you that my best friend lived right next door, I mean it literally. Our houses were so close together that I could tap on her bedroom window with my broom when the phone lines were busy—and with dial-up internet back then, they were busy a lot.

For the most part, we loved our little red house on the corner. But, as with many starter homes, there was one big issue—storage. If you had more than one pair of shoes or an extra winter jacket, you had a problem to solve. Our closets were so narrow that you had to angle the hangers just right to fit them in. And a linen closet? Forget about it. We had a dresser that doubled as our TV stand, and one drawer had to hold all of our towels, sheets, and dishcloths.

When our first baby came along, something had to give. There was just no way to fit another bedsheet in that drawer unless I made room. So, I rolled up my sleeves and got to work, taking out the old, tattered rags to make space for the little crib sheets. There wasn't room for both.

Life can be a lot like that little red house—sometimes it gets cluttered with things that just don't belong. We find ourselves holding onto things that we should have let go of a long time ago, and before we know it, there's no room left for what truly matters. That's where the book of James steps

in. James is like a wise, practical friend who doesn't just tell us what to get rid of, he shows us what we need to add in its place.

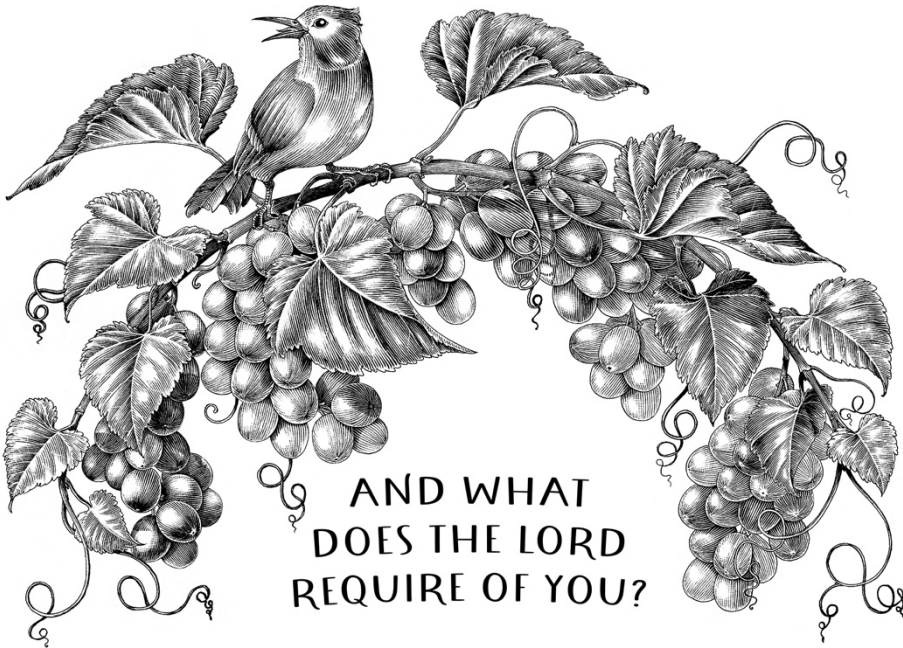
Have you ever wondered what it would be like to sit down with Jesus, to walk with Him, to talk with Him about everyday things? The author of the book of James had that privilege. James, traditionally believed to be the brother of Jesus, grew up in the same house, with the same mother, and shared that unique bond only brothers can have. Can you imagine the impact that must have had on his understanding of faith and life?

But James didn't just keep this wisdom to himself. He became a leader in the early Christian church in Jerusalem, known for his deep piety and practical wisdom. His letter, the Book of James, is filled with down-to-earth advice that speaks directly to our everyday lives. James isn't interested in lofty theological debates; he's concerned with how we live out our faith in real, tangible ways.

James challenges us to put our faith into action, reminding us that faith without works is dead (James 2:14-26). He encourages us to seek wisdom from God, live righteously, and endure trials with patience, knowing that perseverance leads to maturity in our faith. James teaches us about the power of our words, the importance of caring for those in need, and the necessity of living a life that reflects our faith in every area.

The book of James is like that moment when you realize your drawers are too full. It's a call to take out what doesn't belong and make room for what does. It's a challenge to examine our lives and ask, "What needs to go, and what needs to stay?" As we journey through James together, let's be ready to make those changes—to let go of what's cluttering our spiritual lives and embrace the practical, godly wisdom that James offers.

Are you willing to let God transform your life? Are you ready to live faithfully? Me too. Let's get started!



AND WHAT
DOES THE LORD
REQUIRE OF YOU?

TO *Act Justly* AND TO
LOVE
MERCY
AND TO *Walk Humbly*
WITH YOUR GOD.
MICAH 6:8, NIV



Chapter 1

• LIVING FAITHFULLY THROUGH TRIALS •

READ: JAMES 1:1-4 | 1 Kings 18:16-39 & 19:1-18 **JOY THROUGH TRIALS**

After we grew out of our starter home, we moved less than a block away to a two-story character home. I had been eyeing that house for over a year, wondering if they'd ever sell it and what it would be like to have the extra space for our family. When they finally put it on the market, we carried our boxes down the back lane to our new home on the other corner of the block.

Aside from the extra space, one of the things we loved most about that house was the grapevines that lined the backyard. These grapevines liked to grow, and if left unchecked, they could have easily taken over the yard. As such, my husband Michael was out there every summer pruning and cutting them back, but year after year, they grew even more. Maintaining the vines was a bit of a job, but the abundance of fruit we received was well worth the work.

In much the same way that pruning the vines made them grow and produce even more, the testing of our faith brings about spiritual growth and fruitfulness in our lives. In John 15:2, Jesus said, "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." (NIV)

What does this process of pruning look like? It could be the removal of distractions or habits that keep us from fully dedicating ourselves to God. It might involve letting go of relationships that pull us away from our faith or stepping back from activities that consume our time but don't contribute to our spiritual growth. Pruning can also mean enduring hardships and trials

that God allows to refine our character, teaching us patience, trust, and dependence on Him.

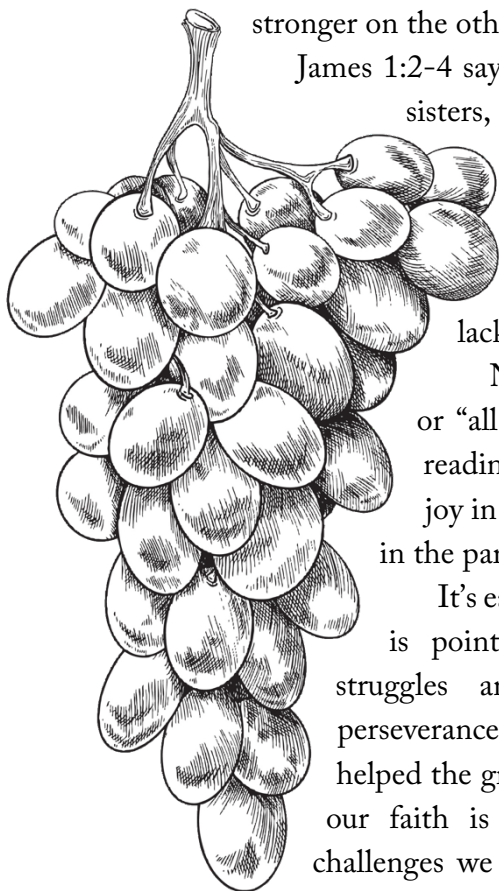
This process isn't easy or pleasant. It might feel like we're losing something valuable or being stretched beyond our comfort zones. But when we allow God to remove the things that hinder our growth, we come out stronger on the other side and better equipped to bear fruit.

James 1:2-4 says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Notice that James uses the term, "pure joy," or "all joy" depending on what version you are reading. The term suggests that we should find joy in the entire experience of our trials, not just in the parts that are easy to handle.

It's easy to be joyful when life is good, but James is pointing out that it's the hard parts—the struggles and the pruning—that actually build perseverance in us. Just as Michael's careful pruning helped the grapevines grow stronger and more fruitful, our faith is strengthened and refined through the challenges we face. It's like working out a muscle; the more you use it, the stronger it gets. Our faith grows stronger through adversity, and this endurance leads to spiritual maturity.

And here's something I'd like us all to remember: tough times are not wasted times. It's the challenges that help us grow the most. They nurture our faith and build our character. When we persevere through these challenges, we come out the other side more mature and complete. Our faith becomes deeper and more resilient, preparing us to handle future trials with grace and strength.



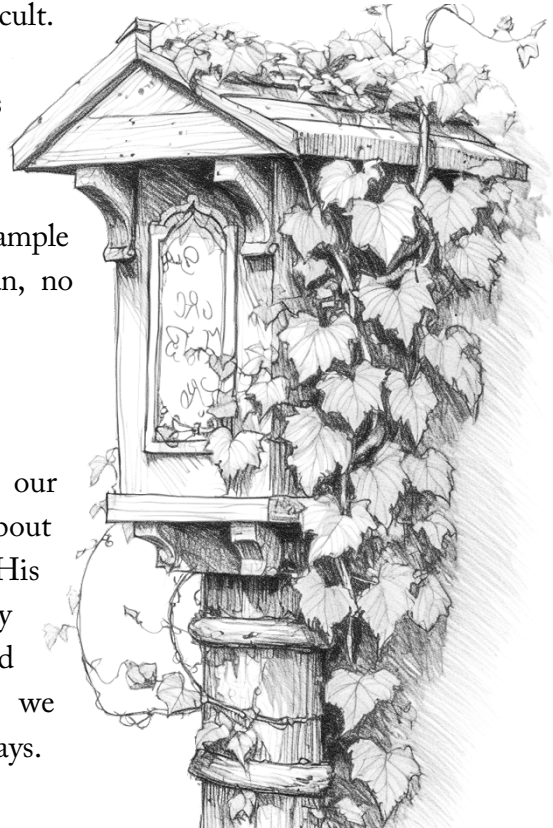
Charles Spurgeon wrote, “If we were wise, we should begin to welcome trials. We would rather fear to be without them, for up till now, what do we not owe to the furnace, to the rod, to the threshing flail? Scarcely has a mercy of any great spiritual value come to us at all except by the way of the cross... We have been blessed in places of trial, let us not, therefore, dread to go to such places again.”

Think about Elijah. He faced immense trials, particularly during his confrontation with the prophets of Baal and while hiding from Jezebel. Imagine the internal struggle he must have felt. Yet, Elijah chose to remain faithful to God, demonstrating incredible perseverance and trust. This test wasn't about God wanting to harm Elijah; it was about proving Elijah's faith and integrity. Just like Elijah, our trials can deepen our faith and trust in God, even when the path is difficult.

Elijah's willingness to go through such challenging trials showed a deep, unwavering faith. This not only strengthened his own faith but also served as a powerful example to others of trusting in God's plan, no matter how difficult it might seem.

Final Thought

Remember, true joy isn't about our external circumstances but about trusting in God's goodness and His plans for our lives. When we truly believe that God is in control and that He wants the best for us, we discover joy on the most difficult days.



What are some situations in which you felt God was “pruning” you in the past? And, how have these experiences helped you grow in your faith and bear fruit?

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James encourages believers to consider trials as 'pure joy' because they produce perseverance. How can this understanding shape your perspective on current or future challenges?

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KEY CONCEPTS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

JAMES 1:1-4

PERSEVERANCE:

Perseverance refers to the continued effort and determination to do or achieve something despite difficulties, obstacles, or delays. In the context of James 1:4 it is the steadfastness in faith and character that is developed through enduring trials and challenges.

MATURE:

To be mature, in the biblical sense, means to be fully developed in character and faith, reflecting spiritual completeness and growth. It suggests a state of being spiritually strong and equipped, having grown through experiences and trials to a point of wisdom and stability in one's faith.

TESTING:

Testing refers to the process of evaluating or proving the quality, strength, or faithfulness of something. In the context of this passage, the testing of your faith means going through situations or trials that challenge and refine your belief and trust in God. This testing is seen as a way to strengthen and purify faith, leading to greater perseverance and spiritual maturity.

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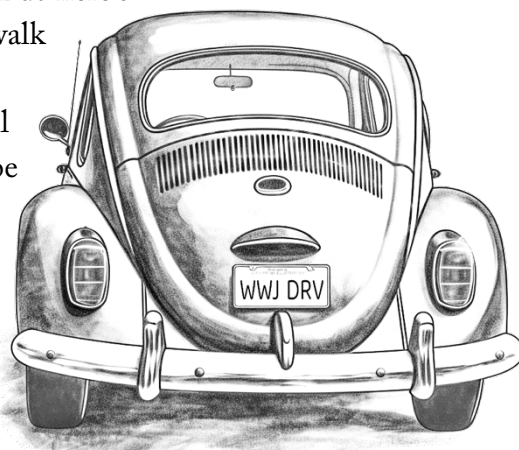
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READ: JAMES 1:5-8 | 1 Kings 3 & PROVERBS 3 RELY ON GOD'S WISDOM

My dad was a backyard mechanic, and it was always reassuring to know I had someone to rely on when it came to things I knew nothing about. If my car had a flat tire, he would change it; if I heard a rattle, he would check it; if a taillight went out, he would fix it. I trusted him completely when it came to my car, so if he told me I needed new parts, I'd head straight to the store to get them.

In much the same way, I trust in the Lord. He understands the intricacies of my life far better than I ever could. He has the power to change, check, and fix things in ways beyond my imagination. His wisdom is perfect, and His Word is unfailing. But here's the key to trusting in God: we need to walk in the truth He's given us.

If a mechanic tells me to get an oil change every 5,000 miles, it would be foolish to ignore that advice—especially if I trust him. Wisdom isn't just knowing what's right; it's applying that knowledge in a way that leads to good decisions and actions. What does this look like? It might be choosing to forgive when it's hard, being

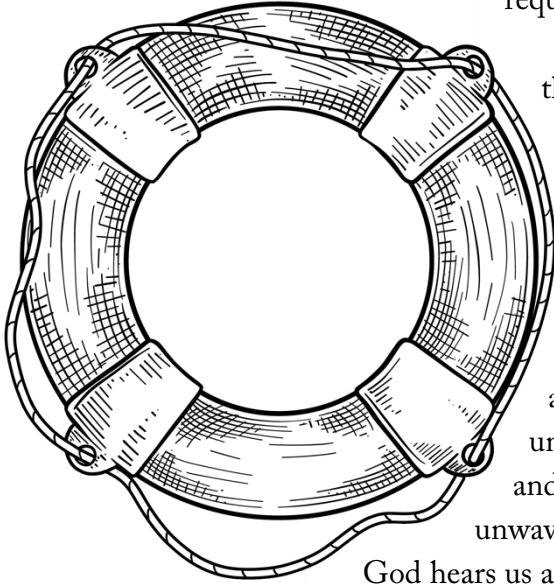


patient in traffic, or making time for prayer when our schedules are full. It's about bringing God's wisdom into every corner of our daily lives, making choices that honor Him and reflect His love.

James 1:5-8 gives us clear guidance on this. When we lack wisdom, God invites us to ask Him for it—without hesitation or doubt—because He gives generously to all. But we must ask in faith, believing that God will provide the wisdom we need. Faith steadies us, giving us the confidence to face our trials with a sense of purpose and trust in God's plan.

Consider Solomon, who, when faced with the enormous responsibility of ruling Israel, asked God for wisdom rather than riches or long life. God honored Solomon's request, saying, "I will give you a wise and discerning

heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be" (1 Kings 3:12 NIV). Solomon's wisdom was a divine gift, but it also required faith to apply it rightly.



Prayer is our lifeline. It's the means through which we ask for wisdom, connecting our hearts with God's, seeking His guidance and strength to persevere. When we pray, we express our dependence on Him, trusting that He will guide us through our trials. But James warns us: we cannot afford to doubt. Doubting makes us unstable, like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. Our faith must be unwavering, grounded in the certainty that God hears us and will answer.

Trials and challenges reveal the depth of our faith. They expose what's truly going on inside our hearts, sometimes bringing hidden sins or weaknesses to light. And, while God doesn't tempt us with sin, He does allow us to go through tough times that refine and shape us. Even Solomon, despite his great wisdom, made mistakes later in life when he allowed his heart to be led astray. This reminds us of the importance of continually seeking God's wisdom and maintaining a steadfast faith.

Final Thought

The trials we face refine us, and through prayerful reliance on God's wisdom, we gain the strength to endure and grow. Just as Solomon sought wisdom to lead with integrity, we too must seek God's wisdom to navigate our challenges. Trust in His guidance, knowing that His wisdom will lead us to spiritual maturity and a life that reflects His glory.

Can you identify areas where you might be struggling to fully trust God's wisdom and guidance, and how can you apply James 1:5-8 to grow in faith during these moments?

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What practical steps can you take to ensure that your decisions are rooted in faith and aligned with God's will, especially when facing trials or challenges?

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KEY CONCEPTS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

JAMES 1:5-8

WISDOM:

The ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting. In the biblical context, wisdom refers to the knowledge and understanding that comes from God, enabling one to live in a way that is pleasing to Him.

DOUBT:

A feeling of uncertainty or lack of conviction. In the biblical sense, doubt refers to a wavering or lack of trust in God's promises, which can hinder one's faith and relationship with Him.

DOUBLE-MINDED:

Being indecisive or having conflicting thoughts or beliefs. In the Bible, double-mindedness refers to someone who is not fully committed to God, wavering between faith and doubt, leading to instability in their actions and decisions.

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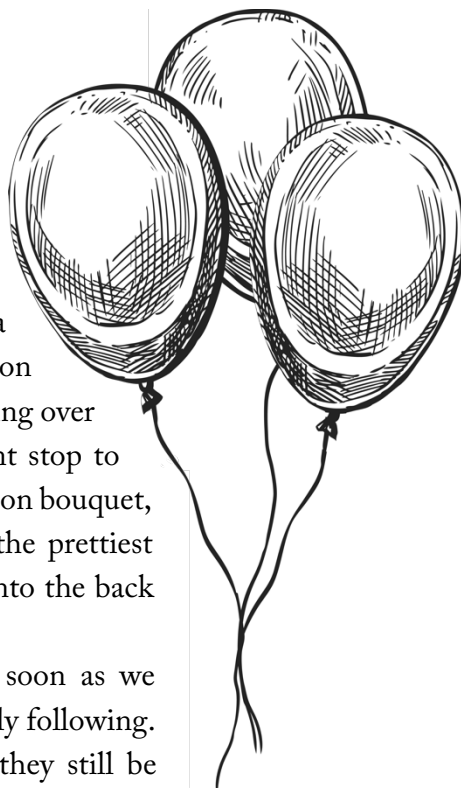
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READ: JAMES 1:9-11 | MARK 10:17-31
DON'T RELY ON YOUR WEALTH

The other day, we celebrated my granddaughter's birthday. After a four hour drive, we dropped off our bags at the hotel and each claimed a bed. Call me strange, but after 36 years of marriage, it's nice to have a queen-sized bed all to yourself, not to mention all of the pillows I get to myself! Before heading over to my daughter's place, we had an important stop to make. I wanted to get little Julia her first balloon bouquet, so we went to the dollar store, picked out the prettiest balloons we could find and squeezed them into the back seat of the car.



Julia's face beamed with excitement as soon as we walked through the door, her curiosity quickly following. "How long will they last, Grandma? Will they still be floating when my friends come over this weekend?" I explained to her that while the balloons would stay up for a couple of days, they wouldn't last much longer than that. It was a small but gentle reminder for both of us that earthly treasures don't last, they're here for a moment, then gone, just like those balloons.

This passage from James serves as a powerful reminder of the transient nature of earthly wealth. It's easy to become absorbed in the pursuit of material possessions, but James urges us to remember that these things are only temporary.

He writes, "Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humility—since they will pass away like a wildflower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business." (James 1:9-11, NIV)

To illustrate this, let's consider the story of the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-31. A wealthy young man asked Jesus, "Good teacher, what must I

do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus listed the commandments, and the young man confidently replied that he had kept them all. But Jesus, looking at him with love, said, "One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

The young man's face fell, and he went away sad because he had great wealth. Jesus used this moment to teach His disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" He explained that it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. Astonished, the disciples asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus replied, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

In their cultural context, wealth was often seen as a sign of God's blessing. Even today, some view material prosperity as an indicator of divine favor, which can lead to misplaced priorities. Jesus shifted the focus from human effort to divine grace, teaching us that reliance on wealth will hinder our relationship with God. The story of the rich young ruler highlights the danger of placing too much value on earthly treasures, as his attachment to wealth kept him from following Jesus.

James reminds us that those in humble circumstances should take pride in their high spiritual position. They may not have much in terms of earthly wealth, but their faith and relationship with God are of infinite value. The rich, on the other hand, should take pride in their humility, recognizing that their wealth is temporary and will soon fade away. This isn't to say that wealth is inherently bad, but that our trust and priorities should be rooted in God, not in the fleeting security that wealth provides.

Final Thought:

As we close this section, let's remember that our true worth is not found in material possessions but in our relationship with God. So, whether we find ourselves in humble circumstances or blessed with material wealth, the key is to focus on our relationship with God. He is the source of true, lasting riches. By keeping our eyes on Him, we can navigate the challenges and blessings of life with a heart that treasures what truly matters.

Why do you think Jesus told the rich man to sell all of his possessions? What was he teaching him by saying that?

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In Mark 10:21, Jesus told the rich young ruler, “One thing you lack.” What do you think that “one thing” was?

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KEY CONCEPTS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

JAMES 1:9-11

HUMBLE:

Having or showing a modest or low estimate of one's importance. In the biblical context, humble circumstances refer to a state of being lowly or poor, often associated with a dependence on God rather than worldly wealth or status.

PRIDE:

A sense of satisfaction derived from one's own achievements or qualities. In this passage, pride is used in a positive sense, where believers are encouraged to take pride in their spiritual status or position, regardless of their earthly circumstances.

FADE:

To gradually grow faint and disappear. James uses this term metaphorically to describe the transient nature of wealth and the life of those who are rich, emphasizing that worldly success and beauty are temporary and will eventually decline or perish.

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READ: JAMES 1:12-18 | 2 SAMUEL 11-12

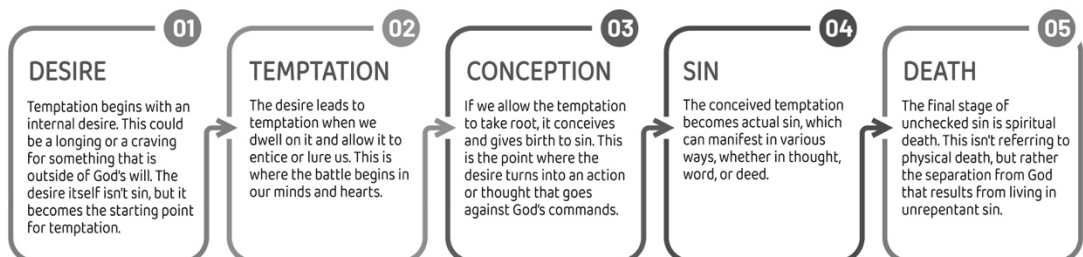
THE PROGRESSION OF TEMPTATION

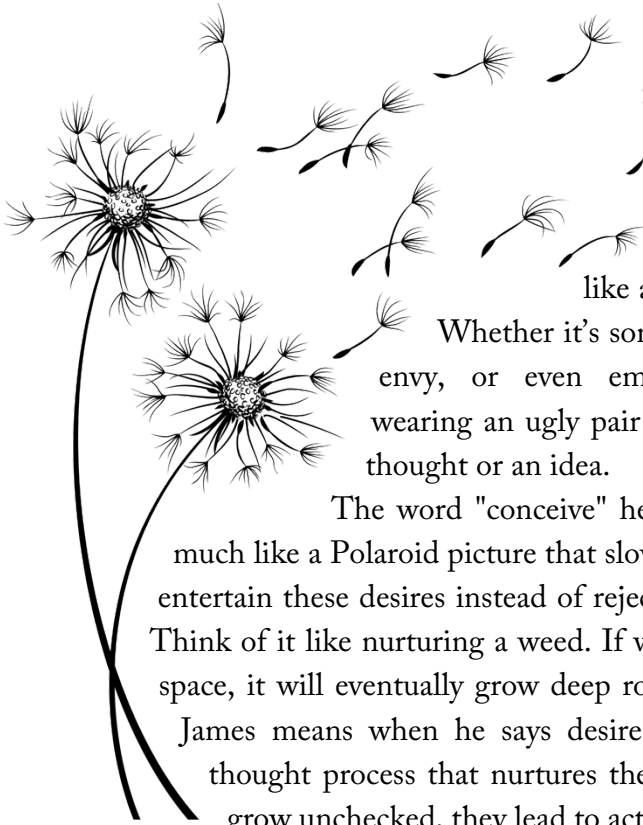
Several years ago, before I had children, I was a receptionist at a dental lab. Because I was the first person the customers saw, I liked to dress well. The only problem was that I didn't always wake up early enough to get myself all together. One morning in particular, it was slushy outside. I couldn't find the right boots to wear with a dress, and because the bus was five minutes away, I quickly slipped on a pair of Crocs and ran out the door. It looked silly, but I had a pair of shoes at my desk I could change into once I arrived.

When I stepped on the bus that morning, I noticed two teenage girls look over at my feet, snicker, and whisper something about me to each other. What I should have done was simply let it go, but instead, I spent the rest of the 20-minute ride feeding my anger and nurturing pride. When it was finally time to get off the bus, I walked up to their seat, and like a crazy person, I leaned over and said something critical about the way they were dressed. Thirty-five years later, I still regret letting my anger determine my actions. It was wrong; I knew it then, and I still know it now. That's an ugly and embarrassing story to share, but that's exactly what sin is when it's brought into the light—ugly.

As we read these verses in James, we see that there's a progression with temptation that, when left unchecked, leads us to sin. We all face temptation; even Jesus Himself was tempted by the devil in Matthew Chapter 4. The way we handle temptation determines the result. James tells us, "Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." (James 1:15, NIV)

5 STAGES OF TEMPTATION ACCORDING TO JAMES





When James talks about "conceiving," he's using a metaphor to describe how sin starts in our minds. It all begins with a desire or temptation. This desire is like a seed planted in our thoughts.

Whether it's something like greed, lust, anger, envy, or even embarrassment (because you're wearing an ugly pair of Crocs), it starts small, as a thought or an idea.

The word "conceive" here means to form or develop, much like a Polaroid picture that slowly comes into view. When we entertain these desires instead of rejecting them, they start to grow. Think of it like nurturing a weed. If we keep giving it attention and space, it will eventually grow deep roots and flourish. This is what James means when he says desire "gives birth to sin." It's our thought process that nurtures these desires, and if we let them grow unchecked, they lead to actions that go against God's will.

Our thoughts are incredibly powerful. They can rob us of joy, make us anxious, and bring us down. When we dwell on negative or sinful thoughts, they shape our actions. It's like a cycle: sinful thoughts lead to sinful actions, which then reinforce those sinful thoughts, trapping us in a loop. James warns us that when sin is fully grown, it leads to death. This can mean spiritual death, where we feel separated from God, and sometimes even physical consequences that bring destruction into our lives.

Remember David in 2 Samuel chapter 11. He didn't go looking for temptation, but sure enough, temptation found him. Standing on the roof of the palace, he noticed a beautiful woman bathing nearby. Instead of turning away from temptation, he stepped further in. Like so many others who have been in a similar situation, David ignored his conscience and chose to entertain sin. Instead of surrendering himself to God's will by turning away, he defied God by resisting the Spirit and choosing the flesh. When you entertain sin, you fan the flame until you're consumed by its fire.

By sending his servants to inquire about her, David entertained a lust that soon overtook him.

Understanding this helps us realize just how crucial it is to guard our thoughts and desires. By catching and addressing sinful desires early, we can stop them from turning into actions. It's about renewing our minds with God's Word, praying, and asking the Holy Spirit to guide us in transforming our thoughts.

When we persevere through trials and resist temptation, we are not only protecting ourselves from the destructive consequences of sin but also working towards the eternal reward that God has promised us. The crown of life is a symbol of victory and eternal life, given to those who remain steadfast in their love and faithfulness to God. Unlike the fleeting and deceptive nature of temptation, God's gifts are pure, perfect, and everlasting. He is the source of our new life, born through His word of truth, making us a reflection of His creation.

5 Ways to Guard Your Thoughts and Desires:

1. **Renew Your Mind with God's Word:** Spend time daily in Scripture to fill your mind with God's truth.
2. **Pray for Strength:** Ask God to help you resist temptation and guide your thoughts. You should do this daily in addition to the times you're facing temptation.
3. **Stay Accountable:** Share your struggles with a trusted friend or mentor who can support you.
4. **Resist the Devil:** Stand firm against the devil's schemes by refusing to dwell on sinful thoughts.
5. **Focus on the Positive:** Intentionally direct your thoughts to what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable (Philippians 4:8).

Final Thought:

Just as David's story teaches us the dangers of unchecked desire, it also reminds us of the importance of repentance and God's readiness to restore those who turn back to Him. Persevere, trust in God's strength, and know that He is with you every step of the way. Through His help, you can overcome temptation and grow in righteousness, ultimately receiving the eternal rewards He has promised.

❓ Reflect on a time when a seemingly small thought or desire led to a sin in your life. Looking back on it now, what could you have done to stop it?

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? What is “renewing your mind” and how can it help you resist temptation?

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KEY CONCEPTS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

JAMES 1:12-18

PERSEVERES:

To continue steadfastly or determinedly despite facing difficulties or challenges. In this passage, it refers to enduring trials with faith and patience, trusting in God's promises.

TEMPTED:

Being enticed or lured to do something wrong or sinful. The passage emphasizes that temptation does not come from God but arises from one's own evil desires, leading to sin if not resisted.

FIRSTFRUITS:

The earliest or first portion of a harvest, often given as an offering to God. In this context, it symbolizes believers who are brought to new life through God's word, set apart as the first and best of His creation

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READ: JAMES 1:19-21, 26 | 1 SAMUEL 25:14-35
QUICK TO LISTEN SLOW TO SPEAK

Several years ago, Michael and I had a friend that we absolutely adored. Even our kids loved the times he spent at our house. There was something about him that made him stand out from the crowd: he had a remarkable way of listening that made you feel like you were the only person in the room. Whenever you spoke, he would lean in, give you his full attention, and respond with genuine interest.

Think about the difference between simply greeting someone at your front door and warmly inviting them into your living room, then you'll get a picture of what he was like. When we truly welcome someone into our



home, we offer them a genuine smile, respect, and our full attention. This same principle applies to listening. Listening is more than just hearing words; it's about taking the time to understand and consider what the other person is

saying. When you genuinely listen, you embrace their words, value their message, and focus on what they are trying to convey. It's about making the other person feel truly heard and appreciated.

James encourages us to be "quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires." (James 1:19-20) This wisdom highlights the close connection between listening and controlling our anger. Verse 26 adds, "Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless." This reinforces the importance of controlling our speech and the impact it has on our witness and relationships.

Being quick to listen can help you avoid anger and foster peace. While anger can lead to conflict, patience and understanding pave the way for harmony, which will take you much further than anger ever could. By practicing love, holding your tongue, and choosing your words wisely, you create a space for positive interactions. Misunderstandings often lead to anger, so by truly listening, we can avoid jumping to conclusions and becoming upset over things that might not be accurate.

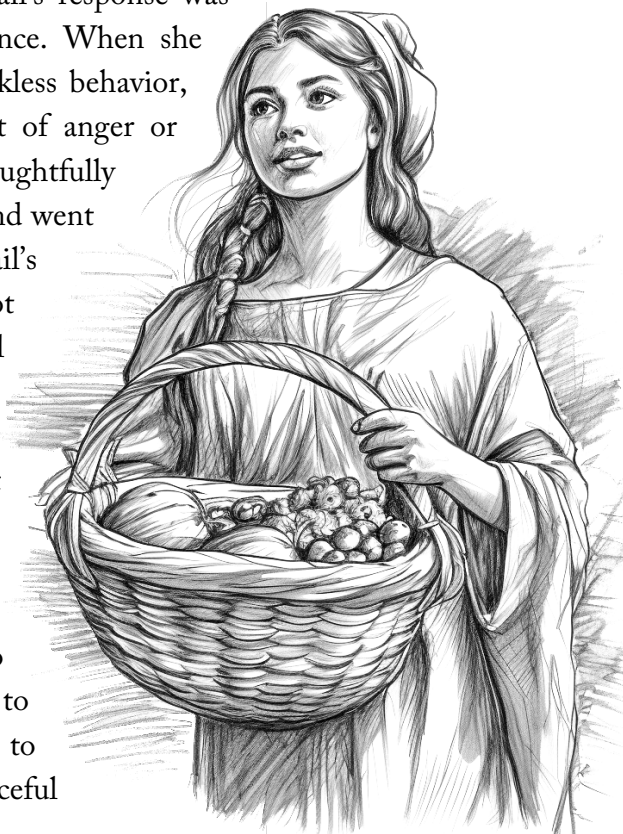
Listening provides a valuable opportunity to connect with others in meaningful ways that you might otherwise miss. It starts with a caring heart. Be thoughtful enough to set aside distractions, considerate enough to lean in and truly hear what the other person is saying, and selfless enough to try to see things from their perspective.

Effective listening is a powerful tool for strengthening all kinds of relationships. It involves creating a space where others feel safe and valued, where their thoughts and feelings are acknowledged and respected. By practicing attentive listening, you demonstrate love and respect, which are essential for any healthy and thriving relationship.

Consider the story from 1 Samuel 25. Nabal, a wealthy but impulsive man, was married to Abigail, a woman of wisdom. When David, who had been protecting Nabal's shepherds, sent his men to request provisions, Nabal's quick temper got the better of him. Insulting David's men and stubbornly refusing their request, provoked an intense reaction from David, who was prepared to attack Nabal's household in retaliation. This rash

decision nearly brought disaster upon his entire family, illustrating the dangers of an uncontrolled temper. Proverbs 15:18 tells us, "A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient calms a quarrel." Nabal is a perfect example of this, as his impulsive anger led to conflict that could have easily been avoided.

Unlike her husband, Abigail's response was marked by wisdom and patience. When she heard about her husband's reckless behavior, she acted quickly but not out of anger or frustration. Instead, she thoughtfully prepared a generous offering and went to meet David herself. Abigail's calm and measured approach not only averted a potential massacre but also turned David's heart from anger to peace. Her actions highlight the power of a well-timed, thoughtful response, in stark contrast to Nabal's impulsive rage. Their story serves to remind us how important it is to intently listen to others, and to respond with calm and peaceful discernment.



Final Thought:

The next time someone speaks to you, remember to listen with your heart as well as your ears. Show them that their words matter to you, that you value their perspective, and that you are willing to invest the time and effort to truly understand them. This level of listening will deepen your connections and foster more loving, supportive relationships in all areas of your life.

❓ How can being "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry" transform your relationships with others? Can you think of a recent situation where practicing these principles could have led to a more positive outcome?

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❓ How does effective listening reflect the love and wisdom that God desires in us?

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KEY CONCEPTS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

JAMES 1:19-21 & 26

LISTEN:

To pay attention to or give ear to what someone is saying. In this passage, being quick to listen emphasizes the importance of understanding others before responding, fostering wisdom and patience.

ANGER:

A strong feeling of displeasure or hostility. This passage warns against quickness to anger, as it hinders the righteousness that God desires in our lives.

RELIGION:

A system of beliefs and practices related to worship and devotion to God. Here, it highlights the importance of genuine faith, demonstrated by controlling one's speech and actions, rather than merely outward appearances.

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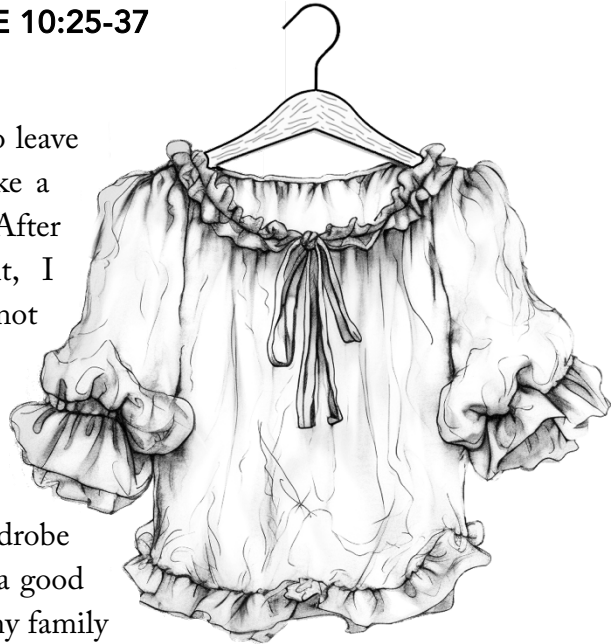
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READ: JAMES 1:22-27 | LUKE 10:25-37
ACTING ON FAITH

The other day I was just about to leave the house when I decided to take a last minute look in the mirror. After turning on the bathroom light, I discovered that my blouse was not only on backward, it was also inside out. If you think that's bad, you'll be horrified to know that one day I went outside to mow the lawn with a major wardrobe malfunction. I was out there for a good five minutes before someone in my family



told me what I didn't know. It's amazing how something as simple as a glance in the mirror can save us from a lot of embarrassment, isn't it?

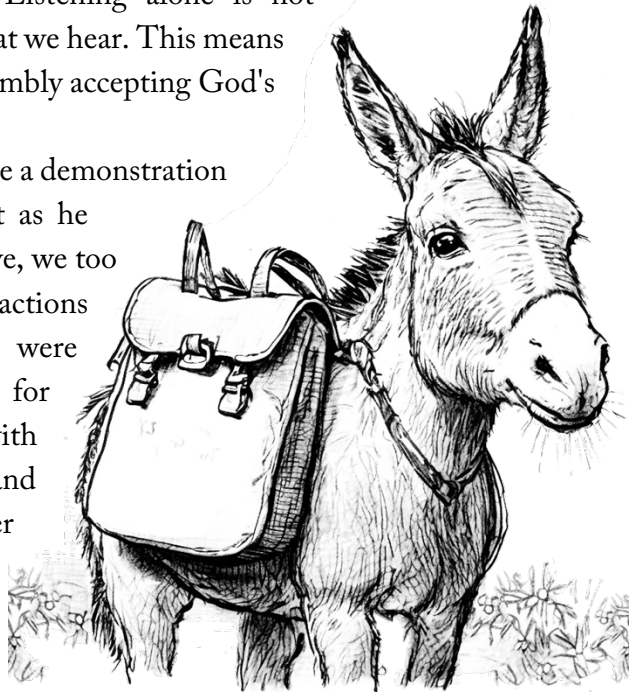
This got me thinking about James 1:22-24, where James writes, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.” Imagine looking in the mirror and realizing that your blouse is on backward. Of course, you're going to fix it, right? If you walked away from the mirror forgetting what you saw, you'd be foolish. That's the point James is making here. Looking at the Bible is like looking in a mirror; it shows us where we need to grow and how we can better serve God.

Consider the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. Jesus told this parable to illustrate what it means to love our neighbor. In the story, a man is beaten and left for dead by the side of the road. A priest and a Levite, both religious men who knew God's law well, saw the man but chose to walk by without helping. They had the entire Old Testament and the stories of their forefathers to guide them, but they ignored the call to love and assist. They are like the ones who walk away from the mirror, forgetting what they saw.

The priest and the Levite might have thought their religious status would save them, but James tells us here what true religion looks like. It's easy to read this story and wonder how they could just walk by, but we need to look at ourselves and ask who we're walking by in our own lives. Who are we ignoring or neglecting, despite knowing God's command to love our neighbor?

The Good Samaritan saw the injured man, took pity on him, and helped him. He bandaged his wounds, took him to an inn, and cared for him. The Samaritan didn't just hear the call to love; he acted on it. This is what James is emphasizing in his letter. Listening alone is not enough; we must also act on what we hear. This means getting rid of moral filth and humbly accepting God's word planted in us.

The Samaritan's actions were a demonstration of true love and kindness. Just as he acted on his compassion and love, we too must act on our faith. His actions weren't just words; they were demonstrated through his care for the injured man. This aligns with what James says about pure and faultless religion: looking after orphans and widows and keeping oneself from being polluted by the world.



Final Thought:

Let's take James' words to heart. Let's not just be hearers of the word, but doers as well. Let's look into the perfect law that gives freedom and continue in it—not forgetting what we have heard, but doing it. In this way, we will be blessed in what we do, and our lives will reflect the love and compassion of Christ.

What are some areas in your life where you've noticed something that needs to be addressed but haven't yet taken action?

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What specific steps can you take to avoid being like the priest and the Levite, who knew the truth but failed to act on it?

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KEY CONCEPTS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

JAMES 1:22-27

PERFECT LAW:

The complete and flawless set of instructions or principles given by God, particularly as revealed in the New Testament. In this passage, the "perfect law" refers to God's commands, which are designed to guide believers toward righteousness and spiritual freedom. It suggests that living according to this law leads to true liberty and blessings in one's life.

FREEDOM:

The state of being free from bondage, oppression, or restraint. The passage refers to the "perfect law that gives freedom," which implies that true freedom is found in living according to God's word, leading to a life that aligns with His will.

POLLUTED:

Contaminated or tainted by harmful substances or influences. In this passage, it is used metaphorically to describe the moral or spiritual defilement that can occur when one is influenced by the sinful practices and values of the world.

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ANSWER KEY

Please note that the answers provided are intended to guide your understanding, but they may vary depending on personal perspectives. Many of these questions invite thoughtful reflection, and your responses might differ from the ones given here. My goal is to encourage you to consider the teachings and how they apply to your own life and faith journey.

CHAPTER 1

What are some situations in which you felt God was “pruning” you in the past? And, how have these experiences helped you grow in your faith and bear fruit?

This answer will be different for everyone.

James encourages believers to consider trials as 'pure joy' because they produce perseverance. How can this understanding shape your perspective on current or future challenges?

It can shift our perspective from viewing challenges as burdens to seeing them as opportunities for spiritual growth. This mindset helps us approach difficulties with a sense of purpose, knowing that enduring these trials strengthens our faith and builds character, ultimately drawing us closer to God.

Can you identify areas where you might be struggling to fully trust God's wisdom and guidance, and how can you apply James 1:5-8 to grow in faith during these moments?

This answer will be different for everyone.

What practical steps can you take to ensure that your decisions are rooted in faith and aligned with God's will, especially when facing trials or challenges?

Practical steps include regular prayer for guidance, seeking wisdom from Scripture, consulting with mature Christians, and being sensitive to the Holy Spirit's prompting. It's also essential to wait patiently for God's direction and remain open to His will, even when it differs from our desires.

Why do you think Jesus told the rich man to sell all of his possessions? What was he teaching him by saying that?

Jesus told the rich man to sell all his possessions to challenge his attachment to wealth and to expose the condition of his heart. Jesus was teaching that true discipleship requires placing God above all earthly possessions and that wealth can be a hindrance to fully committing to God's kingdom.

In Mark 10:21, Jesus told the rich young ruler, "One thing you lack." What do you think that "one thing" was?

The "one thing" the rich young ruler lacked was complete surrender to God. Although he followed the commandments, his attachment to wealth revealed that he had not fully given his heart to God. Jesus was highlighting the need for wholehearted devotion and willingness to sacrifice everything for the sake of following Him.

Reflect on a time when a seemingly small thought or desire led to a sin in your life. Looking back on it now, what could you have done to stop it?

This answer will be different for everyone.

What is “renewing your mind” and how can it help you resist temptation?

“Renewing your mind” involves aligning our thoughts and attitudes with God’s truth through regular engagement with Scripture, prayer, and meditation on His Word. This process helps us resist temptation by transforming our thinking, enabling us to discern right from wrong and making us more receptive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

How can being "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry" transform your relationships with others? Can you think of a recent situation where practicing these principles could have led to a more positive outcome?

a) This practice fosters better communication and understanding in relationships. It shows respect for others’ perspectives, reduces misunderstandings, and helps create a more peaceful and loving environment, reflecting the character of Christ.

b) This answer will be different for everyone.

How does effective listening reflect the love and wisdom that God desires in us?

We demonstrate love by valuing others' thoughts and feelings, showing that we care about them. It reflects wisdom by allowing us to respond thoughtfully and compassionately, aligning our actions with God’s desire for us to be understanding, empathetic, and slow to judge.

What are some areas in your life where you've noticed something that needs to be addressed but haven't yet taken action?

This answer will be different for everyone.

What specific steps can you take to avoid being like the priest and the Levite, who knew the truth but failed to act on it?

We can commit to taking action when we see someone in need. Specific steps include cultivating a heart of compassion, being willing to inconvenience ourselves for the sake of others, and prioritizing love over ritual or personal comfort. Regularly praying for a compassionate heart and seeking opportunities to serve others can help us live out the truth of God's love in practical ways.