

Welcome to our on-line Bible study for 2017

The Epistle of James

Chapter 1 – “Lacking in Nothing”

This letter deals with very practical questions about Christian life and practice. James at first glance seems to challenge Paul's idea that we are saved by faith alone (James 2:24). Yet in the context of the discussion James is really saying, with Paul, that “the only thing that counts is faith acting through love” (Gal. 5:6). We are not exactly sure who the author is but tradition has ascribed the letter to Jesus' brother, James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 21:18).

I. Faith Being Tested – 1:1-16

James is writing to churches that are facing trials. These trials could take many forms. They could include persecution, internal conflict or physical problems which could include everything from sickness to natural disasters. James' advice in such situations is not what we would expect. He says that such difficulties should bring us “nothing but joy.” Is he kidding?

James definitely means what he says. Testing builds up our endurance. The practical effect of this is that, rather than ask God to remove the temptation, we should pray for the endurance which he is supposed to teach us. In testing God always provides a way out (1 Cor. 10:13). That doesn't mean the testing will go away.

James next brings up a provocative idea. We are invited to ask for wisdom (something that is essential to knowing God, Prov. 8). But we are to ask in faith. Already we can see that James, like Paul, places a priority on faith. We are not to doubt. This cannot mean a categorical absence of doubt since doubt and faith invariably go together (Mark 9:24). James is using doubt here in the sense of a general uncertainty. He speaks of being double-minded. This is a person without true conviction who wavers back and forth, essentially a person without commitment.

James goes on to address the issue of wealth. The rich will wither away in the midst of their busy lives. For James the rich should boast in being brought low. It's important to remember that in the context of the present world most Americans would be considered rich. There's no point in envying the rich since, as James says, they will “disappear like the flower in the field.”

James then ends this section with a discussion of temptation. We may well ask, what's the difference between trials, which we are to count as “nothing but joy” and temptation which is an enticement to evil? The clearest way to understand the difference is the

temptation of Jesus. The Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness which is the place of temptation (Matt. 4:1). However, the Holy Spirit doesn't tempt Jesus. Satan does. Yet God may allow us to be tempted as a way of testing our faith. We see a similar example in Job. God allows Job to be both tested and tempted. Yet it is Satan that is doing the real evil. What James is really saying here is that we cannot blame God for our temptations. We most often tempt ourselves. As James says we are tempted by our own desires. Temptation itself is not sin. Yet if we allow ourselves to be lured and enticed then the temptation finally results in sin.

II. Doers of the Word, Not Just Hearers - 1:17-27

James proceeds now to list several basic characteristics of the Christian Life. The first is to recognize that everything we have is a gift from God. God does not give with a hidden agenda (How many times do we get calls saying that we've won a "free" gift?). God gives freely and openly. The greatest thing he has given us is new life in his Son. Why then should we choose to live according to the old and fading patterns of the world? James gets very practical. He calls us to be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger. Imagine how many conflicts we could avoid if we followed that pattern! If we believe in Christ we have God's Word implanted in our lives. Every day we have to concentrate more and more on that Word.

James then adds that it is not enough to listen to the Word. We need to be doers of that Word. As we encounter God's Word in reading, study or worship we can freely nod our heads. We agree with that Word. We recognize its truth. However, if we don't live out that truth then we deceive ourselves.

There is a long standing tradition that goes back at least as far as Martin Luther in the sixteenth century which tends to see James in opposition to Paul. However, the more we study them both the more we see that is not the case. James here speaks of the "perfect law." He does not mean by this the Law of Moses. No, he is referring to the "law of liberty." This lines up with Paul's view of freedom (Gal. 5:1). The true law of liberty cannot be reduced to a legalistic code. This law of liberty needs to be lived out in open and effective ways, even with some risks. James seems to be saying that we have to dwell on God's Word to experience this "law of liberty." Too often we simply forget what we have seen in God's Word. James uses the example of looking in a mirror and then turning away forgetting what the image showed us.

James now gets very personal. If we are to be truly followers of Christ, then one of the first things we need to do is to hold our tongues in check. James will have more to say about this. Gossip and slander have done more harm to the Christian Church than almost any other sin. He concludes this section telling us that "Religion that is pure and undefiled" consists of caring for widows and orphans and keeping ourselves "unstained by the world." The world remains a constant source of distraction, false goals and, indeed, temptation. Trials build up our faith but giving in to temptation can damage our faith. We need to find the balance.

Questions for Us –

1. Why is it so hard for us to find joy in the midst of trials?
2. How can we better discipline our tongues? Why are we so often more ready to speak than to listen?
3. What are some examples of being doers of the Word instead of just hearers?

Chapter 2 – “Faith Brought to Completion”

James in this section gets down to very practical issues in faith and life. He emphasizes the fact that the sin of showing partiality is the complete opposite of loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:39). James emphasizes the difference between faith as assent and faith as genuine trust in the Lord. In reality he shows the same view of the law and faith as the apostle Paul.

I. “Acts of Favoritism” – 2:1-13

The church is not immune to the false standards of the world. We are easily impressed by wealth and prestige. Obviously the same problem occurred in the early church. James points out that we can pay special attention to someone who is well dressed and appears to be rich. At the same time, we can look down on someone who appears homeless or poor. God, however, favors the poor. We can never forget that. Proverbs tells us, “Whoever is kind to the poor, lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full” (Prov. 19:17).

Showing partiality is a sin. Everyone is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). This is the clear basis for the teaching that all are created equal. This applies not only to social standing but to race, nationality, education or even religion. This is not simply a matter of ethics. It is a question of our spiritual nature, of our relationship to God.

James makes a point about the law that is also found in the apostle Paul. If we try to follow the Law of Moses we have to realize that to fail in one aspect of it is to fail in all of it: “Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law” (Gal. 3:10). Following the law is everything or nothing. Paul and James agree that no one can live according to the law. We can’t pick and choose among the commandments.

Paul speaks of freedom (Gal. 5:1). James refers to the “law of liberty.” The essence of this law (or “norm”) is mercy. The only ones to whom this mercy is not extended are those who have not shown mercy. In Jesus’ framework this would be the religious leaders (Matthew 23). Paul speaks of the fact that, in the final analysis, God will be merciful to all (Rom. 11:32). In one of the strongest statements in scripture James says that “mercy triumphs over judgment.” This is why the gospel embraces prostitutes, extortionists, Samaritans and adulterers but condemns the self-righteous.

It is a sad commentary that often Christians are seen as being unmerciful since the demonstration of mercy is so central to the gospel itself. Faced with the frequent criticism of religious leaders Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6, “I require mercy, not sacrifice” (Matt. 9:13; 12:7).

II. Faith Without Works – 2:14-26

This is the section of James' epistle that has caused an apparent controversy with the apostle Paul. On the face of it James seems to contradict Paul. Paul said that Abraham was justified by faith and not by works (Rom. 4:1-5). James says the exact opposite (2:23-24). For this reason, Martin Luther called the Book of James "an epistle of straw." However, in spite of the apparent contradiction we have to ask, are Paul and James talking about the same thing?

In reality they are not. Paul is speaking of faith as an essential trust in God. He offers Abraham as an example because Abraham proceeds to follow God. This however is the result of his faith not the cause of it. James says something very similar when he indicates that Abraham showed his faith by obeying God in offering up his son.

Faith needs to show itself. When Paul in his strongest defense of justification by faith apart from works adds that those who openly engage in the "works of the flesh" will not inherit the kingdom of God, he is indicating, like James, that faith must be visible (Gal. 5:16-21). Early in Paul's career his teaching was being distorted to justify self-indulgence (I Cor. 6:12-20). For Paul faith was a complete trust and confidence in God's promises. It had nothing to do with human effort or merit. Yet once having been justified by faith one's life needed to show the reality of that trust in God (Eph. 5:1-20).

James actually is correcting two misconceptions of faith. One is the view that faith is nothing more than a wish, a general hope. To say to a poor person, "Go in peace, keep warm and eat your fill" without offering any real help is nothing more than an idle saying. Real faith propels someone to action. Paul would not dispute that. The other mistake is to identify faith with mere assent. In that case faith is nothing more than a tacit acknowledgement without any commitment. James uses the example of the demons who believe and shudder. I can say objectively that Jesus is Lord and Savior without expressing any real trust or confidence in him. The essence of James' argument is his saying, "I by my works will show you my faith." This is to say that faith is central. What James means by faith is a committed trust, not just an empty belief that doesn't come to terms with a life that lives out that faith.

To put a final touch on his argument James uses the example of Rahab the prostitute from the Book of Joshua. She knows that the Lord is with the Israelites. She and her people have heard about the crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptians. She believes that God is with the Israelites. This however is more than an assent to a given set of facts. Rahab takes the spies in. She hides them and then lies about them to the king's soldiers. Two key points must be noted here. Her obedience to God requires her to break the ninth commandment ("You shall not bear false witness"). Second, she is a living example of what Paul calls faith working through love (Gal. 5:6).

Questions for Discussion –

1. Why is it so hard for us to be impartial? Why are we so impressed with people's outward appearances?
2. What does it mean to say that "mercy triumphs over judgment?" Does this mean that everything is acceptable (cf. I Cor. 6:12)?
3. How can we demonstrate our faith? Why does faith need to be demonstrated?

Chapter 3 – “Tongue of Fire”

James in this chapter confronts a problem that we often overlook. This is the problem of our tongues, our speech. We tend to focus on more overt sins, murder, stealing, and adultery. Yet James warns us that the tongue is “a fire.” Indeed, it is set on fire by hell itself (v. 6). As opposed to this, James calls us to the wisdom from above, a wisdom that is marked by gentleness.

I. “For All of Us Make Many Mistakes”– 3:1-12

James begins with a serious warning about teachers. What he says would certainly be applicable to anyone exercising authority in the church, deacons, elders, Sunday School teachers, youth workers, etc. He makes what almost seems like an off handed comment that we all make many mistakes (not just a few). There are many mistakes he could list. We misinterpret things. We are forgetful. We don't always pay attention. We ignore people in need. These are all “mistakes.”

James however is focusing in on something that is beyond the realm of a simple mistake. In unflinching terms, he describes the problems we all have with our tongues, with how we speak especially how we speak about other people. He begins by noting that the tongue is a “small member.” Yet it is capable of “great exploits” like a bit guiding a horse or a rudder directing a ship.

James then goes on with a devastating list of what the tongue can do and indeed often does. He calls it a “fire” ignited by hell itself. It is a “world of iniquity.” It “stains the whole body.” It is a “restless evil, full of deadly poison.” It is incapable of being tamed. Is he kidding?

James however is not kidding. He is deadly serious. One of the most untruthful sayings we learned in childhood is the refrain, “Sticks and stones can break my bones but names will never hurt me.” This, as we know now, is false. Words can wound. They can be more painful than any physical injury.

He adds that the tongue cannot be tamed (v. 8). It is in effect a deadly weapon that we can all use very easily and very quickly. Scripture is hardly silent on this subject. What James describes here includes cursing (Ps. 10:7), slander (Prov. 16:27), gossip (“A gossip's whispers are tasty morsels swallowed right down.” Prov. 18:8 Revised English Bible) and boasting (Ps. 12:3-4). To emphasize how serious this issue is Jesus tells us that we will have to give an account “for every careless word” we utter (Matt. 12:36).

James points out the obvious contradiction in the fact that “blessing and cursing” can come out of the same mouth. We praise God with our tongues but then we can in effect curse other people, all of whom are made in the image of God (v. 9). James uses several examples from nature. A fig tree cannot produce olives nor can a

grapevine give figs. Water can't be both fresh and salt. What he is saying is that how we use our tongue, how we speak, reveals who we really are.

This is one of the great unacknowledged failings of Christians. We can easily listen to gossip and all too easily also spread it. We can mask this by pretending to ourselves that we're just sharing a "prayer concern" or passing along some "news." It doesn't take much to begin a sentence with "Have you heard . . . ?"

James is not saying that we shouldn't speak the truth or testify to things of which we have direct knowledge. However, we are reminded that we need to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). We need to remember that our tongues can be expressions of hate rather than love.

II. Wisdom From Above – 3:13-18

James has no illusions about the failings in Christian communities. Twice in this brief passage he mentions the danger of "selfish ambition" (vv. 14, 16). To this he also includes "bitter envy," being "boastful" and "false to the truth." In effect we are presented with two forms of wisdom, so called. The wisdom of the world is essentially little more than the craftiness which Satan demonstrated in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1). In the world many times "selfish ambition" is the pathway to success. This is the wisdom of the world which in God's eyes is "foolishness" (I Cor. 1:20).

James contrast this with "the wisdom from above" which he describes first of all as being pure. What does he mean by "pure?" For James this contrasts with what he described earlier as being "double-minded" (1:8). To be pure in this sense is to have a single focus. This is what Jesus calls being "pure in heart" (Matt. 5:8). It is being unstained, unmixed with other things, like "pure cane sugar."

James goes on to speak of being peaceable, gentle, willing to yield and full of mercy. The opposite of this is showing partiality and hypocrisy. This brings us back to the issue of the tongue. Those who engage in gossip are neither gentle nor merciful. To the extent that they condemn others whom they regard as inferior to themselves, they are showing both partiality, and an absence of mercy. Such people finally are hypocrites. They practice a selective morality which excuses their own behavior and condemns that of others. This is the term that Jesus uses to describe the religious leaders of his own time, especially the Pharisees (Matt. 23:13).

The three things that non-Christians find most objectionable about us Christians are the issues that James raises here. The first is gossip, the abuse of the tongue which quickly leads to character assassination. The second is partiality where we make distinctions among people. We easily condemn those who are different from us. The third is hypocrisy which is evident to everyone but ourselves.

James, rather than opposing Paul actually shares much in common with him. As Paul condemned the legalists of his own time for their "different gospel" (Gal. 1:6), James

warns of those who are unkind, judgmental and hypocritical. We need to take these criticisms seriously.

Questions for Discussion -

1. Why is our tongue so hard to manage? How often do we say things we regret? How can we avoid the “fire” of our speech?
2. Have you been wounded by what someone has said to you or about you? How did you handle those situations?
3. What can we do to help us avoid “selfish ambition,” “partiality” and “hypocrisy?”

Chapter 4 – “Warlike Cravings”

James is dealing with a congregation in turmoil. Passages like these bear out the truth that the early church was not some kind of idyllic community. James is confronting “conflicts and disputes” in the church. The Christian has to make a choice to submit wholeheartedly to God. Only then can the devil be resisted. We need to humble ourselves and seek the “more grace” which God promises.

I. “you ask wrongly” – 4:1-10

James is telling us that we should have no illusions about ourselves. We want things which come from the “cravings that are at war within you.” Once again there is a parallel with the apostle Paul who spoke of an ongoing conflict between the “flesh” (our sinful nature) and the “spirit” (our new nature in Christ). In graphic terms Paul states, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Rom. 7:19).

James puts this in shocking terms: “You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder.” Is he serious? This is another example of what we call hyperbole, literally overstatement, to make a point. Jesus doesn’t want us tearing out our eye (Matt. 5:29). The point is being made that there are serious issues here. What are the cravings which are at war within us? And what does James mean by our asking wrongly, to spend what we have on our own pleasures (v. 3). Finally, how do we resist the “friendship with the world which is enmity with God?”

To answer these questions, several things have to be kept in mind. First, God is not opposed to pleasure. God did not create the world so that we would have nothing to do with the good things it offers. God made wine to gladden the human heart and food to sustain us (Ps. 104:14-15). He gives us the beauties of nature (Ps. 74:16-17). This includes physical beauty (Ezek. 16:6-14) along with love, sex and marriage (Song of Solomon). God does not withhold any good thing from us (Ps. 84:11). Second, as far back as the New Testament there were those who in a hyper form of spirituality taught that the body and even creation itself, were evil. Paul will not tolerate these “deceitful spirits” and states plainly that “everything created by God is good. And nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving” (I Tim. 4:1-5). So James is not talking about a Christianity that is defined by all the things it rejects and finds unacceptable. That outlook leads to a highly negative view of Christian faith which unfortunately has its roots in the Christian Pharisees and “super-apostles” Paul had to confront (Acts 15:1-5; II Cor. 11:5; Col. 2:20-23). Such things contradict James’ view of “the law of liberty” (2:25).

So what is James talking about?

James is confronting his readers with a critical point. The truth is that we all have sinful cravings within us. To pretend otherwise is to fall into self-deception or in James' expression, being "double-minded" (v. 8). We say one thing and do another. We pretend that we are something we are not. We deny the reality of the remnants of sin still within us. Two dangers present themselves here.

The first, in a misuse of our Christian liberty which simply follows the self-indulgence of the world (the boast of the Corinthians that "all things are lawful," including prostitution (I Cor. 6). It is interesting that in several examples in the New Testament the opposite of freedom is not really slavery. It is self-indulgence. On one hand we profess belief in Christ. However, on the other we follow the pattern of the world which resists Christ. This is the essence of being double-minded. Yet the pattern of the world promises (falsely) to satisfy the cravings that are at war within us. This is a deadly strategy which Satan uses to defeat us. James exhorts us in the name of our faith in Christ to resist the devil (v. 7).

The second danger is spiritual pride. If we are proud, if we are over confident, we are unprepared to face the reality that many times even our prayers are misguided. Israel prayed to God for a king and God gave them one. However, Samuel the prophet reminded Israel that in asking for a king they were rejecting God (I Samuel 8). In praying simply for things that build up our pride or excuse our self-indulgence, even our professed belief in God is seriously flawed. Once again we are caught in the trap of being double minded. Both sides of the "double" undermine our faith and life in Christ. Spiritual pride and self-indulgence are really two sides of the same coin.

II. Speaking Evil – 4:11-17

James maintains his focus on the use (or misuse) of the tongue. He warns against speaking evil against one another. What does he mean by this? For him to speak evil means to judge. We are all judged by the law. None of us are able to keep it. Too often the law can be used as a big stick to beat people over the head. The law is not nearly as important as the lawgiver who alone can judge. This is God. We may ask, why did God give the law if no one is able to keep it? Paul's answer is that the law gives us the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:19-20). We have no right to judge one another. The Pope was roundly criticized when he was asked about same-sex marriage and his answer was, "Who am I to judge?" Yet his answer was simply quoting James 4:12.

Does this mean that the church has no standards? No, but the standard we have is the love of Christ. When we fall in our walk of following Christ, when we fail we need to remember Paul's advice to restore each other "in a spirit of gentleness" (Gal. 6:1). This is how Jesus dealt with Peter. We are all vulnerable. There can be no superiority in the household of faith.

James concludes this chapter warning against a temptation to boast. When we make our own plans without depending on the Lord we are, in effect, boasting. None of us knows what tomorrow will bring. We are dependent on the Lord. Even the Greek poets could say that in God we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). There is an old rabbinic saying that if you want to make God laugh tell him your plans for the future. Many times we are boasting without realizing it.

James ends with the simple statement that if we know the right thing to do and we fail to do it then we fall into sin. This is similar to Paul's statement about faith working through love (Gal. 5:6). It is not hard to recognize the need for compassion. What often is hard is doing something about it. James continually reminds us that we need to be doers of the word, not just hearers (1:22). Mercy triumphs over judgement (2:13).

Questions for Us –

1. What are examples for us of “cravings” that are at war within us?
2. What does it mean to be a friend of the world and an enemy of God?
How can religion make us an enemy of God?
3. What are some of the ways that we can be boastful without realizing it?

Chapter 5 – “The Price of Patience”

James ends his epistle with both a warning and an exhortation. He warns those who have become rich through exploitation. The three greatest temptations that human beings face are wealth, power and sex. One of our greatest needs is patience (St. Augustine had the famous prayer, “Lord give me patience and give it to me right now!). Finally, James calls us to prayer reminding us that prayer sustained those who have gone before us and it continues to sustain us with its power.

I. “Come now, you rich people” – 5:1-6

The Bible is not very positive about wealth. For every passage that speaks of wealth as a blessing (Gen. 24:34-35; Job 42:12; Mal. 3:10; John 12:1-3) there are twice as many that warn about the corrupting influence of riches (Deut. 8:10-14; I Kings 10:23; 11:6; Prov. 11:28; 28:22; Eccl. 5:10; Matt. 6:19-21; Mark 4:19; 10:23; Luke 6:24; 12:15; Rev. 17:3-5). Paul calls greed “idolatry” (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). He then gives a clear summons to those “who in the present age are rich” (I Tm. 6:17-19), It can certainly be noted that James is not simply speaking of those who are rich economically. He is denouncing a system of oppression and exploitation. He is describing a situation in which laborers are defrauded and in an extreme sense murdered. We can read these passages and easily justify ourselves by saying that we are not exploiting anyone much less murdering them! Yet one of our greatest errors is to read the Bible as though it only speaks of individuals. To the contrary the Bible speaks of systems, of “rulers and authorities” (Eph. 1:20-21).

Our whole economic system is based on greed. We think nothing of walking into a super market and finding food literally from all over the world. The same applies to clothing stores and shopping malls. There is a long and well documented history of exploitation of workers which allows us to enjoy our materialistic way of life. We have a system that has indeed defrauded laborers. Yet the system itself masks that exploitation where it occurs. When we buy even a t-shirt made in Thailand or wherever we don’t have to see the workers who labored perhaps in difficult circumstances to manufacture our shirt or whatever. The fact that exploitation takes place thousands of miles away from us doesn’t absolve us of the responsibility to see that workers are being paid a fair wage. The sober fact of Jesus’ parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man is that it may well have been the case that the Rich Man didn’t even notice Lazarus until it was too late (Luke 16:19-31).

II. “Be patient therefore” – 5:7-12

We live in a world of instant gratification. We don’t want to wait for anything. We honk at people who stop when the light turns yellow. Yet James reminds us that patience is part of the discipline of faith. This underlines his whole thesis that “faith without works is dead” (2:26). We need to live with the expectation that Christ’s coming is always near. We don’t know when he will come so we need to be ready.

The churches under James' supervision were obviously far from perfect. He has to admonish the believers not to "grumble against one another."

For James patience goes along with suffering. We need to be patient in adversity, in the "trials" which he says produces endurance (1:2-4). He makes the same point here. We will never develop endurance in the faith unless we have been patient in suffering. This is not the lesson we want to learn. We want all the joy and confidence of believing in Christ. Yet there is no Christ without the cross. We cannot follow him unless we are prepared to take up our cross also (Matt. 10:38).

James reminds us of those like Job who endured suffering. He alludes to the "prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord." Among these are Moses (Num. 11:10-15), Elijah (I Kings 19:3-21), Jeremiah (Jer. 12:1-13) and Jesus himself (Matt. 27:11-14). The final sustaining note in this discussion is the fact that "the Lord is compassionate and merciful."

What does James mean by not swearing? This goes back to his earlier comment about claiming more than we can assume. James has an overall concern about the tongue, about how we speak to each other. When we make plans purely on our own (4:13-17) or we make promises appealing to God or anything else we finally are falling into pride. This all comes back to our own self-confidence (or what James would call "selfish-ambition"). Jesus says the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:33-37). Echoing Jesus, James says we should simply say "yes" or "no." Nothing is up to us. It all depends on the Lord.

III. The Prayer of Faith – 5:13-20

James ends his epistle with an emphasis on prayer. What he really is saying is that we should pray in whatever circumstance we find ourselves. If we are suffering, we should pray. If we are cheerful we should sing songs of praise which are also prayers. James here includes the admonition that those who are sick should call on the elders to pray over them anointing them with oil. He says the prayer of faith will save the sick. Does this mean healing? Not necessarily. Salvation has a broader sense. Saving the sick can also mean saving from despair or hopelessness. When James speaks of the prayer of faith using the example of Elijah who "was a human being just like us," he is not talking about degrees of faith but rather simple trust, the basic nature of faith itself. The point being stressed here is that God answers prayer. God does not necessarily answer all our prayers the way we want. In fact, he often doesn't (Job's prayers are really never answered). Yet we are to have this confidence that God does answer prayer and we should pray in good times and bad. As Paul says, "pray without ceasing" (I Thess. 5:17).

Finally, James picks up another theme from Paul. When someone falls in the faith they are to be brought back and restored not condemned (Gal. 6:1-5). We are to confess our sins to one another. This also means we need to be open about our own failings. James says that the one who restores the one who has wandered

away will save the sinner's soul and cover a multitude of sins. Whose sins? Presumably both the one who wandered and the other who restored the fallen believer. What is restoration? It is simply to confess our sins and be reconciled to Christ and to one another (I John 1:9).

The ultimate value of prayer is that it keeps us focused on Christ and not on ourselves or others. We are finally to draw near to God knowing that he will draw us unto himself (4:8). Amen!

Questions for Us –

1. We are the richest people in the history of the world. How do we apply James' warning about wealth to ourselves?
2. What are some of the ways we can build up our patience especially in times of suffering?
3. How can we discipline ourselves to pray in all circumstances?