

WHICH ROAD WILL YOU TAKE?

A STUDY IN JAMES

God Never Changes!

Autumn is a beautiful season. And yet, to many this time of year brings sadness because the arrival of autumn reminds us of how fleeting life is as we watch the beautiful flowers, grasses, and leaves change and then die before our eyes. I can tell you this. There is one thing that never changes. **Hebrews 13:8 (ESV)** ⁸ *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.* Because of this promise, children of the King are able to keep life in perspective. **Isaiah 54:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ *For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you.* No matter what the state of the earth, our nation, or our personal affairs, God’s steadfast love will not change or depart from us! Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Let’s begin our study this week by considering the book of James’ perspective of being poor vs. being rich.

James 1:9-11 (ESV) ⁹ *Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,* ¹⁰ *and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.* ¹¹ *For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits*

James first mentions the believer who is in humble or lowly circumstances. James says the ‘lowly’ should rejoice in the Lord. That means that we rejoice in Christ no matter the current state of our affairs.

We should never allow our circumstances:

1. to dull or destroy our joy in life,
2. to make us bitter against those who have more, or
3. to cause a sense of inferiority and inadequacy in our hearts.

When we belong to Jesus, we are children of the King!

On the other side, the believer of rich or high circumstances in life is to rejoice in his low position. What does that mean? A rich person or a powerful person is not accepted by God because of what he or she has or does. Wealth and high status means absolutely nothing to God. The rich must approach God just like the poor. All people—no matter our ‘rank’ in this world—stand before God as equals. **The ground at the foot of cross is level ground.**

Both rich and poor should rejoice. If we do not rejoice in Him always, it is our own fault. The poor may rejoice and be exalted because the poor can be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom of God. The rich may rejoice in even humbling circumstances because humility is valuable in the sight of God. **Nothing of this world will last.**

Read Isaiah 40:6-8 (ESV) ⁶ *A voice says, “Cry!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.* ⁷ *The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows*

on it; surely the people are grass. ⁸ *The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.*

All flesh is grass God's Word tells us. like the grass, nations, leaders and individuals fulfill our purposes and then fade away, but the Word of God abides forever. ***Psalm 37:1-2 (ESV)*** ¹ *Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers!* ² *For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.* Don't be overwhelmed when you turn on the news, just look to Jesus.

Read James 1:12 (ESV) ¹² *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.*

The KJV uses the word temptation for trial. We won't go into the semantics that is the meanings of these two words. Instead, I will quote Paul in ***1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)*** ¹³ *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*

Notice James does not say, Blessed is the man who experiences trials. James says: *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial.* The person who bears up or remains steadfast under trials and/or temptations and is not led astray will endure as gold endures the fire. A love that cannot endure temptation does not reflect love for God. Those who bear affliction in a gracious manner are the blessed ones. They have a patience that has been tested, a faith that has passed through the fire, a love that has been more than a conqueror in trial.

The blessing for those who endure trials is the crown of life. This crown is a living crown in contrast to those who measure life in terms that pass away – a laurel wreath as presented to runners in James' day was a crown that dried up and withered in a short time. Paul wrote in ***1 Corinthians 9:25 (ESV)*** ²⁵ *Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.* The Lord promises that the rewards He gives are real and lasting – not something that is going to dry up and blow away. This is a reminder that we need to be less focused on the perishable and more focused on the imperishable – meaning souls that need the Lord.

James does not teach that we enter heaven by good works. We are never going to be “that good.” Our endurance is never going to be strong enough to qualify us for salvation. Let's always remember to thank God for His grace and mercy towards us in providing us with His great gift of eternal life.

There are five crowns mentioned in the Bible. Here in ***James 1:12***, James mentions the *crown of life* which is also mentioned in ***Revelation 2:10 (ESV)*** ¹⁰ *Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.* This crown of life is especially dear to those who endure sufferings, who bravely confront persecution for Jesus, even to the point of death.

However, whether or not we face severe persecution and trials, James provides the assurance that this *crown of life* is for all who love the Lord. The question is ‘how do we show our love for the Lord? The Apostle John

answers this question in **1 John 5:3 (ESV)** ³ *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.*

What is the secret of joyful obedience? Warren Wiersbe tells a story that answers this question. A woman visited a newspaper editor's office, hoping to sell him some poems. "What are your poems about?" the editor asked. "They're about love!" gushed the woman. The editor settled back in his chair and said, "Well, read me a poem. The world could certainly use a lot more love!" The poem she read was filled with *moons* and *Junes* and other sticky sentiments, and it was more than the editor could take. "I'm sorry," he said, "but you just don't know what love is all about! It's not moonlight and roses. It's sitting up all night at a sickbed, or working extra hours so the kids can have new shoes. The world doesn't need your brand of poetical love. It needs some good old-fashioned practical love."

D.L. Moody often said, "Every Bible should be bound in shoe leather." We show our love to God, not by empty words but by willing works. We are not slaves obeying a master; we are children obeying a Father.

Read James 1:13-15 (ESV) ¹³ *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.* ¹⁴ *But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.* ¹⁵ *Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

James contrasts between the tests/trials that God uses to bring us to Christian maturity and the temptations that grow out of our own sinful desires. It is human nature to blame others for our sins. In fact, the blame game has been going on since the 'good ole days' in the Garden of Eden. Some people want to make God the direct cause for everything that happens. However, when God created man in His image, we were created with a free will to choose between good and evil. So, if we choose evil, it is on us. Yes, God tests us but He does not use the tests to lead us into evil. In fact, His desire is to deliver us from evil.

If we don't 'blame God, we might try to blame Satan for our sin! It is true that Satan does play a role but James tells us how to handle those situations. **James 4:7 (ESV)** ⁷ *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* If we don't blame God or Satan, we want to blame others. Most often, the one who we are least likely to blame for yielding to temptations – is the one who is most often responsible – our own self!

Although the temptation to sin can be kindled by something external, it takes root internally – that is in our hearts. James verifies this when he said: *But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.* We live in a time where we constantly are thinking about making 'heart healthy' choices. As important as it is to have a healthy physical heart, it is even more important to have a healthy spiritual heart. **Proverbs 4:23 (ESV)** ²³ *Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.*

Read James 1:16-18 (ESV) ¹⁶ *Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.* ¹⁷ *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.* ¹⁸ *Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

One of the enemy's tricks is to convince us that our Father is holding out on us, that He does not really love us and care for us. It first happened in the garden when Satan approached Eve, he suggested that if God really loved her, He would permit her to eat of the forbidden tree. Eve was deceived. James warns Christians then and now to not be deceived.

Keep in mind that the goodness of God is a great barrier against yielding to temptation. Since God is good, we do not need any other person (including Satan) to meet our needs. It is better to be hungry *in* the will of God than full *outside* the will of God. Once we start to doubt God's goodness, we will be attracted to Satan's offers.

James presented some facts about the goodness of God.

1. **God gives only good gifts.** Everything good gift in this world comes from God. If it did not come from God, it is not good. If it comes from God, it must be good, even if we do not see the goodness in it immediately. Jesus said in *Matthew 7:11 (ESV)*¹¹ *If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*
2. **The way God gives is good.** It is possible for someone to give us a gift in a manner that is less than loving. The value of a gift can be diminished by the way it is given to us. But when God gives us a blessing, it is a true blessing. *Psalms 107:9 (ESV)*⁹ *For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.*
3. **He gives constantly.** *Coming down* suggests the picture of how good and perfect gifts keep on coming down to us. God does not give occasionally; He gives constantly. Even when we do not see His gifts, He is sending them. This reminds me of the words to a song by Mercy Me: This is the air I breathe, Your holy presence living in me. This is my daily bread, Your very word spoken to me. Our God gives every time we take a breath.

There are no shadows with the Father of Lights. As I mentioned at the beginning of the lesson, God does not change. The light of the sun varies as the earth changes, but the sun itself is still shining. If shadows come between us and the Father, He did not cause them. He is the unchanging God. This means that we should never question His love or doubt His goodness when difficulties come or temptations appear.

James says that we are the *firstfruits of his creatures*. We read of Jesus in *1 Corinthians 15:20 (ESV)*²⁰ *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*. When Jesus had that talk with Nicodemus concerning being born again, it was because God cannot accept our first birth and allow sinful creatures into heaven. We need a second birth. Until this lesson, I had never noticed the picture of the 'second birth' that is found in the Old Testament. Warren Wiersbe writes, "By granting us a new birth, God declares that He cannot accept the old birth. Throughout the Bible, God rejects the firstborn and accepts the second-born. He accepted Abel, not Cain; Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau. He rejects your first birth (no matter how noble it might have been in the eyes of men), and He announces that you need a second birth." Accept Jesus as Savior, the good and perfect gift from above. He does not change but He wants to change us for eternity.