

Real Faith
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If Facebook and Twitter had existed in AD 44, James (the half-brother of Jesus) probably would have been on them! Here's what I mean: When you read verses nine and following of James chapter one, it can seem disjointed and at times, somewhat random. It's all good, solid truth but it seems to come in short "bursts." It's similar to the book of Proverbs in this way. You could imagine first century Jewish Christians checking Facebook to see what great TRUTH James had posted today! Though this section may seem disjointed and not in a logical order, there IS a theme. The theme is, "How Christians Should Live with Real Faith."

In his book "Shoe Leather Christianity," Pastor Johnny divides this text into four sections. We'll roughly follow those divisions of Real Faith and... Humility; Temptation; Salvation; and The Christian Life. Let's start in verses nine through twelve on HUMILITY:

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.

- Verses nine through eleven seem to come out of nowhere. Still talking about going through TRIALS, James contrasts those poor in material things with the wealthy.
- **How are the poor and the wealthy similar when it comes to trials?**
- **How are both seen in the eyes of God?**

Muretus the "wandering scholar" said,
"Call no man worthless for whom Christ died." (Barclay's commentary)

- **How can loss of material things grow us in our walk with God?**

Warren Wiersbe writes:

“Apparently, money and social status were real problems among these people. God’s testings have a way of leveling us. When testing comes to the poor man, he lets God have His way and rejoices that he possesses spiritual riches that cannot be taken from him. When testing comes to the rich man, he also lets God have His way, and he rejoices that his riches in Christ cannot wither or fade away. In other words, it is not your material resources that take you through the testings of life; it is your spiritual resources.”

- The poor “boast” in low position and the rich “boast” in their “humiliation.”
- We call that HUMILITY. In his book, Pastor Johnny states:
“...humility could potentially exist apart from genuine faith, genuine faith always bears genuine humility.”

- In summary: poor or rich, everyone is the same in God’s eyes. Pastor Johnny says,
“Spiritual riches are independent of material blessings. Spiritual riches last forever while material abundance will soon “fade away. Faith that is humble trusts God to take care of the future.”

Verse 12 describes God’s reward for persevering in humility and faith:

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.

- If we’re a follower of Christ we’re already promised eternal life.
- If we meet trials in the right way there are “crowns” or blessings in this life too.

William Barclay talks about the various crowns in New Testament times:

The “crown of flowers” in times of joy, like weddings and feasts; the “crown of royalty” worn by kings; the “crown of laurel leaves” for the victor in athletic games; and the crown as a mark of honor and dignity. Barclay says Christians can enjoy ALL four:

“Christians have joy that others can never have. They have a royalty... however humble...they are children of God. ...a victory...in the conquering

power of the presence of Jesus Christ. They have a new dignity... God considered them worth the life and death of Jesus Christ."

- In verses thirteen through sixteen, James shifts to the challenge of TEMPTATIONS:

James 1:13–16 (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.

- **In the Garden of Eden when God confronted Adam and Eve with their sin, how did they respond? Who were they really (indirectly) blaming?**
- Since the beginning humans have looked to shift the blame for our sins, to Satan (remember Flip Wilson?), to others, even to God. **What is the truth about who is to blame when we sin?**
- Our society has deceived ourselves: **"I believe people are basically... (what?)"**
- Verse 14: "lured" and "enticed" are hunting or fishing terms. **What "lures" us to sin?**
- Every human, from birth, has a built-in "sin-seeking" device called DESIRE. "I want what I want when I want it!" **When we feed that desire what does verse fifteen say happens?**
- **When it comes to temptation who is in the "driver's seat?" How do we resist?**
- We tend to think temptation applies to "BIG STUFF" like sexual temptation; theft; violence; etc.
- In his book, Pastor Johnny reminds us: *"We daily face temptation toward anger, dishonesty, resentment, bitterness, immorality, impurity, and countless other moral assaults against God's character."* Get that? Anything that is against God's character.
- James warns in verse sixteen: ¹⁶ *"Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers."*
- Ultimately, the only way to overcome temptation is through the Spirit of God living inside us. That comes from SALVATION.

James 1:17–21 (ESV)

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.

- All good gifts come from God. **According to verse 18, what's God's greatest gift?**
- **Based on verse 18, how does God initiate the gift of salvation?**
- Salvation isn't earned by works, but a Christian's behavior should reflect the gift of salvation. Verses 19-21.

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

- Verse 19 is good conduct when any wise Christian interacts with other people.
- We've learned the "hard way" this is better than the reverse: Quick to speak, quick to anger, slow to hear!
- **How does that verse also apply to receiving God's "implanted" word?**
- Now to the key THEME of James, once we've received God's word, ACT on it!

James 1:22–27 (ESV)

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

- James compares God's word to a mirror. **How is the Bible like a mirror to us?**

- **How does James' "glancing in the mirror" example apply to looking to God's word?**

²⁶ If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

William Barclay wrote about verse 27:

"To James, real worship did not lie in elaborate vestments or in magnificent music or in a carefully planned service; it lay in the practical service of others and in the purity of one's own personal life."

So, What's the Takeaway?

- How do we boil so many different "bursts" of truth down to an application for our lives?
- Here's a thought... Take verses 9 through 27 of chapter one, and each day look at one of the sections just as if James had posted it right to your Facebook newsfeed.
- Ask yourself, "How do I measure up in this area of my Christian life?"
- In other words, don't just "look in the mirror" of God's word and rush off. Spend a few minutes to really study your reflection, then DO something about it!