

The Life of Faith, Part 7, A Study in James: God is Working on the Inside

The Book of James addresses a faith that is sustained through every situation of life. True faith is a lifestyle that reveals Christ in us. James is encouraging the believer's faith to increase, persevere, and be unwavering. To understand what the Holy Spirit is saying, we need to look at the whole Epistle of James and not just the parts.

In James 1, we are taught to live with confident faith. Genuine faith is demonstrated by our conduct in every kind of situation, (1:2-18). We are encouraged to develop a faith that profits from every kind of situation, trial and test.

He tells us to count it all joy or learn to rejoice in trials or tests of various kinds. This kind of joy or rejoicing is a result of knowing, or having faith, that God is working in our lives. We know that God has our best interest in mind and we are going to come out of this. When we go through various trials, we should expect to come out stronger and more complete. True faith makes us stable and constant in every situation. It is demonstrated by balanced and holy attitudes.

The testing of your faith should reveal Christ in you. Our faith recognizes the advantage and assistance we have in trials.

Where does your help come from? The Psalmist said, "My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth." (Psalms 121:2)

When trials and tests come, we can confidently stand and resist temptation. We know that God is our resource and is an ever-present help in times of trouble.

Faith teaches us to act and take a stand on God's Word and not just respond to situations. The Word of God is powerful and influential in our lives. We have learned to be receptive, responsive, and obedient to God's Word. We are not just hearers of the Word, but we are obedient to the faith. We have learned to take action on what God has said.

Our faith has taught us to rejoice in trials and testing, to resist the devil and to respond with faith. Our ability to rejoice in trials demonstrates a strong faith. The action we take in resisting tests is a testimony of our strong faith. We can take an unwavering stand on the Word of God.

James 2 tells us, "Faith without works is dead." Genuine faith inspires Christlike actions to all people without showing favoritism. Chapter 2 begins with, "do not hold the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ with partiality." When we know who we are in Christ Jesus, we are emboldened to demonstrate Christ's character to others. We become courteous, compassionate, and consistent.

Strong faith impacts the word of our mouth and the work of our hands. People with weak faith demonstrate an unbalanced relationship with other people. Our faith is the development of Christ's nature within us. Christ's nature is lived out in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As we are led by the Holy Spirit, our faith in Jesus Christ drives us to random acts of compassion and kindness. It brings to action the nature of Christ that is within us. True faith brings us into impartial acts of love and kindness.

After looking at faith that is expressed in our lifestyle, the focus turns to things that challenge the life of faith and revelation of Christ in us.

In James 3, our attention is drawn toward ordinary daily life. Genuine faith is illustrated through common daily activities. Self-control is a sign of Christ's power

working within us.

The greatest challenge to the development of our faith is controlling our tongue. James tells us the tongue is untamable.

The words of our mouth flow from an inner-most being that has been changed by the power of Christ. The individual who has control of their tongue has matured in their life of faith. We must learn to recognize the influence of old passions of jealousy, selfishness, and arrogance. Divine wisdom in us is marked by the control demonstrated over what comes out of our mouth. This is truly Christ being revealed in our lives. Our faith should cultivate a humble, gracious, and peaceable thought life.

James said every kind of beast and bird can be tamed, but no man can tame the tongue. Since the tongue is a fire and world of iniquity, our inner being must remain under the control of the Holy Spirit. When our tongue is not under control, our inner-most being is out of control. Our words reveal Christ in us and how God has changed us. The words of our mouth are a reflection of Christ's influence over our lives. The Psalmist said, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer." (Psalms 19:14) If Christ is truly living within us, the words of our mouth will reflect His presence and influence.

James 4 shows us how to put an end to wars and fights.

James 4:1-2 NIV84 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.

True faith brings our attitudes and actions into alignment with God. Our faith is a demonstration that Christ is in control of our natural desires and passions.

Natural desires and passions challenge our faith. We must learn to humble ourselves in God's sight. That means to submit to God, subdue and control our natural desires and passions. We do this by yielding to God and resisting the evil.

James 4:1-2 tells us that quarrels and conflicts (wars and fighting) come from desires that are not submitted to God. Being driven and controlled by selfish desires makes our prayer and asking God unfruitful.

What does uncontrolled desires and passions say about our faith? James 4:4 tells us, "Friendship with the world is hatred (enmity) toward God."

Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. We cannot have true faith with a divided heart and mind.

James 4:5 NKJV Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

What does that mean? When the Holy Spirit actively works in us, we have a passion, love, and devotion to Christ. That passion for Christ cannot exist or flourish with a divided heart. Our challenge is to remain totally submitted to God.

The cure for evil, (4:7-12). Since wars and conflicts come from desires and passions that are not under Christ's control, IF WE ARE IN HARMONY WITH CHRIST, WE HAVE THE CURE FOR EVIL.

James 4:7-8, 10 NKJV Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you

sinner; and purify your hearts, you double-minded... Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

James is encouraging people of faith to adopt attitudes and actions in us that Christ demonstrated. We are to manifest Christ's viewpoint and values even if it costs personal pain and humility before Him. (vv. 8-10). "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, your double-minded." (vs 8) "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." (vs 9) Faith is in a war against the tendency to judge and criticize others, (vv.11-12).

James 4 show us that true faith is manifested in correct attitudes. A judgmental and slanderous attitude is not a reflection of Christ's character.

What is the correct attitude in believers? A correct attitude comes from relying on and trusting Christ. Rather than self-reliance and pride, we look toward Christ with trust and faith, (4:13-17). Faith is in direct conflict with self-reliance, (vv.13-17).

What is wrong with an attitude of boasting and pride? These attitudes are prevalent in people who are self-centered, self-assertive, and self-confident. True faith in Christ constantly looks to Christ. The faith life is Christ centered and Holy Spirit directed.

In James 5, we are told to live responsibly with our resources, (5:1-6) This is demonstrated by our attitude toward possessions.

What part does finances have to do with true faith? James does not condemn riches for they are neither moral nor immoral. The problem with finances is how we control them or how they control us. The "love of money is the root of all evil," (1 Timothy 6:10). We stray from the faith through greediness and uncontrolled passions. People of faith must learn to submit and trust God in every aspect and area of life.

In James 5:7-20, we are told to live with patience and perseverance until the coming of the Lord. True faith is a demonstration of patient reliance on God and His timing. We are being encouraged to put our reliance and trust in God for all things.

James 5:7-8 NIV84 Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

What part does patience have in our faith? Patience does not give up, but waits for the harvest. Patience causes the believer to stand firm. Knowing that the Lord could return any moment helps us have patience during the trial of our faith.

How did patience affect Job's outcome?

James 5:11 NIV84 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Perseverance is faith and trust in God's faithfulness.

Genuine faith is illustrated in our prayers. Our faith will develop a sensitivity to needs and address them with supplication and prayer.

James 5:13-15 NIV84 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he

has sinned, he will be forgiven.

We should address all manner of weaknesses and sickness with the prayer of faith. We should pray as soon as we recognize sickness or suffering.

What part does faith play in prayer? “Prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well (restore him from discouragement, spiritual defeat, heal his body) and the Lord will raise him up,” (vs 15). This restoration affects every aspect of life.

James is not just looking at outward expressions of faith. He is looking for Christ to be revealed in all our life. He is going deeper than surface religion or faith. He is probing the inner life of spirit and mind, motive and action. He is looking for the work of the Holy Spirit in our life. He is looking for evidence of Christ’s presence. When Christ is revealed in us everything we say or do will be impacted.

The Holy Spirit is digging deeply into each of us.

- What is happening in our spirit life?
- Is God’s power working to produce new life in you?
- Is compassion and faith growing within you?
- Are you struggling over temptations and trials of life?

God wants Christ to be revealed in us.

- He is encouraging us to press up to the next level of faith.
- He is prodding us toward the image and power of Christ.
- He is examining where we are uncomfortable and weak.
- He is developing His church from the inside out.

James is warning us to carefully control our actions because they testify of what is going on inside. We must take note of the meditations of our mind and stop justifying thoughts, words, and activities that dishonor God. Let the Holy Spirit rule and reign in your heart.

God wants Christ’s glory to be revealed in and through every aspect of our lives.