

# James, A Faith That Works If...

## September 13, 2006

It's just five chapters, not terribly theological, and doesn't easily lend itself to structural division. It's more a collection of teachings, each of which is presented through a series of didactic statements, intended to provide instruction around a centralized theme.

### **The Theme—A Faith that Works...If We Do.**

The theme of James is the necessity for Christ-followers to avoid hypocrisy through spiritual maturity—a faith that works. In order for our faith to work, we have to work our faith. It's not so different from anything else.

- Before your business plan can work, you have to work your business plan.
- Before your marriage can work, you have to work at your marriage.
- Before your golf swing can work, you have to work at your golf swing.
- And on and on...

**Hypocrisy** has always been a problem for people of faith, because it's always been easier to know everything than to do anything, or know how to do something than to actually do it. It's why so few of us really buckle down and do, on a daily schedule, what we know is in our own best interests...

- A lot of us eat too much of the wrong kinds of food, and exercise too little.
- Some of us spend too much, save too little, and give away even less.
- Many of us, probably most of us, treat wealthy people with greater respect than we do people of humble means.
- Most of us say a lot of things we shouldn't say, and are reluctant to change.
- And the list can get a lot longer, but we only have an hour, so I'll leave the rest to your imagination...
- My hunch is that each of us could list some hypocritical tendencies we have...and if you don't know any you can just guess at it...and I'll bet you'll get it right without too much trouble.

### **The Author—James.**

Just who is James? What sort of background does he have that qualifies him to write a letter than ended up in our Bible? There are three men in the New Testament named James...

1. James, the son of Zebedee and brother to John, numbered among the chosen 12 disciples of Jesus, and historically thought to be the first apostolic martyr in 44 A.D.
2. James, the son of Alphaeus, also one of the twelve disciples, and that's all the information I can dig up on him.

3. James, the half-brother of Jesus, and oldest of four younger brothers born to Mary and Joseph—and author of this epistle.
  - He was a non-believer during the three years of Jesus’ public ministry: “Even his own brothers did not believe in him.” (John 7:5)
  - He became a Christ-follower after seeing his brother, post-resurrection: “Then he appeared to James.” (1 Corinthians 15:7)
  - He was an early member of the first group that would meet and become the church: “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” (Acts 1:14)

James should be remembered as a highly influential man regarding our faith, both for writing this epistle as well as for his doubter to defender status regarding his half-brother, who gave his life for James that he might have eternal life, in return for which James gave his own life in martyrdom for his elder half-brother in 62 A.D.

It’s significant to me that although James was the half-brother to Jesus he never refers to himself as such—he calls himself the *servant of the Lord Jesus Christ*. (James 1:1) No sibling rivalry there...simply a devoted Christ-follower.

## **The Recipients—Christ-followers.**

James addressed this letter to *the twelve scattered tribes*. The Jewish nation was originally comprised of twelve separate clans, or tribes, each one named for one of the sons of Isaac and Rebekah. In modern days it’s not possible for Jewish people to trace their heritage to a specific clan with any degree of reliability, but in the early days it was a hugely important part of their identities.

The *twelve scattered tribes* were Jewish converts to Christianity—a heavily persecuted people group, both by the Jewish right and the Roman authorities during the early days of the church.

- Let the state and the church sanction targeting a classification of people as heretics, and you have the making for some first class prejudice.
- Make it legal and spiritual to hate and harass them; offer rewards to those who would punish them as criminals and you have the making for the Diaspora.

This letter was written to a group of loyal and biblically astute Christ-followers that were experiencing the kind of life that you and I can’t really even imagine... For bona fide clan members of the great Israeli nation to embrace Christ was costly to the extreme.

For most of us the major challenges against hypocrisy are typically from an entirely different realm than these people were facing...

- In most cases it meant losing their livelihood, their property, and in many cases, their lives.
- Many thousands of our early brothers and sisters became fugitives running for their lives, which made the challenge of living joyfully in verse 2 particularly challenging.

## DISCUSSION # 1

1. What are the major challenges you personally face that cause you to feel hypocritical when you give in to them?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Have you ever seriously considered changing? Yes No
  - a. If yes, what caused you to change? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. If no, how do you justify your decision?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. If you were to elect to change, how would it affect you; what would the cost be to you, personally? \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Are you willing to pray for the strength and character to change? Yes No
  
5. Will you ask one of us to help you through private accountability? Yes No

## **The Purpose—Spiritual Maturity**

Doctrine is not the aim of James. That is presupposed. These were people who, for the most part, cut their teeth on the Old Testament Scripture. These were also people that had lived with the Hebrew notion that as long as you did what was right God would see to it that you were blessed—but they weren't feeling particularly blessed, and the tendency to doubt what they'd been taught all of their lives must have been tremendous.

James writes to reinforce what they already know about life—that it is to be lived with honor, integrity and unflagging loyalty to God, regardless of the circumstances we face that we may or may not always understand—and many times we won't.

The end result is a mature person (James 1:4); but it's doubtful that a person will ever achieve spiritual and emotional maturity without learning the benefits of a well disciplined lifestyle. It's also doubtful that most of us will ever choose a disciplined lifestyle without a little encouragement (read a lot of encouragement). Therefore, God, the divine encourager, through the challenging events that we encounter over the course of a lifetime, intends to develop a level of maturity in us that will display to all who see, an authentic faith. That's what he's up to in your life, and that's what he's up to in my life.

## **The Strategy—It's All About Attitude.**

There's a powerful little word that characterizes the theme of this book, and although it was used commonly in the ancient culture of early Christ-followers, it's only used one time in the Bible, in the opening verse of James...

## James 1:1

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

Greetings, *chairein*, (absolute infinitive, present active verb from *chairo*), means a good bit more than *hello*. It's customary usage was as an encouragement from one person to another to face whatever life throws at you with a positive, and in this case, biblical attitude. It's all about attitude...

Life is a grindstone—whether it grinds you down or polishes you up depends on you.

There's not a single point of action or correction in this book that will require anything from any of us other than developing a balanced attitude toward truth and life. All of us can move toward spiritual maturity if we want to... The question is, *do we want to?*

- What we do is determined by what we are—what we are is the result of a lifetime of having done the right things the right way or not.
- Emotion lets feelings determine action—character allows action to determine feelings.
- All people dream—significance awaits the few who wake up and make it happen.
- God determines what we face—we determine how we face it.
- People catch attitudes the same way they catch colds—by being around others who already have it!
- “The majority see the obstacles; the few see the objectives; history records the successes of the latter, while oblivion is the reward of the former.” (William Gladstone)
- “The last of the human freedoms is to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances.” (Victor Frankl, survivor of Nazi concentration camp)
- “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.” (Walt Emerson)
- “The greatest discovery of my generation is that people can alter their lives by altering their attitudes. (William James)
- “Enthusiasm and perseverance can make an average person superior, while indifference and lethargy can make a superior person average.” (William Ward)
- “Enthusiasm is not contrary to reason. It is reason—on fire.” (Peter Marshall)

- “Every man is enthusiastic at times. One man has enthusiasm for 30 minutes—another man has it for 30 days, but it is the man who has it for 30 years who makes a success in life.” (Edward B. Butler)
- “I feel sorry for the person who can’t get genuinely excited...not only will he never be satisfied, but he will never achieve anything worthwhile.” (Walter Chrysler)
- “It sometimes seems that intense desire creates not only its own opportunities, but its own talents.” (Eric Hoffer)
- “Nothing stops a man who desires to achieve. Every obstacle is simply a course to develop his achievement muscle. It’s a strengthening of his powers to accomplishment.” (Eric Butterworth)
- “You do not succeed because you do not know what you want, but because you don’t want it intensely enough.” (Frank Crane)
- “If you have the will to win, you have achieved half your success. If you don’t, you have achieved half your failure.” (David Ambrose)
- “Be like a postage stamp. Stick to something until you get there.” (Josh Billings)
- “Enthusiasm is the all-essential human jet propellant. It is the driving force which elevates men to miracle workers. It begets boldness, courage; kindles confidence; overcomes doubts. It creates endless energy, the source of all accomplishment.” (B.C. Forbes)
- “Great people are just ordinary people with an extraordinary amount of determination.” (Garner Dunkerley)
- “The will is more important than the skill when it comes to scaling a wall.” (Robert Schuller)
- “Success is never certain—failure is never final.” (Robert Schuller)..
- “Lord, grant that I may always desire more than I can accomplish.” (Michelangelo)
- “If you have it in your heart, we can put what you need in your head.” (Charles Wang, computer entrepreneur)
- “Nothing great will ever be achieved without great men, and men are great only if they are determined to be so.” (Charles DeGaulle)

- “I have come to believe that life is comprised 10% of what happens to us and 90% of how we react to it.” (Charles Swindoll)

## **Attitude & Business**

- The largest salaried executives in the United States hire key personnel based on five qualities:
  - Availability.....5%
  - Adaptability.....5%
  - Ability.....10%
  - Appearance....10%
  - Attitude.....70%
- The Carnegie Institute analyzed the lives of ten thousand of the most successful people in the United States:
  - 15% of their success was related to training or technical skill.
  - 85% was due to personality and attitude.
- The *Cox Report on American Business* states that 94% of all Fortune 500 executives attribute their success more to attitude than to any other basic ingredient.

## **Attitude & Christianity**

- “As a man thinks in his heart, so he is.” (Proverbs 23:7)
- “Rejoice not against me, O my enemy: when I fall, I shall arise.” (Micah 7:8)
- **“The way you treat others is the way you will be treated.”** (Luke 6:38)
- “When both unchurched and churched people are asking what they look for in a church...all of them agree about one factor—the climate of the congregation. They are looking for a church in which they feel at home, where people are friendly, and where there is a warm and comfortable atmosphere.” (Warren J. Hartman, research director for the United Methodist Church)
- “I like your Jesus very much. It’s your Christians I don’t like.” (Ghandi)
- “If the average guest in the average church wanted to get to Jesus, they’d have to go around most church members to get there.” (John Maxwell)

### **QUOTE**

“If you’re a leader in a church you owe it to God, you owe it to those you’re trying to reach, and you owe it to the church you’re trying to lead to show up at every service with your teeth brushed, a pocket full of breath mints so you don’t ruin any chance that they’ll ever come back, a good handshake, and a contagious smile for everyone you see—or stay home. If you’re a designated leader who doesn’t care enough

about people to make them feel cared about, your presence does more harm than your absence.

“Just being a Christian doesn’t give you a good attitude. You have to choose to have a good attitude. Most church members choose bad attitudes. It’s why they don’t scoot over when a guest shows up wanting to sit down. Sometimes I wish I had a gun in the pulpit. As soon as I saw one of these guys who didn’t scoot over I’d just shoot him. I wouldn’t kill him. I’d just wing him. I’d shoot him in the leg and every time people saw him limping around the church they’d be reminded that if a guest ever needs a seat we highly recommend that you scoot over. I’d only have to do it once. After that all I’d have to do is reach my hand down and we’d have people scooting all the way out into the aisles! Al Capone was right: ‘You can get more done with a kind word and a gun than with a kind word alone.’

“I’d rather hang around in a smoke-filled bar with a pagan who has a good attitude than to be in any church with a Christian who has a bad one. And I’m not alone. Literally millions of people all around us are telling us the same thing—we’re just not listening.

“The church is the only organization in the entire world that treats people badly and then criticizes them for not coming back.

“Do I always feel good when I get to church? Of course not. What’d you think I am? Superman? I feel just as tired and rotten as anyone else does sometimes. Probably worse with the schedule I keep. So what? It’s just that I made my mind up a long time ago that how I felt wasn’t going to affect my attitude. And you know what? It doesn’t. But I have discovered that my attitude will affect how I feel.

“Do I always feel great? No. Do I always smile at everyone? Absolutely. And you should too. Smiling just isn’t that difficult.” (taken from my notes on John Maxwell’s speech to the SBC Pastor’s Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, 1993).

### **Attitude Adjustment Indicators**

1. Those **closest** to you don’t want to be around you.
2. **Relationships** seem strained.
3. View of others is **low**.
4. Ministry vision **disappears**.
5. Too little **personal** time.
6. Too little **devotional** time.

### **Attitude Adjustment Remedies**

1. Say the right **words**.
2. Listen to the right **people**.
3. Read the right **books**.
4. Go to the right **places**.
5. Do the right **things**.
6. Be the right **person**.

### **DISCUSSION # 2**

1. Keeping in mind the words you say, the thoughts you think and the things you do—is your attitude where it should be overall? Yes No

2. Do you believe you can change your attitude? Yes No
3. Do you believe that doing so can change your life? Yes No
4. Will you ask one of us to pray for you about a specific area where your attitude needs to change? Yes No

## Self Evaluation

- What positive attitudes are people catching from me?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_

- What negative attitudes are people catching from me?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_

- What is my strategy to increase my positive influence?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_

- What is my strategy to decrease my negative influence?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_