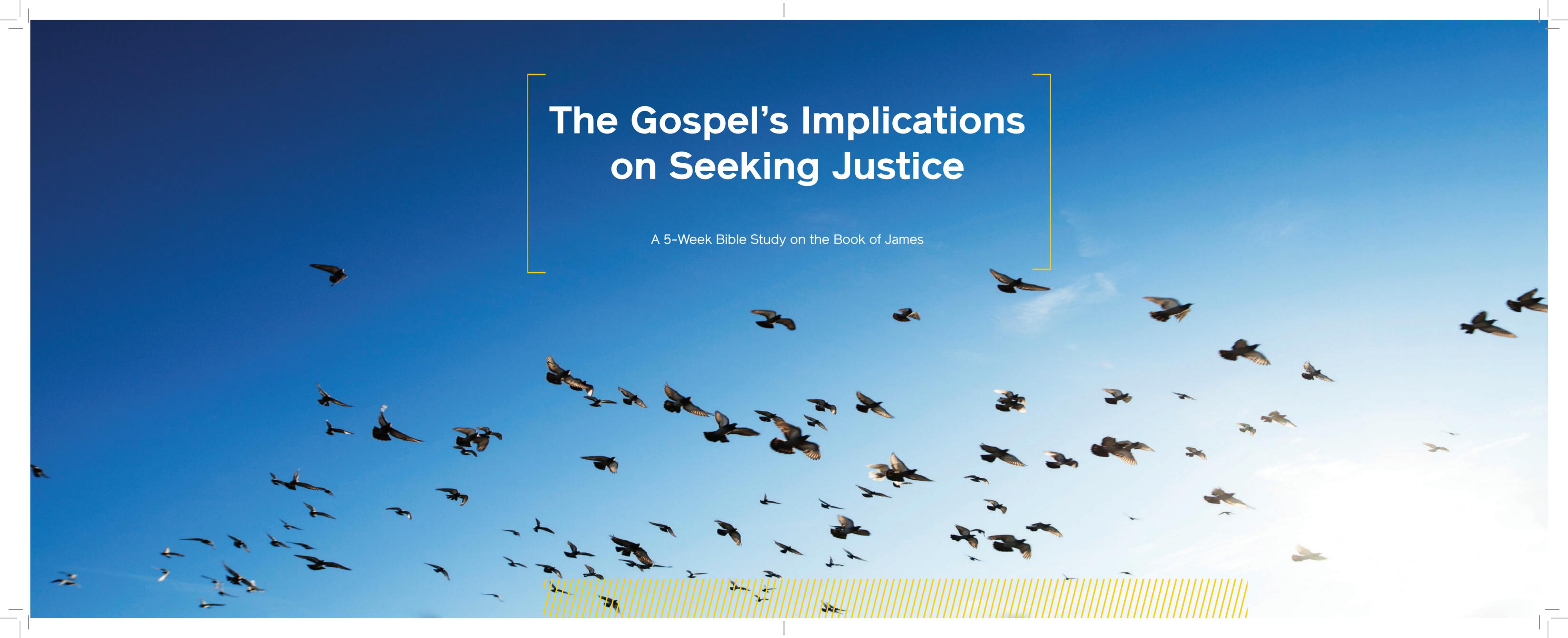


# The Gospel's Implications on Seeking Justice

A 5-Week Bible Study on the Book of James





### Outline of study:

- WEEK 1** Context, Reading the Book of James as a letter, and discovering major themes
- WEEK 2** The Foundation for Godly Living - The Gospel of Jesus
- WEEK 3** Fruit #1 - Wisdom from God
- WEEK 4** Fruit #2 - Impartial, Merciful, Pursuit of others
- WEEK 5** Fruit #3 - Generous and Just Living

**\*\* This study can be done individually or with a group. Either way, we pray that it encourages you in your walk with Jesus!**

Week 1

# Understanding the Book of James

James 1:1 - 5:19

## Goal for this week:

To read through the book of James in its entirety, to evaluate the historical context and literary features of the book, and to begin identifying high-level themes to lay the foundation for a more in-depth study in the following weeks.

## ▶▶▶ Background and Context (read through as a group and discuss)

### 1. Who is James?

- A. Most scholars agree he is James of Jerusalem, whom Paul called “the Brother of the Lord” in the book of Galatians.
- B. Was visited personally by the Lord Jesus after his resurrection.
- C. Was with the apostles at Pentecost.
- D. Acts 15 and 21 indicate that James rose to become the leader of the Jerusalem church by AD 50.

### 2. When is he writing this?

- A. Most likely sometime between A.D. 44-49.
- B. James was likely the earliest recorded Christian document, written just more than a decade after Jesus’ death and resurrection. Its writing reflects the beginning stages of the Church’s theological thinking.

### 3. To whom is the letter written?

- A. Written predominately to scattered Jewish believers living under pressure.
  - Church members were not facing direct martyrdom, but the church was facing extreme economic oppression and suffering.
  - Readers of this letter were facing pressure to compromise their faith and lifestyle via social rejection and economic disadvantages.

### 4. What is his purpose in writing?

- A. To challenge believers to examine their faith to see if they were genuinely living it.
- B. To remind believers that the foundation of our faith is the gospel of Jesus.
- C. To explore the impact of outward faithfulness in the world.



## Notes

▶▶▶ Read through the entire letter as a group.

**1. Underline phrases, concepts, or terms you see more than once. Such as:**

- A. Faith - 1:2-4, 2:14-26, 5:15
- B. Wisdom - 1:5, 3:13-18
- C. Prayer - 1:5, 5:13-18
- D. Poor vs. Rich - 1:9-11, 2:2-7, 5:1-6
- E. Justice - 1:27, 2:15-17, 4:11-12, 5:4, 5:13-15

**2. Discuss the following:**

- A. Which theme or Scripture jumped out to you?
- B. What do you think James wanted his readers to gain from his letter? (Consider the situation in which he was writing his letter.)
  - Think about the letter as whole. What would you consider to be the main idea of this book? (Have everyone try to summarize it in 1-2 sentences)
  - **Example:**  
“Heaven is our true home made possible through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, let your lives on earth be marked by Spirit-filled, transformed lives of generosity, justice, and a character that reflects the heart of God.”

▶▶▶ Before the next lesson:

**Read through James a second time on your own!**

Write down 3-4 key concepts or themes that you see James addressing in the book and cite the references for each.

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

Week 2

# Foundation for Godly Living - The Gospel of Jesus

James 1:18

»» Intro Question: What is the most memorable gift you ever received? Who gave it to you? What was the occasion?

## Main Idea:

God's work of restoring the world begins first in our own hearts and then moves outward.

## Summary of Chapter 1:1-17

In the first 17 verses of Chapter 1, James introduces a set of themes that he will expand upon in the rest of his letter. He introduces themes of trials/endurance, wisdom, wealth, and temptation.

For the purpose of this week's lesson, we are going to focus only on verse 18. As you read through the entire letter last week, you may have started to feel like the book of James is just a big list of do's and don'ts of the Christian faith. This might make you feel overwhelmed, shameful, or even discouraged.

These feelings are not what James had in mind. Instead, he hoped that his readers would once again be refreshed in the joy that comes from the gospel when we realize Christ has redeemed our lives through his death and resurrection. As we now stand in His grace, we get to live lives that honor him and bring hope and healing to the world.

### ▶▶▶ Read the Passage (James 1:18):

<sup>18</sup> He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

Understanding a Bible passage requires knowing the context. Sometimes the context we need to see is much larger than the immediate context of the verse in front of us. James 1:18 is one of those passages. To this end, read James 1:1-7, John 3:1-8 and Romans 6:23.

#### Our need for a savior (“give us birth”)

- In the light of these passages:
  - What kind of birth is James talking about?
  - Why did James think it was important to tell us that God chose to give us birth?
- What are some things that you experienced as a result of your own separation from God before you came to Christ?

#### The Savior revealed in Christ (“through the word of truth”)

- Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. In light of this text, what is the word of truth to which James refers in 1:18?
  - What did Christ do for us?
  - How does someone receive the benefit of what Christ did for us?

#### New life in the Savior (“that we might be a kind of firstfruits”)

- James says that the word of truth wasn’t only to give you and me new birth, but also so that ‘we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created’. The term ‘firstfruits’ is used numerous times throughout the Old Testament to describe the ‘first of something’.



In short, James wants us to think of ourselves as the first, or primary, representation to the rest of the world of what God has accomplished through Christ.

- Why would it be important for His ‘first representations’ to be committed to obeying the one who saved them?
  - In what ways is God’s grace displayed to the world as His followers represent His character through their actions?
    - What firstfruits do we want friends on campus to see in us?
- How does the gospel (or word of truth) free us from shame and guilt and instead give us joy, hope, and perseverance as we seek to obey God’s word?

#### Key takeaways

- Jesus’ sacrificial death and resurrection on the cross has opened a way for restored fellowship with God and a new way to live life.
- Receiving the grace of God lays the foundation for obeying God in all areas of our lives and representing Him to the world.

Week 3

# Gospel Fruit #1 - Wisdom From God

James 3:13-18



▷▷ Intro Question: Think about a time in your life when you've asked God for wisdom regarding a certain situation or decision you needed to make. Was His answer what you expected? If you applied the wisdom He gave you, what happened?

## Main Idea:

The wisdom from heaven that God gives us is others-focused and when applied, God uses it to restore the world that has been broken by sin. When we adhere to the wisdom of the world, destruction arises.

## ▷▷ Read the Passage (James 3:13-18):

<sup>13</sup> Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. <sup>15</sup> Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. <sup>16</sup> For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

<sup>17</sup> But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. <sup>18</sup> Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

### James 3:13 -- Christ crucified, which is the wisdom of God, produces the humility that leads to godly action.

1. Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 and discuss how Paul makes a similar contrast when he refers to the Gospel message of Christ crucified as the “wisdom of God”.
  - How does heavenly wisdom produce humility?

### James 3:14-16 -- The wisdom of the world and its fruits.

1. What does James mean by “bitter envy” and “selfish ambition”? How do these things reflect the “wisdom of the world”?
2. How have you seen envy/selfish ambition create disorder and evil in your own life or in the world around you?
3. What are the two commands that James gives us if we are struggling with bitter envy and selfish ambition? How would obeying these commands lead to the kind of humility that comes from wisdom?

### James 3:17 -- Characteristics of the wisdom from Heaven.

1. Read James 1:5. How does James say that we get the wisdom from Heaven?
2. For each of the following characteristics, discuss the following:
  - How did Jesus embody this characteristic while on earth?
  - Is this characteristic more inward focused or others-focused? Why do you think so?

**Pure** - Not polluted by the world, perfect-like gold - see John 7:1-9.

**Peace-loving** - an active pursuit to be at peace with God and seek peace between image bearers - see Matthew 18:21-22.

**Considerate or Gentle** - Thoughtful, kind, understanding; not harsh - see Matthew 11:28-30.

**Submissive** - Obedient to the word of God and to the authority of others - see John 13:12-15; 15:9-10.

**Full of mercy and good fruit** - showing forgiveness and compassion when none is deserved, free and joyful generosity - see Matthew 9:10-13.

**Impartial** - Unbiased in loving image-bearers - see John 4:7-10.

**Sincere** - Truthful, honest, genuine - see John 5:30; 7:16-18.

### (Question 2 continued)

- If you embodied this characteristic more fully in your life, how would it transform the world around you? How would it help show others the ‘first fruits’ mentioned in James 1:18?
- How might you apply this wisdom from heaven to your life today? How would it change a situation that you’re in to help showcase who Christ is more fully?

#### Key takeaways

- The gospel should produce humility in our hearts; humble hearts will live out the wisdom from heaven.
- The wisdom of heaven is focused on others and will help restore the creation that has been broken by sin.
- The wisdom of the world only produces destruction.

Week 4

## Gospel Fruit #2 - Impartial, Merciful, Pursuit of Others

James 1:22 - 2:13

▶▶▶ **Intro Question:** When is a time that you have wrongly assumed something about someone based on a difference (economic, racial, lifestyle) they embodied? What was the result of that false assumption?

### Main Idea:

The word of God will transform our hearts to act with impartiality and mercy towards all image bearers, especially the most vulnerable in our world

### ▶▶▶ **Read the Passage (James 1:22-2:13):**

<sup>22</sup> Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. <sup>23</sup> Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup> and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. <sup>25</sup> But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

<sup>26</sup> Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

#### Chapter 2

<sup>1</sup> My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious

Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.

<sup>2</sup> Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. <sup>3</sup> If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” <sup>4</sup> have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

<sup>5</sup> Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? <sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? <sup>7</sup> Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong? <sup>8</sup> If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. <sup>9</sup> But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. <sup>11</sup> For he who said, “You shall not commit

*(passage continued)*

adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

<sup>12</sup> Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, <sup>13</sup> because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

**James 1:22-27 -- Christ followers read and obey the word of God.**

1. What are the differences between the ‘man who looks in the mirror’ and the believer who ‘looks intently into the perfect law’?
2. According to James, what are some things that mark a Christian who is reading and obeying the word of God?
  - With whom did Jesus spend the majority of His time? Think of the people He sought out. Read John 4 for reference.
  - If you are consumed with worldly passions (wealth, status, pleasure), in what ways may you be less likely to notice when a widow or orphan needs your help?

\*\* If you're reading the word of God consistently, you will notice that God is very concerned with the most vulnerable of society (orphans, widows, etc). As your heart for Him grows, your heart to serve these image-bearers will as well.



**James 2:1-7 -- Favoritism based on outward appearances is sin.**

1. What are some ways that Christians show favoritism? How have you personally shown favoritism in your own life?
  - What are our real values if we treat people differently because of their external appearance, status, job, or income level?
  - How does the Gospel challenge the way we treat one another based on ‘worldly’ characteristics like money or status?

**James 2:8-9 -- The royal law in scripture has its foundation in the gospel.**

1. Read Luke 10:25-37
  - What does this parable teach us about what James calls “the royal law”?
  - Who is the neighbor Jesus is referring to in this parable?

**James 2:9-13 -- Jesus is our merciful Judge. Reflect Him to the world.**

1. How has God shown you mercy instead of judgment? How does this free you up to be merciful towards others?

#### Key takeaways

- God calls his followers to act with impartiality and mercy towards all, especially those most vulnerable.
- God’s word gives us the eyes to see those on the fringe of society who need to see Jesus’ love and compassion.

Week 5

## Gospel Fruit #3 - Generous Justice

James 2:14-26, 4:13 - 5:6

Notes

▷▷ Intro Question: Suppose you go to the doctor with an illness that you're dealing with. After the checkup, the doctor tells you that you need a prescription called Penicillin in order to be healed. After telling you this, he says, "Thanks for coming in, I hope you feel better!" but doesn't bother to write the prescription for you. How would you feel in that moment? What would you believe about the doctor or the hospital that they represent?

### Main Idea:

Faith in the grace of Jesus compels us to seek justice for those in need with joyful generosity.

We're going to explore 3 passages in James to help us consider this gospel fruit:

### ▷▷ Read the Passage (James 2:14-26):

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? <sup>15</sup> Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

<sup>18</sup> But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. <sup>19</sup> You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

<sup>20</sup> You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. <sup>23</sup> And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

<sup>25</sup> In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? <sup>26</sup> As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

**James 2:14-17 -- Generous deeds validate that someone's heart has been transformed by the gospel of Jesus.**

1. Why does James ask the question, "can such faith save them?"
2. How is a person who doesn't help a brother or sister in need not acting in faith-oriented love?
3. Why should the gospel motivate someone to be naturally generous towards those in need?

**James 2:18-26 -- An apologetic for faith accompanied by good deeds.**

1. Why does James say that belief in God that is not accompanied by good works is not saving faith? Why does he use the example of demons?
2. What did Abraham have to believe about God as he obeyed God's command to sacrifice his only son? How does this point us back to the good news of Jesus?

▶▶▶ **Read the Passage (James 4:13-17):**

<sup>13</sup> Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money."

<sup>14</sup> Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

<sup>15</sup> Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." <sup>16</sup> As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil.

<sup>17</sup> If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

**Your life is shorter than you think. (4:13-14)**

1. What does this person value in life based on how they plan and spend their time?
2. How should the reality that you could die today change the way you spend or give your money/time?
3. What are some ways in which you don't trust God with tomorrow revealed by how you spend your money, use your time, and who/when you serve?

**Pursuing generosity today shows you how to trust God with tomorrow. (4:15-17)**

1. What does the person in verse 15 value or believe that's different than the person described in verse 13?
2. Why does giving generously today cause us to trust God more deeply?

▶▶▶ **Read the Passage (James 5:1-6):**

<sup>1</sup> Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. <sup>2</sup> Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. <sup>3</sup> Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. <sup>4</sup> Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed

your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. <sup>5</sup> You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. <sup>6</sup> You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.

**James 5:3b-6 -- Injustice thrives where there is selfish ambition, greed, and a disregard for human dignity.**

1. What forms of injustice are present in this text?
2. When James says, "The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty," what does that tell you about God's character?
3. Watch this 2 minute video ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGALXBR\\_CCg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGALXBR_CCg)) of 3 young boys explain what it's like to be a child slave on Lake Volta in Ghana.
  - What does this parable teach us about what James calls "the royal law"?

**The consequences of those who are greedy and self-focused. (5:1-3a)**

1. What does James say will happen to people who exploit others for selfish gain? What should this warning do in our own hearts? How does this point us back to the good news of Jesus?

**Key takeaways**

- Christ followers should be naturally inclined toward generosity. In what ways is God challenging you to be more generous?
- Seek justice on behalf of the oppressed around the world.
  - Host an IJM Freedom Fast with your small group - go to [www.ijm.org/freedomfast](http://www.ijm.org/freedomfast) to sign up
  - Launch an IJM Campus Chapter at your university - learn more here ([www.ijm.org/students](http://www.ijm.org/students))
- Learn more about IJM's work ([www.ijm.org/our-work](http://www.ijm.org/our-work)) to rescue and restore the 40 million people living in slavery.