

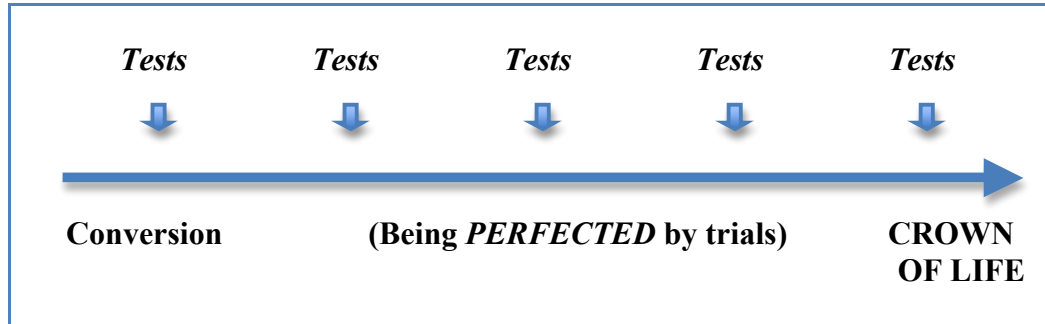
JAMES

1. What Prompted James to Write?

- James' readers were facing trials (1:2), many of them brought on by the rich (2:6; 5:4, 6) who slander the name of Christ (2:7).
- It seems that in order to escape trials James' readers were trying to appease the rich (2:2-3) but with two serious results:
 1. They were neglecting and insulting the poor (2:1, 6).
 2. They were behaving like the rich (4:1-6, 11)—thinking of their own desires (1:13; 4:1), coveting (4:2), being proud (1:9-11; 3:14; 4:6, 10, 13-17)—in a nutshell, being worldly (4:4).
- Basically James urges them to stop being worldly and act like someone who has faith in Jesus Christ:
 1. Don't run from trials but rejoice for they have a sanctifying effect (1:2-15) and be patient until the Lord comes (5:7-11).
 2. Show mercy to those in need (1:27; 2:5, 8-13) demonstrating evidence of salvation (2:14-26).
 3. Be humble and repent (4:7-10).

2. James' Basic Message: don't run from trials but rejoice for they have a sanctifying effect (1:2-15) and be patient until the Lord comes who will deal justly with those who are making your life hard (5:7-11).

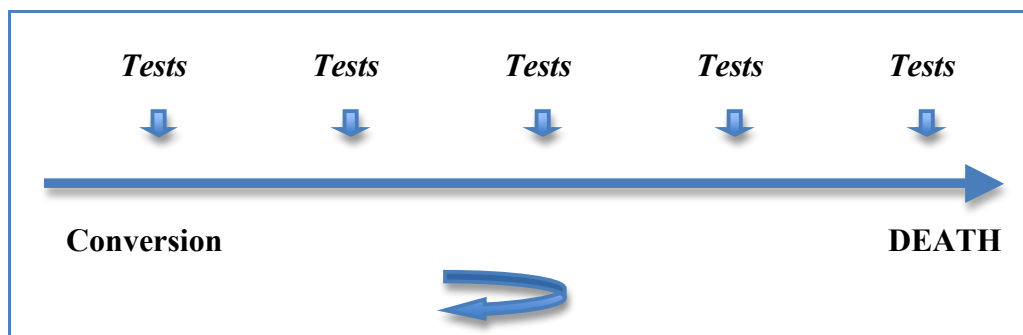
2.1. James urges his readers to respond *positively* to TESTS (1:2-12)



- God uses ‘tests’ to produce in us “perseverance” in order to *perfect* (NIV = ‘maturity’) us, which ultimately leads to the “crown of life” = Eternal life (“crown of life,” 1:2-4, 12).¹
- We are to prayerfully seek God’s wisdom and trust in him completely to use these trials to perfect us and bring us ultimately to the crown of life (1:5-8).

The term “generously” means single-mindedly. James is not so much emphasizing God’s generosity but God’s undivided commitment to give wisdom. Generous is good but undivided commitment is better and thus we can confidently ask with undivided faith (“believe and not doubt”). The one who doubts is a “double-minded man” (Greek = “two soul,” i.e., divided in their soul).

2.2. James urges his readers to not respond *negatively* to TESTS (1:13-15)



- Evidently some of James’ readers are tempted to give up because of their trials (1:12-13). The words “trial” (NIV, 1:2, 12) and “tempt” (NIV, 1:13-14) are the same word in Greek = “test.”

¹ Patrick J. Hartin, “Call to be Perfect through Suffering (James 1:2-4): The Concept of Perfection in the Epistle of James and the Sermon on the Mount,” *Biblica* 77 (1996): 477-92.

Positive Tests (NIV = trial; James 1:2, 12)	Negative Tests (NIV = tempt; James 1:13-15)
Always attributed to God	Never attributed to God
E.g., Gen. 22:1, 12; Exod. 20:20; Deut. 8:2; John 6:6.	E.g., Matt. 4:1; 6:13; Gal. 6:1; 1 Thess. 3:5.
The goal of positive testing is <i>endurance</i> leading to <i>perfection</i> (1:4).	The goal of negative testing is “sin” (1:14).
The outcome of responding <i>positively</i> to testing is “the crown of life” (1:12).	The outcome of responding <i>negatively</i> to testing is “death” (1:15).

LESSONS

- It is not the **source** of the test that is important but how we respond. Both God and Satan can bring the same test but one brings it for evil, the other for good (e.g., cf. 2 Sam. 24:1 with 1 Chron. 21:1; Job 1-2).
- God tests believers to grow their “faith” and “perseverance . . . so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” and “receive the crown of life” (1:2-4, 12). Therefore “when *tested* [to sin] no one should say, ‘God is tempting me [to sin].’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own *evil* (note: not in Greek text) desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (1:13-15).
- So “Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (1:16-17). God is always good (see again 1:5).
- God is good, he is not trying to cause us to fall for, “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created” (1:18).

2.3. James’ readers, it seems, have been responding negatively to tests, revealing:

- *Anger* (1:19-21).
- *Priorities* (1:22-25).
- *Selfishness* (1:26-27).

WHAT DOES TRUE RELIGION LOOK LIKE?		
Looks after orphans and widows in their distress (1:27a)	If anyone . . . does not keep a tight rein on his tongue (1:26)	To keep oneself from being polluted by the world (1:27b)
CHAPTER 2	CHAPTER 3	CHAPTER 4
Showing favoritism is incompatible with faith in Christ (2:1-13) for the proof of faith is works. Those who profess faith in Christ without works will not be saved at the final judgment (2:14-26).	James now moves to a specific “works,” the tongue. Those who can’t control their tongue demonstrate they do not have God’s wisdom but wisdom from the <i>devil</i> (3:14-18).	James’ readers reflect devilish wisdom (4:1-3) = “adulterous people . . . friend of the world . . . enemy of God . . . proud . . . sinners . . . <i>double-minded</i> ” (4:4, 6, 8).

2.4. The *proof* of true religion is demonstrated in...

1) Works (chap. 2)

Showing favoritism is incompatible with faith in Christ because:

1. Favoritism is *discrimination* (2:4) = same Greek word in as in 1:6 (“doubt”). Therefore favoritism reflects a *double-minded* heart² (2:1-11).
2. Favoritism shows no faith in Jesus (2:12-26).
 - The context is the final judgment (2:1,³ 12-13; 3:1; e.g., Mt. 18:21-35).

Conversion

Judgment



- The person in 2:14 “claims” to have faith (e.g., Mt. 7:21; Jn. 8:31; Acts 8:13-24).
- The word “save” refers to *final* salvation (2:14; cf. Rom. 5:9).

Conversion

Final Salvation



- “Works” = after conversion (2:14).

Conversion

WORKS...



- The point of 2:15-17 is to *illustrate* what ‘dead’ faith looks like.
- Faith is seen (2:18; cf. Mk. 2:5).
- There are 2 types of faith (2:1; and 2:19, cf. 1 Cor. 15:2).
- Abraham and Rehab are examples of people whose faith could be seen (2:20-26; cf. Mt. 12:37). Based on the references to final judgment (2:1, 12-13; 3:1) James’ justification refers to “the ultimate verdict of innocence pronounced over a person at the last judgment”⁴ (see e.g., Matt. 12:37; 25:31-46).

**Conversion
(Faith)**

**Justification
(Works)**



- Salvation is by *faith/grace alone in Christ alone*, but the proof of faith is *works* (Gal. 5:6; Ex. 20:1ff; Mt. 7:7-11; Rom. 4:18-20).

² Doug Moo, *The Letter of James*, PNTC, ed. D. A. Carson, (Eerdmans, 2000), 104.

³ The expression “our glorious Lord Jesus Christ” in James 2:1 points to Christ’s Second Coming in judgment (e.g., Matt. 24:30; Titus 2:13; 1 Pet. 4:13); see also Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary of the Greek Text*, NIGTC, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 107.

2) The use of the tongue (chap. 3)

James now moves to a specific “works,” the tongue for 2 reasons:

1. The tongue is a reflection of other areas in our lives (1:2); it “corrupts the whole person” (3:6).
2. The person who uses the same tongue to praise God on Sunday and put people down in the week shows that his heart has a direct line to *hell* (3:6); is *double-minded* (3:9-12); has wisdom from the *devil* (3:14-16) and not from God (3:17-18).

- 3:13 makes the same point as 2:18:

Faith	→	Works
Wisdom	→	Works

- Just as there are 2 types of faith there are 2 types of wisdom (see below).

Faith/Wisdom From <i>God</i>	Faith/Wisdom From the <i>Devil</i>
Characterized by being pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere (3:17).	Characterized by harboring bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, envy and selfish ambition, disorder and every evil practice (3:15-16).
This wisdom is displayed throughout James in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to trials with joy and endurance (1:2-4, 12). • Obeying God’s word (1:22-25). • Keeps a tight reign on his tongue (1:26; 3:1-12). • Looks after orphans and widows (1:27). • Keeps oneself from being polluted by the world (1:27). • Does not show favoritism (2:1-17). 	This wisdom is displayed throughout James in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to trials with sin (1:13-15). • Merely listening to God’s word (1:22). • Being quick to listen and get angry (1:19). • Showing favoritism (2:1-17). • Unbridled tongue (3:6). • Being worldly (4:1-4). • Judging others (4:10-12).
This wisdom is good and perfect (1:17).	This wisdom is earthly and unspiritual (3:15).
Can expect to harvest righteousness (3:18) and receive the crown of life (1:12).	This wisdom leads to sin and death (1:13-15).

⁴ Moo, 141; also Davids, 132; Calvin *Institutes*, 3.27.2 “Paul contends that we are justified apart from the help of works, so James does not allow those who lack good works to be reckoned righteous” (cited in Moo, 142).

3) Our relationship to the world (chap. 4)

James' readers reflect devilish wisdom (4:1-3) = "adulterous people... friend of the world... enemy of God... proud... sinners... *double-minded*" (4:4, 6, 8). James' instructs them:

1. God wants *undivided loyalty* (4:5, see ESV).
2. But don't feel daunted for God *gives us more grace* (4:6). "God's grace is completely adequate to meet the requirements imposed on us by [his] jealousy...our God... willingly supplies all that we need to meet his all-encompassing demands." Augustine: "God gives what he demands."⁵
3. Therefore return to God (4:7-10; see Joel 2:12-13). Genuine return will be reflected in the way we speak to one another (4:11-12) and in our attitudes towards materialism (4:13-17).

2.5. Embrace trials with faith

- In chapter 5 James ties his letter up drawing together earlier themes. The point: *be patient and persevere in the trials brought on by the rich for God will judge them with justice. And if anyone needs help, pray.*

1) The rich people (who are oppressing you, *think back to 1:10; 2:6*) who store up for themselves treasures on earth will not see heaven (*think back to 4:1-3, 13-17*) **(5:1-6)**.

2) "Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming" **(5:7-11)**.

- "Don't grumble against each other (*think back to 3:1-12*), brothers, or you will be judged" (*think back to 2:12-26; 4:11-12*) **(5:9)**.
- Follow the example of others who persevered (*think back to 1:3-4, 12*) "in the face of suffering"—the prophets and Job. They were "blessed" (*think back to 1:12*) **(5:10-11a)**.
- "The Lord is full of compassion and mercy" (*think back to 1:16-18; 4:5*) **(5:11b)**.

3) Pray in faith (*think back to 1:5-8; 4:3*) **(5:12-17)**.

- There are two ways to understand the prayer here: 1) for one who is *physically* sick or 2) prayer for someone who is *spiritually* tired or sick. Most commentators conclude that it is someone who is physically sick,

⁵ Moo, 191.

however there are very good reasons for thinking that it is referring to someone who is spiritually sick:⁶

1. The word “sick” in 5:15 occurs one other time in the NT, Heb. 12:3 where it means, “weary.”
2. The word “healed” in 5:16 can mean physical healing but it can also mean spiritual healing/refreshment as in Heb. 12:12-13 (same context as Heb. 12:3).
3. This prayer is answered only when prayed in faith (5:15). Yet this is not the experience of churches that practice this. However in James there is another prayer that is *always* answered when prayed in faith—the prayer of wisdom in the midst of *trials* (1:5).
4. The mention of sin, forgiveness and confession in 5:15-16 suggests more of a spiritual problem than a physical problem.
5. Calling the elders suggests a spiritual problem.
6. The mention of Elijah in James 5:17 is qualified by “a man just like us” causing us to think of his depression (1 Kings 19). And yet if James wanted us to think of someone being physically raised up he had the perfect example in 1 Kings 17 where Elijah’s prayer raises the dead son (cf. 5:15: “the Lord will raise him up”).
7. The issue addressed in the passage following (5:19-20) is spiritual.
8. James urges his readers to embrace trials joyfully (1:2-4) not to pray that they would go away.
9. The occasion for James’ letter suggests that his Christian readers had given up and were spiritually worn out. If then James is talking about spiritual weariness, this suggests that God’s desire is *always* to grant this request (cf. 4:7-10).

- James finishes his letter with: “My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner (*think back to 4:8*) from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins” (*think back to 1:13-15*) (5:19-20).

⁶ I first came across this view in Daniel R. Hayden, “Calling the Elders to Pray,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138 (1981): 258-66.

3. Application

- 3.1. James writes to people who can pinpoint their conversion (1:18). They read their Bibles and listen to the word (1:22-23). They consider themselves religious (1:26). They attend church (2:2). They claim to have faith in Jesus (2:2). With the tongue they praise their Lord and Father on Sundays (3:9).
- 3.2. And yet James calls them “adulterous people” suggesting that they are “a friend of the world...an enemy of God” (4:4). Adultery suggests they are trying to carry on a relationship with God and the world.
- 3.3. During the week they make no effort to obey God’s word (1:22). They don’t control their speech (1:26). They neglect the poor in their midst (2:1). They say they’ll pray for those in need but do nothing practically to help them (2:15-16). With the same mouth they use to praise God on Sundays they use it to run others down during the week (3:9). They pray with wrong motives interested only in their pleasures (4:3). They are judgmental (4:11). They’re in business to make money and to spend what they earn for their own pleasure (4:13). They complain about other people (5:9).
- 3.4. They are deceiving themselves (1:16, 22, 26). They say they are friends with God but in fact they are his enemies and if they continue on the track they are on they will spend eternity separated from God in eternal death (1:15).
- 3.5. Tim Keller calls these kinds of people “geographical Christians.” Of course it’s not possible that you or I may be a ‘geographical Christian. Note again James 1:16, 22, 26 and observe 2 words:
 - 1) “Deceived.”
 - 2) “Worthless” is often used in Bible to describe idols (Isa. 44:9; 45:20; Jonah 2:8; Jer. 10:3-6; 51:17-18).
- 3.6. Here’s what James is saying: it doesn’t matter that you come to church, listen to the word taught, can cite the day of your conversion, and praise God on Sundays. Your Christianity is worthless = it will not save you. Why? Because they’re actually trusting in the idols of the world that cannot save; only Jesus can save...and he would save them *if* they were trusting in him.
- 3.7. It’s not difficult to see where their faith is:
 - Being extra friendly to those who have money (2:2-4).
 - Praying for those who have needs but not helping them (2:15-16).
 - Neglecting orphans and widows (2:26-27).
 - Coveting (4:2).
 - Their pleasures are governing their prayers and their actions (4:3).
 - They are in business to make money (4:13).
- 3.8. David Platt and the ‘blind spot’ of materialism. What’s the solution? Repent (4:7-10) and trust in the “glorious Lord Jesus Christ” (2:1). “Faith is being convinced that Jesus is the good life and the fountain of all joy and that any other path would be the let down” (Tim Chester).

