

Helping Our Children Develop Practical Christianity

**Growing Godly Families Series
Manual 6**

by
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James

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Growing Godly Families Series

The “Growing Godly Families Series” is the result of weekly topics which were prepared and e-mailed over a period of years. This series is especially designed for those who are already Christian leaders; to give them Biblical principles for the development of additional godly spiritual leaders. Because they give Biblical principles for growth in spiritual leadership, they are also helpful for Christians that want to grow and become godly spiritual leaders.

Mark 10:43-45 says, “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” In these verses, Christ taught that godly spiritual leaders do not have the attitudes of leaders in the world. Worldly leadership is based on power and authority and is designed to benefit the leader and place him above others. In contrast, godly spiritual leadership is designed to help every Christian reach their full potential in Christ. The following three statements give a summary of three styles of leadership.

If we drive people, we will drive them until they can get out of our way.

If we lead people, we will be able to lead them as far as we have gone ourselves.

If we serve people, we will help each person develop their full God-given potential and equip each person for the ministry that Christ has prepared for every Christian.

In the world, people often measure success by the amount of things that they accumulate before they die. However, they are unable to take any of those things with them when they die. Mark 8:36-37 says, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Success produces rewards until we die, but it produces nothing for eternity.

In contrast, God measures effectiveness by our faithfulness and obedience. Matthew 6:19-21 says, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Effectiveness produces eternal rewards. Mark 10:29-30 says, “So Jesus answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life.’” 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” The Growing Godly Families Series is designed to make your life count for eternity by bringing glory to God.

Table of Contents

	Page
1. Learning How to Receive Godly Wisdom	1
2. Learning How to Deal With Temptation	4
3. Learning How to Be Good Listeners	7
4. Learning to Practice Obedience to God	10
5. Learning to Treat the Poor With Respect	13
6. Learning to Practice the Law of Liberty	16
7. Learning to Practice Good Works	19
8. Learning to Show Faith by Works	22
9. Learning to Bridle Our Tongue—Part 1	25
10. Learning to Bridle Our Tongue—Part 2	28
11. Learning to Develop Godly Wisdom	31
12. Learning the Source of Conflicts	34
13. Learning How to Develop Godly Humility	37
14. Learning to Seek the Will of God	40
15. Learning to Avoid the Dangers of Riches	43
16. Learning to Be Patient	46
17. Learning to Pray for One Another	49
18. Learning the Power of Prayer	52

1.

Learning How to Receive Godly Wisdom

One of the things that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand is how to apply the law of liberty in their lives. In the last series of topics, we saw how Paul helped the new Gentile Christians in Galatia to understand how to apply the law of liberty in their lives. Today, we will be starting a new group of topics to see how James helped Jews who had grown up with the law learn to apply the law of liberty to their lives. As a part of this series of topics, we will see how to help our physical and spiritual children learn to develop very practical Christianity in their lives.

James 1:1 says, “James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.” In this greeting, we see that the book of James was written by James. This James was the James that was the half-brother of Christ and the James who had become the leader of the church at Jerusalem by Acts 15. As the leader of the church at Jerusalem, James had a great concern for the Jewish Christians that lived in other parts of the world. James wrote this letter to help them learn to apply the law of liberty. As a result, the law of liberty is mentioned in each of the first two chapters of the book.

One of the things that Christians everywhere face is trials and testing. That is why it is important to prepare our children for trials. James 1:2-3 says, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” The word that is translated “count” means *to lead or to think*. It has the thought of influencing your thinking. Here, we see that we are to think with joy when we fall into various trials. We see this attitude in the apostles in Acts 5:41 where we read, “So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” Here, we see that the apostles were filled with joy for the privilege of suffering for Christ.

We will continue to experience trials and testing as we go through life. The key is how we respond to those trials. Here, we see that God has a goal for our lives when He allows trials to come into our lives. We see that those trials produce patience in our lives. Romans 5:3-5 says, “And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” Here, we see that tribulation produces several positive results in our lives. These include perseverance, godly character, and hope. As the Lord goes with us through these trials, it also causes us to grow in our understanding of the great love that the Lord has for us.

As we help our children to understand that the reason why God allows trials in their lives is to help them grow to spiritual maturity, it helps them to learn to respond with joy instead of complaining. There will be times when our children do not understand the purpose of some trials. As a result, James 1:5 says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” The Lord wants us to understand so that we can learn from every experience that we have in life. Here, we see what we want to help our children do when they do not understand.

The Lord tells us what a person is to do when that person lacks wisdom. The word that is translated “wisdom” is used here to refer to the practical knowledge that is needed to live our lives to bring glory to God. It does not refer to worldly wisdom. Worldly wisdom is described in James 3:14-15 where we read, “But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly,

sensual, demonic.” Instead, this is referring to godly wisdom like that described in James 3:17 where we read, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” We see that God is the source of all godly wisdom.

That is why we are told to ask God when we lack wisdom. We want to help our children understand the importance of receiving their wisdom from the Lord. We also see the way that the Lord gives wisdom. We want to help our children understand that when we ask God for wisdom, He promises to give us wisdom liberally or generously. Proverbs 1:5 says, “A wise *man* will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel.” Here, we see that God wants to increase both our learning and our understanding.

Proverbs 9:10 says, “The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One *is* understanding.” We want to help our children realize that true wisdom and understanding must come from the Lord. God says that those who ask for wisdom will be given understanding by the Lord. There is only one condition that is required in order to receive wisdom from the Lord. James 1:6 says, “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.” Here, we see that a person must ask in faith to receive wisdom from the Lord.

The reason why we must ask in faith is explained in 1 Corinthians 2. 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 says, “But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” Here, we see that godly wisdom cannot be received through human understanding. Instead, godly wisdom must be revealed by the Holy Spirit. This is due to the fact that God has prepared godly wisdom for those who love Him.

In 1 Corinthians 2:12, we read, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.” Here, we see that one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to help Christians know the things that have been freely given to us by God. Of course, that includes godly wisdom. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.” Godly wisdom is foolishness to the world because only those who have the Holy Spirit are able to understand divine truth.

This passage also shows us that God wants our children to understand godly wisdom so that they will be able to speak godly wisdom. 1 Corinthians 2:13 says, “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” The Holy Spirit teaches us to explain the Word of God with the Word of God. He shows us how to compare spiritual things with spiritual. As we help our children learn to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that they are able to use the Word of God to explain the Word, the Holy Spirit will use the wisdom that they gain to develop and expand their ministry to others.

We see that people who are not Christians cannot receive the wisdom of God. However, these verses also remind us that even a Christian must ask for wisdom in faith. James 1:6-8 says, “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; *he is* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” Here, we see that a Christian with doubt is compared to a wave of sea that is tossed and driven by the wind. A similar comparison is made in Ephesians 4:14 where we read, “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and

fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.” The context in Ephesians 4:11-16 is talking about Christians and this verse talks about those who have remained as spiritual young children that failed to grow properly.

Hebrews 5:11-14 also describes spiritual young children that have failed to grow properly. Those verses say, “Of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how to help Christians that have failed to grow properly.

Here, we see that some people, who have been Christians long enough that they should be able to teach others, have become dull of hearing and need someone to become a spiritual parent to them and feed them the milk of the Word so they can to grow and mature. Here, we see why we want to help our children learn how to receive godly wisdom. First, we do not want them to remain as spiritual young children. Second, we want to help them learn how to help spiritual young children learn to receive godly wisdom. This will only happen as our physical and spiritual children grow and mature so that they are able to understand and apply the Word of God because they have grown to the point where their senses are able to discern both good and evil.

As our physical and spiritual children mature so that they can help others learn to understand how trials help them assist weaker Christians in their spiritual growth, we are also filled with joy. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn how to receive godly wisdom and then share with others how to receive godly wisdom.

Learning to Deal With Temptation

James wanted to help the Jews learn how to apply the law of liberty in their lives so he mentioned the law of liberty in both the first and second chapters of the book of James. He also had a concern to help both the poor and the rich learn to apply the law of liberty in their lives. Today, we still have both the poor and the rich. We also want to help both groups in their spiritual growth. All Christians whether Jews or Gentiles, rich or poor also have to deal with temptation. Since we may have both physical and spiritual children in one or more of the groups mentioned above, we want to help them all learn how to have victory over temptation. That will be the focus of our topic today.

James 1:9-11 says, “Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.” The word “lowly” speaks of a person who is low in spirit or humble. In these verses, the lowly is contrasted with the rich while in several passages the lowly is contrasted with the proud. James 4:6 says, “But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’” Then, in 1 Peter 5:5-6 it says, “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to *your* elders. Yes, all of *you* be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.” In these passages, we see that God is the One who gives grace to the humble and also exalts them in His time.

As physical and spiritual parents, we want to follow the example of Christ and model this lowly spirit by our example. In Matthew 11:28-30, we read, “Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light.” In these verses, we see that Christ gave us an example to follow as we show our children by our example what it means to be humble. Here, we see that a lowly brother is one that is focused on spiritual riches that will last for eternity rather than the physical riches of this earth.

That is very important to understand in this context because a common temptation for many people is the love of riches. In fact, 1 Timothy 6:8-10 says, “And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” Here, we see that the love of money is one of the two negative roots given in the New Testament because it is such a great temptation. The other negative root mentioned in the New Testament is a root of bitterness mentioned in Hebrews 12:15.

Many Christians have their focus on earthly riches rather than spiritual riches. Christ warned of the danger of this temptation many times. Matthew 6:24 concludes one passage that warns about the temptation of riches when it says, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” The word that is translated “mammon” means *treasure or riches*. As a result, it is important to understand that these verses are in the context of temptation and sin.

We see that earthly riches are compared to grass in a field during a time of burning heat. The heat quickly withers the grass and the grass is gone. God says that the same thing will happen to a rich man that is depending on his riches. As a result, the poor man is to rejoice in his spiritual riches and the rich man is to rejoice in the fact that the trials of life have brought him low and humbled him. Then, both can rejoice in what the Lord chooses to do through their lives. The Old Testament saints learned to walk by faith. Hebrews 11:16 says, "But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." In the same way, we also want to learn to walk by faith and to look for that eternal reward.

That is why James 1:12 says, "Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." The word that is translated "temptation" in this verse is the same word that is translated "trials" in verse 2. James 1:2-3 says, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience." The Lord allows trials or temptations in our lives for the purpose of helping us learn to count them as joy. We see that trials or temptation actually produce patience or endurance. Revelation 2:10 points out the fact that the crown of life is our reward for enduring trials. That verse says, "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." We see that the Lord has promised the crown of life to all that love Him so that also reminds us that all Christians will experience some forms of trials.

That is why James 1:13 tells us, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone." Here, we see a key distinction to make. God cannot be tempted by evil. God does not tempt any person to do evil. At the same time, we see that God does allow temptation. We need to understand this difference. Satan tries to place the things of the world in front of us with the hope that some of the things that he places in front of us will cause us to be tempted. 1 John 2:15-17 says, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." Those things of the world that we love will tempt us. That is why the earlier verses warned about the danger of riches because many people love worldly riches.

Satan does not know what will tempt a particular Christian, so he places various things of the world in our path as a way to try and tempt us. The reason why that is true is given for us in James 1:14-15. Those verses say, "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." Here, we see that not even Satan can cause us to sin. He can only place things in our path that he thinks might tempt us.

We see that Satan tried to tempt Christ in three different ways. We see that for Christ each temptation was a test in which He showed that He did not desire the things of this world. Luke 4:3-4 says, "And the devil said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.' But Jesus answered him, saying, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God."'" Satan tried to tempt Christ with the lust of the flesh but Christ quoted the Scripture and did not yield to temptation. Luke 4:5-8 says, "Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for *this* has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.' And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Get behind Me, Satan! For it is

written, “You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.”” Satan tried to tempt Christ with the lust of the eyes but Christ quoted the Scripture and did not yield.

Satan tried to tempt Christ with the pride of life when he said in Luke 4:9-12, “Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. For it is written: “He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you,” and, “In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.”’ And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘It has been said, “You shall not tempt the LORD your God.”’” Christ again defeated Satan by quoting Scripture. We want to help our children learn to defeat Satan with Scripture.

God will not tempt us and Satan can only place things in our path in an effort to try to tempt us. However, the source of temptation is actually within ourselves. We are tempted when we are drawn away by our own lusts. In any area where we have a lust for the things of the world, we are subject to temptation. Lust is a strong desire for anything forbidden. However, even that lust is not sin in itself. The last two words in verse 14 say that in addition to lust we also need to be enticed. The word that is translated “enticed” means *to catch by bait or to deceive*. When we deceive ourselves and say it will be all right this time, lust has conceived or given birth to sin. Sin may then become an action in which we carry out the desire to get the things for which we have a strong desire. The final consequence of sin is that it brings forth death. Paul describes this kind of death for the Christian when he says in Romans 7:24, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” The result is that Christians feel great guilt because our conscience has been renewed to convict us when we sin.

We want to show our physical and spiritual children how we can turn to the Scriptures and yield to the Spirit for victory over our worldly lusts. Each time we do this, the Lord will give us victory. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your physical and spiritual children how to have victory over worldly lusts.

3.

Learning How to Be Good Listeners

Many people, including many Christians, talk much more than they listen. However, a very important part of our ministry to others is learning to really listen. Unless we really hear what a person is trying to tell us, we will not be able to share with that person the Biblical principles that will really help that person in his or her life. For that reason, a key part of our ministry to our physical and spiritual children is to help them learn how to become effective listeners. The second part of our topic today will help us to learn Biblical principles for becoming a good listener.

In our previous topic, we saw that God does not tempt us to sin. We saw that we sin when we yield our lives to our own sinful desires instead of yielding our lives moment by moment to the Holy Spirit. Instead of God tempting us to sin, James 1:16-17 says, “Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” James wrote to the Jewish Christians that were scattered in various countries. He wrote to them as beloved brothers. He did not want the Jewish Christians to be deceived by their own choices or by anyone who might say that God caused sin to happen. He wanted these Jewish Christians to understand that God gives us the things that are good instead of inviting us to do evil.

As we come to verse seventeen, we see that every good gift comes from God. The word that is translated “good” speaks of something that is *good in its character and beneficial in its effects*. The first word that is translated “gift” speaks of *the act of giving*. Here, we see that everything that is good in its character and beneficial in its effect is given to us by God. As a result, we cannot boast about anything that we do that is beneficial because we are just doing what the Lord has gifted us to do for the benefit of others. The second word that is translated “gift” speaks about *the kind of gift that God gives to us*. The word that is translated “perfect” speaks of *the fact that every gift that God gives us is complete or perfect*. God gives us good gifts and the gifts that He gives us are complete.

We see that these gifts that are given come down from the Father of lights. God is called the Father of lights because He is the Creator. God said in Genesis 1:3-5, “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw the light, that *it was* good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.” Here, we see that the very first thing that God created was light. Then, in Genesis 1:16, we read, “Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. *He made* the stars also.” Here, we see that God is also the Creator of the light bearers.

However, God is more than just the Creator of physical light. He is also the Creator of spiritual light. The Lord also gives spiritual light. In John 8:12, we read, “Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.’” Then, God told Paul in Acts 26:17-18, “I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.” John 1:9 says that Christ is the true Light who gives light to everyone who comes into the world. Because He is the true Light, there is no variation or shadow of turning in Him.

James 1:18 goes on to say, “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we

might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.” Here, we see that it was by His own will that the Lord brought us forth. We see that Christ determined to bring us out of our spiritual darkness and into His light. Christ caused us to come to faith through the word of truth. Psalm 119:160 says, “The entirety of Your word *is* truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments *endures* forever.” Then, Romans 10:17 says, “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” As Christ prayed the night before He died, He said in John 17:17, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” In these verses, we see that the Word of God is both the way we come to faith in Christ and then the way that we continue to grow as Christians.

God chose us by His will because He chose us to be the firstfruits of His creatures. The firstfruits are the first of the crop and the best of the crop that a farmer gathers from his crops. In Romans 8:23, we read, “Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.” As Christians, we have a much greater privilege than the Old Testament saints because their sins were only covered until Christ came. In contrast, our sins were taken away at the moment of salvation and we received the Holy Spirit as the down payment and guarantee of our salvation.

It is also the Holy Spirit who gives us the power to listen and speak in a way that will bring glory to God. That is why James 1:19-20 goes on to say, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” Many people in the world never really listen to others. Christ wants us as Christians to be different. The word that is translated “hear” means *to listen carefully so that we understand what is really being said*. The first requirement to hear in this way is to be quick to listen.

Many people never listen because they want to give their own opinions. Proverbs 18:2 says, “A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart.” In contrast, Proverbs 17:27 says, “He who has knowledge spares his words, *and* a man of understanding is of a calm spirit.” Here, we see that a wise person takes time to carefully listen to what others are saying. We want to show our children, by our example, the importance of taking time to carefully listen to what each person is saying. A person who has true understanding will also have a calm spirit. We will have a calm spirit if we give others the opportunity to give their opinions but do not take those opinions personally.

That is why James says that we are to be slow to speak and slow to wrath. Proverbs 15:1 says, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” People will seldom listen to an angry person who speaks harsh words. People who are angry often speak harsh words. In contrast, Proverbs 16:21 says, “The wise in heart will be called prudent, and sweetness of the lips increases learning.” If we help our children learn to speak with sweetness, other people will listen to them and they will have the opportunity to teach others as a result.

If we really listen and are also slow to speak, that will help us to be slow to wrath. This is very important because we see that wrath does not produce the righteousness of God. The word that is translated “wrath” can speak of *anger or temper* or *it can speak of the punishment that a person gives because of his or her anger*. This means that it is very important to distinguish between punishment and discipline. We will punish if we are angry at the person. In contrast, discipline is for the purpose of correction and is done with love. Galatians 6:1 says, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” Here, we see that even when a person is caught in the very act of sin, our goal is to restore the relationship of that person to the Lord in a spirit of gentleness.

True discipline of our children will happen most effectively if we help them to understand their choices and the consequences of those choices. We help them to understand that if they make wise choices, there will be good consequences. We help them to understand that if they make sinful choices, they will reap the bad consequences of those sinful choices. In Joshua 24:15, Joshua told the people of Israel, “And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” Here, we see that Joshua told the people they had three choices. Then, in Joshua 24:20, Joshua told the people the consequences if they chose to serve foreign gods. That verse says, “...If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good.” They could serve God and be blessed or serve foreign gods and experience judgment.

James encourages us to make wise choices in James 1:21 where we read, “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. We are encouraged to make the choice to lay aside filthiness (things that defile) and overflow of wickedness (law breaking). These will bring evil consequences. Instead, we are encouraged to make the choice to receive the Word of God with a gentle spirit. That will produce a good consequence because as we receive the Word of God with a gentle spirit it will save our souls. John 10:10 shows the results of this choice when it says, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.” We help our children learn how to show others that they have a choice. We help others understand that we want to offer others the same choice Moses offered the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 30:19 where we read, “...I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live...” May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to be good listeners and make wise choices.

Learning to Practice Obedience to God

In our last topic, we concluded by saying that God gives us the opportunity to make choices. As Christians, the Lord also gives us the power to carry out those choices as we yield to the Holy Spirit moment by moment. If we make good choices we reap good consequences. If we make sinful choices, we reap bad consequences. We want to show our physical and spiritual children how to help others learn to make wise choices so that they can reap the blessings of the Lord. Today, we will learn how to equip our children to make wise choices.

James 1:22 says, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” Here, we see that we are given a choice. We can be just a hearer of the Word of God or we can choose to be a doer of the Word of God. This verse tells us the consequences if we choose to just be a hearer of the Word of God. We actually make the choice to deceive ourselves. Matthew 7:24-27 says, “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.” We see that we can choose to hear and not obey the Word of God. If we make that choice, God says we will be foolish and deceive ourselves. In contrast, we see that we will be wise if we choose to hear and obey the Word of God.

James goes on to give an illustration of how people will deceive themselves if they make the choice to hear the Word of God but not obey it. James 1:23-24 says, “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.” Here, we see the process that a foolish person goes through when they make the choice to hear but not obey the Word of God; such a person does three things. He observes himself. He goes on his way. He immediately forgets what he has seen.

The word that is translated “observes” means *to fix a person’s eyes or mind on something*. It is used in Hebrews 10:24-25 where we read, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” Here, we see that we are to fix our eyes and thoughts on the needs of other Christians. If we observe and obey, we will have a good consequence, because we will stimulate love and good works in other Christians by getting together with them and encouraging them. In contrast, if we carefully observe other Christians and do not encourage them, we will not stir up love and good works and so there will be no benefit even though we observed an opportunity to do good.

The second thing a person does when he deceives himself is to go his way. Christ talked about two men who deceived themselves and went on their way in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. Luke 10:31-32 says, “Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side.” Both of these men missed the opportunity to do good, because they saw an opportunity and went on their way.

The third thing a person does when he deceives himself is to immediately forget what he has seen. The disciples did this in John 4. They went into the Samaritan city of Sychar and saw the

people. They came back to Christ and had already forgotten what they had seen. As a result, Christ told the disciples in John 4:35, “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and *then* comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” A short time later, the Samaritan woman went into the same city and saw the same people and took action. John 4:39 says, “And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, ‘He told me all that I *ever* did.’” This woman and many others received eternal life because of the choice that she made.

James 1:25 talks about the wise man that makes wise choices and receives great blessings because of those choices. That verse says, “But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.” The perfect law of liberty is explained in Galatians 5:13 where we read, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Here, we see that we are carrying out the law of liberty when we are serving one another in love. We see that we are to continue in the law of liberty, which means that if we practice true obedience, we are continually looking for opportunities to serve one another in love and then taking those opportunities to serve one another in love.

Here, we see that the Christian that chooses to obey the law of liberty does so by choosing not to be a forgetful hearer. Instead, this is a person who chooses to do what God says to do. The reward that God promises to the person who is obedient to His Word is blessing in the things that the person does. Psalm 1:1-3 says, “Blessed *is* the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight *is* in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.” Here, we see that one of the things that we want to help our children experience is the blessing of the Lord because they have chosen to be obedient to His Word.

James 1:26-27 gives us three different examples of the way that we practice obedience to the Lord. First, we practice obedience by our personal worship. James 1:26 says, “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion *is* useless.” The word that is translated “religious” here speaks of *a person who fears or worships God*. Here, we see again the danger of self-deception. This verse says that the person who does not bridle his tongue has deceived his own heart. This is true because of the fact that our words describe what is in our heart.

This verse says that the worship of a person who is not learning to bridle his tongue is useless. Christ quoted from Isaiah when He said in Matthew 15:7-9, “Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching *as* doctrines the commandments of men.’” Here, we see that false worship is teaching the doctrines of people. True worship must come from the heart.

In contrast, Matthew 12:35 says, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.” The first part of the verse shows what is required for obedience as we worship the Lord with our words. John 4:23-24 says, “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” According to these verses, in New Testament times, true worship only happens as we yield our human spirit to the Holy Spirit. This true worship is teaching the Word of God instead of the doctrines of men. We need to help our children understand that God is seeking people who will worship Him by yielding their

spirit to Him, obeying His Word in their own lives and then sharing the Word of God with others.

James 1:27 tells us two other ways that we practice obedience to the Lord in our worship. That verse says, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” Second, we see that we practice obedience in our worship by our service. Orphans are children whose parents have died and widows are women whose husbands have died. The word that is translated “visit” means *to look after in order to care and help out with their needs*. In most cultures, these are the poorest of the poor because they have no one to care for them. Paul concluded his final words to the leaders of the church at Ephesus by saying in Acts 20:35, “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”” We see that true obedience and worship involves ministering to the needs of the poor and the needy.

Third, we see that we practice obedience in our worship by living a holy life. Ephesians 1:3-4 says, “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” Then, 1 Peter 1:15-16 says, “But as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” We want to show our physical and spiritual children by our example how to live holy lives.

It is a great privilege to show both our physical and our spiritual children how to grow and become more like Christ as they learn to practice obedience to the Lord in their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children by your example how to practice a life of obedience to the Lord.

5.

Learning to Treat the Poor With Respect

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we practice obedience to the Lord is by ministering to the poor and the needy. In this topic, we will see that the Lord used James to give us some further instructions about the way that we minister to the poor. Many churches have ignored the poor and made little or no effort to reach out to the poor and share the Gospel with them. That is not the desire of the Lord for our lives. Instead, the Lord wants us to have a great concern for the poor. In our topic today, we will see that we want to show our physical and spiritual children by our example how to treat the poor with respect.

We begin by seeing what the Lord says about partiality. James 2:1 says, “My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with partiality.” Here, we see that we are encouraged to avoid one thing in our practice of Christianity in our daily lives. We see that we are to avoid partiality. The word that is translated “partiality” speaks of *treating one person with respect and not treating another person with the same respect because of appearance, wealth or for some other reason*. The word is used four times in the New Testament. We will look at each of the other uses of the word.

We see that God shows the same respect for all people. In talking about the judgment of the Jews and Gentiles, Romans 2:11-12 says, “For there is no partiality with God. For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law.” Colossians 3:23-25 talks about the consequences of good choices and the consequences of sinful choices. Those verses say, “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.” God does not show partiality with either good consequences or bad consequences.

Ephesians 6:5-9 says, “Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is* a slave or free. And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.” If we are bondservants, we are to work to please the Lord and do the will of the Lord. If we are masters we are also to work to please the Lord and do the will of the Lord. We are not to threaten others but realize that the Lord is our Master and He does not show partiality by threatening any Christian.

Based on these principles, the Lord gives an illustration of two different people coming into a gathering of Christians. James 2:2-4 says, “For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and say to the poor man, ‘You stand there,’ or, ‘Sit here at my footstool,’ have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?” Here, we see that the Lord says we are not to show partiality because of wealth or outward appearance. This is why it is so important for us to show our children by our own example the importance of treating all people with respect.

In these verses, James warns against showing favoritism to people of the congregation or to

visitors to a church service by paying attention to a rich man wearing fine clothes and expensive jewelry and shaming a poor man in ragged clothes by making him stand or sit on the floor. In many parts of the world today, this same thing is done to whole sections of a city. Churches will reach out to the sections of the city where the people have nice homes and will ignore the people who live in the poor sections and slums of the city.

When Christians do such things, God asks the question in verse four, “Have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?” Here, we see that God describes such acts of favoritism by two phrases. God says that such actions show partiality. The word that is translated “partiality” in this verse speaks of separating *oneself or showing discrimination*. Peter was challenged in Acts 11:2 after he went to the house of Cornelius. Acts 11:2-3 says, “And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, ‘You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!’ In Acts 11:12, Peter answered, “Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house.” Here, we see that God showed both Peter and the leaders of the church at Jerusalem that they were not to show partiality against the Gentiles.

Second, God asked if we have become judges with evil thoughts. A judge is a person who passes judgment on anything. The word that is translated “thoughts” speaks about the thinking or reasoning of a person within himself. As a result, a person with evil or wicked thoughts has filled his thinking with evil thoughts about others and is using those thoughts to judge others. Matthew 15:19-20 says, “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are *the things* which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.” Here, we see that God places partiality along with every other form of sin and points out that partiality is just as evil as these other sins.

James 2:5-7 says, “Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?* But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?” James wanted to help the Jewish Christians learn to treat the Gentiles and the poor with the same love and respect that Christ showed. The word that is translated “listen” means *to hear so that there is understanding that leads to action*.

God wants us to understand that He has chosen the poor. The word that is translated “poor” here speaks of *those who lack wealth, influence, position or honor*. The word is also used to speak of the *needy, the helpless, and the powerless*. It can speak of those who lack worldly education or culture. 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 says, “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.” Here, we see that God does not show partiality and favor the rich and the powerful. Instead, God also chooses those people who the rich or powerful people often reject.

God looks at the hearts of people. We see that many of the poor are rich in faith. Those who are rich in faith are rich in Christian character and are seeking eternal rewards. Hebrews 11:9-10 says of Abraham, “By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.” Here, we see that Abraham was focused on his eternal inheritance instead of his worldly wealth. These are the people who love

the Lord, instead of loving the things of this world. As a result, they can look forward to eternal rewards.

James went on to tell how the rich people of the world treated the poor. In addition, even some of the Christians had this same attitude toward the poor. God described the way that the rich treat the poor by listing two common actions of the rich. First, the rich often oppress the poor and take them to court. The word that is translated “oppress” means *to exercise harsh control over another person or to use one’s power against a person*. The only other place this word is used in the New Testament is in Acts 10:38 where we read, “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” Here, we see that the oppression of the rich and the oppression of the devil are the two ways that this word is used in the New Testament. The rich oppress the poor by taking them to court to take away what little they did have.

Second, we see that the rich often blaspheme the noble name by which Christians are called. The word that is translated “noble” means *that which is good in its character and beneficial in its effects*. Sometimes, this word is used to refer to a person. The noble name by which Christians are called is the name of Christ. Acts 11:26 says, “And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” “Christians” means *little Christs*. It was probably a name that was given to try and mock Christians because they were becoming like Christ. Instead, it is a privilege to be honored by saying that we are becoming like Christ.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children to develop the same respect that Christ had for the poor. That will only happen as we provide an example by our respect for the poor. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your physical and spiritual children how to treat the poor with respect.

Learning to Practice the Law of Liberty

In our last topic, we saw that we are to show our physical and spiritual children how to treat the poor with respect. This topic is actually a continuation of that topic as we see that we are to show our children how to practice the law of liberty. In an earlier topic, we saw in James 1:27 that those who practice the perfect law of liberty will be blessed in their actions. As a result, in this topic we will see how we can show our children how to put the law of liberty into practice in their daily lives.

James 2:8-9 says, “If you really fulfill *the* royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.” Here, we see that the royal law is to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. When asked what the great commandment was, Christ replied in Matthew 22:37-40, “Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Here, we see that to love God with our whole heart, soul and mind and to love our neighbor as ourselves fulfills the whole Old Testament. A royal law is the law of a king. This royal law “to love” is the law of the King of Kings and fulfills the entire Old Testament.

However, these verses also show that if we show partiality, we have violated the royal law. The reason for this is due to the fact that to show partiality is to commit sin. That means that any person who shows partiality is guilty and has already been convicted by the law as a transgressor. Since no one except Christ has perfectly loved his neighbor as he loves himself, we have all been convicted by the law as transgressors.

James 2:10-11 says, “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.” Many people say that they have lived a pretty good life because they have never committed adultery or have never committed murder. That is why James makes it clear here that partiality makes a person just as guilty of committing sin as a person who commits murder or adultery. Every person is still a transgressor of the law if that person has ever shown any kind of partiality.

Before we placed our faith in Christ, we were standing guilty before God and condemned. John 3:18 says, “‘He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.’” That condemnation was removed at the moment we placed our faith in Christ. Romans 8:1 says, “*There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” For the Christian, that condemnation is removed at the moment of faith. Because we no longer face condemnation, we are now under the law of liberty.

James 2:12-13 says, “So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” Here, we see that we will be judged by the law of liberty because we no longer face condemnation and judgment. Instead James 1:25 says, “But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.” Since we will be judged by the law of liberty for rewards, it is

important to understand what that means.

We must begin by explaining the law of liberty. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” The law of liberty means that we are free. It also means that this freedom makes it possible for us to serve one another through love. In order to practice the law of liberty, we must understand what it means to serve one another through love. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Every Christian has been given one or more spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit to equip each Christian to carry out the good works for which the Lord has prepared that person. We want to help our children learn how to prepare others to carry out the good works for which the Lord has equipped them.

As Christians, we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that there are two common ways that the world exercises leadership. As Christians, we are able to exercise a third form of leadership. In the world, most people are drivers. They exercise their authority over other people and drive others until those people get out of the way. In the world, some people are leaders. That means that they can lead people as far as they have gone themselves.

However, as Christians we are called to be bondservants of Christ. This means that the Lord equips us to exercise a third form of leadership. Servant leadership means that we choose to serve each Christian as an individual and help each person develop their full potential for Christ, which may go far beyond what we are able to do. Philippians 2:2-4 says, “Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. *Let* nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” If we esteem others better than ourselves, we realize that God has given us the privilege to serve each Christian and help each Christian learn how to exercise his or her spiritual gifts to reach the full potential for which the Lord has created that Christian.

Ephesians 4:11-13 says, “And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Here, we see that the Lord gives some Christians gifts to equip others. Ephesians 2:19-20 says, “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*.” The apostles gave us eyewitness testimony of the resurrection of Christ. The prophets gave us the written Word of God. As a result, we want to help every Christian learn to build their lives on that foundation.

However, we see that Christ also gives some to be evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Every Christian is commanded to preach the Gospel. Mark 16:15 says, “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’” Since the law of liberty says that every Christian is free to serve one another in love, every Christian needs to be shown how to share the Gospel with others. Although Paul said that he was a teacher, we see in Acts 20:20-21 how he equipped the saints to preach the Gospel. Those verses say, “How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul took these men with him and showed them publicly and in homes how to share the message of repentance and faith with both Jews and Greeks.

The word translated “pastor” is used eighteen times in the New Testament. The other seventeen times it is always translated “shepherd”. Six of the uses are in John 10 where we see that a shepherd leads, feeds and protects. The New Testament gives us thirty-one ways we are to minister to one another as Christians. Since pastors (shepherds) are to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, pastors are to equip the saints to minister to one another. Pastors do this by showing each Christian how to apply Hebrews 10:24-25 where we read, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” As Christians, each one of us is to be equipped to minister to one another.

Every Christian is also to be equipped to teach and apply the Word of God. Our commission in Matthew 28:19-20 is to make disciples. Matthew 13:52 uses the word translated “make disciples” to give us the definition of a disciple. That verse says, “Then He said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure *things* new and old.’” Here, we see that each person who has become a disciple:

Is instructed (who has become a disciple)

Is the head of a spiritual household (has one or more spiritual children)

Has a treasure (has learned to explain and apply the Word of God)

Is able to bring out of that treasure things that are new (has a learner’s attitude)

Is able to bring out of that treasure things that are old (teach the basics of Christianity)

Our physical and spiritual children may or may not have specific gifts to equip others. However, each of our children can be shown how to show others how to share the Gospel, how to minister to other Christians and how to teach and apply the Word of God. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to practice the law of liberty by serving other Christians.

Learning to Practice Good Works

In our last topic, we saw that each Christian is to be equipped to practice the law of liberty by being shown how to serve others. We saw that each Christian needs to be shown how to share the Gospel. Each Christian needs to be shown how to minister to other Christians. Each Christian needs to be shown how to teach and apply the Word of God. In our topic today, we will build on that foundation as we see that we are to show each of our physical and spiritual children how to practice good works.

James 2:14 says, “What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?” Here, we see that James shows us that true faith will begin to change and transform our actions. We need to realize that some people will say that they have faith but it may be faith in their own works instead of faith in Christ. Works will never produce faith. In contrast, true faith will always produce works. That change is explained in Ephesians 2:8-10 where we read, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Our salvation is totally by grace through faith and that faith is a gift from God.

However, we see in verse 10 that we are created in Christ Jesus for good works. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” At the moment we placed our faith in Christ, He immediately made us a new creation and gave us new desires. Our sin nature that we had before we placed our faith in Christ had a desire to sin. As a result, we frequently carried out that desire by committing sin. At the moment of salvation, we received a new nature that had new desires. Christ gave us new desires so that we have the desire to do good works. God prepared the good works that He has for each one of us before He even brought us to faith in Christ.

God made this preparation in advance so that we could begin to walk in these good works from the moment of salvation. That is why our verse here in James tells us that there is no benefit in our lives if we do not begin to do these good works. We saw in our last topic that we want to equip our children to show others how to do good works. We also want to help our children learn how to help new Christians learn to yield their lives to the Holy Spirit so that the Holy Spirit gives them the power to do those good works. Romans 6:16-18 says, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

Here, we see the key to yielding is obedience. If we obey the old sin nature, Romans 7:14-25 says that we will feel like we are experiencing death on this earth. If we obey the Lord from the heart, He will give us the power to practice righteousness. As a result of obeying the Lord from the heart, Romans 8:37-39 says, “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” In the first part of Romans 8, the Holy Spirit is mentioned 19 times, because He is the One that gives us the power to obey and practice righteousness (do good works).

James gives us a practical illustration to understand what it means to do good works. James 2:15-17 says, “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” As we look at these verses, we see that the Lord wants us to really open our eyes and see the needs around us. Verse 2 of this chapter talked about a poor man with filthy clothes. We can see that this brother needs some better clothes. If we know that a sister has no food, we know that she needs food. These are opportunities to do good works to a brother or a sister because they need clothes or food. They do not need just words of concern and a promise to pray for them. If we have true faith, we will be looking for opportunities like this to do good works and the Lord will show us needs that we can meet. James says that we will show that we have true faith by both seeing and meeting needs that we see in the lives of brothers and sisters in Christ.

Some people might ask the question, what about the statement in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 which says, “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.” It is true that some people who say that they are Christians might refuse to work. However, the answer is given right in the following verses. 2 Thessalonians 3:12-15 says, “Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But *as for* you, brethren, do not grow weary *in* doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count *him* as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother.” We teach them what the Word of God says and admonish the brother from the Word. At the same time, we keep looking for opportunities to do good in our own lives.

James 2:17-18 says, “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” Here, we see that we are not to separate faith from works. True faith will produce genuine concern for others that will cause us to reach out and do good works. It is not a case that faith is against works. Instead, it is important to realize that true faith produces works. It is also important to realize that it is not faith or works. Instead, we want to help our children understand that true faith produces good works because of the fact that we have been given a new nature that desires to do good.

As a result, we want to show our children how to show their faith by doing those things that will be beneficial to others. 1 Peter 4:10-11 says, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Here, we see that God has given every Christian at least one gift in order to be effective in serving others. The purpose of that gift is not to benefit the person. Instead, the gifts that God gives us are to be used to serve others in such a way that the results will bring glory to God. This makes it possible for our children and every Christian to show their faith by their works.

Since James is showing in these verses that true faith produces good works, James uses a very interesting illustration. James 2:19-20 go on to say, “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” Some people who claim to be Christians say that there is no need to do good works because they believe in God. As a result, James points out the fact that the demons also believe in God. Here, we see that they believe in the existence of God. Because they know that God exists, the demons are filled with fear, because they know that one day they will experience judgment.

Faith in the existence of God will never produce good works. The demons may be filled with fear of eternal judgment but that does not produce good works because there is no faith. The goal of Satan will never change. Christ explained the goal of Satan very clearly when He said in John 10:10, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly." The demons cannot do good works that are beneficial to others because they can only carry out the works that will fulfill the goal of Satan and his goal is to steal, to kill and to destroy. As a result, they believe in God and continue to do evil works.

The same thing is true for people who are not Christians. All people who are not Christians have a sin nature that controls their lives and so they are slaves to sin. Christ said in John 8:44, "You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and *does not* stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it." Since all those who are not Christians are slaves to sin, they cannot do good works that are beneficial to others. The works of those who lack faith will be the works of this world and will have no eternal benefit.

God says that a person is foolish when that person thinks that he or she can have faith that does not produce good works. Since God says that we are created for good works when we are in Christ, a failure to desire to do works that are good in their character and beneficial in their effects means that such a person has not yet become a Christian because that person does not have a new nature. That person may believe in the existence of God and even fear eternal judgment just like the demons but the complete lack of desire for good works shows that the person is not yet in Christ. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to explain to others that true faith will produce good works. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children by your own example that true faith does produce good works that bring glory to God.

Learning to Show Faith by Works

In our last topic, we saw that God saved us and created us for good works. Christ gave us spiritual gifts that would make it possible for us to carry out those good works. We saw that once we become a Christian, we immediately begin to desire to do what is good in the sight of God and beneficial in its effects in the lives of others. However, a new Christian may not know exactly how to carry out those good works. As a result, we want to show our physical and spiritual children Biblical examples that illustrate how to carry out good works.

The first illustration that we are given is the illustration of Abraham. James 2:21-22 says, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?” Since James was writing to the Jews that were scattered in various countries, James began with the illustration of Abraham, the father of the Jews. In Genesis 12:1-3, we read, “Now the LORD had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’” Then, we read that Abraham was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.

Isaac was born when Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah was ninety years old. Then, in Genesis 22, we see that Abraham offered Isaac on the altar. A few verses later in Genesis 23:1, we read that Sarah died at the age of one 127 years of age. Incidentally, this is the only woman in the Bible whose age at her death is mentioned so there must be an important reason for her age to be mentioned at this point. That would mean that Isaac was thirty-seven years old when his mother died. As a result, Isaac was probably a young adult at the time his father offered him on the altar. This would mean that Abraham had placed his faith in the promise of God at least fifty years earlier.

Here, we see that faith came long before the works of Abraham that are mentioned here in the book of James. God said that Abraham was justified by his works when he offered Isaac on the altar. To be “justified” means *to declare a person righteous*. Romans 5:1-2 says, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Abraham was justified by faith and as a result God declared that his works were righteous when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. Here, we see that that the faith of Abraham caused him to do good works that God said were pleasing to him. God could be pleased with his works because they were the result of faith. As a result, God was pleased when He saw that the faith of Abraham produced good works.

Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” God called Abraham to leave his own country by faith when God first called him. Hebrews 11:8-10 says, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.” Abraham had shown that faith when he first responded to the call of God to leave his own country. Abraham continued to show that faith by his works throughout the rest of his life.

We see how faith and works go together in the following verses. James 2:23-24 say, “And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.” Here, we see that the first and most important work that any person can do is believe God. When any person turns from sin to God and comes to God through Christ, God puts that to the account of that person as righteousness. Until a person comes to God through faith, Isaiah 64:6 says, “But we are all like an unclean *thing*, And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.” However, the moment we come to God by faith in Christ, God puts that faith to our account as righteousness.

We also see that when God puts faith to the account of a person, it changes the relationship of God with that person. Abraham was called the friend of God. However, in Christ we have an even closer relationship. John 1:12-13 says, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Here, we see that we become the children of God through the will of God. We want to help our children learn to explain to others what it means to become a part of the family of God.

We saw in the last topic that Christ made us a new creation and that God designed every Christian for good works. In 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, we see one of those good works for which God has designed each one of us as Christians. Those verses say, “Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.” We see that God chose every one of us to carry out this ministry of reconciliation (helping others understand how they can be reconciled to God by repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ). God gives us the opportunity to be His ambassadors and to be Christ’s representatives and urge others to turn to Christ to be reconciled to God.

God used James to give us a second illustration of what it means to show our faith by our works. James 2:25-26 says, “Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent *them* out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” Joshua tells us how Rahab was justified and the book of Hebrews tells us why Rahab was justified. Hebrews 11:31 says, “By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.” Here, we see that Rahab was justified by faith.

Then, Joshua 2 tells us how Rahab showed her faith in God. Joshua 2:8-13 says, “Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men: ‘I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who *were* on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard *these things*, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He *is* God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the LORD, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father’s house, and give me a true token, and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.’” Here, we see that Rahab believed in God and God put that faith to her account.

The spies told Rahab in Joshua 2:17-18, “So the men said to her: ‘We *will be* blameless of this oath of yours which you have made us swear, unless, *when* we come into the land, you bind this line of scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you bring your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your father’s household to your own home.’” Here, we see that the faith of Rahab saved Rahab and all of her family that chose to be in the house with her. However, she had to show her faith by her works. She was told to hang the scarlet (bright red) cord in the window of the house. Just as we have to come to God through the blood of Christ, Rahab had to come to God in the way that God said to show her faith.

A cord that is bright red would be very obvious to anyone who saw it. Rahab showed her faith in God where anyone who looked would see the bright red cord. This would be true both of her people and also of the people of Israel. For an entire week, her faith was very obvious to all before the Lord destroyed Jericho and protected Rahab and her family.

James 2:25-26 says that we need both our body and our spirit to have life. In the same way, we need spiritual life as well as physical life in order to have eternal life. In Ephesians 2:1, we read, “And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” Then, Ephesians 2:2-9 tells us how Christ paid the penalty for our sin while we were spiritually dead and then how we were saved by faith that was the gift from God. It is only after these verses that tell how we were saved by faith that we read what God created us to become. Verse 10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” We see that we were given spiritual life for a purpose. As we help our physical and spiritual children understand these things, they begin to realize that the Lord has given them a great privilege to show their faith by their works. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain to others what it means to show our faith by our works.

Learning to Bridle Our Tongue – Part 1

In our last topic, we were given two illustrations of people who showed their faith by their works. Abraham showed the faith that he had already had in the Lord for more than fifty years when He placed his son, Isaac, on the altar. Rahab showed the faith that she already had in the Lord when she placed a bright red cord in the window that many people saw before God preserved her and her entire family. Throughout the rest of the book of James, we are going to see various ways that God gives us to show our faith after we have placed our faith in Christ. In this topic and the next, we will see that one of the ways that we show our faith is by the way that we speak to others.

James 3:1-2 says, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.” The word that is translated “teachers” is used fifty-eight times in the New Testament and is translated either “master” or “teacher”. Forty times, it is used to refer to Christ and the other eighteen times to various people. In Ephesians 4:11, we see that the word is used to speak of one of the equipping gifts that Christ has given to some to equip others for ministry. In Hebrews 5:12, we read, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.” In these verses, we see that some people had been Christians long enough that they should have been teachers of others. However, they had failed to mature and now needed to be retaught the basics of Christianity.

We see that James reminds us that those who become teachers will receive a stricter judgment. It is important to help our physical and spiritual children realize that we receive both a privilege and a responsibility when we are given the opportunity to teach the Word of God. Hebrews 13:17 says, “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.” Here, we see that when we are teachers, we will give an account to the Lord for those that we have taught. If we have not been faithful in our teaching, we will give an account with grief. In contrast, if we have been faithful in our teaching, we will be filled with joy as we give an account to the Lord.

As Christians, James reminds us that we stumble in many things. If we are teachers, we need to realize that when we stumble, we may cause those who are following us to stumble also, because they are following our example. We see that if we are not stumbling that it is evidence that we have become mature in our spiritual lives. In Ephesians 4:12-13, we see that our responsibility is to help other Christians grow to maturity. Those verses tell us that God gives spiritual leaders, “For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Here, we see that if we are a spiritual leader, our goal should be to help each person we lead grow to spiritual maturity. We also see that a mature Christian is one that has learned to exercise self-control in all areas of his or her life.

Since teachers use examples and words as the two primary ways to influence those they lead, we are given two illustrations of the way that we should exercise self-control if we want to be effective leaders for the Lord. James 3:3 says, “Indeed, we put bits in horses’ mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body.” The bit that a person places in the mouth of a horse is only a few inches in length. However, we are able to use that small bit to cause the

horse to obey us. In fact, with a bit in the mouth of a horse, we can control the entire body of a horse that weighs several hundred pounds. In the same way, we see that the words that come out of our mouths as teachers have a great influence on the lives of others.

The second illustration is given in James 3:4. That verse says, “Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires.” Here, we see a second example of the way that our words have a very great impact. In the day that James wrote, the ships were powered by large sails. Ships today can be many hundreds of feet long and may have large motors. Regardless of the size of the ship or how it is powered, it was and is still turned by a very small rudder. The person who determines what direction that ship is going is the pilot. Our words can have the same impact. Most people seldom realize the impact that their words have on the lives of others.

The word that is translated “pilot” means *to lead or guide in a straight path*. This word is used two times in the New Testament. The other place that the word is used is in John 1:23 where we read, “He said: ‘I am “the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Make straight the way of the LORD,’” as the prophet Isaiah said.’” As a result, when we are teaching the Word of God we want to teach the Word of God accurately so that we lead others in a straight path. 2 Timothy 2:15 says, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Some people only work well when their employer is watching. If we are teaching the Word of God, we see that we do not want to be like a worker that is ashamed when he is caught unprepared. Instead, we want to prepare thoroughly to teach so that we can explain the Word of God accurately to others and lead others in a straight path.

If we have prepared to teach the Word of God, we will be able to work with the Holy Spirit in our teaching. We do this as we explain the Word of God with the Word of God. 1 Corinthians 2:13 says, “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” Learning to explain the Word of God with the Word of God will change and transform our teaching. Matthew 7:28-29 says, “And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” The scribes quoted other scribes when they taught. In contrast, Christ explained the Word of God with the Word of God.

We are also given a warning about the danger when we fail to control our tongue. James 3:5-6 says, “Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.” We saw that a horse is controlled with a bridle only a few inches long. A huge ship is controlled by a very small steering wheel and rudder. In the same way, our tongue is a very small part of our body. However, a tongue can be very destructive when we do not yield our lives to the Lord and let the Holy Spirit guide us as we speak.

Here, we see that the tongue is a very small part of the body but it boasts great things. The phrase that is translated “boasts great things” comes from two Greek words. One word means *to boast* and the other word means *great or great things*. Here, we see that when people are controlled by pride instead of the love of Christ that they will begin to boast about themselves instead of giving glory to the Lord. Christ compared the prayers of two men in Luke 18:10-13 where we read, “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so

much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’” Here, we see that all the Pharisee did was talk about himself and what he had done. Christ said in the next verse that every person who exalts himself will be humbled.

James compared boasting to a wildfire. A wildfire can start from just a spark or a tiny fire. However, if that fire gets out of control and becomes a wildfire, that wildfire can destroy thousands of acres. As a result, James says that a tongue is a fire that produces a world of iniquity. The word that is translated “iniquity” speaks of unrighteousness in heart and life. Here, we see that the tongue shows what is in the heart of a person.

Proverbs 15:28 contrasts the heart and words of the just and the wicked. That verse says, “The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.” Here, we see that a person who is right with the Lord will think how to give a wise answer before he speaks. In contrast, the heart that is wicked causes the evil person to pour out evil words. As a result, we see that in order to control the tongue, we must allow the Lord to control our heart. If we do not let the Lord control our heart, we see that a wicked heart will fill the whole life of that person with evil including the words that the person speaks.

We see that an evil heart that speaks evil words will set on fire the course of nature. This means that the words of a person with an evil heart will influence many others to do evil. We want to show our children, by our example, how to have a heart that is right with the Lord so that the words we speak will bring honor to the Lord and give our children an example to follow. May the Lord richly bless you as you speak words that will give your physical and spiritual children an example to follow.

Learning to Bridle Our Tongue – Part 2

In our last topic, we saw that what is in our hearts will determine the words that we speak. If our heart is filled with evil, we will speak words that destroy. In contrast, if we are yielding our hearts to the Lord, we will think carefully before we speak so that our words bring honor and glory to the Lord. As we concluded our last topic with James 3:6, we saw that a tongue that speaks evil will have an effect on many other people. Our topic today builds on that thought by showing the dangers of an uncontrolled tongue. We want to help our children learn to speak with words that bring glory to God.

In James 3:7-8, we read, “For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” In these verses, we see that James gives us a comparison between the animals and the tongue of a person. Throughout history, people have tamed various kinds of animals. People have found that they can tame the animals and the birds. They can tame the reptiles and even the animals that live in the sea. However, we see that a tongue that is controlled by a heart filled with evil cannot be tamed.

Verse eight gives us two characteristics of the tongue of a person whose heart is controlled by evil. First, we see that the tongue of such a person is an unruly evil. The word that is translated “unruly” speaks of something that cannot be restrained or held back. Our hearts were controlled by evil before we placed our faith in Christ. That is why it is important to learn to yield our spirit to the Holy Spirit so that He can give us the strength to learn to control our words. James 1:19-20 says, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” Here, we see that the Lord gives us a pattern for learning to control our words as we yield to the Holy Spirit.

To control our words, first, we must learn to listen carefully so that we really hear what another person is saying. Many people are so busy preparing their answer that they never really listen to what another person is saying. Second, we must be slow to speak. This means that we take time to think and ask the Lord for wisdom before we answer. Third, we must be slow to wrath. The word that is translated “wrath” means *anger that shows itself by punishment*. When we discipline in love, a person who has sinned, we help them learn to correct what they did wrong. Punishment is when we are very angry at the person who sinned and so we punish the person to get even. God says that such wrath will never produce His righteousness. In fact, in most cases it will only cause the person to become more rebellious.

James 3:8 gives us a second characteristic of the tongue of a person whose heart is controlled by evil. We see that such a tongue is full of deadly poison. The word that is translated “poison” when spoken of people speaks of *a person who uses words that injure and destroy others*. Galatians 5:15 says, “But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!” The words “bite-devour-consume” speak of a process of wounding another person with words. To “bite” means *to wound a person by words*. To “devour” means *to continually wound a person with words*. To “consume” means *the last act of swallowing down* and has the thought of destroying a person with evil words. We see the heart of a person who is controlled by evil will speak words that will eventually completely destroy other people.

James 3:9 goes on to say, “With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.” In the time of James, it was normal for the Jews to

say “Blessed be God” when they spoke of God. This was a quotation from the final verse of Psalm 68. This did not mean that these words came from the heart when the Jews said this in the time of Christ. In Matthew 23:27, Christ said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men*’s bones and all uncleanness.” Here, we see one of the reasons why Christ called the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites. They would bless God to appear beautiful. At the same time, because their hearts were filled with evil, they were speaking evil words about Christ and many other people.

James said that people actually curse God when they curse other people. In Genesis 1:26, we read, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’” Here, we see that God made us as people in His own image. That is why God says that people are actually cursing Him when they curse any person because that person is created in the image of God.

We see that people who have not placed their faith in Christ commonly curse other people. As a result, that is why James wrote in James 3:10-12, “Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh *water* and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.” Several times in the book of James, we see that James uses the phrase “my brethren”. We see that verse ten is one of the places that James uses this phrase. As a result, we see that even some who claimed to be Christians were still blessing God and cursing people. James said that cursing people made in the image of God is not appropriate language for Christians and gives several illustrations to back his words.

First, James asked if a spring of water could give out both fresh and bitter water from the same opening. In Exodus 15:23-26, after the people of Israel left Egypt, they came to a place that was named “Marah” which means *bitter* because the water was bitter. God performed a miracle and changed that water and made it sweet. Once that water became sweet, there was no more bitter water. In the same way, once Christ came into our lives and performed a miracle by giving us a new nature, God says that our words should also become sweet instead of bitter. When we realize that the Lord has performed a miracle in our lives, it should be our desire to demonstrate that miracle by yielding our lives to the Lord and asking Him to give us His power to bless others just as we bless Him.

Second, James asked in verse 12 if a fig tree could produce olives or a grapevine produce figs. On the third day of creation Genesis 1:12 says, “And the earth brought forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed according to its kind, and the tree *that* yields fruit, whose seed *is* in itself according to its kind. And God saw that *it was* good.” Here, we see that when God created the fruit trees, He said that each fruit tree would produce the kind of fruit that God had designed that tree to produce. In addition, God said that the seeds that came from the plants would produce the same kinds of trees or plants that produced them. As a result, no person on the earth has ever developed a fig tree that produced olives.

In the same way, in 2 Corinthians 5:17, God says, “Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” We would expect those who have evil hearts to produce evil words when they speak because they have not placed their faith in Christ. However, since we have been made a new creation with a new nature, God says that as Christians we will produce the kind of words that show the fact that the Lord has made us a new creation. Instead of speaking evil words, we need to pray the same prayer that Paul asked others to pray for him. When Paul asked people to pray for him in Ephesians 6:19-20, he asked them to pray, “And for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my

mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” We need to pray the same prayer for ourselves.

Third, James said in verse 12 that no spring of water produces both salt water and fresh water. The Dead Sea is located near the south end of the land of Israel. It is much saltier than even the oceans. You could never quench your thirst with that water. Here, we see that no spring of water can produce both salt water and fresh water. If a spring of water produces salty water, that spring of water will never quench your thirst. In contrast, if a spring of water produces fresh water, that water will produce good water for both people and animals and quench their thirst.

We also see that Scripture talks about living water. Christ told the woman at the well in John 4:14, “But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” Then, Christ said again in John 7:37-39, “On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” First, we see that Christ offers us living water. Then, we see that once we have received living water, rivers of living water will flow out of our heart.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that because they have a new nature, living water will flow from their hearts. It is a great privilege to help them learn to share that living water with others so that others can also have eternal life. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to share that living water with those who do not yet know Christ.

Learning to Develop Godly Wisdom

In our last two topics, we have seen that we are to learn to control our tongue so that the words that we speak will be beneficial to others. In order to help our physical and spiritual children learn to become more effective in their communication with others, we want to help them learn to speak with godly wisdom so that the words that they share will help people in their spiritual growth. That will be the focus of our topic today as we see how to help our children grow in godly wisdom.

In James 3:13, we read, “Who *is* wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works *are done* in the meekness of wisdom.” The word that is translated “wise” was used by the Jews to speak of a person who could apply Biblical knowledge to the situations that we face in daily living. The word translated “understanding” is used only here in the New Testament and means one who can skillfully apply Biblical knowledge to practical situations. Here, we see that it should be the goal of every Christian to learn to apply the Word of God to the practical situations that we face in our daily lives.

We see what will happen as we show our children how to apply the Word of God to the situations that we face throughout the day each day. As we apply the Word of God, the Word will produce good conduct. The Lord will also develop the attitudes in our lives that He desires. Here, we see that the Lord will work in our lives to produce gentleness or meekness. This will happen because we are seeking godly wisdom. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, “‘For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, nor *are* your ways My ways,’ says the LORD. ‘For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’” Godly wisdom makes it possible for us to see things from the viewpoint of God. Then, as we yield to the Lord, the Lord gives us His strength to carry out the actions that please Him. Our children learn from our example to think and act in a Biblical manner instead of a worldly manner.

We see the contrast as we see the results of worldly thinking in the following verses. James 3:14-16 says, “But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there.” In these verses, we see several characteristics of worldly thinking. The word that is translated “bitter” is only used twice in the New Testament and both are in this chapter. In verse eleven, we see that a fountain cannot produce both bitter and sweet water. Bitter water is water that is so bad that you cannot drink it. Bitter envy describes an attitude that is jealous and resentful of others. Many of the people in the world have this kind of an attitude toward others in their hearts.

We see that worldly thinking also produces self-seeking in the hearts of people. The word that is translated “self-seeking” speaks of a person who is pushing himself forward. Philippians 2:3-4 says, “*Let* nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” In these verses, the word used in James is translated “selfish ambition”. Philippians contrasts that attitude with a humble attitude and says that we are not to have a worldly attitude where we make our decisions based on the worldly attitude of selfish ambition.

We see that the worldly wisdom that produces bitter envy and self-seeking in the heart will produce certain actions. Here, we see that these two attitudes will cause a person to boast and

to lie against the truth. When a person boasts, that person is lying about himself. This is spiritual pride. Worldly wisdom will also cause a person to lie against the truth. In John 14:6, we see that Christ is the truth. In John 17:17, Christ said that the Word of God is truth. John 8:32 tells us that Christ and His Word will set us free. That verse says, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Those who follow worldly wisdom will often speak against Christ and the Word of God. We want to help our children learn to enjoy the freedom that comes from godly wisdom.

We are also given the source of worldly wisdom when we see that such wisdom is earthly, sensual and demonic. Earthly wisdom is focused on the things of the world instead of the spiritual thoughts that come from the Lord. A Christian that seldom talks about the Word of God with others is showing that his thoughts are controlled by earthly thinking. The word that is translated “sensual” speaks of the natural man and his thinking. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.” Then, Jude 19 says, “These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.” Here, we see that natural or sensual thinking is the result of worldly wisdom.

We also see a third thing about the source of worldly wisdom. We see that worldly wisdom actually has its source from Satan and is similar to the thinking of demons. In John 8:44, Christ told the Jews that rejected Him, “You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and *does not* stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it.” Here, we see that worldly wisdom is based on the desires of Satan and does not have truth as its source.

However, worldly wisdom affects more than just the attitudes of the heart and the thoughts and words of a person. James 3:16 also tells us that worldly wisdom also affects the actions of each person who follows worldly wisdom. James 3:16 says, “For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there.” The word that is translated “confusion” speaks of things that produce conflicts and instability and is the opposite of what comes from God. 1 Corinthians 14:33 says, “For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” Worldly wisdom produces confusion and conflict. The word that is translated “evil” speaks of works that are worthless or evil. John 3:20 uses the same Greek word when it says, “For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”

In contrast to worldly wisdom, James 3:17-18 tells us about godly wisdom. Those verses say, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” Here, we see eight characteristics of godly wisdom. These cause us to realize why we want to help our children develop godly wisdom in their hearts, thoughts, words and actions.

First, we see that godly wisdom is pure. The word that is translated “pure” speaks of pure from every fault. 1 John 3:3 says, “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” Those who have their hope in Christ desire to be pure as He is pure. The word that is translated “peaceable” speaks of those who love peace or bring peace. Hebrews 12:11 says, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” Here, we see that the discipline that God allows in our lives is to train us to produce the fruit of righteousness.

The word that is translated “gentle” means that we show our children how to *respond to others with gentleness even when they are mistreated*. Philippians 4:5 says, “Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord *is* at hand.” Here, we see that God wants Christians to be known for their gentleness. The word that is translated “willing to yield” means a person who has a teachable spirit so that it causes us to be obedient to the Lord. The phrase “full of mercy” speaks of a person who shows concern for those suffering difficulty or pain. Such mercy also produces forgiveness. Hebrews 4:15-16 says, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are, yet* without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Christ saw our suffering and pain because of sin and was tempted, suffered, died and rose again so that He could show mercy to us. Godly wisdom means that we show that same mercy to others even when they sin against us.

Godly wisdom also produces good fruits. John 15:8 says, “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” Here, we see that we help our children bring glory to God as their lives bear good fruit for Him. Godly wisdom is also without partiality. This means that we do not favor some or reject some as we are warned in chapter two of James. Godly wisdom does not practice hypocrisy. 1 Peter 1:22 says, “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart.” Here, we see that we will love one another with a pure heart with no hypocrisy.

As we help our physical and spiritual children learn to develop godly wisdom in their lives, we see that we are actually helping them learn how to help others make peace with God because their lives are producing the fruit of righteousness in their lives. Here, we see that godly wisdom has a powerful impact in any life. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to develop godly wisdom in their lives so that their lives cause others to learn how to have peace with God.

Learning the Source of Conflicts

In our last topic, we saw that there is a great difference between worldly wisdom and godly wisdom. We saw that godly wisdom will equip our children to help others learn how to have peace with God. They will also experience the peace of God in their own lives. In addition, God says that He will cause their lives to become fruitful. We also saw that worldly wisdom is very destructive. In our topic today, we will see that worldly wisdom is actually the source of conflicts that people experience between themselves and other people in their lives. We will see why in our topic today.

James 4:1 says, “Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires for* pleasure that war in your members?” The word that is translated “wars” speaks of battles and fights that were going on between people in the churches. The word that is translated “fights” speaks of quarrels and arguments that were going on between individuals in the churches. Paul spoke of this same thing when he said in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?” Here, we see that Christians that have these kinds of conflicts are Christians that have not matured in their spiritual lives. In fact, Paul calls them babes.

Spiritual babes are immature Christians who have not grown up in their spiritual lives, because they are still controlled by worldly wisdom instead of godly wisdom. If this is true, because they are just new Christians, 1 Peter 2:1-2 says, “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.” Here, we see how to help our physical and spiritual children learn to help new Christians that are struggling with conflicts in their lives.

First, we want to help our children learn how to help new Christians lay aside the things that are a part of worldly thinking. Romans 12:2 says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” New Christians have been conformed to worldly thinking for many years. As a result, they need to be shown how to transform their thinking. New Christians need to be shown how to lay aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and all evil speaking. They will only be shown how to lay aside these things as our physical and spiritual children learn to walk alongside these new Christians and provide the love of a nursing mother and the example of a godly father that are mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12.

In addition to that love and example, new Christians also need to learn how to transform their minds. The verse we quoted earlier from 1 Peter 2:2 says, “As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.” Here, we see the way to show our children how to help new Christians transform their minds. This transformation happens as our children help new Christians learn to understand and apply the milk of the Word to their lives. Many new Christians have never grown because they never had a spiritual parent to provide love, provide an example to follow and help those new Christians learn to understand what parts of the Bible are like milk so that they can learn to understand and apply the Word of God to their lives. I encourage new Christians to read the book of 1 John every day for a month and then during that month I meet with them regularly to help them understand what they are reading. The second month, I encourage them to do the same thing with the book of 1 Thessalonians, as these books

were both written to new Christians.

Hebrews 5:11-14 shows what happens when new Christians do not have a spiritual parent to walk alongside and provide love, provide an example and help the new Christians learn to understand the milk of the Word. Those verses say, “Of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” Both the writer of Hebrews and also James when he wrote this book recognized that many new Jewish Christians did not grow to spiritual maturity. The writer of Hebrews said that these people had been Christians long enough so that they should have been teachers of others. Instead, they had become dull of hearing and needed a spiritual parent to teach them.

James recognized that the conflicts that were going on among the Jewish Christians were the result of the fact that they were still following worldly wisdom instead of godly wisdom. As a result of worldly thinking, they had a strong desire for worldly pleasures. James 4:2-3 says, “You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.” Here, we see that immature Jewish Christians were having all of the same problems of immature Gentile Christians that had no background in the Word of God. Romans 7:19-20 says, “For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.” Even when we will to do good, we will continue to think and act like the world in our own strength, instead of learning to yield to the Holy Spirit. In fact, we see that we can be guilty of any sin when we depend on our own strength

Here, we see that in spite of all of the sins these Jewish Christians were committing, they were praying. However, their prayer life showed that they had remained as spiritual babes. In 1 Corinthians 13:11, Paul wrote, “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” The word that is translated “child” here is the same word that is translated “babe” in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 and Hebrews 5:11-14. That word speaks of the child that is not yet able to speak clearly or a spiritual toddler. A spiritual toddler is one whose prayer life is focused on his or her own problems and his own needs. James said that the result is that their prayers are not answered because their prayers focus on the things that will give them pleasure instead of giving them spiritual growth.

James 4:4-5 says, “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, ‘The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously.’” In verse 5, we see that James is writing to Christians in these verses because he speaks of the Spirit that dwells in us. In these verses, we see that we can be guilty of spiritual adultery as well as physical adultery. Spiritual adultery is described as being a friend of the world. There were probably some Jews in the church that were only professing Christians and did not have genuine faith. However, there were also Jews who had never had spiritual parents who loved them, provided an example to follow and walked alongside them to help them grow in their obedience to the Word.

We see this illustrated in Ephesians 4:11-16. Spiritual leaders were given by Christ to help new Christians grow to maturity and verse 13 points out that the goal of the Lord is for every Christian to become mature. However, Ephesians 4:14 says, “That we should no longer be

children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.” The word for “children” used here is the same Greek word used in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, 1 Corinthians 13:11 and Hebrews 5:11-14. When spiritual leaders fail to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, there will be spiritual toddlers who fail to grow and mature. That is why we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to become spiritual parents to those who are new Christians.

James went on to give the cure to worldly wisdom beginning in verse six. James 4:6 says, “But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” The proud include those who are only professing Christians and those who have failed to grow to spiritual maturity. In the case of those who are only professing Christians, we want to help our children learn to explain the Gospel clearly to such individuals so that they can experience the grace of God. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Those who are only professing need to have the Gospel clearly explained so that they can be saved by grace through faith.

For Christians that are depending on their own strength and have remained spiritual toddlers, we need to help them obtain a spiritual parent. We want to help our children become spiritual parents and learn how to explain to such individuals the importance of humbling themselves before God by yielding to the Holy Spirit so that the Holy Spirit can change and transform their lives. In 1 Corinthians 4:16-17, we see that Paul sent Timothy to carry out such a ministry. Those verses say, “Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.” May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to minister to weak Christians that desperately need a spiritual parent.

Learning How to Develop Godly Humility

In our last topic, we saw that there are Christians that still live and act like the world. Some of these may only be professing Christians who have never placed their faith in Christ. However, others are spiritual toddlers who have never had a spiritual parent to love them, give them an example to follow and walk alongside them to help them learn how to understand the milk of the Word so that they can begin healthy growth. In order to help these weak and strength-less Christians in their spiritual growth, we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to become spiritual parents to such individuals. This will include helping these weak Christians learn how to develop godly humility in their lives.

Our last topic ended with the statement in James 4:6, “But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” Today, we will see that the Lord used James to give us ten commands that will help us develop godly humility in our own lives so that we can show our children how to develop godly humility and equip them to help others develop godly humility.

James 4:7 says, “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” In this verse, we are given two commands. The first thing that we are commanded to do is to submit to God. In the time of the New Testament, the word “submit” was used to speak of soldiers who were under the authority of their commanding officer. These soldiers submitted because that was their duty. However, as Christians we are to submit to God because of love. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:3-4, “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of *this* life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.” As a result, we see that the word “submit” means *to place your full potential at the disposal of another*. We choose to place our full potential at the disposal of God because He is the One that has given us everything that we have. We will see that the following commands tell us how to place our full potential at the disposal of the Lord.

The second command is to resist the devil. We are promised that if we resist him, he will flee from us. We want to help our children understand how to resist the devil. Peter used this same word when he said in 1 Peter 5:8-9, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” In these verses, we see how to help our children resist the devil. We see that we resist the devil by standing firm in the faith. When Satan tempted Christ in the wilderness, Christ just answered by quoting the Word of God. Satan left Christ as Christ continued to quote the Word of God. As we help our children memorize the Word of God, we are equipping them to stand firm in the faith.

James 4:8 gives us some additional commands when that verse says, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded.” Here, we see that we are commanded to draw near to God. We help our children learn to draw near to God as we help them to put into practice the words of Joshua 1:8 in their own lives. That verse says, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” We show our children how to think and meditate on the Word of God throughout the day and even the night. Then, we help them learn to obey the Lord by praying that the Lord will give them His strength to obey the Word of God.

As we show our children how to meditate on the Word of God, the Word will show us and them when we have sin in our lives. That is why we are commanded to cleanse our hands. 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” We want to help our children understand the need to confess their sins to the Lord so that they experience cleansing in their lives. At the same time, they are also commanded to purify their hearts. Psalm 19:14 says, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.” We want to help our children make it their goal to have the meditations of their heart please the Lord at all times. In doing this, they will become single minded instead of double-minded.

James 4:9 goes on to say, “Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom.” As we help our children learn to cleanse their hands and purify their hearts, there will be sins with which they will need to deal just as we have sins with which we need to deal in our own lives. The word “lament” means *to feel afflicted and miserable because of sin*. The word “mourn” is *our inner response of sorrow for our sin*. The word “weep” tells how we express that sorrow. Mourning and gloom speak of a turning from sin and a cleansing of the heart. Together, these words speak of the actions that show true repentance when we have allowed unconfessed sin to remain in our lives.

James 4:10 says, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” The word translated “humble” means *to make yourself low before God*. Christ gave us an example of a person humbling himself before God in Luke 18:13. That verse says, “And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’” In recognizing his sin, this tax collector humbled himself before God. God gives us a wonderful promise when we humble ourselves before Him. He says that He will raise us up to a place of dignity, honor and joy when we humble ourselves before Him. Peter said a very similar thing when he said in 1 Peter 5:6-7, “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” It is as we humble ourselves before the Lord that we realize how much He cares for us. This is important to help our children understand.

When we have a right relationship with the Lord, it will also help us to have a right relationship with others. James 4:11-12 says, “Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?” Here, we see that we are not to speak evil of one another. To “speak evil” means *to make statements against other Christians that slander or tear down their name*. Such words are common by those who are not Christians. However, as Christians, we are not to slander others.

God says that when we speak evil of a brother that we are actually judging that brother. Romans 14:13 says, “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in *our* brother's way.” In this verse, we see that there are Christians that do judge one another. That is why it was necessary for God to say that we are not to judge one another anymore. It is time to stop judging each other. We also see why we are not to speak evil or judge a brother. We see that such actions can be a stumbling block to other Christians. They can also cause a brother to fall. As a result, we will hinder or stop their spiritual growth.

We are also told that when we speak evil of a brother, we are speaking evil of the law and judging the law. James 2:4-5 says, “Have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love

Him?” Here, we see that we become judges with evil thoughts when we speak evil of a brother. Romans 14:4 says, “Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.” When we judge a brother, we are judging a person who is a servant of God. He is accountable to God just as we are accountable to God. In fact, God is able to make him stand so we are not to judge. That is why it is very important to help our children understand the danger of judging others.

When we judge the law, God says that we are not a doer of the law but a judge. This means that we have become guilty of breaking the law ourselves. We are not obeying the law because we are judging a brother. That means that we have become guilty before God. As James 4:12 says, “There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?” Here, we see a final reason why we are not to judge others. There is only one Lawgiver. That is the Lord. He is the only one who has the right to save or to destroy. When we speak evil against a brother, we have stolen the right that belongs only to God and tried to make it our right to judge a brother. If we are going to be an example to our physical and spiritual children, we must show true humility before God by not judging a brother or sister.

It is important for us to develop true humility before God so that we can show our children how they can develop humility before God. As 1 Peter 5:6 says, “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.” Our children will only learn how to humble themselves before God as they see our example. As they follow our example of godly humility, the Lord will bless both our lives and their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your physical and spiritual children by your example how to develop godly humility.

Learning to Seek the Will of God

One of the things that many Christians do is make their plans without asking the Lord for guidance. In our study today, we will see that there are even many Christians who can go for years without seeking the will of the Lord for their lives. As a result, it is important to help our children realize the importance of being guided by the Lord moment by moment. We will only help our physical and spiritual children realize the importance of being guided by the Lord as they see that we seek the guidance of the Lord in our own lives.

James 4:13-14 says, “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” Here, we see how part of the Christians were doing their planning in the time of James. They made their own plans and never asked the Lord if those plans were His will. That same thing happens frequently among Christians today. As a result, James uses what some of the Christians were doing to give us guidance about the way to help our children learn to seek the will of God moment by moment for their lives.

In the first phrase, we see that some of the people in the time of James were making plans that would last for a period of a year. It is not wrong to make plans. However, the thing that is wrong is to leave God out of our plans because we do not seek His will. In Philippians 2:12-13, we read, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.” As Christians, we see that we are not to leave God out of our plans. As Christians, God is working in our lives and through our lives to carry out His will. We need to continually seek His guidance so that we know His will for our lives. That way He will be able to accomplish through our lives what He has designed us to do.

We also see a second result when people leave God out of their planning. Here, we see that James was writing to people who planned to buy and sell and make a profit; the total focus of their planning was the material things of this world. There is no mention of planning for ministry and service for the Lord. Here, we see an important reason why it is important to help our children learn to include the Lord in all of their planning so that they make their service for the Lord a key part of their lives. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Our children will only do all to the glory of God when they include the Lord in their planning.

We are also reminded of the fact that we do not know what will happen tomorrow. Christ gave a parable to give a warning. Luke 12:16-21 says, “Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, *and* be merry.’” But God said to him, “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?” So *is* he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” A fool is a person who leaves God out of his planning. We need to encourage our children to remind others that they have no guarantee that they will be alive tomorrow.

We are also reminded that life is like a vapor. It appears for a little while and then vanishes. On a cold morning, you can see your breath for a second and then it is gone. In the same way, you can see a puff of smoke and then it disappears. That is what James reminds us our lives are like. Psalm 90:10 points out that even those who live a full life only live for a short period of time. That verse says, “The days of our lives *are* seventy years; and if by reason of strength *they are* eighty years, yet their boast *is* only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.” People who leave the Lord out of their planning act as though they never expect to die and are unprepared to meet the Lord when the day of death comes.

That is why James 4:15 reminds us as Christians of the way that we should plan. That verse says, “Instead you *ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” Here, we see that we need to realize that our plans will only happen if they are the will of the Lord. Paul gives us several illustrations of the fact that he based his plans on the will of God. In Acts 18:21, Paul told the Jews in Ephesus, “But took leave of them, saying, ‘I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.’ And he sailed from Ephesus.” Paul said that he would return again to Ephesus if that was the will of the Lord. Earlier, the Lord had forbidden him to go into the area of Asia which included the city of Ephesus. Acts 16:6 says, “Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.” We see that Paul did not make plans to go to Ephesus when the Lord had forbidden him to go to Asia at that time.

Later, Paul told the Christians in Corinth that he would come to them if that was the will of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 4:19 says, “But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power.” Paul also asked the Romans to pray for him so that he could come to them if it was the will of God. Romans 15:30-32 says, “Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.” Here, we see that Paul would come to visit the Romans if that was the will of God.

Paul was even ready and willing to die if that was the will of the Lord. Acts 21:12-14 says, “Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, ‘What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’ So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, ‘The will of the Lord be done.’” Paul did go to Jerusalem where he was bound and imprisoned because that was the will of the Lord. However, it was also the will of the Lord that Paul minister in Rome and so the prayer of the Romans was answered when Paul arrived in Rome as a prisoner about three years later. We want to show our children by our example the importance of seeking the will of God in our own lives.

We go on to see what God says about those who do not seek the will of the Lord in their planning for their lives. James 4:16-17 says, “But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin.” Here, we see that some of the people in the time of James were boasting in their arrogance. The word that is translated “arrogance” speaks about those who boast about their own power and resources. Their bragging words show that they are depending on themselves instead of seeking the will of the Lord. The only other place in the New Testament where this word is used is in 1 John 2:16 where it is translated “pride”. That verse says, “For all that *is* in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world.” Here, we see that those who are arrogant are controlled by pride. That is why God says that such boasting is evil.

The Lord has called us as Christians to do those things which are good in their character and beneficial in their effects. That is why it is so important for us to seek the will of God so that we know what He wants us to do. Our lives are like a vapor and they will be quickly gone. That is another reason why we want to show our children the importance of seeking the will of God throughout the time that they are here on this earth. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." This verse tells us that God created us to do good works. God wants both we and our children to have the privilege of carrying out those good works. If we are seeking His will daily in our lives, He will give us the time that we need to carry out the good works that the Lord has planned for our lives.

In contrast, if we are not seeking to do the will of God each day, we will fail to do the good things that God has planned for our lives. In addition to missing out on the blessings that the Lord gives us as we do His will, this verse reminds us that it is sin when we fail to do the good that the Lord has planned for our lives. There are two possible things that can happen when we fail to do good. First, we can waste the time that the Lord has given to us. Second, we might use that time to do evil instead. Either way God said that when we know the will of God and fail to do it that it is sin.

Here, we see that we want to show our children how to make wise use of their time so that they bring glory to the Lord. Ephesians 5:15-16 says, "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil." We want to help our children learn to make good use of the time that the Lord has given them on this earth to carry out the purposes that the Lord has for their lives. That will give their lives great meaning and purpose because they will see the Lord work mightily through their lives to accomplish His purpose. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children learn to seek the will of God for their lives.

Learning to Avoid the Dangers of Riches

In our last topic, we saw that we want to show our children how to do the will of the Lord in their lives. We saw that those who do not seek the will of God often base their plans only on their goals to gain the material things of this world. In fact, there are many Christians today who are more concerned about gaining riches and other material things than they are about doing the will of the Lord for their lives. In our topic today, we will see what happens when any person, Christian or non-Christian, chooses to base his or her goals on gaining riches and material things. This is important so that we can help our children learn to be content with what the Lord gives them and avoid the dangers of the love of money. We want them to realize they are stewards of any money that the Lord gives them.

In 1 Timothy 6:6-10, we see why God warns us about the dangers of riches. Those verses say, “Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of evil*, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” Here, we see that God warns that those who desire to be rich fall into temptation. They create a snare or a trap for themselves. They become controlled by many foolish and hurtful lusts that destroy them.

The dangers that are the result of the love of money caused James to write in James 5:1-3, “Come now, *you* rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon *you*! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.” Here, we see that James warned those who had a love of money that there would be miseries that would come upon them. We see that those who depend on riches can expect hardship and trouble to come into their lives. For those who are not Christians, this would refer to eternal judgment.

However, there are also Christians who do have a lot of money. For them it is important for them to realize that they are good stewards of the money that the Lord has given to them to use for His glory. Christ warned of the danger of riches when He said in Matthew 6:19-21, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Later, we see this illustrated in Mark 10:17-31 where we see that a rich young ruler left Christ when Christ asked him to choose to follow Christ instead of his riches.

In contrast, we see that when Zacchaeus chose to follow Christ in Luke 19:1-10 that it changed his attitude toward his riches. He immediately wanted to start using his riches to bring glory to Christ. In Luke 19:8, we read, “Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.’” Christ changed the heart of Zacchaeus. As a result, he had an immediate concern for the poor and he also had an immediate concern to become honest in his business dealings. As a result, Zacchaeus became a good steward of the money that he had. The rich young ruler and Zacchaeus demonstrate two very different attitudes toward riches. James wrote to warn those who made riches their master to cause them to examine their own heart attitudes.

James gave us several reasons why the rich would be miserable even while they were still alive on the earth. Some of their possessions would decay and rot. Their expensive clothing would be eaten by moths. Their gold and silver would become corroded. Here, we see that the riches of this earth are very temporary. Many times, earthly riches and possessions do not even last as long as the person who has them lives. God said that the corrosion and rust that their precious metals developed would be a witness against them. God said that the things that they got with their riches would consume their bodies. This speaks of the fact that many times the pleasures that go along with riches are actually destructive to the physical body.

In Luke 12:16-21, Christ spoke a parable about a rich fool. In this parable, the man had gathered great riches so that he could enjoy various pleasures for the rest of his life. Christ said in Luke 12:20-21, "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So *is* he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." Here, we see that the rich man planned to enjoy many years of retirement. He had provided himself with plenty so that he could have whatever he wanted. Many people, including many Christians, are doing the same thing today. God said the man was a fool because he would die that night and someone else would use all that he had gathered.

We also see how many of those who are rich have become rich. James 5:4 says, "Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth." Here, we see that many people have become rich by taking advantage of their workers. Today, many who do such things just think of themselves as smart businessmen. God says that they have gotten rich by fraud. He says that He has heard the cries of those of whom the rich have taken advantage. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." When we give an account before the Lord, we want to do so with joy because we have been faithful to the Lord in all areas of our lives including our money. We want that same joy for our children.

James tells us what the rich do with their money when they are not putting the Lord first in their lives. James 5:5 says, "You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter." First, we see that the rich have lived on the earth in pleasure. The Scripture tells us how to make wise choices. Hebrews 11:24-26 says, "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward." Moses recognized that there was pleasure in sin. He also recognized that those pleasures would soon pass away. As a result, he chose to suffer affliction rather than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.

Second, we see that the rich have lived in the earth in luxury. Solomon was very rich and enjoyed everything that his eyes desired. However, the book of Ecclesiastes shows us that those things did not bring joy to the life of Solomon. In Ecclesiastes 12:8, Solomon said, "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "All *is* vanity." The word "vanity" means *emptiness*. Solomon came to the realization that all the luxuries that riches could provide only filled his life with emptiness. As a result, Solomon concluded the book with a very important conclusion. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 says, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil." Solomon finally realized that only obedience to the Lord brought peace and joy to his life. Luxury could not satisfy.

Third, James said that the rich have fattened their hearts. The phrase "fattened their hearts"

meant that the rich lived totally to please themselves. They had looked for every possible way to live to please themselves and fulfill their own desires. James made an interesting comparison. People often feed cattle the best grain when they are preparing them to be slaughtered. James said that the rich were actually preparing themselves for the day when they would die and stand at the final judgment.

Fourth, James told how the rich treated the just. James 5:6 says, “You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.” In James 4, we see that those who do not live their lives to please the Lord find that their lives are filled with conflict. Here, we see that the rich are one of the primary sources of this conflict. The word that is translated “condemned” means to *pronounce a person guilty*. Here, we see that the rich will often take other people to court and try to get them pronounced guilty so that the rich can continue to get more for themselves. That is why 1 Timothy 6:10 says, “For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” The love of money will produce every form of evil.

Finally, we see that the rich will destroy others to get what they want. In James 2:6, we read, “But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?” The rich choose to dishonor the poor. They choose to oppress the poor and take them to court. Here, we see that riches continue to become more destructive. That is why 1 Timothy 6:10 says that riches cause some to stray from the faith.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn the danger of riches so that they can choose the things that are eternal instead of the things that are temporary. Then, they will be able to experience the blessing and joy of the Lord. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children the importance of placing the Lord first in their lives.

Learning to Be Patient

In our last topic, we saw that we need to help our children learn to avoid the dangers of riches. The riches of this earth are very temporary. In contrast, the rewards of the Lord are eternal. That is why we want to help our children learn to place their focus on the things that are eternal instead of the temporary things that will only last for a short time on this earth. It requires patience to keep our eyes on the things that are eternal because the rewards do not come immediately. As a result, one of the very important things that we want to show our physical and spiritual children is why it is important to learn to be patient. That will be the focus of our topic today.

James 5:7-8 says, “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See *how* the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.” In 1 Corinthians 13:4, we learn that the first characteristic of love is patience. Here, we see that James tells us how long we should be patient as Christians. He reminds us that we are to be patient until the coming of the Lord. This same word is used in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 where we read, “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.” Here, we see that we are to be patient with all. This means that we are to be patient with all people whether they are Christians or not. Since the previous verses talk about the rich, we are to be patient with others even when they take advantage of us.

James gives us an illustration of patience. The illustration is a farmer planting his crops. Christ used a similar illustration in Mark 4:26-29 where we read, “And He said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.’” A farmer waits many months after he plants the seed before he is able to harvest the crop. He has to show patience while he waits for the seed to grow and the fruit to develop.

James adds one additional thing to this illustration. He points out the fact that the farmer has to wait for both the early rain and the later rain. In the land of Israel, the farmers would plant their crops in the fall so that they would get the early rains that came in October and November. That was the rain that caused the plants to grow. Then, the later rain came in March and April. It was these later rains that caused the fruit to form and mature on the plants. Without the later rain, there would be very little fruit or the fruit would be very small. As a result, the farmer had to wait until he got the later rain as well as the earlier rain.

Just like the farmer, we are to be patient as we wait for the coming of the Lord. We also want to show our children how to serve the Lord as we patiently wait for Him. Galatians 6:9-10 says, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Together with our physical and spiritual children, we want to look for opportunities to do good as we wait for the Lord to come. As we have mentioned in other topics, the word “good” means *that which is good in its character and beneficial in its effects*. We want to practice this goodness toward all people whether they are Christians or not. This will help those who are not Christians to see love in action. It will help us to function as a body as we minister to Christians.

We are also told to establish our hearts. The word that is translated “establish” means *to strengthen or to make firm*. This word is used in 2 Peter 1:12-13 where we read, “For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding *you*.” Peter knew that the Christians to whom he was writing were established in the truth but he wanted to keep reminding them so that they would continue to stand strong. In the same way, we want to help our children continue to stand strong in the Lord and in His Word. As we minister to our children, we want to help them follow the instructions of 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 where we read, “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given *us* everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.” The Lord wants both us and them to have an effective ministry both by our words and by our works because the Lord is coming soon.

We are also told to avoid one thing as we wait for the coming of the Lord. James 5:9 says, “Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!” The word that is translated “grumble” means *to groan or to complain against each other*. Philippians 2:14-16 says, “Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.” We want to help our children learn to shine as lights in a world that is full of complaining. We will know that our lives have made an impact as we see our children shine as lights by sharing the Word of life.

We are also given Biblical examples by people in the Bible that showed great patience. James 5:10-11 says, “My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end *intended by* the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.” The first example that we are given of patience would be the example of the Old Testament prophets. Hebrews 11:35-37 gives us a short summary of what the prophets suffered when those verses say, “Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented...” In spite of what they suffered, the prophets showed patience and endured all of these things.

A second example is the example that was given by Job. One day, Job learned in just a very short period of time that all of his oxen and donkeys were destroyed, all of his sheep had been burned up, all of his camels had been stolen and all ten of his children had been killed. In spite of what he had just suffered, Job 1:20-22 says, “Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: ‘Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD.’ In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.” Here, we see that Job accepted with patience what God had allowed Satan to do in his life.

Later, Satan was allowed to cover the body of Job with boils. Then, his wife told him to curse God and die. Job 2:9-10 tells us the words of his wife and how Job responded, “Then his wife said to him, ‘Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!’ But he said to her, ‘You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips.” Here, we see that in

spite of what his wife had just said, Job showed patience by accepting the fact that he should accept adversity as well as good from God.

After losing everything he had and having his wife turn against him, the friends of Job came to visit him. They sat for seven days and said nothing. Then, for the next 35 chapters they took turns telling Job that he must be a very sinful man for God to do such things to him. In fact, part of them even claimed to have received a message from God. In spite of all the words that his friends had spoken against him, Job showed patience and did not blame God for his suffering. By what he did, Job gave all of us an example of patience even in the middle of suffering. Instead, by the end of the book, we see that Job had learned that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

James tells us one of the ways that we can show patience and show our children how to show patience. James 5:12 says, “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your ‘Yes,’ be ‘Yes,’ and *your* ‘No,’ ‘No,’ lest you fall into judgment.” Here, we see two ways that we can provide an example of patience to our children. First, we can show patience by avoiding any oath where we try to back our words by anything in the heavens or the earth. Second, we can show our patience by being people who keep our word. We are to be people who say “yes” only when we mean “yes” and say “no” when we mean “no”. Then, we put our yes or our no into action by doing or avoiding what we said we should do or avoid. In this way, we are giving our children an example of how to practice patience in their own lives.

The world around us does not model patience and it does not practice patience. Our physical and spiritual children will only learn to practice patience in their own lives as we give them an example to follow. As they see us model patience by waiting patiently just like a farmer waits, refusing to grumble and complain about others and follow those who showed patience in the Old Testament, our children will see how to practice patience in their own lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you provide an example of patience for your physical and spiritual children to follow.

Learning to Pray for One Another

In our last topic, we saw that we are to show our children how to learn to be patient. Patience is the first characteristic of love given in 1 Corinthians 13:4. We are actually showing our children how to love as we show them how to practice patience in their lives. There are many different situations where we need to show patience. In our topic today, we will see that we are to show our children how to pray for one another. One of the times when we need to show patience is when we suffer. As a result, we see that we begin the topic about praying for one another with the topic of suffering.

James 5:13 says, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.” The word that is translated “suffering” means *to suffer hardships or troubles*. The other three places where this word is used in the New Testament are all in the book of 2 Timothy. 2 Timothy 2:3 says, “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” When soldiers are on the battlefield, they do not have an easy life. They experience various hardships that they have to endure. As our physical and spiritual children learn to serve Christ, they will also have to endure hardships of various kinds. Here, we see that the Lord used James to tell us what to do when we are going through times of hardship or trouble in our lives. We see that we are to pray and ask the Lord for His strength as we endure various hardships.

We also want to help our children understand that they will experience times of great joy as they serve Christ. This verse also tells us what they should do in such situations. The word that is translated “cheerful” means *to be joyful, to be in good spirits, or to take heart*. This word is only used three times in the New Testament. The other two times are in Acts 27:22-25 where we read, “And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, “Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.” Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.” In these verses, it is translated both times “take heart” and has the thought to be in good spirits. At times, when our children have a joyful heart, we see that we are to encourage our children to sing praises to the Lord.

As we go on to James 5:14-15, we see what we are to do when someone is sick. Those verses say, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” The word that is translated “sick” here means *to be weak, to be without strength, to be powerless or to be sick*. This word is used thirty-six times in the New Testament. Several times, it is used when Christ healed a person who was physically sick.

However, many of the other uses of the word help us to understand the word more fully. The word is used twice in Romans 14:1-2 to speak about a Christian that is weak. Those verses say, “Receive one who is weak in the faith, *but* not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables.” In these verses, it talks about a person who is weak in their faith. Paul gives us an example to follow when he uses the word again in Romans 14:21. That verse says, “*It is good* neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor *do anything* by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.” Here, we see that we help weaker Christians by making the choice not to do anything that would cause the weaker brother or sister to stumble. Three times in 1 Corinthians 8:9-12 this word is

used to speak of a brother that is spiritually weak. We need to show an attitude of concern and helpfulness by our actions so that our children can learn from our example.

Paul also used this word when he was talking to the elders of the church at Ephesus. Acts 20:35 says, "I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'it is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Here, we see that Paul says that the weak can include those who need support of various kinds.

Paul used this word to speak of his own weakness in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. In those verses, we read, "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." Paul said that at the very time he was weak in himself, then the strength of the Lord was able to work most effectively.

As we said earlier, the word that is translated "sick" here means *to be weak, to be without strength, to be powerless or to be sick*. We see what a person is to do when he is sick or weak. James said that when a brother is weak or sick he is to call for the elders of the church and let them pray for him. Some Christians have only looked at these verses when physical sickness is involved. However, we see that the word is used many times to speak about spiritual weakness as well. We need to also encourage our children to ask the leaders of the church for special prayer when they are going through times of spiritual weakness just as Paul did. Through such a ministry, the elders will strengthen, encourage and comfort our children in their times of spiritual or physical weakness.

We also see that the Lord will respond to the prayer of faith. Since the elders are to be asked to pray, they are the ones that are to pray in faith. In addition to talking about salvation, this word can also talk about restoring to physical or spiritual health, to preserve a person in danger of destruction or to save a person suffering from disease. Whether it is physical sickness or spiritual weakness, we see that the Lord says that He will work in the life of the afflicted person as a result of the prayer of faith.

There are times when a person is experiencing physical sickness or spiritual weakness as a result of sin. In such a case, James 5:16 says, "Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." The word that is translated "trespasses" is the same word that is used in what is often called the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-15. It is also the word that is used in Ephesians 1:7 where we read, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." In this verse, we see that the word is translated by the word "sins".

Many times, a Christian will have a struggle with a particular sin even though he or she is a Christian. In such a situation, this verse says that they are to ask the elders or even another Christian to pray for them so that the Lord will give them victory over that sin. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 says, "Two *are* better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him *who is* alone when he falls, for *he has* no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm *alone*? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a

threefold cord is not quickly broken.” When a Christian, who is struggling with a particular sin, is open and honest and shares that struggle with one or two others, they are able to pray for the person who is struggling. This can be a real ministry for our children to others also.

The Lord reminds us that He will answer when a Christian shares a struggle with a particular sin with one or two others in openness and honesty and they pray for the person who is struggling. Galatians 6:1 also tells us the attitude that those who pray should have. That verse says, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” Here, we see that the person or persons who are praying are to have as their goal the restoration of the brother or sister that is struggling. They are to show gentleness. They are to realize that they will open themselves to temptation if they do not have these attitudes. We want to help our children realize that they can have a great ministry of helping others if they will pray for others with the right heart attitudes.

We see that the key in prayer is that the person or people who are praying are righteous. The word that is translated “righteous” means *one that is approved or acceptable to God*. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Then, 1 John 3:7 says, “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.” The Lord placed His righteousness on us at the moment of salvation. As our children learn to be obedient to the Lord, they are practicing righteousness. Here, in James, we see that one of the ministries that God will give those who are walking in obedience is the opportunity to pray for Christians who are struggling

God promises that the prayer of a righteous person will accomplish much. The word that is translated “effective” or “fervent” means *to work effectively*. Philippians 2:13 says, “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.” Our children will see the Lord work mightily through their lives to help others as they walk in obedience to Him and pray for others. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to have a very effective ministry as they pray for others.

Learning the Power of Prayer

In our last topic, we looked at what James wrote about praying for one another. We saw that James teaches several very important lessons about prayer. In our topic today, we will be looking at a related topic. We will see how to help our physical and spiritual children understand the power of prayer. This is important because many Christians have not developed to spiritual maturity. As a result, their prayer life often consists of praying primarily for their own needs and their own problems. Other Christians pray primarily for physical needs. We want to help our children understand the power of prayer so that they will learn to pray for spiritual needs as well as physical needs.

James 5:17 says, "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months." The first thing that we see in this verse is that Elijah was a man that had a nature like ours. The word that is translated "a nature like ours" means "*a nature that has the same feelings or affections*". In other words, Elijah was not a super saint. He was just an ordinary follower of the Lord like each one of us.

In fact, we see how much like us Elijah was when he was driven by fear. 1 Kings 19:2-3 says, "Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, 'So let the gods do *to me*, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.'" And when he saw *that*, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which *belongs* to Judah, and left his servant there." Elijah had been in Jezreel and he ran to Beersheba. He ran about one hundred miles because of his fear of Jezebel. This shows us that he could be controlled by fear just as we are controlled by fear at times.

Next, 1 Kings 19:4 shows that Elijah became suicidal. That verse says, "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, 'It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I *am* no better than my fathers!'" We see that Elijah asked the Lord to take his life. Here, we see that when any person becomes focused on their own problems, they can become very depressed and even suicidal. Again, this reminds us of the fact that Elijah had a nature that was just like ours.

Elijah continued on from there to Mount Horeb. This was the area where Moses had received the law many years earlier. When Elijah came to Mount Horeb, 1 Kings 19:9-10 says, "And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and He said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' So he said, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.'" In these verses, we see that Elijah got to the point where he felt like he was the only one left that was serving the Lord.

We see that more than three years and six months before Elijah had become controlled by fear and depression and focused on his own problems, he had prayed and the Lord had answered his prayer. We see that he had prayed earnestly that it would not rain. After his prayer, Elijah went and spoke to Ahab, the king of Israel. 1 Kings 17:1 says, "And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, '*As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.*'" God heard the prayer of Elijah and stopped the rain in Israel for three years and six months.

At the end of that period, Elijah challenged Ahab and the prophets of Baal in front of the people of Israel. Elijah told the prophets of Baal to build an altar and prepare a sacrifice to Baal and he would build an altar and prepare a sacrifice to God. Then, Elijah said that the God that answered by fire was the true and living God. The prophets of Baal cried to their god all day and got no response. Elijah then had twelve barrels of water dumped on his sacrifice and altar. 1 Kings 18:36-38 tells what happened next. Those verses say, “And it came to pass, at *the time* of the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, ‘LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You *are* God in Israel and I *am* Your servant, and *that* I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You *are* the LORD God, and *that* You have turned their hearts back to You again.’ Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that *was* in the trench.” Here, we see two things about Elijah. He was obedient to God. He prayed and trusted God to answer his prayer.

After telling the people of Israel to destroy the false prophets of Baal, Elijah prayed again. 1 Kings 18:43-45 says, “And said to his servant, ‘Go up now, look toward the sea.’ So he went up and looked, and said, ‘*There is nothing.*’ And seven times he said, ‘Go again.’ Then it came to pass the seventh *time*, that he said, ‘There is a cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea!’ So he said, ‘Go up, say to Ahab, “Prepare *your chariot*, and go down before the rain stops you.”’ Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel.” Here, we see that God answered his prayer by sending the rain so that the land became fruitful again. In each of the prayers of Elijah, we see the power of prayer when we come to the Lord in prayer.

James gave this illustration of how God will answer our prayers to teach us some very important lessons. We want to help our children understand these same lessons. James 5:19-20 says, “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.” Here, we see that it is possible for a weak or immature Christian to wander from the truth. Ephesians 4:14 says, “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.” Many times, new or immature Christians will be deceived by false teachers. Others can become controlled by fear and then act out of fear. In fact, Galatians 2:11-14 show us that even Peter and Barnabas had that happen in their lives.

Here, we see that any Christian that wanders from the truth either because of deception or fear needs to be brought back to fellowship with the Lord by someone who has a real concern. We want to show our children how to minister to such individuals by turning people back to a right relationship with the Lord when someone has wandered from the truth. The word that is translated “turn back” can mean to turn someone from a lost condition to salvation.

However, it can also mean to turn a person back to love and obedience to God. An example of this use is found in Luke 22:31-32 when Christ told Peter, “And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren.’” Christ said that He had already prayed for Peter and as a result He knew that Peter would turn back to Him after denying him. Peter felt like such a failure that he only felt that he could return to fishing which he and six other disciples did in the first verses of John 21. We see in that chapter that Christ went right to the place where Peter and the others were fishing to put His prayer for Peter into action.

Notice how Christ restored Peter and turned him back to love and obedience to God by what Christ did in John 21. Christ went to Peter and the other disciples where they were fishing. He

prepared breakfast for them. He gave them a great catch of fish. While they were eating, Christ never condemned Peter or the other disciples. Finally after the meal, Christ asked Peter one question in verse 15, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” At that moment, Peter had to decide whether he loved fishing more than he loved Christ. Even though Peter used a lesser word for love, Christ told Peter, Feed My lambs and tend My sheep the first two times Peter answered. The third time is recorded in John 21:17 where we read, “He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed My sheep.’” Here, we see that Christ restored Peter three times because Peter had denied Christ three times.

We see that Christ gave us a model that we can show our children about the way to restore a brother who has wandered away from the truth. Christ knew that Peter had experienced the words of Romans 7:24 which says, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” He did not need more condemnation. Just the look of the Lord in Luke 22:60-62 had already reminded Peter of his sin. Christ never had to even mention the fact that Peter had denied him three times. What Peter needed was restoration. He just needed to be reminded of his love for the Lord. He needed to understand that the Lord still had a ministry for him. As a result of this restoration, he was the one that preached on the Day of Pentecost just a few weeks later in Acts 2.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn the power of prayer. We want to help them understand how to restore a brother that wanders away from the truth and feels like a failure. As we show our children the power of prayer through our own example, they will learn to pray. As we show them how to restore other Christians, we will prepare our children for an effective ministry. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children by your example the power of prayer.