**Series Big Idea**

James, the half-brother of Jesus, shares wisdom on how to overcome challenges that can trip us up as Christ-followers and keep us from from growing to maturity.

James is the half-brother of Jesus. During Jesus’ ministry, James thought he was nuts. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, he is convinced that his half-brother is God and becomes the key leader of the church in Jerusalem. Ultimately, James is martyred when he refuses to recant his belief that Jesus is God. *(Note: As part of the intro/recap to each message, we’d like to share a unique insight about James from historical accounts.)*

**Series Scripture**

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. -James 1:2-4*

James writes to the first Christ-followers during a time when they were scattered around the region after fleeing persecution in Jerusalem. He shares wisdom on how these early Christ-followers can grow and flourish in their spiritual journey, becoming “mature and complete, not lacking anything” (1:4). In this short letter, he addresses a number of challenges that can trip Christ-followers up. Rightly navigating these “tests” will help a Christ-follower mature.

The word “testing” in our series verse is a term silversmiths would use. When they heat up the silver, impurities rise to the surface where they can then be scraped off. A silversmith would do this over and over again until eventually the silver was pure. The silversmith would know it was pure when he could look down and see his reflection.

God wants us to be a reflection of him...mature and complete. The challenges we face in our spiritual journey can purify us making us more and more like Jesus.

The letter of James is the closest thing we have to “wisdom literature” in the New Testament - it’s kind of like the “Proverbs” of the New Testament. The wisdom found in this short book is as relevant today as it was in the first century. It is easy to understand, but challenging to follow.

**Message 1  | June 24 | Temptation**

**Scripture:** James 1:1-4, 1:13-18

**Message Big Idea**

When it comes to temptation, it’s not an “if” but a “when,” and the key to maturity is how we respond.

*1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,* *To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:* *Greetings.* *2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. -James 1:1-4*

*13 When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.* *16 Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. 18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. -James 1:1-18*

**Message Description**

Temptation is part of the Christ-following life. Evil desires don’t leave us when we find our way back to God. Temptation is not an “if” thing; it is a “when” thing.

What is the origin of temptation? It’s in our nature to want to blame others, circumstances, or even God; but to effectively deal with temptation, we have to face the real source: the evil desires inside of us. The only reason something becomes a temptation is because we desire it.

The ESV translated verse 14: *“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.”* Picture a fish being lured by bait on a hook. James is trying to help us understand we have a choice in the moment of temptation. The moment you go for it, the moment you take the bait, you are on the path to “death.” You are headed for misery. Sin is not just a matter of right and wrong; it’s a matter of life and death.

In this message, we’ll want to help people recognize that someone is fishing for us and identify the “bait” we are susceptible to. We’ll want to provide practical application for how we can resist temptation, “swimming” away towards the good gifts of God so that ultimately we grow to maturity in our journey as Christ-followers.

Resource: Previous COMMUNITY message - “Are You Serious?” - Serious Temptation

**Docent Requests**

* Insights on James from historical accounts. What do we know about him from historians? Tradition? Could you list this out in bullet points and include in every brief for this series?
* Commentary on James 1:1-4, 1:13-18.
* Practical instruction/quotes from spiritual writers on resisting temptation.
* Interesting info on fishing lures. Why are there different lures for different fish?
* Lighthearted ideas for an introduction based on this idea of “temptation.”
* Insights from social science about why people give into temptation.

**Message 2  | July 1 | Favoritism**

**Scripture:** James 2:1-13, I Thess. 5:11, Romans 15:7, Philippians 2:35, Galatians 5:14

**Message Big Idea**

Loving all people as ourselves is a mark of maturity.

*My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,”4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?* *5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?* *8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.*

*12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment. -James 2:1-13*

*Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. -1 Thessalonians 5:11*

*Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. -Romans 15:7*

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus. -Philippians 2:5*

*For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” -Galatians 5:14*

**Message Description**

*"My brothers and sisters, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism." -- James 2:1*

Whenever James starts a sentence "my brothers and sisters" brace yourself!  He's talking about prejudice, partiality, favoritism. The New English Bible calls it "snobbery". A snob is somebody whose nose turns up when their eyes look down, somebody who always thinks they're better than everybody else. The Greek word is a compound word that means "to receive" and "to face". It literally means "to receive somebody's face" -- to receive somebody at face value, on the basis of how they look, superficial judgment. James says, “Don't do that. Don't accept people based on superficial judgments.”

So what are some common areas of discrimination?

* **Appearance --** We discriminate often because of appearance. Beauty is everything in our world.
* **Ancestry --** We judge people according to their race, their nationality, their ethnic background.
* **Age --** You're too young or too old.
* **Achievement --** Our society gushes over winners and forgets the losers.
* **Affluence --** We judge people by their wealth -- whether they're rich or poor -- their economic status.

It's love that reaches people. You don't argue people into the kingdom of heaven. You love them into the kingdom of heaven.

How do you do that? Three steps:

**1.  Accept everybody.**

Do you know why people have a hard time accepting others? They confuse acceptance with approval. There's a big difference between acceptance and approval. You can accept somebody without approving of his lifestyle. He may be doing something totally contrary to the word of God, but you can accept him as a person without approving of the sin he's involved in.

*"Accept one another just as Christ accepted you." -- Romans 15:7.* That's the start -- acceptance.

**2.  Appreciate everybody.**

This goes a little bit further than acceptance. Philippians 2:35 *"Do nothing from selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself. Each of you should look not only to your own interest but also the interest of others."* Appreciate everybody. Find something you can like, not just accept. Tell them so.

**3.  Affirm everybody.**

Give everybody a lift whenever you can. I Thess. 5:11 *"Encourage one another and build each other up."*  When people stumble, don't criticize, sympathize. Be an encourager not a complainer, not a condemner.

What is God saying in James? Absolutely nothing can stop the church that's filled with love. Nothing. It doesn't happen accidentally. It requires an all out effort by each of us. Everybody needs to contribute to the atmosphere of the church. Everybody here contributes to the atmosphere of the church either negatively or positively. Would people come back to this church just because of you?

**Docent Requests:**

* Commentary on James 2:1-13.
* National or regional statistics regarding discrimination.
* Humorous examples of favoritism gone wrong.
* Neurological research explaining what happens in the brain when we discriminate (or why we’re prone to do it in the first place)
* In what ways was the early church/early Christians breaking down walls of prejudice?
* Word pictures/analogies for what James is talking about in James 2:1-13

**Message 3  | July 8 | Words**

**Scripture:** James 3:1-12, Luke 6:43-45, James 1:19

**Message Big Idea**

Our words are powerful and reflect the depth of our maturity.

*Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. 2 We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.*

*3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. 5 Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.* *7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.* *9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. 11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? 12 My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. -James 3:1-12*

*43 “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. 44 Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briers. 45 A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. -Luke 6:43-45*

*19 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry… -James 1:19*

**Message Description**

Nothing in our lives is harder to control and bring under obedience to God than our words. James opens this section of the letter by reminding us…

Words are Problematic (v.1-2)

Every one of us will stumble with our words from time to time. This should serve to us as a caution to be more careful about the words we say. We live in a day when most people feel it’s their “right” to speak their opinion, to give advice, to instruct. Everyone wants to be “the teacher.” James is warning us about taking on that responsibility lightly. Why should we be cautious? Because…

Words are Powerful (v.3-8)

One careless word can destroy a relationship. One slight exaggeration can ruin someone else’s reputation. One insensitive sentence can send someone into depression. James uses several analogies to illustrate the power of our words.

How can we at one moment use our speech to celebrate God and at another moment tear a person down? James says it’s because there is evil in our own hearts that needs to be cleaned. He echoes Jesus’ own teaching in Luke 6:43-45 to remind us…

Words are Revealing (v.9-12)

During this message, we’ll challenge one another to examine our own hearts. If we find ugly words coming out of our mouths, it should cause us to ask: What in my own heart isn’t right?

No one can ever be perfect in all they say, but James 1:19 may provide a great filter to guard our speech.

Resource: Previous COMMUNITY Message: “Are You Serious” - Serious Talk

**Docent Requests:**

* Commentary on James 3:1-12, Luke 6:43-45, James 1:19.
* Insights that further illustrate the analogies of v.3-8. (i.e. How big is a ship’s rudder in relation to the size of the ship? Description of a great forest fire that was traced to something like a cigarette butt or an unattended campfire.)
* Modern day examples of the destructive power of words (i.e. Examples of where words destroyed lives, started riots, etc.)
* Practical instruction/quotes from spiritual writers on “taming the tongue.” James says it is impossible for the tongue to be fully tamed, but are there things that can help us guard our speech more carefully?

**Message 4  | July 15 | Pride**

**Scripture:** James 4:1-10

**Message Big Idea**

Maturity means humbling ourselves and drawing near to the God who draws near to us.

*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.4 You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? 6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”* *7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. -James 4:1-10*

**Message Description**

We all feel the swirl of desires within us that cause us to fight for our own good and pleasure. There is an emptiness within us that we are trying to fill. And this quest for fulfillment leads us to push and shove those around us in an effort to get the best and the most for ourselves. This is the way of the “world” meaning the way the world behaves and if we aren’t intentional, we will default to it.

There is a name for this fighting game we play. It’s called pride.

Pride is the arrogance that says my desires come first, my cause is most important...so much so that it’s worth fighting and killing for. Pride is extremely dangerous because as the church father Augustine said: “Pride is pregnant with all other sins.”

James responds to this display of pride with the charge: “You adulterous people!” Why the charge of adultery? Because when we look to the things of this world to bring us fulfillment, we betray the true lover of our souls...God.

God longs for exclusive friendship with those he has made in his image. He is jealous for us. He wants to be the one who fulfills us. He offers us this amazing, intimate relationship with himself, but too often we turn around and look to be fulfilled with someone or something else. We betray the one who loves us most.

Maybe you’ve spent your whole life rejecting God and chasing things of this world? The good news? “...he gives us more grace.” At any moment, at any time, we can choose to come back to God. What does James tell us to do? Submit yourself to God. Resist the devil. Draw near to God.

NT Wright: “God is ready and waiting. He longs to establish a friendship with you, a friendship deeper, stronger and more satisfying than you can ever imagine. This, too, will take time, as any friendship worthy of the name will do. But what could be more worthwhile?”

This message would lend itself well to a FYWBTG/Baptism Ask. Locations should schedule a baptism date within the following month.

**Docent Requests**:

* Commentary on James 4:1-10.
* Examples of the “king of the hill” mentality in our culture (could be lighthearted, ridiculous, or serious).
* More material on this concept that “Pride is pregnant with all other sins” from Augustine himself or other spiritual writers commenting on the quote.
* Practical instruction/quotes from spiritual writers on what it means to “Submit yourself to God. Resist the devil. Draw near to God.”

**Message 5  | July 22 | Wealth (Senior Send Off)**

**Scripture:** James 5:1-8, Matthew 6:19-21

**Message Big Idea**

When it comes to our maturity, wealth can either be a snare or a tool.

*Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. 2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. 4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. 5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.6 You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.* *7 Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. 8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near. -James 5:1-8*

*19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. -Matthew 6:19-21*

**Message Description**

Passages like this one from James 5 can illuminate a major challenge that keeps us from growing to maturity. The danger is often we read passages like this and don’t think they apply to us. Yes, James is speaking to the rich, to those who were taking advantage of the poor, but there are warnings here every one of us needs to pay attention to.

We live in a time when a lot of us are pretty well off, and those riches can actually be a distraction from the things God wants for us. It’s so easy to be drawn to the lure of “self-indulgence.” James is warning Christ-followers against setting their sights on living a life of comfort.

Once James became a believer in Jesus, he wholeheartedly believed that Jesus had launched a new kingdom. He viewed time as “the last days” because he lived with an awareness that Jesus would be coming again at which time the kingdom would be fully restored “on earth as it is in heaven.” During these “last days,” one of the most foolish things a person could do was store up riches for themselves. His teaching here echoes back to Jesus’ own words in Matthew 6:19-21. It is a sharp warning about pursuing careless luxury. James is saying, “Your assets will become liabilities because you have laid up treasure for yourself.”

Understand, wealth in itself is not evil. However, wealth can be used wrongly or rightly.

In this message, we’ll want to make sure people understand this warning isn’t about being legalistic; it’s about making sure we’re people who live as if we’re not attached to this world. Jesus wants to save us from living self-centered, self-indulgent lives that are only for ourselves. Instead, let’s encourage one another to be people who live in light of Jesus’ return.

When we live with this kingdom perspective, we realize it doesn’t make sense to store up more and more for ourselves when there are people in need today, when there are people who need to find their way back to God.

**Docent Requests:**

* Commentary on James 5:1-8, Matthew 6:19-21.
* Examples of extreme luxury and self-indulgence from popular culture (not connected to an individual, but in general).
* Historical background - How were the rich exploiting the poor in James day?
* Current statistics showing the wide gap between the world’s rich and the world’s poor. Examples of exploitation and systemic inequality that reinforces this gap.
* Examples of how we as consumers might be unknowingly supporting these inequitable systems.
* Insights from spiritual writers on the wrong use vs. right use of wealth.