

SOUTHWESTERN ASSEMBLIES OF GOD UNIVERSITY  
HARRISON SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

LDR 5253-530

INSTRUCTOR:

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ASSIGNMENT: Book of James Devotional - Journal

STUDENT DATA:

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### **Journal #1 - Scripture: James 1:2-18 NLT**

James talks about a faith that endures in the middle of challenging situations. How fitting because the history of the Christian people is one plagued with complex events. The struggles we face today might not be the same ones that the Christians in the first century endured. However, from social distress to individual circumstances, the essence of the command is the same: persevere in tribulation, and if you need the wisdom to sustain you, seek it from God.

On Sunday, I prayed with a couple in the middle of many difficult choices; she had health issues, he needed help in his career, and they were also in the process of adopting a baby. They have faced adverse situations in every one of those areas of their lives in recent months and just needed someone to pray with to seek God's guidance. I started thinking about their requests. What if God does not help that couple? What if she never recovers her health, he does not find what he is looking for in his career, and their adoption does not go through? Would God be evil because He let all of these things happen? And if we know there is a possibility that he might answer no to their requests, should that keep us from praying with faith that God would move?

Sometimes God's answer is yes, sometimes it is a no, and other times it is a wait, not yet. Although, in any case, temptation and adversities do not come from God. Yet He can find a way to use our hardships and disappointments to work in us and through our circumstances. If it is true that we became His prized possession, as verse eighteen points out, then I know He is the kind of God that will do good by His word. Even if the outcome is not what I expected, I understand He is working inside me to turn me into who He wants me to become.

### **Journal #2 - Scripture: James 1:19-27 NLT**

**Quick to listen.** Denotes paying attention to what others say, not regarding ourselves as too important to the point that we speak over people instead of letting them express themselves.

Quick to listen implies active listening; it demonstrates that the person hearing does his part to understand. **Slow to speak.** Allowing time for our thoughts to process helps create a speech that honors God. Letting the Holy Spirit have the first word from our mouth instead of speaking from our sinful condition indicates spiritual maturity. A reminder that before we speak words, we are their master; once we say them, they master us. **Slow to get angry.** Our words often evolve into negative actions when we speak without giving them a second thought. Interesting that it says “slow to get angry;” it does not say never get angry. There is a place for anger, but we should not enter there too fast.

However, our actions must go beyond that, for the Christian life encompasses much more than listening, minding our speech, and avoiding negative actions. The point is not only to prevent walking down wicked ways. Our active listening needs to show its fruit in the kind of work we do. Active listening of the word must create a desire to do good for others. If I only attend a church gathering because I want to listen to the word, but nothing happens, then I listen in vain. The purpose of listening to the word of God is to experience transformation into the image of Jesus, to the point that I do what he would do and love on who he would love (v. 26 - 27).

My prayer today, Lord, help me be a doer of your word and not just a passive listener. May your presence in my life reflect how I speak and interact with others. And let it shape my future to the point that I seek to honor you with every fruit of my life.

### **Journal #3 - Scripture: James 2:1-13 NLT**

How can you say you are a follower of Christ if your life does not show evidence of what you say you are by how you treat others? James calls them brothers and sisters who claim to believe in Jesus. Yet, their fruits did not match what they were preaching. They showed

favoritism in their acts towards the elite instead of seeking to welcome the poor. With his salutation, James is asking them, do you think your partiality pleases the Lord? God chose the poor to be rich in faith (James 2:5, NLT), so why would we, as humans, contradict God's desires? Do you not remember Jesus telling us to love our neighbor as ourselves? I am guilty of this; sometimes, I judge with my sight.

I recently discovered that "the human body has about eleven million sensory receptors. Approximately ten million of those are dedicated to sight" (Clear, 2018, p. 84). So even though we have five senses, our sight has the most sensory receptors. No wonder why our sight often fools us. And why we should live by faith and not by sight. We see people dressed in fine clothing, and we tend to like them or think that they must have their lives in order because they look nice. As a young professional, people advise "make sure always to look the part," "dress for success," or "dress for the job you want, not the one you have."

We are often fooled by what we see, yet God does not look on the outside; He looks in the heart. God has called us to do the same; to love our neighbor. He has called us to love our homeless neighbor, our weird neighbor, our neighbor who has sinned. When we judge by sight, we do not let the character of our neighbor speak, as we give more importance to his appearance.

Lord, help me love and embrace everyone. Help me not to make any distinctions of people based on their appearance. Keep my heart pure as I meet new people, may it not be to climb a status ladder, but to show your love and mercy to everyone.

#### **Journal #4 - Scripture: James 2:14-26 NLT**

Faith without actions is not complete. We need to show evidence of the inner work of Christ in ourselves by how we treat others. For God did not come to do a secret work in us, the fact that it is personal does not mean we should not live it out in public. His work is personal but

not private. So if we say we love God but show no evidence of how we love our brothers and sisters, then we are not living out that love.

James explains how Abraham's actions completed his faith (vs. 22). Faith without works means no action is happening in us because of what we believe. If we do not show compassion because of our faith, do we believe what we say we believe? On the other hand, works without faith are also death because we would toil in vain. In the example of Rehab (vs. 25), she did not merely hide the spies because she was a good person; she did it because she believed in the power of their God and turned away from her past life. So coupled with faith, our actions take on a different higher purpose.

Finally, the author compares our works as a response to our faith, to the vital act of breathing. Just as we cannot live without breathing, we cannot be faithful followers of Christ without good deeds following our faith experiences. The world is tired of people who only talk and do nothing to help their neighbors. Unfortunately, pastors are not exempt. Often we speak more than we are willing to help others (not always, but I have seen cases). Although we usually encourage others to give to the poor, this should not exempt us from giving. We cannot think that the end of our responsibility is urging others to give; we must share our resources. It must cost us something.

### **Journal #5 - Scripture: James 3:1-12 NLT**

Teaching the word carries weight. So controlling what comes out of our mouths as teachers and pastors is crucial. Words can transform moods and environments; therefore, we must use them wisely when speaking them from a pulpit. Christian leaders need to guard their thought life; anything from their mouths reflects what went into their minds. James said, "if we

could control our tongues, we would be perfect..." (vs. 2). So we need to be careful of our words, for they can destroy our rapport if we misspeak. Our words can corrupt our works.

Our mouth is strong, and misusing it can impact every single area of our life. Therefore, we cannot overlook the impact of our words on other people. The wrong word at the wrong time can cause much trouble and even end relationships.

Often when we are negative, we focus on the wrong things. We tend to speak out of the abundance of what is overtaking our hearts. The wisdom writer says, "The lips of the wise spread knowledge, but the hearts of fools are not upright" (Proverbs 15:7). And Jesus reminds us in Luke 6:45 NLT that "an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart." Our output problem is an input problem. With what are we filling our hearts and minds? Are we binge-watching TV more than growing our minds and hearts to align with Jesus? If we intend to edify and build the next generation, we need to heed the advice that what comes from our mouths is essential. To watch what comes out of our mouths, we need to be exclusive with what goes in our minds.

Prayer: Lord, help my focus be on the things above. If I focus on heavenly things, I will have little care for the temporal. If I focus my mind on you, then my mouth will follow. Help me to speak words of wisdom to edify others.

### **Journal #6 - Scripture: James 3:13-18 NLT**

There is a distinction between our carnal desires and the wisdom from above. In our flesh, we are selfish. We turn "bitterly jealous" as we have "selfish ambition" (v. 14). Such actions are "unspiritual," and the author even categorizes them as "demonic" (v.15). When we turn inwards and only procure our benefit, we stop caring about others. In such cases, good works and humility are not our distinct characteristics.

However, there is a difference when we receive “the wisdom from above” (v. 17). We turn from acting selfishly to seeking peace to letting others shine. When we walk in this type of wisdom, we show more love to others and mercy. Grace is giving what someone does not deserve; mercy is withholding what they do deserve. So, if someone acted nasty against us, spread false rumors about us, and hurt us, “the wisdom from above” invites us to give good for evil, to serve ourselves to them on a silver platter. Godly wisdom will make us peacemakers and not quarrelers.

God’s wisdom does not pick favorites; instead, it is objective and sincere. In the passage, the author pits wisdom against jealousy. Wisdom creates peace, jealousy leads to disorder, to evil of every kind. But the wisdom from above produces peace in a person and their realm of influence.

Do you want more peace? Seek it! God will grant it. The reward for those who “plant seeds of peace” is a “harvest of righteousness” (v. 18). There are ways that look right to humans; those paths, however, lead to selfish ambition. But when we seek the way to God’s wisdom, He promises to show us the way to everything else. His wisdom helps us become whom he calls us to become, not just for our good but for the good of those with whom we live.

### **Journal #7 - Scripture: James 4:1-10 NLT**

Our natural desires are at odds with how God wants us to live. This inner war in ourselves spills out into others. What we say and do in public is a byproduct of our internal thoughts. In this passage, we again see that the root of Christians quarreling with other Christians is jealousy (v. 2). They count themselves as part of the church, but their methods and actions reflect the world’s way. They scheme and plot to do evil things. God is not blessing them, not

because they do not ask, but because even when they ask, they come before him with the wrong motives (v. 3). Their actions are at odds with the nature of God (v. 4).

However, no matter how many mistakes they have made, God is ready to extend His always sufficient grace. James says, “Come close to God, and God will come close to you” (v. 8). When people far from God humble themselves before God, he is merciful and draws near. He is readily available to forgive if sinners come to Him because He is a loving father.

He listens if we call Him not to make our fleshly desires come true but to accept His will in our lives. However, it is hard to go near God when you run a hundred miles an hour in the wrong direction. Pride keeps people away from God because pride makes humans feel as if they do not need a savior. But our actions by themselves are evil. We cannot outrun our sinful desires if we continue to rely on our strength. However, when we run to God, he accepts us and takes us in. He gives us a new name and calls us His. He changes our scheming ways the same way He changed Jacob’s name. So we go from cheating, and scheming evildoers, to being called triumphant with God.

#### **Journal #8 - Scripture: James 4:11-12 NLT**

Even seasoned believers can, from time-to-time fight with each other. A quarrel starts with something inappropriately said by a party; then, it escalates when it gets to the other party. Before they know it, they are fighting in front of the whole world to see. This happens online often. Someone will share a post raving about a particular topic, and someone else brings their opposing viewpoints to the discussion, and before long, a controversy takes place.

God’s word invites us not to speak evil against others (v. 11). Our job as Christ’s followers is to obey His commands and see everything we do through the lens of the Great Commission. Next time we are in a heated argument, we can ask ourselves, “do these words help



advance the Great Commission? Or do they deter it?" It is often a tiny word that makes us deviate from our focus. Gossip and slander start with simple words and misunderstandings that turn evil when we let our human nature take over. But God is inviting us to take the higher road.

We often think we should secure our vengeance in our human nature and understanding. We believe that if someone speaks ill against us, we must reciprocate with even nastier words. However, vengeance is the Lord's. It is not our place to seek it. It is, however, our place to bring those people in front of the father in prayer. What would happen if we prayed over those who say ill statements about us? The Lord could reveal to us that those people are just hurting like everyone else. When we go to the Lord for these people, he might even burden us to see their well-being.

How contradictory is the way of man to the way of God? For His kingdom is the kingdom of the reverse. If you want to go up, you must go low. If you want to be first, you must seek to be last. If you want to live, you must die to your human nature. It is not easy to not fight evil with evil. Therefore, let us ask the Lord for perseverance to do His will.

#### **Journal #9 - Scripture: James 4:13-5:6 NLT**

Here is a warning about the power of our tongue; it makes us boast about our strengths and plans (4 v. 16). As someone who studies leadership in these academic courses, I am more comfortable now to start articulating vision statements and mission purposes. These classes taught me about casting vision and acting more strategically. So all of that is a must. However, this passage is a great reminder that God has the last word. We cannot exchange the temporal for the eternal.

In chapter five, he warns rich people of their possession's effect on them. If you count on your wealth as your ultimate security source, you will be utterly disappointed. Riches on earth

are not as secure as some would think. And not only that, but they are the source of deep frustration for most people. Loving riches and earthly possessions more than loving others leads to an empty life that is eaten away by excess wealth.

Most of us look through this passage and can think of three or five, or maybe a hundred, people with more wealth than us. Because of that, we often believe that passages about the wealthy do not apply to us. However, when we look at global demographics, people in the USA are economically on the top. So, when we consider that globally having running water at home, a functioning car, and food on the table are luxuries, we can understand that these passages apply to our lives. The problem is that we compare ourselves to people who have ten times what we have, but the reality is that compared to the rest of the world, we are already wealthy.

It is not a guilt trip, but understanding this reality can help us identify the hold that riches have on our hearts and minds. I do not want this corroded treasure to testify against me. (5 v.3). So what can I do? I need to start by offering it to God. God can redeem my wealth (as little or as much as I have) and use it for His glory. Just like the little boy with the five loaves and two fish, he can make my little much when I let Him redeem it.

#### **Journal #10 - Scripture: James 5:7-12 NLT**

This passage is a call to patience. Yes, patience is a fruit of the Spirit, but we can argue that it is one of the hardest to master. We like things to happen for us quickly. We ignore the seasons. Yes, God can do the miraculous, but He also has a process. No patience equals conflict—people who struggle with patience often run their mouths or lash at people. People with patience-related problems tend to get mad at each other. They tend to grumble against the people for whom they need to be praying.

And regarding our prayers, no patience leaves little room for prayer. Or we pray drive-through prayers, expecting immediate responses. But what if the Lord delays his response? James shows that patience is suffering. Just like Job endured every kind of calamity imagined. It is the kind of patience that Joseph had when he was thrown in prison unjustly; he endured that time. The type of patience David had when he was running from Saul after he had been anointed – he had many opportunities to kill Saul but decided to be patient. And Jesus, Hebrews 12:2 says, “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.” He was patient even on his path to death. He is the prime example that patience is suffering.

There is a reward for patience. It is not that everything will turn out the way we want it. Or magically, we will have everything we want. The reward for patience is not that God is a genie but that He is good. Surely the goodness of the Lord will follow those who learn patience.

#### **Journal #11 - Scripture: James 5:13-18 NLT**

This scripture reminds us of the power of prayer. God is listening to our prayers and wants to answer us because he is a great father. Are we going through hardships? (v 13) Pray! He will listen to you. He will be your refuge in times of trouble. Are we experiencing happiness? (v. 13) Then also pray. We seek God when we're in the valley, but we leave Him out when we experience His goodness; we often limit it to a “Thank you, Jesus!” expression and continue with our day. God doesn't want us to turn to Him only when experiencing hardships; He wants us to remember Him in the good as well.

Prayer is miraculous. Lately, I have been praying more in the Spirit. Recently I was having a conversation with my dad, who has been a Pentecostal pastor for fifty years, and He told me, “I pray every day in the Spirit.” He said, “after I pray in the Spirit, even heavy loads get lighter.” And I have been putting it to the test. I can attest that it is true.

Prayer is a discipline with which I have historically struggled. When too many things are pressing you, it is hard to make time. However, the last few weeks of praying in the Spirit have shown me that I cannot afford to start my day any other way. My mood improves when I pray. My outlook on life gets tremendously positive when I pray. God is burning a fire in me to seek more of His presence.

### **Journal #12 - Scripture: James 5:19-20 NLT**

These two verses convicted me. Was James talking about someone specific when he talks about those who wander off? I thought of somebody when I heard it. Someone I have not spoken to in a very long time. He used to go to church. He used to play in the worship team. But he decided church wasn't for him. One day he left. However, the decision was probably festering in his heart for some time.

It was fine at first. I understand, he's busy at work. I'm glad he is getting more responsibilities at work. That is good. What a blessing! Didn't we pray for him to find a job that would pay him well? He did! We had prayed about it just a few months ago. And now the blessing we prayed for became the excuse not to come. But it wasn't about the job. He had been thinking about dropping from church for a while; this was just the excuse.

I was frustrated when I realized he wasn't coming back to church. So I tried to bring him back. I promise I did! I texted him and called him. But nothing.

James 5:19-20 reminds me that I need to try again. God is not done with the life of my friend. I need to become a bridge of reconciliation between him and God.

## Reference List

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