

Final Exhortations

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[0 : 0 0] Hey, how's everybody doing this morning? Good? All right, good. Fine. Good morning, everyone, both everyone here and listening online this morning. My name is Elliot. I'm one of the pastors here. So good to be together with you. And today we're actually going to be wrapping up a series that we've been doing in the book of James. So we've been looking through the wisdom for life that James has. Next week, you know, kind of our bread and butter here as we go through books of the Bible. So this week we're going to be concluding James. And then next week we're going to be moving into the book of Nehemiah, which is a really interesting book that we're excited to kick off. But today we've got the final installment of the James series. And just frankly, what you're going to see is we've got a lot of ground to cover here at the end. And this part of the book seems as all over the map as the rest of it. So if you remember, as we've talked through the book of James, this book really reads a lot more like kind of a set of Proverbs. Like if you've ever looked in the book of Proverbs, how it seems to jump around to different topics. And you kind of have to read this book a lot more like a father passing on wisdom to his children than like a thesis on one particular subject. And the ending of it is no different than the rest of it. In fact, this might be the most James portion of the book. Okay. So we're right in the middle of chapter four. We're going to go all the way to the end. So everybody kind of get loose, right? We're going to try to go through that together. All right. So we're going to pick up in chapter four, verse 13. And the next section actually does really tag on to what we've seen in the last few chapters where James has kind of been warning us about a couple different things, right? He's been talking to us about how dangerous our tongues are and what they can do to ourselves and others. The dangers of being friends with the world, kind of cozying up to the things that are opposed to God. The danger of fighting amongst one another. And to kind of close out the book, he's got two final warnings, like two things that wisdom really cries out that you need to pay attention to. But then after that, he's going to land the book with two very specific encouragements. And in some ways, he actually circles it all the way back to the beginning into what those, how he wants you to be encouraged. And so with that, let's just dive right into it. And I think the end of this book is actually helpful instead of just reading it all the way through to just take it in a couple sections. Okay. So let's start with chapter four, verses 13 through 17.

You can read along. It'll be behind me if you want to see it there. So in James four, it says, Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and we'll spend a year there and trade and make a profit. Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that. As it is, you boast in your arrogance and all such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the thing, the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him, it is sin. So the first lesson James has for us in this section is actually a really hard one for us. James warns us that we are not in control. Now on the surface, I think that's something that most of us could at least intellectually acknowledge, right? So like if I asked you, do you really know what your life is going to look like five years from now? Or maybe if you're unconvinced, like if I flash back in time five years, would you imagine your life would look like what it does right now? Like I would guess something about that is different than you thought it was going to go, right? Like something about that is not something you would have dreamed of happening.

And so in our minds, we kind of know that, right? That we don't really have a grasp on the future. But this verse is here because even though we know it in our heads, this cuts at something deep in our heart that we hate to acknowledge, which is everything that happens to me is not up to me. I cannot control all the circumstances, all the outcomes in my life. But that does not stop us from trying. We do everything we can to try to live within a certainty we see instead of an uncertainty we

can't see. And because of that, like we're terrified of the fact that there's no way you can be sure, like you can guarantee your life is going to turn out like you hope it does. And so that's a fear that just kind of follows us around in our lives. And I think it leads us to tend to respond to it in one of two ways. And one of them is very clear in the verse.

[5 : 05] The first thing we just kind of do is arrogantly declare, I am in control. I got this. I'm going to make my plans. I'm going to chart my course. I'm going to make my own luck and nobody's going to stop me.

I'm going to accomplish. Like that's how you do it. Like you take the bull by the horns and you make it happen. You make your own destiny happen. It actually sounds a lot like in the gospels there's this story that Jesus tells of a rich man. And he gets richer and richer and richer. And so he's trying to figure out what to do with all his riches. And the kind of best thing he can come up with from his logic and his desires for the future is. I'm just going to build bigger and bigger barns to put all my wealth in. And then when it's all stored up I can say to myself, man I got a lot now. I can kick back and take life easy. That plan makes sense. I'm going to make that happen. Let's start on those barns.

And in the story God shows up and says about that, you will never see another sunrise. This is your last day here.

There's no way he would have prepared for that. We can pretend like we're in control but we all know ultimately we're not. And that's kind of the other, it actually dovetails into the other thing that this verse says is that when we're not arrogantly trying to control it we're really running around trying to find some way to pretend that our lives aren't a mist. That they aren't a vapor. Just to simply run away and not face that fact that God has only given you a short time here and you don't know exactly how long that time will be.

And you do that in all sorts of ways. There are unlimited ways you can cross into a fantasy world and not think about that. You can do that with sports. You can do that with video games. But you can also do that with things like your family. With your business.

[7 : 06] Like there are all kinds of ways to live in a reality that seems to give purpose but you're ultimately not facing the thing God wants you to. In the book of Ecclesiastes Solomon says this in chapter 7 verse 2.

He says, It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting for this is the end of all mankind and the living will lay it to heart.

Now Solomon doesn't say that because he's a guy that doesn't know how to party. Okay. And actually, in fact I'd wager most of Solomon's partying would make you blush.

Okay. Like Solomon is not a guy that doesn't know how to have a good time. And that verse isn't there to say it's better to be sad than happy. You should seek out sad and not seek out happy.

What the verse is trying to get at is there's something better that happens in the house of mourning, in the house of suffering, that doesn't happen in the house of feasting.

[8 : 09] And that is in the house of mourning you might actually learn something. When you are in a place of mourning, like when you go to a funeral, it is right in front of you.

You are forced to stop and face the fact that life is temporary. And when you do that, the reason it's better is because you might actually stop to start considering God in all your plans.

And the end of that verse is pretty blunt about that. If you know the right thing to do and don't do it. In other words, it's saying you have to consider God in all of your planning.

Like it's not just enough. Even if you're not actively doing evil, right? So like even if as you go through your life, you're not actively hurting people in your mind, you're doing good things.

God says if you're doing good things, but you have no consideration for what God might want you to actually be doing, you're missing the mark. We are not in control of our lives.

[9 : 09] And James wants us to know that because it's a really important point for getting where he wants us to get. And he doesn't stop there. In the next section, he turns his attention to something else.

And I'll be honest again, this is one of these things that seems really out of place. Like it seems like a hard gear shift, but there is a connection to what he just did. So in chapter five, verse one, he switches tone and he says, come now you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.

Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth eaten. Your gold and your silver have corroded and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. This is encouraging. You have laid up treasure in the last days. Behold the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you.

And the cries of the harvesters have reached the ear of the Lord of hosts. You've lived in luxury on this earth and self-indulgence and you've fattened your hearts in the day of slaughter.

[10:16] You have condemned and murdered the righteous person and he did not resist you. Now James' second word here again seems a little out of place, but it's meant as both a warning and an encouragement because while he warns us that we're not in control, James also reminds us that the wicked are not in control either.

Now there's this subtle shift in the verse that's easy to miss in that if you look at the rest of the verses in James, it's pretty clear he's talking to people who are believers, to people who are attempting to be disciples of Jesus because he almost always says brothers or brothers and sisters. And there's a subtle shift here in chapter 5 where that language goes away which probably means he's actually turning this critique to just the wicked rich, right? Like just the powers of this world that are doing wicked things with their power and position.

Now we're going to see in a moment there's a reason for that because this rebuke of those doing evil things with their power and position actually winds up being a great encouragement for those who follow Jesus.

But there's kind of a temptation I think to rush past this sort of prophetic verse here because honestly I think this might not resonate with us. I mean if it does, like if we read that and that describes you, right?

[11:39] Like if you know that you are doing wicked things and oppressing people, this verse is a warning. It says ultimately no one gets away with anything and there is a judge waiting at the door.

So if that does describe you and you have the grace to hear it, I would say turn from that. That is a very harsh verse that says you don't get away with it. But I think it's also easy to jump over the verse because you may read that and say well, number one, I'm not rich.

Or maybe you would say I am rich but I'm not taking advantage of my people. I'm doing this honestly. Or you would say I'm certainly not a murderer. So why is this speaking to me?

And if that's where you're at, I would say consider this. The context of this verse and who is kind of in view here wouldn't have been ambiguous to the hearers in this day, right?

So like the wealthy landowners in this particular political context, people who have all the stuff and cheat everybody else out of it and try to squeeze out every last cent for themselves, it is a well-known problem to everyone that kind of lives in this socioeconomic order you see in this time period, right?

[12:56] Like that, it wasn't some vague, you rich, like everyone knew who he was talking about. And so you might rightly ask, why does James, in a letter that's really intended to encourage followers of Christ, just kind of go off script here and seemingly just aim this shot at the unbelieving wicked rich?

And I think it is, what we see is it really is here for believers, as he's going to show us here, but it's important to note both what he says about that and what he doesn't say.

So he's told us prophetically the wicked rich, you don't get away with it, but then he tells you what that means to you as a believer. And the first thing he does, it's actually interesting, not what he says, but what he doesn't say.

So at the end of that, what he doesn't say is that you get to gloat because they're going to get theirs. And actually this is probably one of the most poisonous things we do kind of in our current political life, which is just, again, I guess I would think about it like this.

When you think about the things you're passionate about or that you want to push back on in this world, how many times does it cross into something that, like you're watching somebody that really frustrates you, right?

[14:14] Like, and they may actually be doing or advocating for something evil, right? And like you're watching them talk on TV, you're seeing your thing, and in your mind somewhere you're thinking, I can't wait until God shuts you up.

Or maybe in a less, a less noble moment, you're kind of thinking, I can't wait until you find out how really wrong you are and you suffer for it. How, till God gives you what you deserve.

A good, a good check for that is like if I were to ask you right now, like think of in your mind the person in power or the politician that you dislike the most and like whenever you think about that person what you hope happens to them.

This verse makes it very clear that God doesn't abide evil and he doesn't just let things slip by but the thing it doesn't say is that you get to gloat.

The Bible actually says God takes absolutely no joy in the death of the wicked. He says his longing is that everyone will turn and be saved.

[15:23] So wherever we're at, the thing he doesn't give us permission to do is go, I'm glad they're getting theirs. But that being said, he does offer this as an encouragement because he says if you are a follower of Jesus knowing that the wicked aren't in control either allows you to patiently labor on when it looks like the deck's stacked against you, right?

So when all the power and all the riches and all the currents that are in control in a culture make it look like they're holding all the cards, this reminds you that all the power and riches of this world will be made low before the Father and those who are low in Christ will be lifted up.

Douglas Moo on his commentary on the book of James actually quoting someone else, he says this, he says, James has a regard to the faithful that they, hearing of the miserable end of the rich, might not envy their fortune and also that knowing God would be the avenger of the wrongs they suffered, they might then be able to with a calm and resigned mind bear them.

And that's how he dovetails into the end of this book. He says, this verse isn't just a rebuke of the wicked rich, it's an invitation back to where we started the letters because once again, James calls us to be patient and steadfast just like he did in verse 1.

In James chapter 5 it says this, be patient therefore brothers until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth being patient about it until he receives the early and late rains.

[17:13] You also should be patient. Establish in your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another brothers that you may not be judged.

Behold the judge is standing at the door. And as an example of suffering and patience brothers take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold we consider those blessed who remain steadfast.

You've also heard of the steadfastness of Job and you've seen the purpose of the Lord how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. So notice again he switches back to be patient therefore brothers.

So now he's back to speaking to the primary audience here. And in this verse where he's calling us to be patient and steadfast there's a few themes that you see a lot in scripture one of them is this kind of key idea that they would have really understood about a farmer and rain about how there are things you can do and things you can take action on but there's other things you just have to wait patiently for.

You can sow like you can plant but you can't make the rain come and you can't get into the ground and make the seed grow right? Like you can see things you can do for the gospel but you still have to pray and trust that the Holy Spirit makes it grow right?

[18:31] And in this he takes us all the way back to this idea from verse 1 that you may not be in control but God is and he can be trusted and because he can be trusted you can remain patient and steadfast and then just like in verse 1 there's another parallel he says you know while you're being steadfast while you're being tested to remain steadfast you're going to run into a few temptations you need to avoid and one of those is pretty clear in the verse he says do not grumble against each other okay so you ain't got to be a biblical scholar scholar to unpack that okay do not grumble against each other it is a simple warning a simple admonition but it is especially hard to do when you're under pressure or even persecution right like when things are happy it is easy not to grumble when things are hard you get snippy at each other right and James says you gotta watch out for that that is a natural side product of when you are under pressure when you are under testing you're gonna be tempted to grumble at the people around you don't do it the other thing he gives us here is also very simple and also very hard to do he says you need to be consistent and dependable and true to your word

James chapter 5 verse 12 again feels like a gear shift but above all my brothers do not swear either by heaven or by the earth or any other oath just let your yes be yes and your no be no so that you may not fall under condemnation if you remember when we talked about the book of James how it's

so much mirrors stuff you see in the gospels and the sermon on the mount like this is pretty much word for word a passage that mirrors an earlier teaching of Jesus where he says just that let your yes be yes and your no!

setting up is this contrast between how you use words right like there's a way that you can move in this world with an integrity of speech that looks like you simply mean what you say and you do what you say right and that's kind of contrasted to what might look like the way you try to weasel yourself around a legal contract right like you try to if you've ever been in like a detailed legal dispute!

right like I mean you really get into the the marrow of like well if you look at subsection 5 paragraph B you know subsection C it clearly states that the word therefore like you're not trying to get at the heart of the thing sometimes you're actually just trying to see like how can we contort the words in a way that gets to an end we want to the only really example I could think of this maybe it's good one I don't know so in the scene where they get to this giant cliff and there's a rope and they're all trying to climb the rope to get to the top they've got her and so they look down and Wesley has grabbed onto the side of the cliff they thought he would have fallen but now he's grabbed onto the side and he's slowly starting to climb his way back up right and so they leave one of the bandits Inigo Montoya there with his sword to say okay if he falls cool if he doesn't when he gets up here cut him right and so they leave and Inigo is not a real patient man right so he's like kind of going over to the edge and he's like can you maybe hurry up here and he's like you know this is really hard so like if you want to throw a rope or something else useful down that would be helpful but other than that so they kind of get to this place where he's like well yeah I'll throw a rope down to you and he's like I mean you're trying to kill me how could I ever trust that right and they go these little interchange back and forth about how could I trust you in this and I give you my word is this and he's like no good and they just kind of go back and forth and then at the end of that interchange he says I swear on the sword of my father Domingo Montoya you will reach the top alive and when he says that Wesley goes throw me the rope and so he throws it over and he comes up to the top right and we resonate with that a little bit right like we get that because as you know in that movie like how important his father is to him like he takes that as a way to trust him but it really is kind of this picture of a world in which where nobody can be trusted like

[23 : 28] I need a little something else right it's like if you ask somebody to do something you're like are you going to do that and they're like yes I'm going to do it and you go do you promise it's like yes I promise you know like I mean if you have to say I promise and that's the only time it means anything I mean it's like everything else you say a lie right and that's a little silly but what he's what he's really consistency and integrity people don't have to wonder do you really mean that are you really going to keep your word right reliable truthfulness we are steadfast we do what we say we're going to do followers of Jesus don't need pinky swears okay you can be trusted people know where you stand we're steadfast and after he calls us back to steadfastness

James kind of takes us into the conclusion of the book and he lets us know that if you are living a life of patient steadfastness that is also going to lead to a place of hopeful prayer James calls us to a faith filled expectant prayer James chapter 5 verse 13 it says this is anyone among you suffering let him pray is anyone cheerful let him sing praise 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 one who is sick and the Lord will raise him up and if he has committed sins he will be forgiven therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed the prayer of a righteous person is powerful as it is working Elijah was a man with a nature just like us and he prayed fervently that it might not rain and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth and then he prayed again and the heaven gave rain and the earth bore its fruit

James gives us a very specific thing we can do to wrap up his book we can pray now I think it's important to note here that the prayer the passage about how you pray in here is not really intended to be a textbook or a process for how you guarantee success right like this isn't intended to be like you do x and then you do y and you throw a little oil on it and boom you get what you want we know that because if you look at the entire context the entire conscious of scripture that's not how God always tells you to pray there are people who don't pray like that and it results in what God wants to accomplish it's not supposed to be like some mathematic formula that you follow but it is here to encourage you that you can trust that your prayers are powerful and effective I think one of the best ways I've really ever heard this described is that!

in our prayers we always pray with expectation but without agenda expectation in that we believe and we trust that God actually does hear and respond to our prayers right like if you don't believe God can or will do anything that is precisely what he will do nothing you have to pray with the trust of a good father that he does care but when we pray we also pray without our agenda in it right we pray with some humility that knows we can trust a God who know that we know knows more about us knows more about a situation than we do right like we know his timing might be different than we think it should be we know that God doesn't force himself on people like God comes where he's! you see in the scripture that like there's times where it says even Jesus can't do a healing in a place sometimes because nobody was open to it they didn't want it to happen so we trust that when we pray there will be times that it doesn't result in the healing or the restoration at that moment that we think but we can do that because we trust a good father will continue to hear us we talk about this a lot Jesse's mentioned before that so I've you know the last couple years I've just really been leaning into the idea of praying for healing over people right and part of that is just because I know how powerful that is like that might affect kind of our modern sensibilities a little bit but man if you look at the way Jesus moves particularly throughout the global church like there are a lot of people who are Jesus followers not because of some lecture they went to but simply because God healed them in a miraculous way or because Jesus appeared to them in a dream that kind of stuff we should welcome into

[28 : 49] God's fold because Jesus still wants to heal and hear prayers and you know what I can tell you is from leaning in that and praying and trying to pray in simple faith I have absolutely seen people report at that moment something chronic that they had is no longer a problem for you I can also tell you there are times that I've prayed over somebody over a period of time and things changed and there are also people that I have prayed over and that I desperately want to see relief from their pain and God hasn't done it yet the rhythm of our life however should be to ask and keep on asking there may there may actually be other practical things we can do as well so the oil is actually kind of tricky in this verse because if you look at oil in the ancient world it actually it can mean a lot of different things it can have a lot of different purposes and it's not 100% clear exactly what

James has in mind here right so like there's a certain way in which oil was medicinal right like it was one of the few medicines they had that could be effective for a healing balm in some way so there's a way you could read this that's like it's kind of a practical you come you pray in faith and then you do a practical good for someone right there's also a way in which oil is kind of pastoral and that means it you don't believe it has any magic power as much as it's kind of a physical intimate act that you just do and the whole purpose is to just let someone know that they're loved and maybe that stirs up the faith they need to trust that God's going to do something just that he sees them there's also a way that oil shows up that sacramental where it's literally like the Holy Spirit chooses to do something through that act right but wherever you're at on that and we actually even see in the verse it's important too like it says there is power in confession of sins like sometimes the thing that is holding back the thing you want is simply you not these moves through history where like God is always doing stuff and then sometimes it seems like he does just a little bit more almost always when you see God do something like that it is preceded by two very clear things one is people kind of get desperate for God to show up like they want him to and they start praying and number two is people get tired of sinning and they give that over to God they confess the things they have been doing and they repent of it but all of them take us back to the same place the prayers of God's people are powerful and should not be neglected and then there's a last bit like like James can't resist just one more passage that seems out of place right like seems like bracketing with you should pray would be a good end but James has got one more thing he wants to throw in but as we read it I think you'll actually see this is a really great place to land because the book of James ends in the hope of the gospel

James 5 19 and 20 he says my brothers if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins this entire book is about applying wisdom from God about remaining steadfast through the trial about faithfulness under pressure but what if you haven't remained steadfast what if you haven't been faithful what if you have actually wandered far away from all of that the end of this book basically says all that stuff we said before if you've wandered from all that you can still come home you can still be saved and no matter how big those

sins are a multitude they can be washed away you can be made new that's how he ends his book in the hope of the gospel just the good news that however far we stray whatever ways we haven't remained!

steadfast whatever ways we have been unfaithful God will continue to be faithful and that brings us back to the place where we can be encouraged again to keep standing because we always know Jesus will pick us up when we stumble as the band comes up if you're here today and you're not yet a follower of Jesus I guess I would hold out to you I think the end of James he was writing with someone like you in mind maybe the word wandering!

[34 : 00] actually resonates you I know that's how life gets experienced a lot right you don't feel like you have any particular direction you're just kind of going wherever your desires your heart leads you and it doesn't ever seem to go anywhere if you're tired of living like that Jesus arms are wide open you don't have to live in wandering in a multitude of sins he can cover all that we're going to have a prayer on the screen behind me maybe that is a way to express to God that you want to do that you want to turn from that kind of life we'll have some men and women over to the stage to pray like me and Jesse will be around we would love if any of that expresses where you're at we'd love to talk with you about that if you're listening this morning and you are a follower of Jesus I mean I think to me like James ends and when it gets hard to remain steadfast we have 10,000 reasons as we sang this morning to keep doing it like everything we do matters and everything is seen by the father

God gave this book for us because he loves us and so if there's something in there that has struck with you this is just a moment again to lift that up to God and say God I'm faltering there strengthen me or God I want to be like that and I'm not help me or God I'm grateful of what you've done but I want to see more like I want to see that more and more all of that's open like this place of worship this altar is open for all of that we're going to take communion!

together so what we'll do is we'll go to the tables here around the sanctuary you can take that back to your seat communion is a time that really it always reminds us of how far Jesus was willing to go to make sure that that multitude of sins could be covered it's a reminder to your heart that when you come before him you never find an angry or disappointed heart like there's no length he was not willing to go it's also kind of this moment where you can invite him in right like it's again it's physical things in some way this is like the oil right like you can take this thing and invite Jesus to commune with you right there to give you whatever faith or strength or courage you need the Bible tells us it's a moment to examine our hearts like you can before you take it ask God like you don't do that in fear you do that and trust that he's not doing that to embarrass you he's doing that to bring you out of bondage to bring you into the light so let's

I'm going to pray and then let's go to the table together if you're a follower of Jesus take that back to your seat and when you're ready partake of that and trust and ask Jesus help me to show that steadfastness in the world okay father we just commend this moment to you God thank you for giving us your word to give us light and wisdom in a place that we otherwise wouldn't have it Jesus if there is anything in our heart that is destroying us that is keeping us from you that is grieving us and your spirit I pray you would reveal it and you would you would enter that moment not with the spirit of condemnation but just as you always call us out into freedom and forgiveness I pray as we take this this morning your spirit might meet some of us in a special way that something is different today

God I pray you bless these elements as your people take them father we give this moment to you in Jesus name man