



THE WORD ON THE STREET

A PARAPHRASE BY BOB BOYD

A Letter from

JAMES

Foreword

I share my study notes, which I call the “Word on the Street,” with others in hopes God will use them to awaken in you and other readers, a fascination and love for the Bible and its teachings. It is God’s “Handbook for Living.”

I believe you will find my notes to be in common, conversational language, as I would say the words to you as a friend. Sometimes they may be a little “gritty,” just like our ordinary daily conversations. If they help you to understand the message of the Scriptures then they have served their purpose well.

Prior to my spiritual reawakening in 1978, my focus was on material things and self-gratification. When I was 15 I had a spiritual experience, and I had been sincere in my teens, but I became more and more indifferent to spiritual matters. After I graduated high school, my principal values were earning money, building my business, playing music and drinking.

My uncontrolled downward spiral into alcohol addiction produced more and more horrendous results and troubles in my life and consequently in the lives of others. I was steadily and alarmingly doing things that were far removed from what I knew to be the right and godly way of living.

In 1978 God mercifully gave me a moment of clarity and a new vision of myself and what He had originally intended for me. I desperately needed the forgiveness of Christ as illustrated in His Parable of the Prodigal Son. God showed me that Christ offers me a better life, and that He died on the cross to give me the hope of eternal life. He is still my only hope of surviving, spiritually and physically. He gave me the desire to go to any lengths necessary to recommit my life to Him. He gave me the will to ask Him to do for me what I could not do for myself; to free me from my addiction to alcohol and restore me to a right relationship with God, and security to be in His presence forever. He also revealed to me that I can do nothing to “earn” a place in Heaven, that it is God’s free gift to me if I believe and trust Jesus and His sacrifice for me.

God did remove my desire for alcohol and the life style it offered. I was in awe of a God Who could and would (and did) forgive me and heal my body and soul despite the way I had mistreated my “temple” for those past 25 years. I asked God to change me, and I became willing to do whatever He required.

God moved me to recommit my life to Christ, and to make Him first and foremost in my life. My desires now are to continue to seek God’s will for me through the Scriptures, and to be committed to God’s work of witnessing, as described in the Gospel of Christ. I

ask God daily to show me His will for me and to help me to keep my priorities straight. I have had spiritual setbacks, but none that have caused me to go back to my addiction and all its accompanying sins.

I am so grateful that God didn't give up on me. Instead, God has given me a fascination with His word and a dedication to studying His word. He also gave me a new approach to studying His word; to analyze it verse by verse, and with the aid of several good study guides, to write my own paraphrase, my own version or "take" on what He revealed to me. I shared some of these paraphrases and was encouraged to continue to study this way. I began to post a chapter every week on a special "Word on the Street" Facebook page.

With the help of my friend and brother Jim McMurry, I now move to a new phase of sharing my scripture studies with others. I pray you will read with a renewed interest, the greatest and most important book ever written.

–Bob Boyd bgboyd6@sbcglobal.net



Bob Boyd at the “Afterthought” 2005

.....Watercolor by Jim McMurry

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Fun Things to Know and Tell about the Letter from JAMES

Who was James?

There are 4 guys named James in the New Testament, but most Bible students believe it must be Jesus's oldest half-brother James, (Jude's brother,) who wrote this letter. He didn't believe in Jesus at first, but came around later and became the main man in the Jerusalem church. He had seen Jesus after He had come back to life. Josephus wrote in his history books that James was murdered in A.D. 62. When we compare James's Letter with a speech he made in Acts chapter 15, we see some of the same words and style.

Why and when did he write this letter?

Things were in a mess in Acts 12, about A.D. 44. He didn't mention the Jerusalem Council of A.D. 49, so it probably hadn't happened yet. So he probably wrote it sometime between A.D. 44 and 49. That makes it the earliest New Testament book! James was writing to the Jews who had been kicked out or run out of Jerusalem when Herod Agrippa I was top dog.

James always comes right to the point; "Here's how we gotta live." It reminds you of the Book of Proverbs. He talks a lot about the Old Testament, and mentions Jesus's Sermon on the Mount teachings 20 times. He mentioned nature stuff at least 30 times, so folks think he spent a lot of time outdoors.

One way to study James is to look for the 13 "tests" he talks about. That's what I'm going to do in this paraphrase.

JAMES' LETTER TO THE JEWISH BELIEVERS EVERYWHERE:

CHAPTER 1

Verse 1: I'm James, (actual Hebrew name Jacob,) a slave to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm writing to say "Hello" to all y'all 12 families of Old Jake's kids who scattered like a covey of quail and are living all over the world now.

Spiritual Growth Comes from Living in Hard Times.

Verses 2-4: Brothers, when you find yourself in a heap of trouble, it's time for you to jump for joy. You know that when your faith gets tested, you learn how to be patient and hang in there.

No pain, no gain! Tests are opportunities for spiritual growth. They draw us closer to God. How else will we learn to become a spiritual grown-up?

Verse 5: If you're short on smarts, go ask God for more smarts. (*Note: God tests us to see how we'll deal with it, and to show us we can't do well without going to Him for help.*) He gives us wisdom without picking on us. All we gotta do is ask.

Verse 6: But listen up. When you ask, you gotta believe He's gonna help you. If you don't believe, you'll be like an ocean wave that the wind whips around every which way.

Verses 7-8: If that's the kind of guy you are, forget it. You may as well hang it up. You're gonna get zilch from the Lord. That guy's an unbeliever. He can't make up his mind; "God, or the world?" That makes him screwed up in everything he does.

The Different Attitudes of the Homeless and the Fat Cats

Verse 9-10: So the poor guy on the street can be glad he's the same in God's eyes as the fat cat. The fat cat has troubles too, and they bring him down onto the same level as the poor guy. He won't be a big shot for long. He's just like the pretty wild flowers.

Verse 11: The sun beats down on them and burns them off their stems. They're here today, and gone tomorrow. The rich guy will fade away to black, along with all his wealth and power.

How to Love God Even When He's Testing Us

Verse 12: What about the guy who hangs in there through his trials, and passes the test? He gets God's stamp of approval, and the winner's award and is crowned as winner. He gets to live forever with God, just like God promised those of us who love Him.

Verse 13: Don't ever tell anybody, "God is tempting me!" God can't be tempted to screw up. God never tempts anybody else to screw up.

Verse 14: No, the "bait" for us is something we want bad enough to go after, (my note: Like a fish leaving his hidey-hole after a piece of fish bait or a lure, we trap ourselves.)

Verse 15: What happens is this: we get to thinking about something we want. The more we think about it, the more we want it. It's like we're giving birth to an idea, (and Satan is the daddy!) If we don't put the lid on it right away, it grows and grows in our minds. Then we start talking about it, and finally we take the action and sin. That takes us farther down a bad road. At the end of that road we're gonna die if we don't do a 180.

Verse 16: I love y'all. You're my brothers! Don't let anybody mess with your mind.

Verse 17: Everything good that happens to us, (and that includes when we give of ourselves to others,) is God's gift to us. He created the sun, moon and stars. They change from day to day, but He always is the same forever.

Verse 18: God took it upon Himself, by His words we read in the Bible, to make us believers the first and best part of His new crop. We get to see and be a part of His work in renewing the whole earth.

Verse 19-20: So, dear brothers, listen up to God's word so you can learn what His will is. Keep your ears open and your mouth shut. Getting angry about things doesn't carry out God's will.

Verse 21: Get rid of all the nasty stuff. Don't even think about it. Be humble, and plant God's word in your mind and heart. It can rescue your souls.

Verses 22-24: But don't kid yourself. Don't just hear God's word. You gotta do what it says, else you'll be like a guy looking at himself in the mirror. He looks, then he walks away and forgets what he looks like.

Verse 25: If you look into God's word, and do what it says, and don't forget to keep on doing it, God's gonna reward your work.

Verse 26: Now, what about the guy who thinks he's religious, but doesn't keep a tight rein on his tongue, and fools his own heart? His religion isn't worth a plugged nickel.

Verse 27: On the other hand, here's a good picture of a guy whose faith in God is 100% genuine. He looks after folks who are in trouble and can't help themselves, or pay him back, like orphans and widows and homeless folks, and he lives a clean life.

Adding it all up: James hits us with 3 "tests" in this chapter.

- 1. The "hanging in there" test, verses 1-12**
- 2. The "Who's To Blame When We're Tempted?" test, verses 13-18 and**
- 3. The "How Do You React to God's Word?" test, verses 19-27**

Chapter 2:

Treat the Fat Cat and Poor Guy the Same: (The “Impartial Love” Test)

Verses 1-3: Listen up, bros. Jesus, our Head Man, didn’t turn His nose up at poor folks. Let’s say a fat cat comes to your church, with his gold Rolex watch and rings, and shiny tailored silk suit. Then let’s say a raggedy homeless guy comes, too, but you run to meet the fat cat; “Hey, man! Welcome! Come on over here and we’ll give you a front-row seat!” But you tell the poor, dirty guy “You can sit over there on the floor, next to the wall, buddy.”

Verse 4: What are you doing? Who made you a judge? You’re acting like sinners!

Verse 5: Now, I love y’all. You’re my brothers. But let me ask you 4 questions. Didn’t God pick the poor folks to be rich in faith? Didn’t He promise the folks who love Him, that He’d give them His kingdom?

Verses 6-7: But now looky here. You’ve done gone and put down that poor guy. Don’t fat cats come down on you, and drag you into court? Don’t they badmouth you for being Christians?

Verse 8: If you want to follow God’s orders, you gotta “Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself.” If you do that, you’re fine.

Verse 9: But when you treat that fat cat better than the poor guy, you’re really screwing up. You’re ignoring God’s Orders (in Deuteronomy 1:17 and 16:19; check it out.) Y’all are breaking God’s law!

Verse 10: Even if a guy manages to obey all God’s Orders, if he screws up just once, he has still broken God’s law.

Verse 11: The same God who said, “Don’t mess with another man’s wife,” also said, “Don’t murder anybody.” So if you do one but not the other, you’re still in trouble. (My note: What’s the point? Being partial to the fat cat is just as bad. You can’t get by, just picking which of God’s orders you want to obey.)

Verse 12: Say, and do, like you’re getting ready to go up before God the Big Judge.

Verse 13: If you won’t cut your neighbor some slack, God’s gonna treat you just like you treated your neighbor. Mercy will win out over showing no mercy every time!

Bottom Line:

Test #4: God doesn’t favor one guy over another, so we gotta do like God!

Faith without works doesn’t work! (Test #5: The Works Test)

Verse 14: Now, bros. What good is it if a guy says, “I’ve got faith!” but doesn’t do anything to show for it? Will that kind of faith rescue him? (No way!)

Verses 15-16: Let’s say you see a bro or sis who’s homeless and starving. They have no food or clothes. So you tell them, “Everything’s okay! Eat and warm yourself!” but you don’t give them the clothes and chow they need. What kind of a deal is that?

Verse 17: That’s my point, y’all. If you say “I’ve got faith!” and don’t do anything to show you really do have faith, it’s all talk and no walk. It’s all show and no go.

Verse 18: If some guy says, “Hey! You’ve got faith, but I’ve got works!” I tell him, “Okay, then you show me your faith *without* work, and I’ll show you my faith *by* the good deeds I do!”

Verse 19: I know you believe there is only one God, and that’s great! But the devils know there’s only one God too, and it scares the heck out of them!

Verse 20: You’re a dumbbell! You say you’ve got faith, but I don’t see any proof! (Note: The way we know a guy has faith, is by watching what he does, not just what he says. If I really believe in God, and that Jesus died for my sins and came back to life, I’m naturally going to show my gratitude that He rescued me, by doing whatever I can, for folks who need help!)

Verses 21-22: What about our old ancestor Abe? He followed God’s orders to kill his son Isaac and burn him up on an altar. He already had faith, big time, or he wouldn’t have. *(My Note: No disagreement here. In chapter 1 verse 17 and 18, James already said God’s rescue is a gracious gift from Him. Check out Genesis 12:1-7, too. First, God gave him, and us, the faith. James’s point is, if you see the works, it shows the worker’s got faith. “If it walks and quacks like a duck, it’s probably a duck.”)*

Verse 23: So Abe proved Scripture in Genesis 15:6. He “Believed God, and righteousness was credited to his account.” That’s why Abe was called “The friend of God.” (Check 2nd Chronicles 20:7 and Isaiah 41:8.)

Verse 24: So, see? It takes faith first, then works to prove that faith

Verse 25: Now, let’s talk about Rahab the Jericho streetwalker. (Read her story in Josh 2.) She risked her own neck, big time, and hid Josh and Caleb from the Head Man and lied to him so they’d get away safely.

Verse 26: Look at it like this. When the spirit goes outa a body, you’re lookin’ at a dead body. Faith without deeds, is as dead as that body.

So here’s the take-home lessons from Test #5, the Works Test:

- 1. We believers have gotta dig our heels in, even when we’re tested and tried.***
- 2. Besides that, we gotta take care of our Christian believer brothers and sisters.***
- 3. We gotta welcome all God’s family folks the same and don’t pick favorites, and***
- 4. We gotta help our godly family members by taking action whenever we see they need help.***

If we wanta be spiritual grown-ups, we gotta be what God wants us to be and do what God wants us to do!

Chapter 3

The Runaway Tongue (Diarrhea of the Mouth)

Verse 1: Bros, being a teacher is a serious business. Be ready for the Big Judge, ‘cause He’s listening to your teaching and you’re gonna stand before Him on the Big Day.

Verse 2: We’re all stumbling around and screwing up, me included. If you can keep from mouthing off, you can probably keep your whole body under control.

Verse 3: You know, we put bits in horses’ mouths so we can make their whole big bodies go whichever way we want.

Verses 4-5: And what about big ships? Powerful winds blow them around, but that little bitty rudder back there under the water makes the ship go wherever the pilot wants it to go. The tongue is a little bitty part of our body, but it sure does brag and talk big. A match is a little bitty wooden thing, too, but it can burn down whole forests of trees!

Verse 6: That little old tongue in our mouths is like a match from hell. It’s in our body in a place where it can pollute and screw up our whole body, and set fire to everything, and burn up or pollute everything else in sight and in the whole world!

Verse 7: We’ve tamed every kind of critter; animals, birds, snakes, alligators, sea critters like dolphins and even whales.

Verse 8: But hey! There’s not a man on earth who can tame that tongue! It’s out of control, in runaway mode and it’s full of cyanide and strychnine and battery acid.

Verses 9-10: One minute we’re talkin’ good things about God and how good He is to us. The next minute we’re comin’ down on guys, even our brothers. Hey, God made them, and us, to be like Him! Hey bros, it’s just not right for us to talk outa both sides of our mouths.

Verses 11-12: Do you ever see sweet, pure water and bitter, salty, stagnant water come out the same watering hole? No way! Can a fig tree grow olives, or a grapevine bear figs? That’s dumb.

(Note: God made us like Him. He creates with His words. So do we! We gotta be careful what we say and even think about other folks. Once those words go outa our mouths, we can’t bring ‘em back. They keep on goin’ and will do good or bad stuff forever!)

Verse 13: Which one of y’all is wise and understanding? (Note: is good at using his smarts to live every day.) He’s gotta show he’s teachable, by the way he acts and the things he does for others.

Verse 14: If you’re just being selfish at the core, if you’re out to “get yours” no matter who gets hurt, if you are harsh and resentful, don’t be bragging and lying.

Verses 15-16: That kind of attitude and thinking isn’t coming from God above. It’s like an animal instinct, or a demon. Wherever we see somebody like that, everything is a foul, screwed up mess, a SNAFU (Note: Situation Normal, All Fouled Up.) That guy’s not worth a plugged nickel. (Note: A wise person isn’t looking for his own Glory and Gain, but is Gracious and Giving.)

Verse 17: What is God's wisdom like? It's pure, peaceable, gentle, and willing to give in. It's full of kindness, mercy, patience, and doing good things for others. No picking favorites with God. He doesn't talk outa both sides of His mouth, (like men do.)

Verse 18: You'll recognize God's work. His reps are peacemakers and spread peace around everywhere they go.

Chapter 4

Bragging Starts Fights

Verses 1-2: How come y'all are fightin' amongst yourselves? It's 'cause you love havin' fun more than you love God. You want stuff you don't have. You even kill, to get stuff you want, don't need and can't get. You tussle and battle each other. The reason you ain't got, is 'cause you don't ask. What you really want and need only comes from God, like true joy, peace, happiness, meaning, hope and fulfillment.

Verse 3: If you do ask and don't get, it's because you're asking the wrong questions for the wrong reasons; so you can live it up.

Verse 4: Y'all are spiritual cheaters! Don't you know if you're the world's friend, you're not in good with God? If you wanta buddy-buddy with the ways of the world, you're slapping God in the face! (My note: You can't be a believer and care more about the creation than the Creator!)

Verse 5: (My note: A lot of folks have trouble figuring out the real meaning of this verse. I think James was just setting us up and making verse 6 stronger.) Do y'all think the Scripture was just wasting our time where it says, "The Spirit who lives in us is powerfully jealous"?

Verse 6: **But** God just gives us more kindness and patience. That's why He says, "Just when you think you're ready to give up, holler 'Good times are just around the corner!' and God will rescue you!" (That's in Job 22:29, by the way.) He doesn't listen to proud, arrogant folks, but He rescues you because you're humble.

Get Humble before God and He'll Rescue You

Here, James gives 10 direct orders to his brothers.

Verse 7: So, *line up for duty* with God. *Ignore the devil* and he'll run like a scared rabbit!

Verse 8: *Cozy up to God* and He'll get up close and personal with you. But first, you gotta *Go wash all the nasty stuff off your hands, sinners!* And if you're talking outa both sides of your mouth, you better *wash your hearts, too.*

Verse 9: You ought to *be all bent outa shape* because of the way you've screwed up your life and others. *Stop laughing* about it! You ought to *be moanin' and wailin'* over it!

Verse 10: *Get down on the ground*, and God will pick you up and set you on your feet, if you really make yourself lowly! (My note: My sins are a lot worse than I think, and my magnificent and magnanimous God is more holy than I think He is!)

Verse 11: *Don't be badmouthing anybody.* If you do, you set yourself up as judge and jury. Are you wiser than God? He's the real Judge. Keep God's law. Don't badmouth it.

Verse 12: There's only one Lawgiver, and He can rescue you or wipe you out! Who do you think you are, setting yourself up as your bro's judge and jury?

Don't go bragging about what you're gonna do!

Verse 13: And who do you think you are, bragging about how today or tomorrow, (without asking God first,) “We’re gonna move to another city, live there for a year, and buy and sell a bunch of stuff and make a bunch of money!”

Verse 14: Hey! You don’t know what’s gonna happen tomorrow! Your life is like a morning fog that creeps in for a little while, then the sun burns it away.

Verse 15: What you ought to say is, “If the Lord wants me to, I’ll live and (fill in the blank.)

Verse 16: But you think you’re a big shot and go around bragging about what you’re gonna do. That kind of bragging is evil!

Verse 17: Bottom line is: if a guy knows he ought to do a good thing, but doesn’t, he’s committed a sin.

Chapter 5: *Pushy Fat Cats Will Get Theirs*

Verse 1: Okay, fat cats! Moan and groan ‘cause you’re gonna be in a heapa trouble!

Verses 2-3: All your money is nasty and your clothes have got holes in them. (*Note: Your real “god” is money and what it will buy. You’re worshiping the creation, but you pretend to worship the Creator.*) All that gold and silver you’re piling up for a rainy day is tarnishing, and it’s gonna someday be a witness against you, and will burn up your bodies.

Verse 4: You cheated your field-hands’ outa their paychecks. Now those paychecks are hollerin’ “Foul!” Now, the Lord of the Angel Armies hears the screams of your hungry employees.

Verses 5-6: You fat cats have been living it up in your posh digs. You’re fattenin’ your hearts up (*note: too much cholesterol?*) like you’re getting’ ready to kill the fatted calf. We’ll, you’re it! You’ve been usin’ the court system so you could keep livin’ it up. You’ve been puttin’ down and even killin’ the good folks.

Bros, just bide your time and hang in there.

Verses 7-8: Just be patient (*with the pushy, crooked fat cats*), my brothers; the Lord’s on His way. After they’ve planted their crops, farmers stand by and watch the early showers, then the later rains. They’re waitin’ for the crops to sprout and grow and for their ground to make precious fruit for them. Y’all just bide your time like they do, bros. Keep your hearts right with God, ‘cause He’s gonna be here before long.

Verse 9: Hey! No grumbling at each other, y’all! Looky here! That’s Jesus, standing right outside the door!

Verse 10: Just remember all the old prophets, guys. They set a good example for us. They put up with all kinds of hassles and gettin’ whacked while they were out there talkin’ about the LORD.

Verse 11: We really admire folks who can keep on takin’ it on the chin without complaining. How about that Job? (*It couldn’t get much worse than that!*) You know the Lord has already written a good ending for our story, and that He is so very kind and good to us.

Verse 12: But back to how we talk. Folks can tell a lot about you by what you say. So be careful what you say. Don't cuss or swear or use "by words." Speak in plain, honest language. Just say "Yes" or "No" and leave it at that. *(That's Jesus's advice in Matthew 5:33-37 and 23:16-22.)* If we don't, we're headed for trouble.

Taking Care of What Everybody Needs

Verses 13-15: If anybody out there is suffering, he needs to be praying. Is anybody cheerful? He needs to be singing God's praise *(and picking his stringed instrument, his psalleteo.)* Is anybody sick? *(Weak, discouraged, down in the dumps, having a hard time, needing a lift spiritual shot in the arm)* He needs to call for the church geezers to pray over him and put oil on him in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick guy, and the Lord will pick him up. *(Note: the Greek words Paul used show he may have been talking about spiritual healing.)* If he's been screwing up, (because he's sorry and called the geezers to help him,) God will forgive him.

Verse 16: Come clean to each other about how you've screwed up. Get it off your chests. Pray for each other, so you'll get well. The effective, fervent prayer of a man who's doing God's will, pays off big time.

Verses 17-18: Remember old Elijah? He was an ordinary guy like us. When he prayed hard that God would hold up on the rain, wow! It didn't rain there for three and a half years! Then he prayed again, and bingo! God let go of the showers of blessing and the land grew fruit again.

Fetching that Guy Who Has Screwed Up, Back onto the Straight and Narrow:

Verse 19: Now, brothers, let's say one of y'all wanders away from the truth and starts screwing up. Then another of you goes and turns him around. Tell that 2nd guy that if he turns a screw-up around and brings him back home, he's rescued a soul from dying and buried a whole raft of screw-ups.

Conclusion: As always, James gets right down to the nitty-gritty of how we gotta live. Stand with confidence, serve with compassion, speak with care, submit with contrition, and share with concern. A believer needs to be what God wants him to be, do what God wants him to do, say what God wants him to say, sense what God wants him to sense, and share what God wants him to share. Being a spiritual grown-up adult person involves everything about life!



“I pray you will read with a renewed interest, the greatest and most important book ever written.”

–Bob Boyd bgboyd6@sbcglobal.net