

GLENKIRK CHURCH



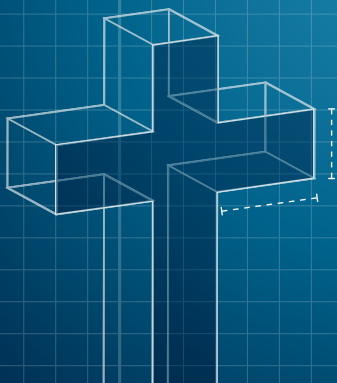
WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

SEPTEMBER 6 - 10, 2021

FAITH
WORK

the book of
James



MONDAY

James 1:9-11; Ecclesiastes 5:10-12; Matthew 6:19-21, 19:23-26

Is wealth itself sinful? The Bible does not teach this. One of its most misquoted verses actually states, “*The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils*” (1 Timothy 6:10). Money is neutral biblically, but the *love* of money—like any idol impairing right relationship with God—is problematic. James 1:9-11 warns of wealth’s fleetingness and snares, an American cautionary tale. About 90% of the US population rates “middle income or higher” by global standards. (Pew Research Center) The US, representing about 4.25% of the world’s population, accounts for 30% of global wealth. (Visual Capitalist)

James’ comparison of the rich person to “*a flower ... [that] will pass away*” (James 1:10) sounds like Solomon’s musings, in which Israel’s elderly king notes the emptiness of a lifelong, selfish pursuit of wealth and pleasure: “*All are from the dust, and to dust all return*” (Ecclesiastes 3:20).

When asked once by Larry King, “Is it a sin to be wealthy?” Pastor Rick Warren replied, “It’s not a sin to *be* wealthy. It is a sin to *die* wealthy.” Warren’s sentiment complements Jesus’ teaching, “*Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven*” (Matthew 6:20). Jesus’ often-quoted teaching, “*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God*” (Matthew 19:24), cleverly shares an exaggerated illustration.

The Savior, via His first coming mission, remains our wonderful Example. The Word laid aside His rich privileges as God to enter a lowly life—born to an unwed teenaged girl, stepson to an impoverished carpenter—and die substitutionally in the most painful, humiliating manner possible (Philippians 2:6-8). By His obedience and sacrifice, Jesus glorified the Father and—in fulfilling His mission—commenced calling His Church and Bride.

The lesson is not “be ashamed if God has blessed you financially” or “shun prosperity.” Rather, we are to embrace our call to faithful stewardship of God-given resources, applying them for kingdom building. A contemporary restatement of Solomon’s reflections: “You will never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul.” Do you give cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7), not possessed by possessions?

QUESTIONS

Why is the love of money a particular concern among Americans?
Is it a sin to be wealthy?

PRAYERS

For Emre Uflazoglu (International Fellowship of Evangelical Students)

Emre and his wife, Faven, serve as missionaries doing student outreach in Turkey. Pray for Emre’s patient perseverance and renewed energy after months of ministry by phone or online when he would greatly prefer in-person outreach.

TUESDAY

James 1:12; Matthew 24:9-14; Revelation 2:9-10

Certain evangelists and teachers tend to paint pictures of Christian life entailing relative ease and happiness, wherein “all of your problems go away.” Some immature believers therefore expect this to happen, and their faith is rocked when inevitable troubles, temptations and opposition surface. Jesus, however, famously promised, *“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33).

James 1:12 reinforces Jesus’ teaching, promising a “crown of life” for those who faithfully endure trials and love God to the end. Theologians dispute whether the promised crown of life is affirmation of eternal life itself in Christ—thus given to all believers—or a “special award” given to some believers (independent of their salvation) for their noteworthy endurance.

“There are five crowns mentioned in Scripture (awarded to believers) ... the Everlasting Crown (1 Corinthians 9:25), the Crown for the One Who Wins Souls (Philippians 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:19), the Crown of Righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8), the Crown of Glory (1 Peter 5:4), and the Crown of Life (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10). ... Each of the crowns ... represents a reward for some particular special act of service or perseverance within the Kingdom of God ...” (Jeremy Myers)

“The ‘crown of life’ refers to eternal life itself ... the prize received by all entrants into heaven. ... [It] means more specifically ‘the crown that is life.’ Life itself is the future reward. ... This crown has been promised to those who love God ... who persevere and stand approved ... This perseverance until our death isn’t in our strength alone, but with God’s help as we walk in obedience with Him.” (Renewing Truth)

Regardless of whether the “crown of life” signifies a believer’s eternal life itself or is a special reward for those “especially faithful amidst trials,” our hope is in Jesus’ promise, “*The one who endures to the end will be saved*” (Matthew 24:13). I wish I could claim, “I endure faithfully daily, throughout each day until its end”—sadly, I cannot. Fortunately, the Creator, Lord and Savior who has “*overcome the world*” is accessible whenever I faithfully and repentantly pray. Do you seek God regularly, drawing upon His power to endure trials?

QUESTIONS

What are some areas where it is clear to you that the Christian life is not one of ease? What is the “crown of life”? What is the importance of Jesus’ statement, “*I have overcome the world*”?

PRAYERS

For Emre Uflazoglu (International Fellowship of Evangelical Students)

Pray for Emre’s ongoing ministry to Antony, who is being transformed by Jesus from being a critical, judgmental person to a compassionate, caring evangelist. Pray that more discipleship can happen and that new leaders can be raised up.

WEDNESDAY

James 1:13-15; Genesis 39:6-12; 1 Corinthians 10:12-14

James 1:13-15 headlines the week: exercising faith amidst temptations. We all face temptations; even Jesus Himself did—via Satan in the wilderness (Luke 4) and in the Garden of Gethsemane, when asking if the Father would “*let this cup pass from Me*” (Matthew 26:39). Being tempted is not sinful; sin happens, or not, pending our response.

“[Temptation prompts] sin when we allow the temptation to become action ... Jesus taught us to pray, ‘*Lead us not into temptation*’ (Luke 11:4), but we have a responsibility to pay attention to the direction God is leading us and avoid temptation ... Temptations ... do not come from God, although He does allow them (to test and strengthen us).” (GotQuestions.org)

Comedian Flip Wilson’s 1970s character, Geraldine, had a famous catchphrase: “The devil made me do it!” While the enemy brings temptations, his attempts are futile absent our cooperation. “Satan is roaming on the earth like a lion, seeking people to devour (1 Peter 5:8). ... Temptations [can] come from Satan ... [however] temptation originates in us as well. ... Our fallen and corrupted human nature ... allows ... temptations to take root and causes us to act on them, thereby ‘*giving birth to sin*’ (James 1:15). (GotQuestions.org)

Even the Apostle Paul occasionally yielded to temptation. “*For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ... Wretched man that I am!*” (Romans 7:15, 24). Therefore, what hope have we? “The better we know

[God's] Word, the easier it will be to claim victory ... Prayer [also helps] us to resist temptation. ... Remember what Jesus Christ did for us. ... Every sin we've ever committed, or will commit, played a part in nailing our Savior to the cross. ... Use ... common sense and [avoid] situations that prey upon, or stimulate ... weaknesses." (GotQuestions.org) Joseph wisely fled temptation (Genesis 39) and so should we.

Paul advises that we "*put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires*" (Romans 13:14). "God's Word and Spirit are infinitely more powerful than ... Satan's schemes. When we walk with the Spirit ... temptations [provide] opportunities ... to show God that He is indeed the Master of our lives." (GotQuestions.org)

QUESTIONS

How does Jesus' life reinforce that merely being tempted is not a sin? Why does God allow temptations? What are the best ways to avoid succumbing to temptations?

PRAYERS

For Emre Uflazoglu (International Fellowship of Evangelical Students)

Pray for the spiritual growth of many more students as they develop into courageous leaders, active and effective in sharing their faith.

THURSDAY

James 1:13-18; Genesis 3:8-13; John 3:16-17

It is natural, even understandable, when someone suffering a tragic loss temporarily blames God for allowing the heartbreak to happen. However, there are some who fault God for every misfortune. Even Adam, upon God's questioning after he joined Eve in the disobedience causing their fall, hinted at God's responsibility for their sin: *"The woman You put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it"* (Genesis 3:12).

This dynamic reminds me of self-proclaimed atheists who swear by damning something or someone in God's name. These same people often act angrily toward a God whom they profess is nonexistent. Can you see the reckless contradictions here?

James follows yesterday's verses regarding temptation's lures with an important truth, *"Every good and perfect gift ... [comes] from the Father ..."* (James 1:17). In verse 16 James warns, *"Do not be deceived ..."* (1:16), and he ends verse 17 reminding us that *"[God] does not change."* The apparent problem James addressed is the fallen tendency to blame God for the world's evils. Thus James 1:17-18 reminds us (paraphrased): "God is good, the Source of all goodness; He always has been and always will be. In fact, He is so good and loving that He has provided the means for our salvation."

“When God finished His creation, He saw everything and declared it ‘very good’ (Genesis 1:31). ... ‘God is light’ ... (1 John 1:5) ... [and] ‘not the author of confusion’ (1 Corinthians 14:33) ... Sin [is not] something that was created ... [but] is simply a *lack of moral perfection in a fallen creature*. ... All evil in the universe emanates from the sins of fallen creatures. ... God is certainly sovereign over evil. ... But God’s role with regard to evil is never as its author. He simply permits evil agents to work, then overrules evil for His own wise and holy ends.” (John MacArthur)

When witnessing, it’s important to meet people where they are. Unbelievers you know, like everyone, live in a desperately broken, fallen world. Connect with them there. See if conversation steers toward the Redeemer and God’s plan of reconciliation and salvation in Christ. Help them to see what lies ahead.

QUESTIONS

Is it OK to be upset with God? What does “sin is not something that was created” mean? How can you meet an unbeliever in the desperately broken, fallen world?

PRAYERS

For Emre Uflazoglu (International Fellowship of Evangelical Students)

Pray for the re-opening of Emre’s library/study center. Emre has been working hard on this place so that he can meet students and introduce them to a life of faith in Jesus.



James 1:18; Leviticus 23:9-14; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23

James 1:18 provides a synopsis of God's work of salvation and the believers' resultant mission. God "*brought us forth*"—" [*everyone*] *in Christ ... is a new creation*" (2 Corinthians 5:17), "*born again*" (John 3:3). The LORD did this "*by the word of truth*"—which can mean via Jesus Himself, "*the Word*" (John 1:1) and/or as prophesied by God's Word, the Bible. Our right response is to "*be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.*" Let's unpack that final phrase a bit.

Within Judaism, the firstfruits were "the first agricultural produce of a season, especially when given as an offering to God." (Lexico) The Jewish Feast of Firstfruits celebrated spring harvest, honoring and thanking God for His provision. In 2021 this Feast fell on April 4, the final day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For Christians, firstfruits picture Christ's resurrection. Paul called Jesus, accordingly, "*the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep ... [and subsequently experience] the resurrection of the dead*" (1 Corinthians 15:20-21).

In considering this, I pondered, "What about the unfallen angels—they apparently preexisted humankind and live to glorify God?" Unlike humans, however, angels don't experience salvation personally but, rather, "*long to look*" upon God's redemptive work amidst humankind (1 Peter 1:10-12). Angels are either fallen or faithful;

they cannot be born again, nor do they experience sanctification (refinement into increasing Christ-likeness). Not knowing life's trials or temptations like humankind, angels are "finished products"—thus, they are not "firstfruits" experiencing a process of progressive "finishing."

We, as believers, are God's "crop." As such, we are to be faithful, manifesting "*fruit of the Spirit ... [including] love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness [and] self-control*" (Galatians 5:22-23). Such fruit should attract others to Christ.

"Christian men and women ... are meant to be the first small example of a great harvest that is to follow. ... We should stand here as specimens of what [Jesus] means the world to be, and as witnesses of what He, by the gospel, is able to make [people]. ... Christians ... [are called to] make more Christians." (Alexander MacLaren) This takes us full circle to creation, to God's original call to "*be fruitful and multiply*" (Genesis 1:28). How fruitful are you?

QUESTIONS

What did James mean when referring to "firstfruits"? Why did Paul call Jesus a "firstfruit"? What should the fruitfulness of Christian life yield?

PRAYERS

For Emre Uflazoglu (International Fellowship of Evangelical Students)

Pray for the settlement of the visa volatility that continues to hang over the heads of Emre and his wife, Faven, who is a citizen of the Netherlands. Please pray for a resolution.

Sources

- Pew Research Center statistics are from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/09/how-americans-compare-with-the-global-middle-class/>
- Visual Capitalist's data can be found at <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/all-of-the-worlds-wealth-in-one-visualization/>
- Jeremy Myers' quote is from <https://redeeminggod.com/what-is-the-crown-of-life/>
- Renewing Truth's quote can be found at <https://renewingtruth.com/2017/02/what-is-the-crown-of-life/>
- GotQuestions.org quotes are from <https://www.gotquestions.org/temptation-sin.html>, <https://www.gotquestions.org/overcome-temptation.html> and <https://www.gotquestions.org/resisting-temptation.html>
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