

James 5:12
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The Bible says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned. He who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the Name of the only begotten Son of God. For as many as received Him, to them he gave the right to become children of God to those who believe in His Name. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved for it is by grace you have been saved through faith, that not of yourselves. It is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”

Let’s pause so that we can exercise 1 John 1:9 which says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” We do this of course to restore harmony with God. This is not a verse to use with unbelievers. This is not talking about salvation (justification), but rather salvation (sanctification).

We are on James 5:12. Let us review verse 11 again. It says, “Indeed we count them blessed who endure.” Remember, the context of James 5 is that people were bickering back and forth. There were employees who were being ripped off. There were employers who were not paying their wages to the employees. And so people would go before God and pray, and James is reminding those who are suffering persecution and feeling slighted and feeling that they were not being heard. James reminds them that the Lord of the *Sabaoth* hears the prayers that go before God. And so that’s a strong reminder for us as believers in Christ that whatever situation we’re in, we can pray to the Lord of the *Sabaoth*, or God. And sometimes we tend to bypass that and we go to our friends, we go to our families – before we even go on our knees. And James is reminding the recipients of this letter that before you do anything else, and because you’re fighting back and forth, you have failed to put doctrine first. And if you follow the previous chapters you know that was what he was trying to do. He was trying to iron the differences among the brethren. He was trying to straighten them out. He was reminding them that trials are not necessarily bad. Actually, they are good! Problems are actually good for us because they make us aware of our flaws. They make us aware of the deficiencies that we have. They remind us of our flaws in our character. And so this allows us to take our eyes off ourselves and focus on God. And that’s the initial chapter of James. “Count it all joy when you encounter trials.” That’s not the kind of advice that you would hear from your friends, right? But this is the Word of God that is teaching us to count it all joy – because in the end it is for your own good. It makes you more like Christ. You’re able to fine-tune your walk with God, and there’s no way you’re going to be able to recognize the faithfulness of God apart from situations – like trials.

So, he goes on to verse 11 of Chapter 5 and he says, “We count them blessed who endure.” So we count them fortunate; we count them happy (or if we use the lingo of today – we count them lucky) – those who endure. And see, that’s the key thing that we miss and that we sometimes overlook. We have to endure the things that we go through. Just because you’re a believer in Christ doesn’t necessarily mean that life is going to be easy. Sometimes you hear a person say, “If you become a Christian, if you accept Christ as your Savior, then everything is going to work out. Your marriage is going to come together, your finances are going to take off and go through the roof.” But the truth of the matter is, that’s not always going to be the case. You still have volition. You still have freewill and so does your spouse. And so one of you may be fixed on God’s Word and the other one may not and there’s a tension. And that’s why it’s important to always use the Scriptures as the basis for authority. Because now it’s no longer what you think, but it depends on what God says and what he thinks. And when you offer the Word of God, it doesn’t matter what they are thinking. They can realign their differences and look at what the Scripture says and now they have to step back and say, “Well, do I want to argue against the Scripture?” And if that’s the case, then that’s your prerogative. As clearly seen from Genesis 3, people can make decisions apart from God. And he is a gentleman; he will not coerce you to believe him; he will not coerce you to follow him or to serve him. He will allow you to be who you are until you recognize that your life is going to be miserable until you get in touch with him through fellowship. And the only way that you’re going to be able to walk with stability is when doctrine is a very real part of your life – where you take it in on a regular basis so that when Tuesday comes along or Wednesday comes along and you are stuck and you don’t know what to say, you can’t contact your parents, you can’t contact your kids, you can’t contact your siblings or your family members, or even friends because of embarrassment – that’s the whole purpose why we have God. That’s the whole purpose why we have doctrine. So that when we store it up in our souls, we can recall it and execute it. We can apply it to life and watch God work. And sometimes, it doesn’t turn out the way that we would want, but God’s goal and objective is to conform us into his Son’s likeness. And if that means that we have to burn for a little bit and go through some trials like his Son, he will allow that to happen – with the end result as being giving him the glory, while at the same time, we recognize that he remains faithful in spite of our opinions and what we think during the crisis.

So, we count them lucky – the ones who endure. Why? Because they experience God’s compassion and his mercy. Notice, “You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord.” So that’s also a reminder that the trials that he went through, including the loss of family members, loss of business, loss of cattle, loss of money, loss of finances, and even his wife starting to have reservations about God, that was all intended by God. So it’s possible that you are going through something and that this could be the working of God himself in your life! And notice that the intention of the Lord, the end result of Job was that the Lord was very compassionate and merciful. Job only discovered this at the back end. He had to live through all the crud for many many years before God stepped in and started to do a work. And I know how we are today. We’re so used to the internet. You remember how it was with dial-up

internet? It was 9600 kilobytes per second, and then we upped it to 56K, and then DSL, and then cable, and then T1, and we're still never satisfied. We still want to go faster. And that's the way we live today. We want things NOW! When we pray to God, we want the answers now. We want things resolved yesterday. But that's not God's policy. He's not in a hurry. And in fact, if you'll recall, there was a time when Lazarus was about to die. And what did Jesus do? Did he take a taxi there and speed it up a little bit to catch him before he died? If you observe the text closely, He stays back an additional two days – so that Lazarus would die. See, the way that God works is quite different from how we work and how we would want to solve things. And we have to remember this, because in the midst of the fire, we're not thinking properly. And that's why it's all the more important to store up the doctrine prior to the challenges, prior to the trial. Because I guarantee you, when you're going through hardship, you're not going to want to open your Bible, you're not going to want to pray, and if you pray, you're going to be complaining. You're going to be asking God, "Why are you allowing these things to happen?" But if your perspective was aligned prior, if you consistently get into Scripture and you discover how God works and how he operates, then you're going to take what you're going through, lay it alongside Scripture and say, "You know what, maybe, just maybe, he's doing something in my life. And rather than complain, I'm going to learn how to focus on God and trust him and see whether or not he is going to be faithful as the Scripture says." We have a natural tendency to always be quick to be upset, and that's going to be the next verse, and we start saying things that are not becoming of a believer in Christ.

So if you "PSR" that verse, do you remember what "PSR" is? You take the verse and you Paraphrase it – put the verse in your own words. Use Synonyms as you're putting these things together. And then Rewrite it. Take a pen, put it down on paper. Rewrite the passage in your own mind and capture the essence of that verse. Now what you've done is you have hurdled the biggest hurdle ever for studying Scripture, and that is paying attention to the text. Sometimes people rush through the Bible, they read the Bible through in a year, but the ability to retain all that information is very wanting. It's few. You can't remember much. And so what we do here is capture the verse. Put it in your own words. Use alternative words or synonyms for key words like verbs or nouns and then rewrite it in your own words. And if you do that, more than likely that verse is going to stay with you longer than if you didn't. If you read a verse and close the Bible and a half hour later I ask you what you just read and you say, "I don't remember," or "I don't know," that's equivalent to not reading it at all. So I think this is one of the culprits for the lack of attention or a lack of growth in our walk with God. We're not capturing the essence of the passage. And if you can't give back to someone what you just read, then in that guy's opinion you didn't read it at all. So why proceed with the next verse if you haven't captured the essence of the one verse?

So this is what I came up with. I'm not striving for 100 percent accuracy. I'm striving for essence. I want to be able to get the flow or the gist of what I just read. This is the verse in the New King James Version. Verse 11 says, "Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You

have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord, that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.” Now putting it in my own words, this is what I came up with – Verse 11 for me is like this: “We honor people who don’t give up. You’ve heard how Job maintained focus in spite of his trials, and you’ve read how God purposefully allowed these trials to happen, and in the end we see that the Lord is good. He truly is compassionate and merciful.” I’ve just captured that and put it in my own words and I should be able to give that to you a day or two days from now because I’ve taken ownership of the verse. I am a strong believer in taking in God’s Word on a regular basis. “Man doesn’t live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God”. Do you believe that? Well then how often are you getting into the Word of God? He lines that up with physical food. But he says, “In order for you to live spiritually, you’ve got to have spiritual food. You don’t live by food alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” So how consistent are you with taking in God’s Word? I’m not talking about a devotional; I’m not talking about *Our Daily Bread* or these things you can get on the internet once a day that you look at when you wake up in the morning or before you go to sleep. They have their place, but I’m talking about meeting God with his Word. The Bible open, you listening to him as he speaks through his Word, and you closing in communicating anything you would like to say to him before you end the evening. Imagine if you go to church one hour every Sunday. For a month’s time you’ve gone to church four hours a month. Over twelve months that’s 48 hours. Over a year, that’s two days. 365 days in a year and you’ve gone to church 2 days out of that year. How much training can you get accomplished there? How much intake of doctrine can you get from that? Can you, in your career, whatever field you are in, do a real in-depth training in two days out of the one year? And that’s why people say, “Well he’s been a Christian for 4 years.” Well, do the math, how many times has he been in church? Sometimes people don’t even go to church or only go for about a half hour, so maybe in 4 years, he’s only gone to church 4 days. Can you get a lot of training in 4 days? I hope you see the glaring problem and I hope it challenges you to get into the Word on a regular basis. Because if you’re wrestling with sin, you’re wrestling with trials or temptation, the only way you’ll be able to muscle that is not by willpower, but by His transforming power that comes by a direct result of renovating your mind through His Word. If it’s a sin issue, it has to be dealt with through a spiritual angle – never from your volition or your will. The only time your volition is part of this is when you decide to make time to carve time out and get into the Word. Other than that, nothing’s going to happen. You can try all you want, but it’s not going to work.

So now that takes us to verse 12. Remember we were reminded to honor people who don’t give up. Remember how Job maintained focus in spite of his trials. You’ve read how God purposefully allowed these trials to happen, and in the end we see that God is good. He truly is compassionate and merciful. He continues now with verse 12 (in the New King James Version), “But above all, my brethren, do not swear – either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your ‘yes’ be yes and your ‘no’ no, lest you fall into judgment.” What James is talking about here is, “Be a man of your word. Be a woman of your word. Don’t lean on oaths to validate or support what you are saying. You should be able to stand on your own word. People

should be able to count on you when you give your word. If you say, ‘Yes’, it’s a yes. If it’s a ‘No’, it’s a no”. And this is what he gets at here. The New American Standard reads like this: “But above all, my brethren, do not swear either by heaven, or by earth, or with any other oath, but your ‘Yes’ is to be yes, and your ‘no’ no, so that you may not fall under judgment. The NIV says, “Above all, my brothers, do not swear. Not by heaven or by earth or anything else. Let your ‘yes’ be yes and your ‘no’ no, or you will be condemned.” The English Standard Version reads, “But above all, my brothers, do not swear either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath. Let your ‘yes’ be yes and your ‘no’ no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.”

Let me do a “Subject/ Complement”. Remember, you ask the text a question and you get an answer from the text. What does James say to the brethren about swearing? James tells the brethren, “above all” to “not swear by heaven or earth or anything else and to let your ‘yes’ be yes and your ‘no’ no, lest you fall into condemnation.” This is very important. And if you were to “PSR” it, or put it in your own words, it might sound something like this: “More than anything brethren, don’t go around swearing just to confirm what you’re saying. Let your ‘yes’ be yes and your ‘no’ no. Otherwise you’ll be disciplined by God.” We have to remember the big picture here. Remember this goes back to verses 7-11. Let’s paint the context here. “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.” What you get here is this whole idea of being patient. Remember, he uses the analogy or the illustration of a farmer. How long does it take to grow something in the yard? As a farmer waits patiently for his crops to grow, we ought to be patient with God to see results. It’s not something that’s going to happen overnight. That’s the picture that he paints to the recipients of this letter. They’re complaining back and forth and notice what he does. He says, “You also be patient. Strengthen your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand.” He is reminding them, look, whatever it is you’re going through, it’s not going to last forever. The Lord is coming soon. This is what he does to motivate them to keep them on track. He’s having them take their eyes off of each other and he’s saying, “Keep your eyes focused on Him. The Lord is coming soon. The Lord is at hand. Don’t grumble against one another, brethren.” Apparently, they were grumbling within the assembly. And that sometimes happens, right? We know this to be true. And he says look at the farmer and remember that the Lord is at hand. Stop bickering back and forth. God is going to iron all of this out in due time. Let him handle it. So rather than channeling your energies toward each other, why don’t you use that energy to focus on him? And that is what James is trying to communicate.

So when you get back to James 5:12, it breaks down like this, “Above all, above everything, do not swear.” And this has nothing to do with taking a legal oath in a court of law. It is a direct command against the flippant use of our words. And we are going to see in a moment what this looks like in the life of at least one of the disciples where he was trying to use oaths to establish the fact that he was telling the truth. “I swear to God! It wasn’t me!” Have you ever said that before or have you ever heard someone say that before? That’s how it pans out. That’s what it looks like. We’re not talking about vulgar language or cussing. It’s using something like God to validate that your word is true and sincere. But you shouldn’t have to do that. Because if you think about it, if you need that, your word doesn’t have enough weight to stand on its own. You should be able to be a man of your word or a woman of your word. You should have the integrity so that when you say something, you honor it, and when you honor it, people believe it, and when people believe it, you become reliable, you become dependable, you become a man of your word. And by the way, this is a great way to strengthen relationships. If you’re going to say “yes,” mean yes. If it’s a no, don’t say “yes”. If it’s a yes, don’t say “no”. That’s a biblical command according to James 5:12. So this is how the trust factor is built. This is how reliability is developed. This is how dependability is nurtured – when you and me and the person next to you exercises honesty. Let your “yes” be yes, your “no” no. Don’t use oaths, don’t swear, just stand on your own word and over time people will begin to depend on you because you’re a man of your word or you’re a woman of your word.

The word “oath” is the idea of a solemn qualification, where again, you are using God to validate your sincerity. “I swear to God, I did not touch the table!” Why can’t you just tell the person that you didn’t touch the table? What’s wrong with your own words? See, James is trying to prevent people from talking like this because you could fall under judgment. Actually, when you look at the Greek, “judgment” is better rendered “hypocrisy”. Because if you can’t be true with what you say and you need something to anchor your word, more than likely you are going to be a hypocrite down the road. You may go against what you’ve said because of the fact that you need something to confirm to the person that you’re talking to that you’re really, really, really sincere. Just think for a moment, if you talk to someone who’s always swearing: “Oh, I swear to God it’s true and I didn’t do that. I didn’t do that. I didn’t open this. I wasn’t there. I was over here,” there’s probably a pattern they have developed and their word is no longer trustworthy and so they are calling upon that to validate their words. I think we have experienced that before. Now in that context, he gives us this command: “But above all my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath, but your ‘yes’ is to be yes, and your ‘no’ no, so that you may not fall under judgment”. The point is that there is one thing that must take precedence in a suffering situation. And that’s the control of the tongue or speech. He’s midway through chapter 5, and he’s saying that with all the drama going on, you have to be careful with what you say. It’s in situations like this that we have the tendency to start talking and our words start to be modified. And the truthfulness is sometimes skewed – not necessarily by us, but sometimes by others. Isn’t it true that when we enter a trial or problem, we become impatient? Don’t we sometimes lose self-control? And when you lose self-control,

what do your words sound like? Sometimes it's better to have things left unsaid or unspoken. We sometimes regret the things that we say. So he gives us this vital command. "But above all..." That preposition is "*pro*" which usually means "before". "But before all...", which carries the connotation of "First of all..." And the Greek lexicons say that in this verse it is a marker of precedence in importance. So when you see "But above all..." then you know that there is something of extreme importance that is going to follow this. "But above all, do not swear!" So it would be correct to translate it "Above all", that is, in a suffering situation like Job and the prophets, there's one thing that takes precedence over everything and it relates to our conduct in speech. A lot of what we say is going to be a direct result of how we view, and how our perspective is in the circumstances around us. And I believe this is the reason why the Scripture is replete with the fact that we don't walk by sight, but that we walk by faith. If we walk by sight, we will collapse, we will fumble, we will make mistakes, we will react rather than respond with God's Word. And so we're not supposed to look at life through circumstances alone. We're supposed to look at life, see the circumstances, we peel back, and then we learn how to exercise faith towards God and recognize that he's not done. This is part of the overall divine plan. Our job is to hang in there, trust him, wait, and exercise patience – just like a farmer is patient for his crop. We ought to be patient because we know that the Lord is at hand. And above all, be careful with our speech. Don't swear! And in fact he says let me get down to the nitty-gritty; let me give you specifics. If you're going to say something, let it be true. Let your "yes" be yes, your "no" no.

Now what do you think it will look like in churches today and homes today if people would honor their word? What if, when a person said "yes" it really meant yes? Or "no" meant no? Wouldn't things operate more smoothly? But unfortunately, a lot of people aren't like that today. Some people are not. They can't honor their word. And what that does is that it crushes relationships that are connected with this person. And it's a long road to recovery when a person or a group continues to mishandle their words – their speech. Remember what James 3:2 says? Do you know what a mature believer looks like? Is it a person who is serving valiantly? Is it a person who is always at church and always at Bible study? What would you say a mature person looks like? Is it a person who knows the Bible inside-out, quoting verses back and forth? Always giving to the church; always supporting ministries and missionaries – is that a mature believer? If you're not sure what a mature believer is, how do you know you're headed in that direction? What is your goal; what is your aim? If someone were to ask you, "Brother, what does a mature believer look like that I might be a mature believer in time?" what would you say? James addresses this. James 3:2 says, "For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well". "Perfect" in the Greek is "mature". A person who does not stumble in what he says – that is a mature person. And regardless of what is going on around him or her, the tongue is bridled. In other words, it's under control. Why? Because this person has saturated himself or herself with the rest of this book and recognizes that trials are a regular part of life. And guess what, unbelievers go through it as well. They go through the exact same thing you do. But oh yeah, a lot of them are rich,

they're successful, they're always thriving. Well suppose they die in that state and they never become a believer like you. Is that success? It doesn't really matter what they possess. In fact, proof positive is that some of the wealthiest people end up taking their lives because they are not really happy.

We have God's Word to help us go through this thing called life. So that when you're angry, when you're squabbling with your spouse, when your kids are not listening to you, when you're not listening to your family, you have tension between friends – you can go back and default to God's Word and you can say, "What am I supposed to do?" Well, James says, "Be careful with what you say. Let your 'yes' be yes, your 'no' no." Be patient like a farmer. Why? Well, God's coming soon. Count it all joy when you encounter trials? Why? Well, because he's doing something in your life. He's softening those rough edges in your life. We don't want to hear that – not when the going gets tough. When we're going through hardship, we don't want to hear doctrine. You don't want to go to church when you're mad, or you're frustrated, or things aren't going your way. That's why you need to take this in on a regular basis so that when you're all by yourself, you're going to default to what the prodigal son did. He remained a son, no matter what. Some would say that he lost his salvation. I don't think so. He didn't lose his sonship; he lost his fellowship. When he was away, he squandered his money, he went with prostitutes, he did all kinds of things and finally he was left with nothing. And the only thing he had for himself was that he was feeding the pigs with pods. That was his new career. That was his new job. And he was even desiring to eat the food for the pigs. And remember what he did? Thankfully, he had enough doctrine stored up in his mind and in his soul to say, "You know, my father who is at home – I wonder if he'll take me back. I wonder if he'll allow me to be a servant. I wonder, I wonder, I wonder, if I just go back home would the father take me – even as a servant?" He goes back home. And the father receives him, regardless of the problem or the sin. That's what we have to be ramped up on – doctrine, doctrine, doctrine! So that when you go through hardship – when you leave church on Sunday, Monday will come along and some of you are going to have problems. Tuesday comes along and some of you are going to have problems. Wednesday comes along and someone else will have problems. All the way through the week. And you're going to collapse if you don't have any way of standing. The only way that you're going to be able to stand for any duration without affecting the people closest to you is when you store up doctrine in your soul. And that's what we're doing here. You take and you draw from the principles here. We've already learned a few just by looking at a few verses. What did we learn? Well, let's be like farmers. What's a farmer do? Exercise patience. What else? Well, we're reminded that God is coming soon. What else? Well, we have to be men and women of our own word. If we say "yes", let it be yes. If we say "no", let it be no. Don't go beyond that. Don't go swearing. These are all antidotes to restoring broken relationships among the brethren so that God may be pleased. It works in the church. It works among the Christian community. And it works especially between a believer and the Master.

What we say when we come under a trial in a frustrating situation is very telling. We can see whether or not we are living by the circumstances of life – human perspective, or divine perspective which is doctrine – looking at life through Scripture. It may be stress. It may be pain. It may be someone else in pain that we have to watch, but no matter what the trial is, above all, we have to watch our words and speech. He wants us to guard our words and in the prior chapter, the mark of a mature person is contingent upon what he says or what he doesn't say. Not by the overt behavior and serving and running around and doing all kinds of church work, but you can tell by the way the person speaks. There's something very telling and crystal clear when a person speaks in the midst of a circumstance, you can certainly tell a lot about a person by how they respond to life. Someone was telling me of a friend who suffered great loss. His wife had MS for many years, and the health continued to deteriorate until finally she went home to be with God. And the only way he was able to go through all of that was through Bible doctrine. He did not complain one bit. Supposedly this man was a really good looking man and strong and athletic and young. And I'm sure as any average young man who is not a believer, he probably could have just up and left and went for someone else. But his eyes remained focus on God's word while at the same time focused on his wife. And that's what happens when you have doctrine in your soul. You can go through life and say, "Well, we're in it together. Honey, it doesn't matter. God put us together. We're going to stay together until he calls us home." That's the application of doctrine. Not – "How come God is allowing you to go through all of this? He knows that I need you. Why are you in this condition?" Apparently, God would say, "Well, count this all joy. I'm doing something in your life. And you can't tell me what to do; I'm in charge here." And there are all kinds of stories of people who because of the result of storing doctrine prior to the problem, they were able to weather it in such a way, and that if they didn't store up doctrine, they would have fainted. Because that's a very tough situation and the only explanation for his stability is Philippians 4 or God's Word where he gives us a piece that surpasses all understanding. That means even the peace that you receive at that moment – you can't even begin to understand it. There are some times when you receive peace that you can understand because it's circumstantial. You land a good job; you get good pay – you have peace. But the type of peace that Philippians 4 is talking about is a peace that goes beyond the mental capacity or the understanding of the mind. It goes beyond our comprehension. That's the stuff that I think people need more of – we need that stability so that we can press on and do what God has called us to do.

Remember, James is concerned with our speech. He says in the theme of the letter, "Be slow to speak," and that's because in a suffering situation, it's so easy to get angry and lash out with the tongue. But anger does not produce the righteousness of God according to James 1:20. Anger without definition can hinder you. Anger itself is not necessarily a sin. In fact, it's a command to be angry – when you read it. It's an imperative. So, "be angry"! But it also says, "Do not sin". So it is possible to be angry and not sin, and that is a result of being angry at the sin.

It's easy to sin with the tongue. We use it to curse God. "Why are you doing this to me God?" We use it to curse men. "Oh I wish you were dead!" We use it to blame others. "That's so-and-so's fault! No problem here – I'm just a victim." And so the sins of the tongue are a dime a dozen and we have to be very careful because the tongue tends to slip. The tongue is typically the first thing to sin in a suffering situation because we fly off the handle. And that's why we read in James 3:2 that "if any man does not stumble in what he says, he's a mature man." The Greek word there is "teleios". He's reached spiritual maturity. He's able to keep his tongue in check. So one of the marks of a mature believer can be seen by what he says, or what he doesn't say. So James says, "Above all my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven, or by earth, or with any other oath." That's the negative command of what not to do in a suffering situation. "But your 'yes' is to be yes, and your 'no' no, so that you may not fall under judgment." That's the positive command – what to do in a suffering situation. You'll see that the verse begins with the word "but". And in the middle is another "but". And those two conjunctions separate the negative command from the positive. The negative command is the verb "swear". "Do not swear" is directed toward the brethren. Believers do this. Believers are accustomed to swearing. The word for brethren is the Greek word "adelphos". That's not an unbeliever. James is talking to believers here. Believers were accustomed to swearing. And the mandate is to stop. If it could happen back then, it certainly can happen today. It is directed toward the brethren or fellow believers in Jesus Christ. James, throughout the book, is clearly writing to genuine regenerate believers. And the command is "Do not swear." It's the Greek word "omnuow" and it's not talking about vulgar words. James is making an application to a suffering situation. Remember, that's why we went back to verses 7 to 11, to look at the context and to establish that there were people grumbling and bickering and fighting back and forth. They were suffering. Remember Job and the prophets and how they were in suffering situations. And when you get in a suffering situation, the first tendency is to get frustrated or angry. And once that happens, more than likely our words are going to be altered. "I didn't cause this! It's not my fault!" Often, we're on the defensive when we're angry. Often we are taking the blame for something, and when that happens, people sometimes say, "I swear to God, I did not do that! I swear to God, I did not say that!" This is what James is condemning. The word "swear" means to affirm the veracity of one's statement by invoking a transcendent entity – which means to ask help from someone higher than self – namely God. What's the implication if I have to invoke a transcendent being? If I have to swear to God or something, then what does that imply about my daily speech? It implies that it is not reliable.

What does James mean when he says "above all"? It doesn't mean that he elevates this command above any other that is given or that he will give. Rather this is simply an emphatic way of introducing the command. He's saying that the most common response of the human heart to problems and difficulties is to say the wrong thing. And that is why he has given the command to not swear. The Greek word "omnuow" means to declare with an oath. "Stop making promises with an oath!" That's a command. A believer should be honest and straightforward – not needing to enforce everything with an oath. Be true to your word.

Suppose your integrity is shot. Suppose you've had a tendency for failing. And your "no's" were really not no's, and your "yes" was really not a yes. There's no consistency there. Let's say I have that problem. What should I do about it? If I want to fix it, what do I do? First of all, it would be helpful to stop. But if you want to change, it is helpful to look at Romans 12:2,

which says that our lives are transformed by the renewing of our minds. A lot of people think that if we have a habit and we want to change we need to try harder. Wrong! “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” So change is a direct result of renovating our minds. And Paul tells us not to be conformed to this world. The fascinating thing is that this “world” here is not like the “world” in John 3:16. Both words mean “world”, but the Greek word in John 3:16 is “kosmos”, and the Greek word for Romans 12:2 is “aiowni”. So if it’s not the same “world”, what is Paul talking about? One is talking about the physical world. One is talking about the *trends* of the world – the way they think. The bottom line is that they think apart from God. You don’t catch that in the English text, but that’s what happens when you dig a little bit because now it starts to make sense. If you want to change the way that you are, it begins with your thinking because if you’re mixing with the world – the world has its own way of thinking. Imagine a group you hang out with. They have their own way of doing things. They have their own way of thinking. They have their own way of playing. That’s their style or tendency. God’s way is different. And the way to offset what you’ve been taking in for the last few years is to saturate your mind with God’s Word. Rather than putting the cart before the horse, it’s not about trying harder. It’s not “I can’t believe it! I’m a believer and I keep dropping the ball and I keep having these struggles and failures and thoughts.” We all do; nobody’s immune. But the more you renovate your mind, the more that God is going to transform you into the likeness of his son Jesus Christ. That’s his job. So rather than try harder, try harder to commit to regular reading of Scripture. That’s what’s going to change your behavior.