

(James) - Becoming Mature

Practical Advice on How to Live A Mature Christian Life



- Are you growing spiritually, or are you at a standstill?
- Do difficult times make you bitter or better?
- What does a mature Christian look like, in your opinion?

Becoming a Christian and experiencing “the New Birth” (John 3:3, 7) is only the beginning of the Christian life. Next, you have to grow up! You have to progress through the stages of spiritual infancy (being a “babe” in Christ), spiritual adolescence, and eventually spiritual maturity (cf. 1 John 1:12-14; Hebrews 5:12-6:1; 1 Corinthians 3:1-2). Spiritual immaturity is the cause of most of our problems in life. God wants us to grow up! He gives us practical advice for maturity in the epistle of James. Bible teacher Warren Wiersbe comments:

“Spiritual maturity is one of the greatest needs in churches today. Too many churches are playpens for babies instead of workshops for adults....I am convinced that spiritual immaturity is the number one problem in our churches. God is looking for mature men and women to carry on His work, and sometimes all He can find are little children who cannot even get along with each other.” (*Be Mature*, p.13)

“Not everybody who grows old, grows up. There is a vast difference between age and maturity. Ideally, the older we are, the more mature we should be; but too often the ideal does not become the real. The result is problems—problems in personal lives, in homes, and in churches. As a pastor, I see more problems in these areas caused by immaturity than by anything else. If Christians would just grow up, they would become victors instead of victims.” (p.5).

James is the most practical of all the New Testament epistles. It has been called **“A Practical Guide to Christian Life and Conduct.”** The book of James is the Proverbs of the New Testament and covers many practical topics of everyday life. It conveys the ethics of Christianity. Like Proverbs, it is full of metaphors and figurative language. James is as relevant today as it was in the first century.

Central Lesson:

God often uses our problems to help us GROW in CHARACTER and spiritual MATURITY.

Author: The author of the book is **JAMES**.

Four men are named James in the New Testament: (1) James, the father of Judas (not Iscariot), is mentioned twice (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13) as the father of one of the twelve but is otherwise completely unknown. (2) James, the son of Alphaeus (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13), elsewhere called James the Less (Mark 15:40), was one of the twelve disciples. (3) James, the son of Zebedee and John’s brother (Matt. 4:21; 10:2; 17:1) was one of Jesus’ intimate disciples, but his martyrdom by A.D. 44 (Acts 12:2) makes it very unlikely that he wrote this epistle. (4) James, the Lord’s brother (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3; Gal. 1:19), was one of the “pillars” in the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:18; Gal. 2:9, 12). Tradition points to this James as the author.

The book begins with: **“I am writing to the ‘twelve tribes’—Jewish believers scattered abroad”** (1:1). It is clear from James 1:19, 2:1, 7 that this greeting refers to **Hebrew Christians** outside of Palestine. Their place of meeting is called a “synagogue” in the Greek text (2:2), and the whole epistle reflects Jewish thought and expressions (e.g., 2:19, 21; 4:11-12; 5:4, 12).

Date: James was written about A.D. **49**, before the Jerusalem council which met in A.D. 50 (Acts 15).

Key Verses: James 1:**3-4**. This verse best reflects the emphasis and process of spiritual maturity. **“³ For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. ⁴ So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect (mature) and complete, needing nothing.”** NLT.

Key Chapter: James chapter **1**.

Life is often difficult and filled with trials and temptations. In chapter one, James explains the correct way to respond to difficulty and the reasons for that response. **The bottom line** is that a correct response to both trials and temptation builds character and develops spiritual maturity. Difficulty will either make us bitter or better. God wants us to respond to hard times correctly so that we become better, that is, spiritually mature..

Outline: My outline of James is:

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| 1. Facing Trouble (1:2-18) | 8. Focusing on the Future (4:13-17) |
| 2. Following Scripture (1:19-27) | 9. Fortune and Fairness (5:1-6) |
| 3. Forsaking Partiality (2:1-13) | 10. Firm in Patience (5:7-11) |
| 4. Faith That Saves (2:14-26) | 11. Fidelity in Conversations (5:12) |
| 5. Folly of the Tongue (3:1-12) | 12. Fervent Praying (5:13-18) |
| 6. Favoring Godly Wisdom (3:13-18) | 13. Fixing Backsliding (5:19-20) |
| 7. Feuding People (4:1-12) | |

Does James 2:14-26 Contradict the Apostle Paul?

Many people misunderstand James 2:14-26 as teaching salvation by “faith plus works.” This would contradict Paul’s teaching of salvation by faith alone, apart from works (Read Romans 3:28, Titus 3:5, Ephesians 2:8-9). A careful study of the James passage will show that James and Paul actually agree. James’ main question is—*what kind of faith saves?* (cf. 2:14). **Good works** are the key **to recognizing genuine saving faith**. Genuine saving faith is productive, visible, useful, and is demonstrated by a changed life and behavior (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). Dead faith accomplishes nothing and makes no difference in a person’s life and behavior; it is invisible.

Paul is looking at the **root** of salvation (faith apart from works); James is looking at the **fruit** of salvation (Works that flow from true faith *after* salvation by faith alone). Paul deals with the **means** of salvation, and James deals with the **outcome** of salvation (good deeds and behavior). James and Paul do not contradict each other but complement one another.

Central Lesson:

God often uses our problems to help us grow in character and spiritual maturity.

► Accept Christ as your Savior. ► As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ. ► Invite someone to next Sunday’s study. ► Attend a small group. ► Read the Bible this week. ► Pray for friends that need Jesus.