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Slide 1 Not everyone who grows old, grows up. As we start this series on the book of James that is what we will be addressing - spiritual maturity. How does the risen Jesus we saw last week at Easter, transform us? How does Jesus filter down & out into a practical life of faith?

Slide 2 Who was James? Tradition tells us he was called “the Just” and quickly became very influential in the early church, especially to Jewish believers. He earned the moniker “camel knees,” because of the callouses developed on his knees in prayer.¹

James was the brother of Jesus and did not believe in Him during His earthly ministry (Mark 3:31–35; John 7:1–5). But he was there in the upper room praying with the other disciples (Acts 1:14). First Corinthians 15:7 indicates that Jesus appeared to James after His resurrection, which convinced James that Jesus truly was the Savior, and pushed him to share this with others. James became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. Paul called him “a pillar,” in Galatians 2:9. It was James who moderated the church conference described in Acts 15. When Peter was delivered from prison, he sent a special message to James (Acts 12:17); and when Paul visited Jerusalem, it was to James that he brought greetings and the special “love offering” from the Gentiles (Acts 21:18–19).² James was a respected leader.

Slide 3 So, James had the relational authority to send this type of letter which includes 54 imperatives in 108 verses—averaging one call for action for every other verse!³ So, James was not one to make suggestions, but to command. Not too popular these days...we don't like to be told what to do.

Slide 4 This is a letter which deals more with the practice of the Christian faith, than with its precepts.⁴ Showing how Christian faith and love can be

¹ Richards, L. O. (1991). *The Bible readers companion* (electronic ed.) (869). Wheaton: Victor Books.

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Heb 13:20). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

³ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *Vol. 2: The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (816). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *Vol. 2: The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (818). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

expressed in real situations. The book has a unified theme. **Slide 5** As someone once said, “The pearls are not rolling around in some box; they are carefully strung to produce a necklace of priceless beauty.”⁵

If there is a key verse in this book it is 1:4 which says **Slide 6**, ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.⁶ To do that, James would say we need a firm foundation. And in his mind, a believer can stand by pursuing, perceiving, and practicing the Word of God. Trials from without, and temptations from within, are no match for those who stand on Truth.⁷

Slide 7 In this short book he addresses a few important doctrinal issues; God is holy (1:13), a giver of good gifts (v. 17), and the Father of His people (3:9). Sin infects human nature (1:14–15) and expresses itself in anger (v. 20), immorality (v. 21), discrimination (2:9–11), bitterness, and out of control passions (4:1–3). James is concerned with a faith which works itself out in a godly life. James is interested in the impact of faith on the life of the believer. **Slide 8** For James it was not just “believing the right things.” Or, adding to head knowledge alone which makes a true believer. He would say that kind of faith is worthless, only a faith that transforms our hearts leading to a godly life is useful.⁸

Slide 9 Although James doesn't quote a lot, he alludes, often to the sayings of Jesus, particularly the Sermon on the Mount. So, he shows us that the Word of God is imbedded in his psyche. The mature Christian is not one who impresses by knowledge, quoting every little verse, but one in which the Word of God pours out of them in real, natural, and practical ways. Others may not even realize how much this persons speech reflects the loving word of God, but their hearts are warmed & convicted in the persons presence.

James 1:2—Matthew 5:10–12

James 1:4—Matthew 5:48

⁵ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *Vol. 2: The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (818). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁶ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Jas 1:4). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁷ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jas 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁸ Richards, L. O. (1991). *The Bible readers companion* (electronic ed.) (868). Wheaton: Victor Books.

James 1:5—Matthew 7:7–12

James 1:22—Matthew 7:21–27

James 4:11–12—Matthew 7:1–5

James 5:1–3—Matthew 6:19–21⁹

Slide 10 Under the value of Story Matters for Six:Eight we have also a Mature Christian Profile which is reflective of what kind of person James was:

The mature Christian in the issue of Story is not only knowledgeable of God's Word, but has allowed it to influence, and guide, all aspects of their life. They see themselves as rooted in the biblical story, which is larger than themselves, beginning in creation, and ending in the hope of restoration. They are not only able to 'quote' or lead a person to certain ideas or verses, but more importantly, are able to apply them in ways that are refreshing and challenging to the soul. Their world view is shaped by the story of God, how they view life, and reality; it is born out of this holistic story. They do not try to impress with their knowledge, but if one listens closely to the mature Christian, they can hear that their words are bolstered with the ideas and verses of Scripture. They no longer dwell on the elementary teachings, but have moved onto deeper issues of the faith. They do not try to impress, but are just 'being'.

If James' words were a curtain you could peek behind, you would see Jesus standing there directing the show.

Slide 11 James used the word *perfect* several times, a word that means "mature, complete" (James 1:4, 17, 25; 2:22; 3:2). By "perfect" (James 3:2) James did not mean sinless, but rather one who is mature, balanced, grown-up. These people were not mature enough to eat solid spiritual food, so they had to be fed on milk (Heb. 5:11–14). The problems James dealt with reveal that they are characteristic of children:

Impatience in difficulties - 1:1-4

Talking, but not living the truth - 2:14ff

No control of the tongue - 3:1ff

Fighting and coveting - 4:1ff

⁹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Heb 13:20). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

Collecting material “toys” - 5:1ff¹⁰

His readers were having personal and church fellowship problems. Difficult testings & temptations. Some catered to the rich, others put down by the rich. Members competing for offices in the church, particularly teaching offices.¹¹

Sounds a lot like the local church today. People suffering for one reason or another? Members who talk one way, but walk another? Some unable to control their tongues. Worldliness. James is dealing with timeless appropriate issues.¹² All of which had a common cause: *spiritual immaturity*. Those who grow old, don't necessarily grow up. So, James leads us to understand *the marks of maturity in the Christian life*. Slide 12 James logically follows Hebrews, and one of the major themes of Hebrews is *spiritual perfection*. The word *perfect* is found in Hebrews at least fourteen times. The key verse in Hebrews is 6:1 which says, “Let us go on unto perfection” meaning, “spiritual maturity.” James exhorted his readers to build on this perfect salvation and grow into maturity. Without the perfect work of Christ there can be no perfecting of believers.¹³ Slide 13 For James, the blessing does not come in *studying* the Word (although he would agree we must study), but in *doing* the Word. Unless we are willing to obey, God's teaching will not metastasize in us, and out to others (John 7:17).¹⁴

Slide 14 So, James outlines for us what the Marks of the Mature Christian are:

- I. are PATIENT IN TESTING - chapter 1
- II. PRACTICE THE TRUTH - chapter 2
- III. HAVE POWER OVER THEIR TONGUE - chapter 3
- IV. ARE PEACEMAKERS, NOT A TROUBLEMAKERS - chapter 4

¹⁰ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Heb 13:20). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

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¹² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Heb 13:20). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

¹³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Heb 13:20). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

¹⁴ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Heb 13:20). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

V. ARE PRAYERFUL IN TROUBLES - chapter 5¹⁵

This will be our rough outline of James. One of our members met Jesus years ago, which has worked itself out over a number of years of practical faith, let's listen: **VIDEO**

2nd Sermon after 2nd worship set

Slide 15 James begins his book by saying, 'James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.'

James, viewed himself simply as a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. He considered himself a bond-slave (*doulos*). He was the property of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. He recognized his position under the authority of Jesus, although Jesus was his brother. And he acknowledges the deity of Jesus by placing Him coequal with God in this opening.¹⁶

Slide 16 James would not agree with someone who says, 'Jesus has been my Savior, but I need to make him Lord.' He would not see it possible for Christ to be only Savior and not Lord? James would say we cannot enjoy the benefits of salvation without the obedience that comes under his Lordship? God is God. If we are constantly struggling along constantly turning away from Jesus, James would say there is a Lordship problem. James reveals his willingness to have God's reign over him as God's servant. James reflected obedience, and that obedience is what gives him the authority to write such strong imperatives to the church.

In Exodus Chapter three God meets Moses in the burning bush and calls him to go to the Israelites because he has heard the cries and suffering of his people under Pharaoh. As Moses approached the bush, God said:

Slide 17 ⁵"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

¹⁵ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Heb 13:20). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

¹⁶ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jas 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Then in verse 14, ¹⁴God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.' "

This interaction helps better understand James initial greeting. And what James knows and we will notice is...

1. **Slide 18** God is in charge; He suffers no identity crisis. He knows who he is, and proclaims his authority unapologetically. He's in charge with every right to command Moses. It reminds us of Joshua on the battlefield in Joshua 5 **Slide 19**:

¹³Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" ¹⁴"Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?" ¹⁵The commander of the LORD's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

Same language, take off your sandals, God is present. I am not for you, I'm not for them, I'm not for either, I'm not here to take sides; I'm here in charge. I'm God, redeeming my creation; you can be a part of it. Take off your sandals, I'm Lord. Joshua falls on his face, using the same term for himself that James does, servant.

2. **Slide 20** God is like no other; He is good. It does not seem like he is in charge. Why doesn't he just come down and clean house? Why doesn't he just make us obedient? Simply, that would not be love - and I know that does not make sense to a lot of us, but it will if you will obey, and grow up as you grow old. His Lordship demands obedience, but he wants us to respond. He is good, patient, loving, and sacrificial. He embodies servant-hood; models it to us; moving on our behalf, because he loves us. He does not call us to anything he will not endure along with us. In the interaction with Moses, God says he is coming down to help, and to serve his people, in a time of great need. I think James reflects this understanding of God.
3. **Slide 21** God serves; He governs with love & sacrifice. He hears the cries of his people in Exodus 3 and '*comes down*' to bring them '*up*'.

The world is not as it should be, and God has made provision for that in Jesus; redeeming the world, overcoming evil one heart at a time. We serve a God in charge, with every right to direct His servants, yet serves them. He offers us the opportunity to engage, which is what James calls us to in practical ways.

4. **Slide 22** God models; He calls us to reflect Him. Jesus said 'whoever wants to be first, must be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' When we give our lives to Jesus, we take on His character & purpose. A King who lived and died to move us from bondage to freedom (Romans 6/Philippians 2). What we don't get is that obedience to a good loving authority brings freedom, as compared to doing it my way, which brings bondage. We are to keep our focus on the Kingdom of God & His Righteousness, modeling grace and love; James will push us in these ways.

Slide 23 Who is James writing to, and why? He says the twelve tribes scattered among the nations. He says 'greeting', which is actually better translated '*Joy be to you!*' These new Christians of Jewish background have been scattered among the nations due to persecution, they need joy. If we look at Acts 8:1-3 we see what has happened - this is in the early days of the church before Saul's conversion **Slide 24**.

¹And Saul was there, giving approval to his death (the stoning of Stephen). On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ²Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

Their newfound faith tested in ways; outcasts, facing hardships due to their confession of Christ as Lord and Savior, and their own internal temptations. **Slide 25** So he is reminding them in essence of 3 things; Who they serve, what they are in relationship to Jesus, and how they are to live as believers in a difficult world.

In looking at James, and the issue of spiritual maturity, we'll all have to deal with various outward issues or inward struggles. We'll be confronted with his Lordship. We may have to look at how we value our own comfort,

safety, and control over our lives. It is natural for us to seek these things in reaction to life, but it is exactly there, when we want all the benefits of relationship with Jesus, but are unwilling to come under His lordship, when we are sapped of joy & purpose.

Slide 26 Some of us might simply say, 'I am afraid of what He might call me to.' A fear which should dissipate in light of a loving God who comes down to serve you in your hour of need. Even in the harshest of situations working for your good, and for redeeming the world at large. Is God going to call you to leave Pennsylvania, could be. Is God going to call you to Cambodia, maybe. Is God going to ask you to serve the sick, or in a dangerous neighborhood, He might. But all of us are called to give up those things which are killing us, and to love our neighbors where we are now; that is frightening enough. Leave the future to itself.

Slide 27 There is a great article from Neue Magazine up on our blog which speaks about what Six:Eight has been driving at for years - getting rooted into your local community, becoming an insider, and loving people right around you, making your church home in the same geographical area as where you live - and we are seeing that happen here. Read it this week if you can, the link is in the newsletter, or on our blog. They use a quote from **Slide 28** Jim Elliot when speaking of his longing over a distance to be married to his wife, but with ministry right in front of them where they were. It says, "Let not our longing slay our our appetite for living". In our context we might say, **Slide 29** "Do not allow your thoughts of doing lofty things for God somewhere else deflect you from loving those right in front of you."

Sacrifice & love come down to small things; the inconvenience of a neighbor who wants to talk when you have work to do; giving your money to a need, holding your tongue, shaking someone's hand, making someone feel welcome, inviting someone to dinner and paying, driving someone somewhere, setting up here, greeting, tithing, etc. It may come in ways of not arguing about hot-button issues, but actually doing something about them in very practical, simple & small ways. It may come in dealing with your own personal sin, or negative character traits, in order to not hamstring community.

We have to be realistic, we will not solve the worlds ills as individuals or even collectively, but we can make small dents which are very worth it and have eternal consequences with our neighbors right before us here. In a

recent article called, "Are we raising a generation of helpless kids?" Tim Elmore who works with building kids into leaders was asked where we went wrong. **Slide 30** One of his answers was, "We've told our kids to dream big - and now any small act seems insignificant. In the great scheme of things, kids can't instantly change the world. They have to take small, first steps - which seem like no progress at all to them. Nothing short of instant fame is good enough. "It's time we tell them that doing great things starts with accomplishing small goals."

Jesus is a patient Lord, one who is bringing you into deeper obedience by a loving hand. James starts out our series expressing a profound truth that Christ is Lord, placing himself under that lordship as his servant. We must remember; **Slide 31** God is in charge, God is good, God serves, and we are to reflect Him. And, James' question to us will be, how shall we live as servants of Lord Jesus?

BENEDICTION after 3rd worship set

Slide 32 The word *scattered* in James 1:1 is an interesting one. It means "in the dispersion." The term *the dispersion* was used to identify the Jews living outside the land of Palestine. But the Greek word carries the idea of "scattering seed." When the Jewish believers were scattered in that first wave of persecution in Acts 8, it was really the sowing of seed in many places; and much of that seed bore fruit later (Acts 11:19ff).¹⁷ It was like throwing out small churches of people around Palestine. This morning we come together as individuals. One church among the diaspora of believers in the world, and we want to acknowledge that by announcing the newest members of Six:Eight.

Pray over them

Slide 33 As we leave here today we scatter as individuals or seeds of Christ among our neighbors but we remain a unified body in this community. How we live this life, reveals who we follow. So, go and remember who you serve, who you are in relationship to Him, as we begin to explore how we live under his lordship together in the coming weeks.

¹⁷ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Heb 13:20). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.