

Third Millennium Ministries

Application Guide

A practical guide for leaders
of groups studying our curriculum

The Epistle of James

Lesson Two

Two Paths of Wisdom

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ABOUT THIRD MILLENNIUM MINISTRIES

Founded in 1997, Third Millennium Ministries is a nonprofit Christian organization dedicated to providing **Biblical Education. For the World. For Free.** In response to the growing global need for sound, biblically-based Christian leadership training, we are building a user-friendly, donor-supported, multimedia seminary curriculum in five major languages (English, Spanish, Russian, Mandarin Chinese, and Arabic) and distributing it freely to those who need it most, primarily Christian leaders who have no access to, or cannot afford, traditional education. All lessons are written, designed, and produced in-house, and are similar in style and quality to those on the History Channel[®]. This unparalleled, cost-effective method for training Christian leaders has proven to be very effective throughout the world. We have won Telly Awards for outstanding video production in Education and Use of Animation, and our curriculum is currently used in more than 150 countries. Third Millennium materials take the form of DVD, print, Internet streaming, satellite television transmission, and radio and television broadcasts.

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What does this Leader's Guide offer?

Our leader's guides provide practical suggestions for helping your students integrate IIMM curriculum into their lives. They begin with an overview and then give attention to each of the 2-4 main parts of each lesson. They offer three areas of concentration: 1) *Concepts to Review*, 2) *Applications to Personal Life*, and 3) *Applications to Ministry*. These three areas of concentration give leaders opportunities to reflect on the kinds of concepts, personal applications and ministry applications that their students need.

Concepts to Review

Our lessons often have concepts that are unfamiliar or difficult to grasp. We provide samples of concepts that may need to be reviewed with students.

Applications to Personal Life

Our lessons have many implications for the personal actions and attitudes of students. We provide sample discussion questions for class, assignments to be done outside of class and case studies that help leaders focus on the spiritual growth of their students and their families.

Applications to Ministry

Our lessons have many implications for the skills students should have as they serve others. We provide sample discussion questions for class, assignments to be done outside of class and case studies that help leaders focus on ministering to others.

The Epistle of James

Application Guide for Lesson Two: Two Paths of Wisdom

Objective: This lesson enables the learner to understand and take advantage of (grow through and become a more effective kingdom agent through) the reflective wisdom that comes from God.

1. **REFLECT** What stood out to you in this lesson, and why? Discuss this in your learning community.

2. **REVIEW** **The Need for Greater Awareness:** It might seem too obvious to say, but here it is: we don't know what we don't know. This truth *is* obvious to children when they think about babies. And it's obvious to adolescents when they think about children. It's also obvious to adults when they consider adolescents, and to older adults when they consider young adults. When is it not so obvious? When we think about ourselves. We need to be challenged into greater awareness. Why? God made us as beings in the process of becoming more developed and more fully aware beings. Because of this, even Jesus "learned obedience." (Hebrews 5:8). Unlike God who "is who he is" (Exodus 3:14-15), we humans are in the process of becoming what we will be. Our awareness is something that needs to grow. Furthermore, our need for greater awareness is complicated by the fall. Sin makes us less willing to face our need for greater awareness. As a result, all of us have faced situations that we think we understand, only to find out later that we were mistaken. We have thought one way about ourselves only to discover later that we were in some ways mistaken. This is why the Lord urges his people to seek "reflective wisdom." Books of the Bible like Job, Ecclesiastes and James ask us to reflect on God's purposes behind challenging, difficult and even painful situations. [*Section: Reflective Wisdom*]

3. **CASE STUDY** Mary was the life of the party. Everyone loved her because she was always so sociable. She would always strike up a conversation with anyone who was near. Whenever the conversation lulled she felt uncomfortable and tried to keep things going by saying something. Society affirmed her so much in this behavior that she rarely felt the need to reflect. In fact, her personality type was exactly what her culture appreciated. As a result, her lack of reflection was rarely challenged. She was a Christian and she did read the Bible. But it was usually just a few verses, and usually from the Psalms. She looked for a verse or two that would be uplifting. But she didn't reflect much on it or on her life. She got married at the age of 24 to a young man who was very different from her. At first the differences intrigued her, but eventually she got fed up with his quietness. Their relationship became very strained. She agreed to marriage counseling thinking that this would straighten her husband out. One of the things the counselor told her is that she didn't know herself very well. She needed to take time to reflect. That was the last thing she wanted to hear.
 - a. **REFLECT** How would you evaluate the experience of Mary?
 - b. **REFLECT** Discuss your experience with small children who, due to their lack of awareness, insist on having something or doing something that you know could easily be dangerous for them. How does it make you feel when you say "no" to something and it makes them upset with you?

- c. **REFLECT** How do you feel when people in your church insist you do things for them that you know are not good for them? How do you respond when you say "no" and they get upset with you? Discuss this in your learning community.
- d. **REFLECT** Now think about how God must feel when his children insist on something that might be bad for us. In your learning community, share your experiences of insisting that God do something for you that later, with greater awareness, you realized was or would have been, bad for you.
- e. **ACT** Don't be the fool of Proverbs (see for example 18:2 and 23:9) who lacks awareness of self, of the situation and of God, yet acts as if he knows everything.
- f. **ACT** Make time every day to read the Bible and pray. As you do, use it as an opportunity to reflect on your life and thus become more aware of areas in your life in which you need to grow. Reflect alone, but also with another trusted person--this would include your spouse if you are married. Introverts probably will resist reflecting with other people, while extroverts will probably resist reflecting alone. It is healthy for everyone to do both.
- g. **ACT** As you reflect, write in a diary or journal ideas and feelings the Lord brings to your mind and heart. These may include questions that you aren't sure how to answer, or vague ideas that begin to impress themselves on you. They may include feelings of uncertainty, anxiety or joy. Let your reflection focus not only on ideas, but also on your feelings--what you love, what moves you, what excites you--and your actions--the things you do or don't do.
- h. **CASE STUDY** I like to watch good movies and I often find myself identifying with the hero. "I want to be like that," is what I experience. I don't think there's necessarily anything wrong with that if the hero exhibits biblical characteristics. But when you read the Bible you find it's a story in which you are not (even potentially) the main hero. Jesus is the hero and he gets the glory. Yes, we can be like him in very important ways. And we even share his glory. But there is an important sense in which the Bible is unlike any other story: we can't ever be a hero in the same way Jesus is. In the story of the Bible we are more like the sidekick. From another perspective we are the bride who gets rescued. We are the children who look to their elder brother for wisdom and guidance. By saying these things I don't want to downplay the important role that the sidekick/bride/younger siblings get to play in God's kingdom plan. I just want to note that many people have a hard time making sense of the Bible because it's a book that allows us to be only secondary heroes as we become like the Great Hero Jesus. Needing to be rescued and living for the glory of the Great Hero seems humiliating to many people.
- i. **REFLECT** Discuss the previous case study with your learning community.
 - i. **REFLECT** Why do you think people who like to watch good movies and read good books often don't like to read the Bible just as much or more?
 - ii. **REFLECT** Do you know people who reject Christianity because of the reasons mentioned in this case study? Elaborate.

- iii. **REFLECT** Do you ever find yourself rebelling against the idea of living for the glory of someone else, of being the sidekick, or of being the bride who needs to be rescued? Elaborate.
 - iv. **REFLECT** Is there something, maybe this very reason, that keeps you from daily meditating on God's Word? Elaborate.
 - v. **REFLECT** How badly do you want greater awareness of yourself, of your situation and of who God is? Enough to go through challenging and sometimes painful situations? Enough to pray for wisdom to see them from God's perspective? Enough to read the Bible regularly to gain insight? Elaborate.
 - vi. **ACT** Repent if necessary of whatever reasons you have for not spending time daily meditating on God's Word and praying for wisdom. In faith, reach for the greater awareness that comes from reflective wisdom.
4. **REVIEW** **The Need for Tests and Trials:** When an organization looks to hire a new leader, they might look for someone who did well in school, who is tall, good-looking, and confident. But more importantly they should look for someone whose knowledge, abilities and character have been tested in challenging situations and who performed well under that pressure. That kind of challenging pressure reveals not just who you say or think you are, but who you really are. God tests people so they--and everyone else--can see who they are and what they can do. Even Jesus was tested. As a believer in Christ, you don't know what your faith can do unless you face challenging situations. Tests come to prepare us for greater service in the kingdom of God--not just because they reveal our weaknesses, but also because they show us what God can do through us when we believe. They bring us the maturity that is required for greater service. [*Section: Reflective Wisdom*]
- a. **CASE STUDY** Guillermo was tall, good-looking, had a lovely wife and a charismatic personality and was a very gifted speaker. In addition, he had a masters degree from a seminary in the United States. He was readily chosen as the pastor of the church. However, as time went on the people began to realize they had not payed sufficient attention to his character and maturity level. He had avoided the tests and trials that are necessary for maturity. While the church grew under his ministry, it became much more of a social club than a place of worship, fellowship, service, sound teaching and outreach. It was eventually discovered that Guillermo was having an affair with someone. After he left, someone found his sermon notes. In the margin at one point he had written a note to himself that said, "Cry here." He had deceived everyone--maybe even himself.
 - b. **REFLECT** How could the situation described in the previous case study have happened? How could it be avoided? Have you even seen anything like this? If so, describe it.
 - c. **REFLECT** Sometimes our faith is tested by opportunities to interact with people who are unlovely or who rub us the wrong way. How do you tend to respond (both emotionally and behaviorally) to people who are unlovely or for some reason rub you the wrong way? Give some examples (without mentioning names). If you were able

to work it through before the Lord and grow from it, describe that process. If not, describe what happened?

- d. **REFLECT** Sometimes our faith is tested by opportunities to respond to those who disrespect us. How do you tend to respond (both emotionally and behaviorally) when you feel disrespected? Give some examples. If you were able to work it through before the Lord and grow from it, describe that process. If not, describe what happened?
- e. **REFLECT** Sometimes our faith is tested when we are under pressure. How do you tend to respond (both emotionally and behaviorally) under pressure? Give some examples. If you were able to work it through before the Lord and grow from it, describe that process. If not, what happened?
- f. **REFLECT** Sometimes our faith is tested when we experience loss of some kind. How do you tend to respond (both emotionally and behaviorally) when you experience the loss of something you value? Give some examples. If you were able to work it through before the Lord and grow from it, describe that process. If not, what happened?
- g. **REFLECT** What other ways has your faith been tested and how did you respond?
- h. **REFLECT** What would you say these typical responses say about your spiritual growth and readiness for usefulness in the kingdom of God?
- i. **CASE STUDY** Jeremy was afraid to ask the Lord for more love, or more patience, or more of any kind of spiritual growth. Why? Because he had heard that if you ask for more spiritual growth, the Lord will give it to you through suffering. And he didn't want to suffer.
- j. **REFLECT** Discuss the previous case study with your learning community.
 - i. **REFLECT** Should Christians *ask* for suffering?
 - ii. **REFLECT** Read Matthew 26:39-42. Even though Jesus' suffering was necessary for our salvation, there is an important sense in which Jesus did not relish the suffering that was before him.
 - iii. **REFLECT** Even though the church often grows under persecution, the Lord tells us to pray "Deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13).
 - iv. **REFLECT** Are you afraid to pray for spiritual growth? Elaborate.
 - v. **REFLECT** If you are afraid to pray for spiritual growth, does that mean you are more interested in societal points (see Application Guide on lesson 1 of James) than in usefulness in God's kingdom? Elaborate.
- k. **ACT** If necessary, repent of being afraid to ask the Lord for spiritual growth.

- I. **ACT** Ask the Lord for spiritual growth. Specify areas in which you think you need to grow. Ask the Lord for grace to see the growth process/training from his perspective.
5. **REVIEW** **The Tension between those who have Societal Points and those who don't:** The recipients of this letter from James were experiencing tension between the wealthy and the poor. For application purposes we can generalize the word "poor" to mean anyone who in any situation is looked down upon by society and its expectations of what it means to be somebody significant. They have few "societal points." "Wealthy," then, can be generalized to mean those who do live up to these societal expectations in any given situation. They have more "societal points." (See Point 2 of the Application Guide for James Lesson 1 for more on the "societal point system"). [*Section: Reflective Wisdom: Guidance*]
- a. **CASE STUDY** Let me continue the story of Mary that I began in a previous case study. Mary saw her husband as "poor" in the sense that his quietness didn't meet with the approval of society. She saw him as immature. She saw herself as "wealthy" in the sense that she had something her society valued: outgoingness. She saw herself as mature. This, of course, affected the way she treated her husband. She would say she loved him, but focused on trying to help him mature. Through the sessions of marriage counseling, she began to realize that she was much more immature than she had thought, and that her husband was much more mature than she had thought. It was a difficult and humbling experience. But valuable.
 - b. **REFLECT** What are the qualities, possessions or abilities that in your culture signify that someone is respected, important or significant?
 - c. **REFLECT** How would your society evaluate the people of your church in this regard? How would they evaluate you in this regard? (See your answers in lesson 1).
 - d. **ACT** If you don't know how to answer the previous question, is there a way you could find out? Try to think of a way and get some feedback.
 - e. **ACT** Make a list of the evidences for the previous questions.
 - f. **REFLECT** How does this evaluation make you feel?
 - g. **REFLECT** How do you generally respond when you feel evaluated in this way?
 - h. **REFLECT** Do you find yourself buying into or believing as true the evaluation of your society? Give examples.
 - i. **REFLECT** How much influence does this evaluation have on your feelings and your behavior? How much influence do you see it having on the people who attend your church? Give examples.
 - j. **ACT** Do something to reach out in love to someone who is not considered important by your society. Look for someone who might be considered less important than you. It might even be someone who rubs you the wrong way. Begin to develop a relationship with that person. You might consider inviting them to your home for a meal.

- k. **ACT** Keep a journal of your attempts to reach out to this person. Write down how the process makes you feel and what you learn through it: about God, about yourself, and about the mission of the church.
 - l. **ACT** Encourage the people in your church to follow your example in this. If they are reluctant, invite them to do it with you.
6. **REVIEW** **The Need to Persevere by Relying on God's Grace in the Present:** Sometimes Christians constantly talk about what God has done for them in the distant past. This is not necessarily wrong, but it does make you wonder sometimes whether or not the Lord has been at work in their lives more recently. It's easy to fall into the trap of being content with God's grace to us in the past. We convince ourselves that we are doing well spiritually *now* in the present because of this grace in the *past*. But relying on God's grace in the past for our assurance and confidence could be a sign that we are not *persevering*. It is only those who *persevere* who will be saved. [Section: *Reflective Wisdom: Guidance*]
- a. **CASE STUDY** Max was afraid to ask God for greater usefulness in his kingdom. Why? Because he had heard that if, for example, you ask God for more patience, or more love, he will give you a challenging and maybe painful opportunity to develop those graces. So Max was content to focus on the grace he had received in the past, and not press on toward greater grace and usefulness. However, Max didn't realize he was afraid to ask God for greater usefulness. He didn't think of it that way. He just told himself that he was doing well spiritually and would think of all his past experiences as evidence.
 - b. **REFLECT** Discuss the previous case study with your learning community.
 - i. **REFLECT** Share with those in your learning community God's grace to you in your conversion.
 - ii. **REFLECT** Share with those in your learning community God's grace to you during the early months or years after your conversion.
 - iii. **REFLECT** Discuss in your learning community God's grace to you in the past month. If you can't think of anything in the last month, move back to two or even three months.
 - 1. **REFLECT** Describe some of the challenges the Lord has given you to face, how they have made you feel, and how you have reacted.
 - 2. **ACT** What are you learning about God, about yourself, and about the mission of the church as you face them? Write a 300 word (or more) essay on this subject.
 - 3. **ACT** Ask five people who know you well if they see you growing in the Lord. Ask them for their evidence. Take special note of any recent evidence (maybe during the last 6 months). If they don't give any recent evidence ask them about it.

4. **REFLECT** Compare your essay with what these people have said about you. Is there any overlap? Talk about what you think the results of this comparison mean.
 5. **ACT** Spend time in prayer asking the Lord for his grace to be more useful in his kingdom. Be aware that this may mean that he will send you a challenging opportunity to put your faith to work.
 6. **REFLECT** Examine your response to the previous step. To what extent are you willing to ask God for greater usefulness in his kingdom, knowing that it may involve a challenging opportunity to put your faith to work? What does your answer reveal about your spiritual maturity?
- c. **CASE STUDY** Ellen was a new believer. Her husband was not a believer, and was threatening to leave her unless she left Christianity behind. She read James 1:6 about asking in faith and not doubting. So she prayed that her husband would become a Christian or at least change his mind. She tried very hard to work up the faith to believe that God would answer her request. She chased all doubts out of her mind, but to no avail. She went to talk to her pastor. "I've been trying to really believe and not doubt that he will be saved like James says, but so far nothing has happened." The pastor replied, "When James says to ask in faith and not doubt, he doesn't mean that if you believe hard enough God will necessarily give you what you ask for, as if the granting of your request were a reward for your faith. No, he wants you to believe in God's goodness, power, faithfulness and love to you. Remembering and rehearsing in your mind who God is, what he has done and what he promises to do, tends to evoke faith in God. We ask for specific requests but we rest in the fact that God is good and he will do what is good. Our faith in God, not in our ability to believe that some specific thing will happen." Praying in faith involves making our requests known to God, but also being willing to let God decide the best way to answer because we trust his goodness and wisdom.
- d. **REFLECT** Discuss the previous case study with your learning community.
- i. **REFLECT** Have you ever tried to "work up" faith that some specific thing will happen? Elaborate.
 - ii. **REFLECT** Can you elaborate on the differences between trusting your ability to believe and trusting in God's goodness by giving some examples?
 - iii. **REFLECT** As you face various trials/challenges, are you able to resist the implicit temptations to despair or to take things into your own hands in some way by trusting God's goodness and wisdom? Elaborate with examples.
 - iv. **REFLECT** Discuss how trusting God's goodness, wisdom, power, faithfulness and so on is a powerful weapon to resist being captivated by the societal point system (See Point 2 in the Application Guide for James Lesson 1).

7. **REVIEW** **The Need for Reflective Wisdom:** We need to learn to look at challenging things that happen to us from God's perspective. We need his reflective wisdom. Let's practice reflecting. [*Section: Reflective Wisdom*]
- a. **CASE STUDY** Let me continue Mary's story. When she began the counseling sessions, she experienced a very challenging situation in which she felt disrespected and misunderstood. She didn't want to continue the sessions at first. They were too humbling and challenging to her self image. Eventually, she began to pray that if the Lord wanted to teach her something, he would help her see it and help her grow. This was a big step forward. But she still had a hard time making sense of things. The counselor urged her to write down what it was that was bothering her. This went through several revisions over a period of a week or so. Most of it focused on her husband and his quietness. Why didn't he talk to her more? Didn't he love her? Why did he want to be alone so much? Didn't he want to be with her? Why couldn't he see that he was being immature? Some of it also focused on the challenge to her self image when she began to question whether she might not be seeing things correctly. How could that be? She certainly felt like she was in the right. Throughout the process the counselor urged her to pray that the Lord would give her wisdom to see things from his perspective. Eventually she wrote down her negative reactions to the whole thing: anger at her husband, looking down on him, pressuring him to change, speaking negatively of him to others, fighting, anger at the counselor and so on. She began to see that, whether or not she was right in her evaluations of the situation, her reactions were often sinful. Together with the counselor they studied what God said about the situation. For example, Proverbs 10:19 says that "in many words sin is not absent." Another proverb talked about using your words to be a blessing to others. She had thought she was using them to be a blessing, but maybe it was more because society rewarded her for talking nicely--whatever the motive. She eventually began to realize that the reward she received from society for being a nice talkative person was for all practical purposes more important to her than Christ and what he had done for her. "Yes, thank you Jesus for dying for me on the cross, but please help people to like me for being a nice talkative person." Why hadn't she noticed this before? Probably a lack of reflection. She realized that, while her husband also had his faults, he was much better at reflection than she was. She gained a new appreciation for him, and a new desire to be more reflective in order to see things from God's perspective, and not be captivated by society's perspective.
- b. **CASE STUDY** Following is the outline of a process I try to use when I need God's wisdom to see things from his perspective. This process may in some ways reflect my particular personality type, but you may find it useful and might modify it--or use it as is--for your own progress in the faith:
- i. **CASE STUDY** I experience something bothering me. Maybe I'm not even sure what it is, but it's producing anxiety, or anger, or envy or grouchiness—something that makes me discontent.

- ii. **CASE STUDY** I'm often so busy that there is a temptation to ignore it, or deal with it superficially. I need to stop what I'm doing if at all possible and go somewhere I can be alone to think.
 - iii. **CASE STUDY** Asking the Lord for a godly attitude as I face the situation is essential for me. Sometimes I'm not eager to pray, but if I can at least say, "Help me because I don't really want to deal with this," it's like opening the door a crack and that seems to help. I find the Lord is willing to take a door that's been barely cracked open as an invitation to come in and help.
 - iv. **CASE STUDY** Then I ask myself, "What is it that is bothering you? What happened that triggered this bad mood? Why are you downcast, O my soul?" Let's say, for example, that someone said something that showed his or her lack of appreciation for me.
 - v. **CASE STUDY** Once I am able to identify the event or circumstance that triggered my bad attitude, I ask myself, "What is it that has become more important to you than Christ in this situation?" In this case, maybe I'm too concerned about what people think of me.
 - vi. **CASE STUDY** Then I ask myself, "What would be the worst that could happen if these people didn't think well of me? Would God still love me? Does he still work all things together for my good? Does he still have a significant place for me in his kingdom? Is Jesus--his death, resurrection, ascension and outpouring of the Spirit--enough, or do I think I need something else--like appreciation from others--in order to love and serve in his kingdom?"
 - vii. **CASE STUDY** Then I urge myself to repent of having made something more important than Christ, to believe what I know is true and act on the basis of it. "Hope in God for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."
- a. **REFLECT** Think of a challenging situation you are facing now that is causing you some tension. Maybe someone said something that made you feel bad. Maybe you feel disrespected or misunderstood. Maybe you are experiencing a loss of some kind.
 - b. **ACT** Now practice reflection on that situation to gain wisdom about it.
 - i. **ACT** You may find that you don't really want to deal with it. If this is the case, pray that the Lord will help you want to deal with it. If you open the door to the Lord even a crack, he will often come in.
 - ii. **ACT** Create a document and at the top write down exactly what the situation is that has produced tension. Write down also, if possible, what were the events or situations that triggered that tension.
 - iii. **ACT** Pray again to ask the Lord for wisdom to see it from his perspective. Even if you don't feel like praying because you really don't want to uncover and deal with this situation, ask the Lord to help you *want* to deal with it.

- iv. **ACT** Then make three columns below that. In the first column write down how the situation makes you feel.
- v. **ACT** In the second column write down reactions to this situation and to your feelings about it that would be typical within a non-Christian perspective. Include anything you feel like doing about this but aren't sure if it's the right thing to do (or know it's not the right thing to do). How does this situation tempt you to act or react? James lists a number of possibilities:
 1. Self-denigration (1:9)
 2. Speak negatively of others (3:9)
 3. Envy others (3:14)
 4. Selfish ambition (3:14)
 5. Fights and quarrels (4:1)
 6. Impatience (5:7)
 7. Anything else?
- vi. **ACT** In the third column write down what God says about this situation in his Word. If you can't think of anything else, you could at least include James 1:2-8. You could also ask other believers what God says about your situation. Or search the Bible yourself.
- vii. **ACT** Below the three columns write a paragraph to yourself (or pretend it's for someone else in your situation if that helps) trying to convince yourself that God's perspective is the true one--that this view of things is the real one. Make your argument as convincing as possible.
- viii. **ACT** Include in your argument the following:
 1. **ACT** What's the worst thing that could happen in this situation?
 2. **ACT** Are you willing to trust the Lord even if that should happen? If not, why not?
 3. **ACT** Is there something that has become (or that you are being tempted to allow to become) more important to you than Christ? If so, what is it?
 4. **ACT** If so, are you willing to let it go for the sake of Christ and trust him?
 5. **ACT** Include a prayer of repentance if necessary.
- c. **ACT** Let someone you trust--maybe someone in your learning community-- read your argument and give their ideas on how convincing it is, and if necessary on how to make it more convincing. Modify the argument as necessary.
- d. **ACT** Just because you can make a convincing argument doesn't mean you believe it enough to be at peace about the situation. Read the argument at least once a day and pray about the situation at least daily--asking for his wisdom--until the Lord gives

you peace (maybe in the midst of sadness) as you see the situation from his perspective.

8. **REVIEW** **The Need to Gain Practical Wisdom:** You have *practical wisdom* when there is an increasing consistency among these three in your life: what you say you believe, your actions, and your attitudes such as humility and love. It's very common for both churches and individuals to over-focus on one of these. They tend to over-focus on what they're particularly good at. This over-focus might give others the impression of spirituality, but according to James its the integration of the three that really counts. Discuss the following with your learning community. [Section: *Practical Wisdom*]
- a. **CASE STUDY** The Pharisees knew a lot about the Scriptures. In fact, Jesus told people to do what they say. Just don't do what they do, though, because they don't practice what they preach. Not only their actions were inconsistent with what they preached, but also their attitudes. They loved to have a good reputation--the praise of men. Because of this inconsistency, Jesus condemned them very strongly (See Matthew 23:1-7).
 - b. **CASE STUDY** Jack was technically a very good preacher. His sermons were in some ways more biblical and Christ-centered than most I had heard. He had a reputation for being an excellent preacher. The first time I heard him preach his opening went something like this: "You might think the passage we have before us today can't be preached in a Christ-centered way. But I'm going to show you that it can be." So he proceeded to preach a sermon that technically was very good. In the end he communicated in various ways (not explicitly), "See, I did it." And indeed he had done it. However, he had not pointed us to Christ but to his own intellectual ability. At the end of the sermon the feeling he left us was, "You too can learn to preach as well as I can. You can be like me." I didn't leave church that day with my eyes lifted to Jesus and his glory. In his sermon, Jack had not shown us the integration in Christ of his knowledge with his character/attitudes. The concepts pointed us to Christ, but his character/attitude pointed us to himself. His technically excellent sermon probably did more damage than good for the kingdom.
 - c. **REFLECT** Discuss the previous case studies with your learning community.
 - i. **REFLECT** How can you tell if someone is over-focusing on having correct beliefs as opposed to being gifted in the area of understanding and communicating the truth?
 - ii. **REFLECT** How can you tell if someone is over-focusing on having right attitudes and emotions as opposed to being gifted in the area of being empathetic, feeling with people, communicating feelings that put people at ease, and so on?
 - iii. **REFLECT** How can you tell if someone is over-focusing on doing the right things as opposed to being gifted in the area of getting important things done?

- iv. **REFLECT** Can you think of a church denomination that tends to focus or over-focus on having correct beliefs? If so, which one or ones? How is their focus or over-focus evident?
 - v. **REFLECT** Can you think of a church denomination that tends to focus or over-focus on doing the right things? If so, which one or ones? How is their focus or over-focus evident?
 - vi. **REFLECT** Can you think of a church denomination that tends to focus or over-focus on having the right attitudes or emotions? If so, which one or ones? How is their focus or over-focus evident?
 - vii. **REFLECT** Is your church gifted in one of these areas? If so, which one? Give evidence.
 - viii. **REFLECT** Does your church tend to over-focus on its area of giftedness? Give specific evidence for your answer.
 - ix. **ACT** If your church is over-focused on its area of giftedness, pray for your church in this regard and if possible ask the leadership of the church what they think about it.
 - x. **REFLECT** Are you gifted in one of these areas? If so, which one? Give evidence.
 - xi. **REFLECT** Do you yourself tend to over-focus on the area of your giftedness? Give specific evidence for your answer.
 - xii. **ACT** If you do tend to over-focus on an area of giftedness, ask the Lord to help you integrate it with the other two. Ask for help from someone who understands personality in a Christ-centered way. Ask someone who is a strong Christian and who has a different area of giftedness to help you.
 - xiii. **REFLECT** What is your motive for wanting to be a Christian? For wanting to be a minister? Give your evidence.
 - xiv. **REFLECT** What impact would it have on children if parents said one thing but did another? In your learning community, discuss the importance of ministering in a way that reflects the integration of your ideas, your actions and your character/attitudes.
9. **REVIEW** **Avoiding Earthly Wisdom by Seeking Heavenly Wisdom:** One way to look at earthly wisdom is to see it as focusing on some truth from the Bible, but separating that truth from the whole context of the Bible in a way designed to give you more societal points. That is, you make an idol out of something that is good--maybe a gift--and thus distort it. But because there is something biblical about it, some people will think of it as true wisdom. Heavenly wisdom submits to all of God's Word even though it may mean being willing to give up societal points. The Bible is full of doctrines that we have a hard time putting together from a human perspective--like the tension between knowing the truth, putting it into practice, and having the right motives.

- a. **CASE STUDY** Clyde was the pastor of a church that was especially good at correct doctrine. He would often criticize other churches who hadn't thought through their doctrine as much and who tended to be unduly emotional in their worship service. Alex was the pastor of one of those more emotional churches. He criticized Clyde and his church of being unloving, cold, unfriendly, and arrogant. One was especially interested in the area of truth, and the other was especially interested in the expression of love. Each doubted the salvation of the other.
- b. **REFLECT** Discuss the previous case study with your learning community.
- i. **REFLECT** If Clyde was making an idol out of his area of interest and giftedness, and if Alex was making an idol out of his area of interest and giftedness, who is right and who is wrong?
 - ii. **REFLECT** How could making an idol out of truth bring one societal points?
 - iii. **REFLECT** How could making an idol out of love bring one societal points?
 - iv. **REFLECT** Discuss how this kind of argument distracts us from heavenly wisdom.
 - v. **REFLECT** Discuss how in cases like this it may be true that one party is actually more idolatrous than another, even though both may be wrong. How could this be judged?
 - vi. **REFLECT** Most people understand *balance* as the mean between the extremes. Discuss how the solution to the tension between Clyde and Alex is not a matter of *balance* between truth and love.
 - vii. **REFLECT** What's the difference between balance and heavenly wisdom?
 - viii. **REFLECT** Are you more gifted in the area of truth or in the area of love? Toward which does your personality type lean?
 - ix. **REFLECT** What would be the signs of making an idol out of truth? (For example, using the truth as a club to win arguments and be seen as smart and right.)
 - x. **REFLECT** What would be the signs of making an idol out of love? (For example, finding your sense of worth in feelings, or being hesitant to say "no" to people for fear of rejection.)
 - xi. **REFLECT** Have you experienced the supernatural integration of truth and love in your life? Elaborate.
- c. **REFLECT** Think of some other doctrines that from a worldly perspective seem to be in tension with each other. Even though we might not be able to reconcile them completely in an intellectual way, in each case both sides of unambiguous implications for obedience and character. For example:
- i. **REFLECT** God's sovereignty and man's responsibility
 - ii. **REFLECT** Boldness and humility

- iii. **REFLECT** Leadership and servanthood
 - iv. **REFLECT** Goal and process
 - v. **REFLECT** Teaching and learning
- d. **ACT** List your areas of giftedness and/or strength. Ask a close friend who will be honest with you to help you see ways in which you might be over-depending on (making an idol out of) one or more of them. Ask the Lord to help you use the gift to serve and not as a way to feel important or the basis for your sense of worth.
10. **REVIEW** **Reaching Out Without Worldly Reward:** James focuses on those who have correct beliefs but who don't put those beliefs into practice. He does so by giving a very specific example: believers should look after widows and orphans in their distress. In other words, if you say you believe in God, you will be reaching out in love to those who, according to one's *societal point system*, aren't very important. (See Point 2 in the Application Guide for James Lesson 1). You do it even though reaching out to help them is of no benefit to you according to the standards of society. James calls us to love even when we get nothing out of it humanly speaking. Even the demons believe, but their belief doesn't move them to behavior (or emotions) that is consistent with those beliefs. [*Section: Practical Wisdom*]
- a. **CASE STUDY** Many of the members of a church in a poor section of a large city in Latin America struggled to make ends meet financially. Very few had a vehicle, and so they were unable to purchase food at the larger grocery stores downtown where the prices were cheaper. They bought from the local corner store at higher prices. Because of the higher prices, they ended up getting behind in their ability to purchase food, so they ended up buying on credit from the local store. When they got paid, all the money would go to pay for the food bought on credit. Then they had no money to buy at lower prices even if they were able to get a ride. It became a vicious cycle. So the members banded together to form a coop. The church gave an initial amount of money to purchase some basic foods at lower prices. Those who had cars volunteered to go and get it. All the members could buy at lower prices. This required some effort on the part of various people. But in this way they were able to break the slavery to high prices at the local store.
 - b. **REFLECT** Does your faith move you to loving action? Give examples.
 - c. **ACT** Make a list of some of the things that in your culture would be the equivalent of looking after widows and orphans in their distress.
 - d. **REFLECT** How many of these have you done in the past month? In the past year?
 - e. **REFLECT** Are your daily actions--the things you choose to do--based more on God's love for you and your consequent love for others, or on what you will get out of it--societal points? (See Point 2 in the Application Guide for James Lesson 1). Elaborate.

- f. **ACT** Ask at least three close friends who will tell you the truth whether or not they see you reaching out in love, or reaching out only when it benefits you someone. Ask them to be honest and to give concrete examples.
 - g. **REFLECT** Does your church have anything in place to help its members reach out in to those who might not be able to repay the favor? Elaborate.
 - h. **CASE STUDY** One time I conducted a survey for a church. Two of the questions were about having fellowship meals at the homes of other members. These questions were not next to each other in the survey. Interestingly, many people answered "yes" to the question: "Would you like the people of your church to invite you over to your house for a meal and fellowship?" On the other hand, the response rate was very low to the question, "How many times have you invited people from your church to your home for a meal and fellowship?"
 - i. **REFLECT** Discuss the previous case study with your learning community.
 - i. **REFLECT** Why do you think inviting other church members over for a meal and fellowship is uncommon in some churches?
 - ii. **REFLECT** Is it a common practice in your church? Elaborate.
 - iii. **REFLECT** When people invite others over, do they tend to invite people who have more societal points? Do they invite people who have few societal points? (See Point 2 in the Application Guide for James Lesson 1). Give examples.
 - iv. **REFLECT** To how many homes of members of your church have you been invited this year?
 - v. **REFLECT** When was the last time you invited someone from your church to your house for a meal and fellowship? Why did you choose that person or those persons? Examine your motives.
 - j. **ACT** Make a plan to fit some reaching-out activities into your schedule. Reach out not only to those who have many societal points, but especially to those who have less.
 - k. **ACT** Encourage your church to develop ways that encourage its members to reach out to others--including those who have fewer societal points.
11. **REVIEW** **Doing Good Works In Response to God's Salvation in Christ:** No one is saved by their works. Believers trust in the works of Christ on their behalf. However, if you are saved so that the Holy Spirit lives in you, you *will* produce good works. But to do so you must put your faith to work. This is not salvation by works, but acting on the basis of your faith. It's putting your faith to work. [Section: *Practical Wisdom*]
- a. **REFLECT** Imagine a wife who is always doing good things for her husband. But she does them *in order* to get him to love her. Discuss the difference between doing something good *in order* to be liked or loved, and doing something good *because* God has shown and proved his love by sending Christ to die in the place of sinners.

- b. **CASE STUDY** A pastor in Latin America, Marcos, was thrilled to learn about God's sovereignty, and the fact that God saves his people by grace alone through faith. Salvation is not earned. The missionaries who taught him this modeled a lifestyle that also taught him something: if you believe in God's sovereignty in salvation you shouldn't worry too much about your sin, and striving to obey is works righteousness. For all practical purposes, the doctrines of sanctification and perseverance were minimized and the Christian life became a very passive one of over focusing on our need to rest in the Lord's forgiveness. As a result, Marcos didn't grow much over the years.
 - c. **REFLECT** Do you tend to pay more attention to God's sovereign control over all things and the implications of this doctrine; for example, the confidence this gives you that nothing can happen to you without God's permission? Or do you tend to pay more attention to the doctrine of man's responsibility before God to obey? Elaborate with examples.
 - i. **REFLECT** What are the positives of focusing in each of these biblical doctrines?
 - ii. **REFLECT** What are the negatives of over-focusing on God's sovereignty?
 - iii. **REFLECT** What are the negatives of over-focusing on man's responsibility?
 - d. **REFLECT** When was the last time you did something you didn't really want to do, and you did it *only* because of your belief that God loves you, and not because of social pressure or the pressure of feeling guilty? Discuss this in your learning community and give examples.
 - e. **ACT** Think of something good that you know you should do but haven't felt like doing it. Now focus on things you know about God's love and promises to you in Christ. Write out an argument focusing on why God's love and promises in Christ give you strength and motivation to do this thing. Then make a plan to do it and implement the plan.
 - f. **REFLECT** In your learning community, discuss the importance of persevering in faith and putting your faith to work in practical ways and with love *because* God is sovereign in salvation.
12. **REFLECT** List and discuss any other personal or ministerial applications that come to your mind. What can you do to put those into practice?