

*The unfolding of your words gives light.*

## Faith That Works

### *An Exposition of the Book of James*

<sup>9</sup>But the brother of humble circumstances<sup>a</sup> is to glory in his high position<sup>b</sup>; <sup>10</sup>and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation<sup>c</sup>, because like flowering grass he will pass away<sup>d</sup>. <sup>11</sup>For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed<sup>e</sup>; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits<sup>f</sup> will fade away<sup>g</sup>.<sup>h</sup>

<sup>a</sup> 1:9 **But the brother of humble circumstances.** Mary the mother of Jesus applied the word translated “humble circumstances” to herself in the Magnificat saying, “He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble” (Luke 1:52).

<sup>b</sup> 1:9 **is to glory in his high position.** James is using irony here that promotes a healthy view of the Christian’s view of prosperity. The person in “high” position is not necessarily the person with the most wealth and the least trials. The Lord Jesus helps his people to become like him through allowing them to experience his trials. See Luke 14:11 and Luke 18:14. As the Lord Jesus taught in the Beatitudes, real satisfaction may not be found in “living the dream,” but in having your dreams crushed.

<sup>c</sup> 1:10 **the rich man is to glory in his humiliation.** Some have concluded that, since James does not call the rich man a “brother,” that he is contrasting a believer and an unbeliever. More likely the word “brother” is assumed here. The reason the rich man can glory in his humiliation is that it leaves him in a position to see he has nothing to offer the God before whom he stands.

<sup>d</sup> 1:10 **because like flowering grass he will pass away.** Notice that James does not say the rich man should not be rich. It says he should have a humble attitude toward his riches. They do not make him better than the person of humble circumstances. We might expect James to tell us that the riches will not last. Instead he tells us that the rich man will not last. The word translated “pass away” it is used of the eventual demise of heaven and earth (Matthew 24:35), of the passing of time (Mark 13:30) and the passing away of the believers are life (2 Corinthians 5:17). The humbling message for us wealthy Westerners is this: “You are going to die. Then what?”

<sup>e</sup> 1:11 **For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed.** There are lots of ways to lose all the earthly things that we think will matter most. As Jesus pointed out in Matthew 6:19-21, earthly treasures are susceptible to moth-eating, rust or theft.

<sup>f</sup> 1:11 **so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits.** The word “pursuits” refers to “journeys” and, by implication, carrying out business. James later reminds us that we are vapor, thus making all our plans subject to change if God wills (James 4:13-16).

<sup>g</sup> 1:11 **will fade away.** Peter uses the same word with a negative prefix speaking of an inheritance that will not “fade away” (1 Peter 1:4).

<sup>h</sup> 1:9-11 Texts like this one do not reveal James as a hard-hitting legalist calling people to renounce their wealth so that they can attain eternal life. This small passage is one of many in this letter that strips away human achievement and leaves man standing before the judge, pleading for mercy. Consider the things men value that get in God’s way:

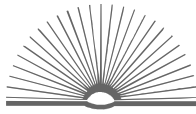
1. Position. The people of this world crave power. God exalts those who have no strength but his.
2. Riches. The people of this world worship the comfort wealth brings. God supplies the needs of those who are satisfied with what he gives.
3. Beauty. The people of this world value beauty over character. God creates an unfading beauty that improves with age (Proverbs 31:30; 1 Peter 3:3-4).

James 1.9-11  
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

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4. Business pursuits. The people of this world plan their lives with no thought of eternity.  
God changes plans to show us there is more important business at hand.

James 1.9-11  
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