

# EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



## From My Window

When John Bunyan was arrested in 1661 for preaching without a license, he had no idea that for the next twelve years he would be imprisoned at the Bedford gaol. These years were a great trial for Bunyan and his family of four children. While in prison, he penned his personal testimony in a book he titled, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Until his conversion, his “delight and pleasure in vileness” was known by the entire town. However, after understanding “the gospel of grace,” two transformations took place in his life. First, he received from the Spirit a sensitivity “to the very act of sinning.” Second, he felt love to Christ “as hot as fire.” The apostle Paul declared, “If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation.” May we, like Bunyan, live as a *new creation!*



## VBTS Chapel each Thursday

The spiritual temperature of the seminary is reflected in the weekly chapels of VBTS. Our chapels are strategically organized so that the students profit from hearing a book of the Bible preached throughout the fall and spring semesters. In recent years, the professors and select pastors from the area have preached through *Ephesians*, *Mark*, *Exodus 1–20*, and *1 Peter*. This past year, we studied through the book of *James* and it was a blessing to our entire community. Sitting in class is important to grasp the biblical languages, theology, and church history, but it is just as necessary for our students to both *see and hear* how a book of the Bible is preached and applied to them. This academic year we will study various narratives and instructions from the *Gospel of Luke* (chaps. 1–10). Please pray that the Word will be clear, and our lives challenged to walk closely with our Lord!

## *The Popularity of the Letter of James*

*Dr. Thomas K. Dailey, New Testament Professor*

The broad appeal of the Letter of James is directly connected to its uniqueness among the letters of the New Testament. The letter was written by James, the brother of Jesus. The thought of what it would have been like to grow up in a house where Jesus was an older brother can be fertile ground for all sorts of speculation. Those speculations, however, need to be reined in to reflect the way James acknowledges that relationship. In one instance, James describes his brother as the object of faith: “hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory” (2:1). In fact, James appears to bypass his familial relationship with the Lord when he chooses to describe himself as a slave “of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1). James, who grew up in the shadow of Jesus, highlights his brother as the object of both faith and service.

Another unique element that captures the reader’s attention is James’ use of vivid imagery: “one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind” (1:6); “does a spring pour forth from the same opening fresh and salt water?” (3:11); “your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire” (5:3). To these can be added several memorable sayings: “count it all joy ... when you meet trials of various kinds” (1:3); “faith apart from works is dead” (2:26); “come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you” (5:1). The use of evocative language strengthens the reader’s comprehension by making vivid mental connections to more familiar realities. The instability of the man who wavers in his faith is reinforced by the imagery of waves that are subject to the blowing winds. James’ style of writing provides his audience with word pictures that anchor the truths he intends to teach.

A third unique feature to James that distinguishes it from other letters in the NT is its direct appeal to the practical. One who is used to Paul’s development of theology prior to his exhortations can readily see a contrast in James. This is not to say that James is less theological than Paul; it is only to acknowledge that their styles are different. Instead of waiting for the indicative to turn to imperative, James starts his imperatives immediately following his letter opening: “Greetings. **Count it all joy**, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds” (1:1b-2). The imperative form is a staple in the epistle, and it directly impacts the letter’s style. In fact, James tucks 62 imperatives into the space of 108 verses. On average, every other verse is an imperative directing readers in exactly what they should be doing. With this kind of design, readers are not at a loss as to what James expects: “be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (1:22); “let your ‘yes’ be yes and your ‘no’ be no” (5:12). This practicality appeals to everyone who comes to the Bible asking, “God, what do you want me to do?”

One final feature of James that appeals to modern readers relates to the status of its recipients. James writes to Jewish believers that are scattered from their homeland (1:1). The letter is not written to a specific church (e.g., Colossians) or to a specific individual (e.g., Philemon); it has a generic force that was appropriate to believers in multiple locations. This has allowed readers of James throughout church history to draw out applications based on similar life circumstances. It gives James the character of touching lives precisely where they live. The desire for relief from trials, the potential to blame God for temptations, the destructive nature of the tongue, the tendency toward showing partiality, the interactions between the rich and poor, etc., are universal experiences making the Letter of James as relevant today as it was when the Lord’s brother penned it.