# James, Lesson #6 The Pressure of Retaliation

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You might email your people and ask them to watch some clips on hoarders on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

## James 5

### OPEN

Let’s each share your name one thing you would buy if had a million dollars.

### DIG

1. Let’s talk about what the Bible says about money. What verses come to mind? How would you summarize it? What verses come to mind?

I did a message on this last week. My perspective is that the Bible’s view on money is. . . well, medium. It is good to get more money if you can. But, don’t make it too important to you.

1. James 5.1 – 6. Is this saying acquiring wealth is a bad thing?

The Bible does not discourage the acquiring of wealth. In the Law of Moses, specific rules are laid down for getting and securing wealth. The Jews in Canaan owned their own property, worked it, and benefited from the produce. In several of His parables, Jesus indicated His respect for personal property and private gain. There is nothing in the Epistles that contradicts the right of private ownership and profit.

What the Bible does condemn is acquiring wealth by illegal means or for illegal purposes. The Prophet Amos thundered a message of judgment against the wealthy upper crust who robbed the poor and used their stolen wealth for selfish luxuries. Isaiah and Jeremiah also exposed the selfishness of the rich and warned that judgment was coming. It is in this spirit that James wrote. He gave two illustrations of how the rich acquired their wealth. — Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible exposition commentary (Jas 5:4). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

1. This speaks of misery coming on the rich. Have you ever known any rich who were miserable?

In 1923 an elite group of businessmen met at the luxurious Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago. The roster included some of the most influential, famous, and wealthy moguls of the early twentieth century. Some of the names included:

* Charles M. Schwab—president of Bethlehem Steel Corporation
* Richard Whitney—president of the New York Stock Exchange
* Albert Fall—Secretary of the Interior under President Harding
* Jesse Livermore—Wall Street tycoon
* Ivar Kreuger—head of a global monopoly of match manufacturers

These heavy hitters controlled more wealth than the total assets of the United States Treasury at the time. Surely these men would become models of the entrepreneurial spirit and stellar examples of financial success. But fast-forward about twenty-five years or so and look back on the courses of their lives:

* Schwab—died $300,000.00 in debt in 1939
* Whitney—served time at Sing Sing prison for embezzlement
* Fall—served time for misconduct in office, leaving behind a ruined reputation
* Livermore—committed suicide in 1940, describing himself as “a failure”
* Kreuger—shot himself in 1932 after his global monopoly collapsed

Buried beneath the rubble of humiliation, defeat, crime, sickness, and financial collapse, these men—along with a number of their colleagues—died in a depressing, pitiable condition. Their wealth, power, and prestige did nothing to sooth the personal anxiety and guilt they suffered in life. The reality is that great intelligence and hard work can make a person wealthy. But it takes God-given wisdom and supernatural humility to be able to manage wealth and influence. — Swindoll, C. R. (2010). Insights on James and 1 & 2 Peter. Swindoll’s New Testament Commentary (pp. 101–102). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

1. Why were these rich people rebuked?

First, James rebukes the rich because they are guilty of hoarding their riches (5:2–3). In those days a person could display his or her wealth in three ways: by feasting lavishly, by dressing extravagantly, and by spending wildly. (Some things never change!) James targets these three areas of the flamboyant lifestyle of the rich, pointing out how foolish it is to center their lives on these things. Through time and disuse, food goes bad, garments get eaten by moths, and precious metals tarnish. By hoarding rather than sharing, the wealth of the rich rots and rusts.

Second, James rebukes the rich because they are guilty of cheating others (5:4). Instead of giving a fair wage to those who work their fields, the rich cheat them. One sign of the selfish rich is their reluctance to pay their bills. During the financial crisis that began in 2008, the world witnessed numerous superrich reward themselves with bonuses while their employees lost their jobs. It’s an amazing reality that some of the greediest people are also some of the wealthiest—and some of the most generous people will give away their last dime!

Third, James rebukes the rich because they are guilty of a selfish lifestyle (5:5). The wealthy wicked live in the lap of luxury, indulging in pleasures and fattening not just their bellies, but their hearts, too. James paints a picture of a person trying to satisfy the deepest longings of his heart by a playboy lifestyle. Like a pig fattened for slaughter, these wealthy don’t even know that as they selfishly gorge on the pleasures of life, they are eating and drinking judgment upon themselves.

Fourth, James rebukes the rich because they are guilty of taking unfair advantage of the righteous (5:6). Echoing a charge already mentioned in 2:6, James takes his rebuke to the highest level. The rich are guilty of judging and putting to death the “righteous.” The word “righteous” is singular, referring to a kind of person—the righteous one. This category would include not only Jesus, the ultimate Righteous One, but also all those believers who, like their Lord, endured condemnation and martyrdom for their faith, all at the hands of rich, powerful oppressors. It includes all the righteous people who are treated brutally by wealthy unbelievers. — Swindoll, C. R. (2010). Insights on James and 1 & 2 Peter. Swindoll’s New Testament Commentary (p. 105). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

1. Verse 2 speaks of how wealth is destroyed. What are some ways wealth can evaporate?

The man who would have sold his Picasso painting for $139 million put an elbow through it minutes before completing the sale.

Throughout his life, Pablo Picasso produced an estimated 13,500 paintings and designs, 100,000 prints and engravings, 34,000 book illustrations, and 300 sculptures and ceramics. The painting titled The Dream was completed in 1932.

In 1997, at an art auction at Christie’s in New York City, casino magnate Steve Wynn purchased The Dream for $47 million. Less than a decade later, Wynn completed a deal to sell the painting for $139 million. The transaction would have set a record for the sale of a piece of art.

It would have—if Wynn, who was standing close to the painting, hadn’t turned and inadvertently clobbered the Picasso with his elbow, punching a six-inch hole in the middle of the masterpiece. While no one is certain what that does to the value of the painting itself, the effect on the sale price was immediate. Even more quickly than it had come, the record-breaking $139 million sale evaporated. —Associated Press, “Vegas Tycoon Pokes Hole in a Picasso,” CBSNews.com (October 18, 2006) / Larson, C. B., & Ten Elshof, P. (2008). 1001 illustrations that connect (p. 508). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

1. Verse 3 has a word made popular by a recent TV show: hoarders. Why do you think hoarders hoard?

According to Dr. David Tolin, director of the Anxiety Disorders Center at the Institute of Living at Hartford Hospital, some people hoard because of perfectionism. "They don't necessarily color-code their closets, but they have that perfectionistic streak that bites them when it gets too bad," he says. "They have the mentality that, 'If I can't make this decision perfectly, I won't do it at all.' And that's where the hoarding comes in. They become so frightened that they will make a mistake, that they become paralyzed and just allow the clutter to build up."

Other people hoard because they are afraid that they will accidentally throw away something that is useful. "People with hoarding problems will often think of all kinds of ways that they could use something, or they think of people that might want that object, so they keep it," Dr. Tolin says. "The irony, however, is that in most cases, they never actually use the object in the way they thought of. They don't actually give the object to the person they thought of. So these reasons for keeping things don't turn out to be good reasons after all."

Still other people save things because they feel a sense of emotional attachment to the objects in their home. "All of us get attached to things some of the time," Dr. Tolin says. "We have things that remind us of people we love, or they remind us of happy times. But for people with hoarding problems, the attachment to objects becomes very intense—sometimes more intense than the attachment to actual people. And instead of feeling attached to one thing, like a scrapbook or a favorite sweater, they can become attached to hundreds, even thousands, of things. Some people have told me that all of the things in their homes feel like their friends or family members, so they can't bear to throw them out." <http://www.oprah.com/home/Why-People-Become-Compulsive-Hoarders>

1. How could you get over the tendency to hoard?

I am trying to incorporate these principles into my own preaching and teaching. Recently, I preached on materialism. James actually uses the term made popular by a TV show: Hoarders. (James 5.3) I talked about how we all have a little hoarder in us. I showed a clip from the show. I explained what I could from the passage. Then, I asked people to do something. Give something—anything—away. Give something small away. Give something you don’t need away. Give anything away. What is amazing is this: no matter how small the step, people struggle to take it.

Small seems to be the key to good application. Try to get people to do something—no matter how small or seemingly insignificant.

I read one book on hoarders and the writer had an interesting illustration. She asked one man to get rid of a coffee maker. Curious thing; he didn’t drink coffee. He got the coffee maker because it was cheap. It was cheap because it didn’t have the carafe that goes with it. Coffee makers are made in such a way that only a certain carafe will work with that maker. He wasn’t even sure if it worked. So, here is a worthless coffee maker owned by a man who doesn’t drink coffee.

She asked him, “On a scale of one to ten how much pain would it cause you to get rid of this coffee maker.”

“About an 8.” (This is why hoarders have houses that look like they do.) But, here is the real key. Rather than pressing the point, she looked for something that would cause him less pain to get rid of. What they have found is that if they can get rid of something—anything—good things follow. The key is to make the first small step. — Josh Hunt. (2012). Teach Like Jesus.

1. Verse 4. Here is a high-dollar word you can impress your friends with: anthropomorphism. What is an anthropomorphism and what is the anthropomorphism in this verse? Can you think of other examples?

The term “anthropomorphism” comes from two Greek words: anthropos (“man”) and morphe (“form). Therefore, an anthropomorphism is something that appears in the form of man, or human form. Human characteristics are assigned to God throughout the Bible, predominantly in the Old Testament. Reference is made to God’s face (Psalm 34:16), eyes (2 Chronicles 16:9), mouth (Isaiah 1:20), ears (James 5:4), hands (Exodus 15:17), finger (Luke 11:20), arm (John 12:38), and foot (Lamentations 1:15). God is also said to have walked in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8) and smelled the sacrifice of Noah after the Flood (Genesis 8:21). God is never depicted in human form, however, due to the prohibitions of the second of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:4–6). The ultimate anthropomorphism occurred when God appeared on earth in the form of a human being, Jesus of Nazareth. — Jeremiah, D. (2004). Knowing the god you worship: Study guide (p. 58). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

1. Verse 4 reminds us that if we are a boss it is important to be a good one. Paying your people in a timely way is one thing that is discussed here. What else goes into being a good boss? Why is it important that bosses be good bosses? Ever had a bad boss? Who has a story?

Research in England revealed that employers who unfairly treat their employees can actually make them sick. That’s according to a study in which 6,400 civil servants in London were asked questions such as, “Do you ever get criticized unfairly?” and “Do you ever get praised for your work?”

A follow-up study ten years later showed that men who reported low scores on their bosses’ fairness were 30 percent more likely to have coronary heart disease, which is the number-one killer in Western societies. Ongoing stress is a major contributor to this affliction.

Labor experts say the effect on employees’ health might be even greater in the United States than in Britain, since workers in the United States spend more time at their jobs than their overseas counterparts. —“When the Boss Is a Jerk,” The Week (November 11, 2005) / Larson, C. B., & Ten Elshof, P. (2008). 1001 illustrations that connect (pp. 365–366). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

1. Verse 5. Would you say it is true of us today? Do we live in luxury or would you say we are a generous people?

Most Americans are generous. According to a 2006 study, the vast majority of Americans make some contribution to the Red Cross, Salvation Army, American Cancer Society, local church, or other charitable organization every year. More Americans contribute to charities than bother to vote. U.S. donations rose from $1.7 billion in 1921 to more than $200 billion a year in 2006. There has been an 88 percent increase in the last decade alone.

Americans privately donated more than $4.2 billion to the Red Cross and other agencies to assist the survivors of hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 and nearly $2 billion to relief efforts connected to the Indian Ocean tsunami.

“Philanthropy is no longer just for the very rich,” says Robert Bremner, professor emeritus of history at Ohio State University. “Philanthropy is everybody’s business now.” —Ted De Haas, “Philanthropy Is Everyone’s Business,” PreachingToday.com / Larson, C. B., & Ten Elshof, P. (2008). 1001 illustrations that connect (pp. 97–98). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

1. Verse 7. What do farmers know about Christian living that the rest of us need to learn?

The first example James brings before us is the patient farmer. Knowing how difficult it is to be patient, he prefaces it with ‘behold’ (idou) to draw special attention to the illustrations that follow.

Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth (5:7)

Jesus refers to farmers frequently in the Gospels, as in Matthew 21 in the parable of the landowner and vineyard. The word here describes an independent landowner or tenant farmer rather than a day laborer. He plants his field and anticipates the yield, but he knows there must be an interval of time before his crops come to fruition. — Ellenburg, B. D., & Morgan, C. W. (2008). James: Wisdom for the Community. Focus on the Bible Commentary (p. 179). Great Britain: Focus Christian Publications.

1. Verse 10. What does suffering do to us?

When the future leadership responsibilities are especially difficult (or the potential leader is particularly hardheaded), God uses time to pass for the maturation process. He also allows trials. The larger the task ahead, the more difficult the trials. That was true for many prominent leaders in Scripture: Moses, Daniel, Job, Naomi, David, Esther, Peter, Paul, and many others. Joseph was among that group.

When faced with adversity, people become either bitter or better. Joseph chose the latter. He certainly had plenty of opportunities to become negative. He could have held a grudge against many individuals: his brothers, the slave traders, Potiphar’s wife, and the chief butler. But instead he turned to God in the midst of his struggle and viewed the people who offended him as instruments of divine sovereignty. —Maxwell, J. C. (2000). The 21 Most Powerful Minutes in a Leader’s Day. Thomas Nelson Publishers.

1. Verse 9. What does grumbling do to us?

Paul said there’s a better way to live: working out our Christian life without complaining. It’s an attitude more in tune with life as it is. We are living in a fallen world. It isn’t always going to be the way we like it, and the people around us aren’t always going to be the way we’d like them to be. When we complain about them, we offend God and position ourselves for His judgment. James warned, “Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door” (James 5:9). Imagine a little kid in his room complaining to his sister, “Boy, I sure hate the way Dad treats us.” But what he doesn’t know is Dad is standing right outside the door! God, likewise, is always in earshot of our complaints. — MacArthur, J. (1993). Anxiety Attacked. MacArthur Study Series (p. 102). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

1. Why is grumbling such a popular past time?

Beverly Bush Smith was shocked when her husband finally spoke his mind. “It’s hard to come home from work,” he said, “and listen to you complain.”

“Me? Complain?” thought Beverly. She had never thought of herself as a complainer. But her husband continued: “I listen to you grumble that you were caught in traffic, or that your editor trashed the lead on which you worked so hard, or that my mother demanded your time, or that the washing machine overflowed.”

“I thought I was just telling you about my day,” Beverly replied.

“But it comes through in your tone of voice and body language.”

For several weeks Beverly tried very hard to utter no grumbling sounds, but at length on a particularly bad day, the complaints poured out like a torrent. The next morning in her Bible study she looked up the word “murmuring”—which means to grumble. She read of how the Israelites had grumbled in their wanderings, and how it was displeasing to God. She read Philippians 2:14 which says, “Do all things without complaining and disputing.”

All things.

Beverly later wrote, “Now evening conversations with my husband are more pleasant. I hear a lot more about his concerns by encouraging him to tell me his feelings before I leap in with my problems.

“When I am tempted to launch into a monologue of the day’s woes, I remind myself that I do not want to quench the Holy Spirit with my complaining. And I pray that God will help me reflect His love.” — Morgan, R. J. (2000). Nelson’s complete book of stories, illustrations, and quotes (electronic ed., pp. 395–396). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

1. Can you think of other verses that speak of grumbling? If you have a smart phone, you might do a search on the word grumble or complain on a Bible app.

Moses also said, "You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD." Exodus 16:8 (NIV)

Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.'" Exodus 16:9 (NIV)

"How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. Numbers 14:27 (NIV)

The staff belonging to the man I choose will sprout, and I will rid myself of this constant grumbling against you by the Israelites." Numbers 17:5 (NIV)

The LORD said to Moses, "Put back Aaron's staff in front of the Testimony, to be kept as a sign to the rebellious. This will put an end to their grumbling against me, so that they will not die." Numbers 17:10 (NIV)

"Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. John 6:43 (NIV)

Do everything without complaining or arguing, Philippians 2:14 (NIV)

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 1 Peter 4:9 (NIV)

1. Does grumbling do any good?

“[Do not] complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer,” says 1 Corinthians 10:10. Their complaining demonstrated both a lack of gratitude for past blessings and a lack of confidence in God’s wisdom, will, and ways.

Perhaps the unknown author of “Grumble Tone” had the Israelites in mind when he wrote:

There was a boy named Grumble Tone who ran away to sea,  
“I’m sick of things on land,” he said, “as sick as I can be;  
A life upon the bounding wave will suit a lad like me!”

The seething ocean billows failed to stimulate his mirth,  
For he did not like the vessel, nor the dizzy, rolling berth,  
And he thought the sea was almost as unpleasant as the earth.

He wandered into foreign lands, he saw each wondrous sight,  
But nothing that he heard or saw seemed just exactly right;  
And so he journeyed on and on, still seeking for delight.

He talked with kings and ladies fair; he dined in courts, they say,  
But always found the people dull, and longed to get away  
To search for that mysterious land where he would like to stay.

He wandered over all the world, his hair grew white as snow;  
He reached that final bourne at last where all of us must go,  
But never found the land he sought. The reason you would know?

The reason was that north or south, where’er his steps were bent,  
On land or sea, in court or hall, he found but discontent;  
For he took his disposition with him everywhere he went.

Morgan, R. J. (2000). Nelson’s complete book of stories, illustrations, and quotes (electronic ed., pp. 393–394). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

1. Verse 16. Who are we to confess our sins to?

Confess your sins. James 5:16 tells us, “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results” (NLT). Read this passage aloud during a group meeting and then spend some time discussing it. Go around the room and ask group members what this passage means to them. Have they ever confessed their sins to someone? How did it go? Why does God want us to confess our sins to each other when we can confess them directly to him? Then ask group members to risk stepping out of their comfort zone and confess a sin to the entire group. Everyone has some sort of sin they are dealing with. As each individual does so, spend a few minutes praying for him or her. — Gladen, S. (2012). Leading small groups with purpose: everything you need to lead a healthy group. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

1. What healing is promised to the person who confesses their sin to God but never to another human being?

It is interesting to me what this verse does not say. It does not say that healing comes from trying hard, or being disciplined or even letting go and letting God. This verse teaches us that healing comes as we confess our sins. As we acknowledge the gap, the gap gets smaller. There is something magical about acknowledging the gap. — Josh Hunt. (2008). Good Questions Have Groups Talking.

1. What benefits come to those who confess their sins?

The odd thing is, I don’t necessarily need a solution. I just need someone to whom I can confess my sins.

In the Bible we call this person a priest. A priest is one who represents God to me and represents me to God. I think one of the reasons we miss this point is out of a misguided reaction against the Catholic application of James 5.16. The Catholic approach is to go to a priest. Now, let’s think about this.

True or False:

We don’t need a priest.

I have asked this question to hundreds of groups. Ninety-five percent get it wrong. The correct answer is False. We do need a priest. We believe in the priesthood of all believers. Now, if we believe in the priesthood of all believers, it stands to reason that we need these priests for something. Our difference with the Catholics is not about whether or not we need a priest, it is about who the priests are. We believe that all believers are priests. “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” 1 Peter 2:9 [NIV]

It is true that we can go individually and directly to God. We don’t need an intermediary. But, there is great healing in confessing our sins to one another. — Josh Hunt. (2008). Good Questions Have Groups Talking.

1. Verses 17 – 18. Does prayer change God? Does prayer matter?

God does not just want us to pray. He wants us to pray in faith. Jesus often said something to this effect: “Then He touched their eyes, saying, ‘It shall be done to you according to your faith’” (NAU Matt. 9:29). James, the half-brother of Jesus, also said, “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (NAU Jam. 1:5). Prayer and faith go together, just as doubting and unanswered prayer go together. Some people recoil when they hear the phrase, “Prayer changes things.” They believe that God has already predestined everything that is going to happen, therefore, prayer does not really change anything. It simply acknowledges a Christian’s willingness to accept whatever the Lord has decreed.

Yet there are many instances mentioned throughout the Bible that clearly teach that God moved in a certain situation in a specific manner simply because someone prayed in faith and believed that God would act. One tremendous example is when God healed Hezekiah because he prayed. God said in 2 Kings. 20:5, “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you.” God did not say, “I have already decided to heal you, but go ahead and pray in agreement with my foreordained decision.” No indeed! God heard Hezekiah’s faith-filled prayer and then gave a miraculous answer to that great intercessor! Others like Elijah also prayed in faith, and the windows of heaven were shut. He prayed again, and then they were opened (cf. James 5:17-18). — Steve Gaines. (2013). Pray Like it Matters. Auxano Press.

1. What do you want to recall from today’s conversation?
2. How can we support one another in prayer this week?