



Menai
Baptist Church



THE BOOK OF JAMES

MBC Connect Group Integrated Series 2019
Studies compiled by **Garry Gawthorne**

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THE BOOK OF JAMES

INTRODUCTION

Who wrote the book?

While James did not specifically identify himself as to which “James” he was ([James 1:1](#)), the author is widely thought to be James the half-brother of Jesus. James was not a follower of Jesus during the Saviour’s time on earth ([Mark 3:21–35](#); [John 7:5](#)) but eventually became an apostle in the vein of Paul, as one who had seen and believed the Lord post-resurrection ([1 Corinthians 15:7](#); [Galatians 1:19](#)). After witnessing the Lord’s resurrected body, James became one of the leaders of the church at Jerusalem. Peter singled him out among the other Christians there following Peter’s miraculous release from prison ([Acts 12:17](#)). James made the deciding speech at the Jerusalem Council (15:13–22), and Paul called James one of the pillars of the church ([Galatians 2:9](#)).

Where are we?

As one of the chief leaders in the church at Jerusalem, James wrote from that city prior to the meeting of the Jerusalem Council, which Luke recorded in [Acts 15](#). At that council, James, along with Peter and Paul, affirmed the decision to take the gospel message to the Gentiles. This council met in AD49, meaning James likely wrote his letter in AD45-48.

Such a significant event as the Jerusalem Council warranted comment from James, as he was writing to a Jewish Christian audience. But James made no mention of Gentile Christians at all, making an early date for the letter most likely. In fact, it could have been one of the first New Testament books written.

Why is James so important?

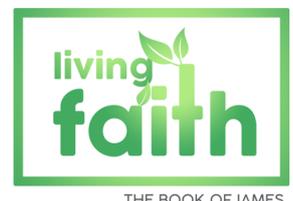
The book of James looks a bit like the Old Testament book of Proverbs dressed up in New Testament clothes. Its consistent focus on practical action in the life of faith is reminiscent of the Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament, encouraging God's people to *act* like God's people. The pages of James are filled with direct commands to pursue a life of holiness. He makes no excuses for those who do not measure up. In the mind of this early church leader, Christians evidence their faith by walking in certain ways and not others. For James, a faith that does not produce real life change is a faith that is worthless ([James 2:17](#)).

1. FROM TROUBLE TO TRIUMPH

James major emphasis in this section of his letter is this: If a person's faith is genuine, it will prove itself during times of trouble, whatever the nature or source of the trouble may be.

The clear message of Scripture is that trials are a tool in the loving hands of the Lord. They test the strength of our faith; they humble us; they call us to eternal and heavenly hope; they reveal what we really love; they teach us to value God's blessings; they develop enduring strength for greater usefulness; they help us better encourage others who are in times of trials. Since trials are so productive, it is essential for us to respond rightly to them.

Read James 1:1-12



Questions:

1. What questions or comments do you have about this passage that you would like to share with the group?
2. What do you feel is the significance of James' description of himself as a 'servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ'?
3. What qualifies as a trial? How do trials test the genuineness of our faith?
4. Why does it seem strange that we should "consider it pure joy" whenever we "face trials of many kind" (v.2)?
5. List some ways painful circumstances and unanswered questions can actually strengthen our faith?
6. Wisdom is needed to cope with trials and to build patience. Why does James emphasize asking for wisdom with faith (vv.5-8)?
7. How do trials act as an equalizer to the rich and the poor?
8. How might either getting rich or becoming poor test our faith?
9. How do you define endurance as it relates to the Christian life? According to v12, why is it imperative that we persevere?

For reflection

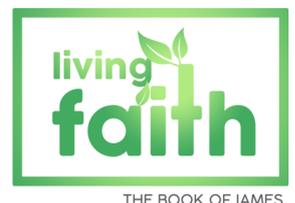
James opens his book by emphasizing the reality of hard times. How do you usually respond to trials or setbacks in your life?

2. UNDERSTANDING TEMPTATION

It's human nature to deflect responsibility. We see this from the very beginning of creation. When God confronted Adam with his sin in the Garden of Eden, Adam's reply was "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." When the Lord asked Eve, "What is this you have done"? She replied, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Gen 3:12-13). Eve blamed Satan. Adam blamed the woman, but really blamed God. And on it goes today.

So, is God ultimately responsible for our temptations and sin? James provides strong proof that God is not responsible for our temptation nor for our weakness in succumbing to sin.

Read James 1:13-18



Questions:

1. What questions or comments do you have about this passage that you would like to share with the group?
2. What do you think is the major difference in the trials God sends (verses 1-4) and the temptations described in verses 13-15?
3. Why are words like tempt, drag away, and entice appropriate descriptions of the way human desire and sin capture us?
4. Since God is sovereign, does this mean we are not at fault when we give into sin? Explain your answer.
5. What do we learn about God's nature in this passage (vv. 13, 17)?
6. James warns the believers not to be deceived. In what ways can we be deceived when it comes to temptation?
7. How can the "word of truth" v18 help us to overcome sin's attraction?
8. Pick one verse from this study that has proven especially meaningful to you and share it with the group?

For reflection

The question James raises is, what is going to last? What is permanent? His answer is clear: God and the word of truth. So, we must learn to trust God and his word rather than the snares of the world.

3. BELIEF THAT BEHAVES

In the passage before us, James presents another test for true believers. The first two tests centred around our response to trials and temptation. The third test is our response to the truth revealed in the Word of God. As important as the proper reception of the Word of God is, without obedience to its truth it is not only without benefit, but also becomes a further judgment against its readers. Obedience to the Word is the most basic spiritual requirement and is the common denominator for all true believers. The bottom line of true spiritual life is not a momentary feeling of compliance or commitment, but long-term obedience to God and His word.

Read James 1:19-27



Questions:

1. What questions or comments do you have about this passage that you would like to share with the group?
2. How do you feel when someone really hears you?
3. Why is it so hard for some people to be good listeners?
4. How could the command in verse 19 affect the way our connect groups or Sunday church services interact?
5. In the arena of faith, how are the actions of “hearing” and “doing” different? How are they related?
6. What must we do to properly receive God’s word (v21)? How do we do this?
7. James reminds us that Scripture, and the message about Jesus, really is “the perfect law of freedom.” How can a law create freedom?
8. James also reminds his readers in (v 27) that true devotion to God includes helping those in need (such as widows and orphans) and not being stained by the world. How do these two dimensions offer a balanced view of the Christian life?

For reflection

Do our actions show that we have received Christ and are following Him?

4. FAVOURITISM IN THE CHURCH

James' practical letter deals more with day-to-day issues than with theology and doctrine. In this passage, he stresses that showing partiality, or not showing it, is another kind of test of true living faith. He focuses mostly on partiality regarding social and economic status. Doubtless, these issues were special problems in the early church and were obviously problems with some of the Jewish believers "scattered abroad" (1:1). James presents five features of genuine, Godlike impartiality: the principle (v.1), the example (vv.2-4), the inconsistency (vv.5-7), the violation (vv. 8-11), and the appeal (vv.12-13).

Read James 2:1-13

Questions:

1. What questions or comments do you have about this passage that you would like to share with the group?
2. What are the reasons that believing in “our glorious Lord Jesus Christ” (v1) keep us from showing favouritism?
3. What are the key reasons for showing favouritism?
4. According to James, why is showing favouritism incompatible with faith?
5. What is forgotten by those who give special treatment to the rich (v5)? What is true wealth?
6. What is the significance of describing the command to love as ‘the royal law’ (v8)? Why is this command, above everything else the bible teaches, royal?
7. How can obeying these great commands eliminate the sin of partiality and favouritism among people of faith?
8. Read 2 Timothy 3:1-5. How do these verses shatter the common myth that the command “love your neighbour as yourself” is a call for people to love themselves?

For reflection

There will be no poor in heaven in any sense, no second-class citizens. Everyone will be rich in the things that matter eternally. Every believer will receive the same eternal life, the same citizenship in the kingdom of God, and the same perfect righteousness of Christ.

5. FAITH ACTS

James 2:14-26 is the most controversial passage in the Book of James. When looking at this passage it is important to remember that James is doing battle with Jewish believers who hold that it is possible to have 'faith' in God and Jesus without commitment to the path of love. James makes three things about faith clear.

Firstly, faith is not mere intellectual assent (v19) "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-and shudders." Second, faith is not simply an emotional response. According to James 2:19, the faith of demons is not just intellectual but also emotional. The demons believe and they "shudder."

Thirdly, James points out that faith involves wilful obedience. You show your faith not just by what you think or by what you feel but by what you do. Faith acts. James is not contrasting two methods of salvation (faith and works); instead, he contrasts two kinds of faith: living faith that saves and dead faith that does not.

Read James 2:14-26



Questions:

1. What questions or comments do you have about this passage that you would like to share with the group?
2. Why is it so easy to blur the line between doing a good work as a means to salvation and doing a good work as evidence of salvation?
3. What advice would you give to a friend who believes the teachings of scripture but has no spiritual fruit?
4. What two examples does James cite to show the futility of faith without works (vv. 15-16)? How are these good examples of dead faith?
5. What did James mean when he said that the “demons believe”? How does this emphasize the difference between dead faith and genuine saving faith?
6. What can we learn about faith from Abraham’s life?
7. Why is it significant that Abraham was called “the friend of God”? What does this mean?
8. If God ultimately produces spiritual fruit in our lives, what role do we play in pursuing greater maturity in the faith?

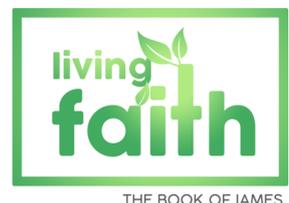
For reflection

In what ways would you like to grow as a “friend of God”?

6. FAITH SPEAKS

The old adage ‘Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never harm me’ is more memorable than it is true. Most of us will be able to recall occasions when words carried a force far beyond that of sticks and stones. James writes to a group of Christians to talk to them about the power and importance of words, words that flow from the tongue or, even more essentially, from the heart. Jesus made clear where words come from when He said in Luke 6:45 that we speak “from the overflow of the heart.” We all know words are critically important. We have been deeply hurt by words, and we have also been greatly helped, encouraged, and blessed through words. In James 3:1-12 we will see what James has to say about words and the way we use our tongue.

Read James 3:1-12



Questions:

1. What questions or comments do you have about this passage that you would like to share with the group?
2. What is wrong with the idea that our actions, and not our words, are what really matters?
3. What things do you think a teacher might be judged 'more strictly (v.1) for? What might this stricter judgement look like?
4. What would you say to another Christian whose conversation is often impure?
5. Read Matthew 12:33-37. What similarities and differences can you see between Jesus' teaching and that of James 3:2-12?
6. What types of evils are caused by the tongue?
7. Why are the metaphors James uses for the tongue particularly apt? What do they convey?
8. How do James' instructions apply to social media-texts, e-mails, internet communication, etc.?
9. James has focused primarily on the destructive power of words. In what ways can our words also bring refreshment and healing?

For reflection

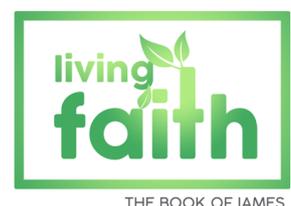
What are two or three practical ways I can be more careful with my words?

7. WISDOM FROM ABOVE; LIFE HERE BELOW

In this passage James makes a transition from discussing teachers and the tongue to dealing with wisdom's impact on everyone's life. He supports the truth revealed in the Old Testament that wisdom is divided into two realms: man's wisdom and God's, earthly and heavenly. James offers wisdom as still another test of living faith. The kind of wisdom a person possesses will be revealed by the kind of life they live. Those who possess the wisdom of man, the wisdom from below, will demonstrate by their lives that they have no saving relationship with Jesus Christ and no desire to worship, serve, or obey Him. On the other hand, those who possess genuine saving faith will manifest the wisdom of God, the wisdom from above. The Jewish Christians to whom James wrote understood that true wisdom was not intellectual, but behavioural. So, the biggest fool was one who knew truth and failed to apply it.

To the Jews, wisdom meant skill in living righteously.

Read James 3:13-18



Questions:

1. What questions or comments do you have about this passage that you would like to share with the group?
2. How would you define 'wisdom' according to James 3:13-18? How does this compare with the contemporary use of the word?
3. What is the difference between knowing facts and possessing godly wisdom?
4. How can a person tell if the wisdom he/she is receiving is man's or God's?
5. What needs to happen for this fruit of righteousness (v17-18) that is sown in peace to thrive in our connect groups and church?

Read James 4:1-12

Questions:

1. What questions or comments do you have about this passage that you would like to share with the group?
2. How might wisdom from heaven help us resolve conflicts we face?
3. Why is James so intolerant of conflict in the church? What causes in fighting?
4. Why is James so adamant about not slandering and judging others? Does that mean that believers are forbidden to confront overt sin in others? Why or why not?
5. Practically speaking, what does it mean to submit to God and resist the devil?

For reflection

Worldly speech discourages one another and dishonours God. Godly speech, on the other hand, encourages one another and exalts God.

8. THE RICH AND THE SUFFERING

The bible does not teach that possessing wealth is sinful in and of itself. What is wrong is to misuse one's wealth. Wealth may be a blessing, a gift from God bringing the opportunity to do good. If wealth is to be a source of blessing and not condemnation, it must not be uselessly hoarded, unjustly gained, self-indulgently spent, or ruthlessly acquired. These first six verses of James 5 are most likely addressed to unbelievers. These people are not called brothers. You might wonder why, in a book addressed to Christians, James would spend time using such harsh language towards unbelievers. The answer is that he is reminding the Christians that the justice of God is coming. This reality should enable them to be patient.

Read James 5:1-12

Questions:

1. What questions or comments do you have about this passage that you would like to share with the group?
2. What charges does James bring against the wealthy? Why was he so harsh in his rebuke?
3. Does James teach that it is a sin to be wealthy? How do you support your answer?
4. How does greed blind us to spiritual realities?
5. According to James 5:1-11, why is it detrimental to our faith to abandon a belief in Christ's return and final judgment? How should this truth affect our outlook on life while we wait?
6. Is the patience James calls for different from inactivity? Explain.
7. Why is faith in God's character so crucial in our suffering?
8. James goes on to give three examples of patient people: a farmer, the prophets and Job. How is each an example of patience?
9. What role can our connect groups or the church play in helping others who are suffering and struggling at this time?

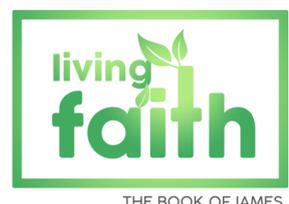
For reflection

Matthew 5:11-12 Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

9. PRAYING IN FAITH

As we come to this final passage, it would be surprising, if, in this letter to struggling, persecuted Christians, James neglected to mention prayer. A strong commitment to prayer is a prerequisite to enduring suffering and affliction. James' exhortation to prayer embraces the prayer life of the entire church. Individual believers are called to pray in verse 13, the elders in verses 14-15, and the congregation in verse 16. This section also reflects James' compassionate pastoral care for his suffering flock; his main focus is on the casualties of the spiritual battle-the persecuted, the weak, the sick, and the defeated believers. As the context and content of this section make clear, the subject is not just physical illness or healing, but also with the healing of spiritual weakness, spiritual weariness, spiritual exhaustion and spiritual depression. James is emphasising how important our prayers are for others.

Read James 5:13-20

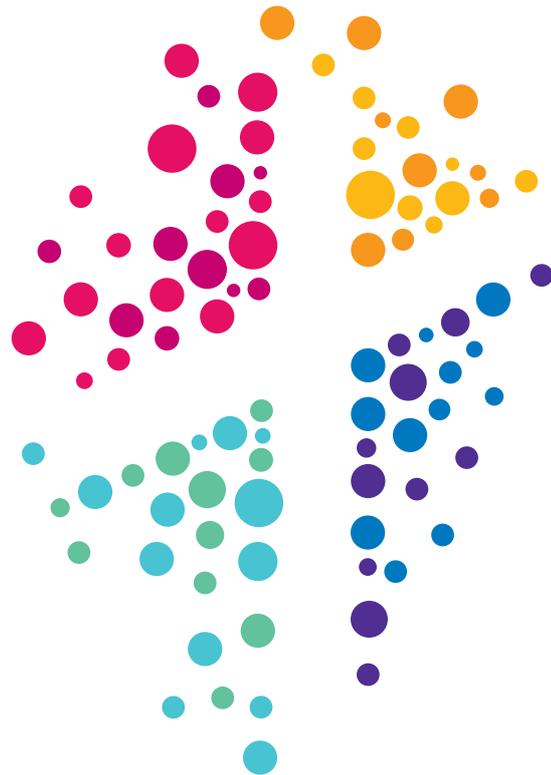


Questions:

1. What questions or comments do you have about this passage that you would like to share with the group?
2. Do you pray more when you are in trouble or when things are going well?
3. How can prayer make a real difference in the life of a struggling Christian?
4. In verses 14-16 James discusses physical and spiritual healing. What are the steps in this process?
5. How is physical healing connected with forgiveness of sins?
6. What do we learn from Elijah's example of faithful praying?
7. What does it mean to "wander from the truth"?
8. According to verses 19-20, how, if at all are we our brother's keeper?

For reflection

As we come to the end of the book of James, what core truths will you take away from these studies?



Menai Baptist Church

**LOVE GOD, LOVE OTHERS, SERVE OUR WORLD
*IN JESUS' NAME***

MBC:2019

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