



## Life Group Studies

## Introduction

One of the difficult things in the life of a Christian is connecting our faith with how we behave in everyday life, and the various contexts in which we live and work. The letter of James is a concise and practical letter that gives Christians guidance in ethical living based upon the character of God and our need to put our faith in Jesus into action.

Most likely written by James, the brother of Jesus and a leader in the early church in Jerusalem, the letter of James is written to Jewish Christians dispersed throughout the Middle East who were struggling with the trials of life – poverty, marginalisation, and temptations of various kinds. James gives them a sermon in the form of a letter that encourages them to persevere and to follow Christ wholeheartedly, obeying the new ‘law’ that Jesus has given them.

These studies and sermons are aimed at helping us connect (or reconnect) with the ethical demands of Christian discipleship and the power that God gives us to live the way that we should, that puts our faith into action.

## Facing Trials – James 1:1-18

1. Define what we mean by the word 'ethics'.
2. Where do you get your ethics from? What are some of the principles that you live by?
3. Why should the Christians to whom James is writing consider it 'pure joy' when they face trials (v2)?
4. How can testing of faith produce perseverance?
5. What does it mean to be a 'mature' Christian? What characteristics would such a person have?
6. What is 'wisdom', and how do you think that people attain it?
7. Can you think of a time in your life when you have been 'double-minded' about something to do with your faith in Jesus (v8)?
8. Read vv9-11. What do poor believers have to be proud about? What do rich Christians have to be proud about?
9. Have you ever said or thought that 'God is tempting me' (v13)? Why does James reject that possibility?
10. How does James describe the process of temptation (vv13-15)?
11. What about God's character should give us confidence about his actions towards us (vv16-18)?

12. What does this passage teach us about how we can persevere through trials, suffering and temptations?

## Doers Not Just Hearers – James 1:19-27

1. What do you think of when you hear the word 'religion'?
2. What does James mean by the 'word planted in you', which can save us (v21)?
3. When it comes to faith, are you more of a 'doer' (active and serving) or a 'hearer' (thinking and reflecting)? What are the dangers of 'merely' being one or the other?
4. Explain to each other what James means by the image of the mirror in verses 23-25.
5. What is it that causes us to be hearers only and not doers of the word? What blocks do we have to putting our faith into practice?
6. Can you think of a time when you have been led into anger, with bad results? How does James encourage his readers to deal with that issue (vv19-21)? Is all anger bad?
7. In verses 26-27 James describes what 'pure and faultless' religion looks like. What might be the characteristics of *impure* and *faulty* religion?
8. What does James argue is the kind of religion that God accepts? Why are these things important?
9. How can we encourage each other to be more consistent in 'doing' what we hear in the Bible?

## No Favouritism – James 2:1-13

1. Have you ever been judged and treated poorly solely because of your outward appearance?
2. 'Favouritism' in the Greek used by James means 'receiving the face', or judging on appearances. Why do we tend to be so quick to do that?
3. What is the problem scenario that James outlines in vv2-4? What might that look like if it happened in our own context at Diamond Creek or a church like it?
4. What are the reasons James gives for these Christians not to show favouritism?
5. Why would they be tempted to show favouritism to the rich, even though they were usually the ones who were oppressing them?
6. Why is favouritism a sin and a way of breaking God's law (v9)?
7. How can it be true that someone who 'stumbles at just one point' is guilty of breaking the entire law (v10)?
8. What is the 'royal law'? Read Matthew 22:37-40, and discuss why these commands sum up the entire law of God.
9. Does God show favouritism to some people?
10. What basis (if any) should we use to judge other people?

11. Do you find it daunting to read about the judgement in verses 12-13?  
What does this section of the passage mean?
  
12. How can we help each other to see people the way that God does,  
and act on that?

## Living Faith – James 2:14-26

1. Is there any type of good deed or work that you must do in order to be a real Christian? Why might we often think it important to say ‘no’ to that question?
2. In verse 14 James asks about those who have faith with no deeds, saying ‘Can such faith save them?’ What would your answer to that question be?
3. Can you think of other ways we might respond to other people’s needs in the unhelpful way described in verse 16?
4. What would it look like to have faith that did not result in ‘deeds’? (v18)
5. Why is mere belief in God’s existence not enough to save us? (v19)
6. How did Abraham’s actions demonstrate the sincerity of his faith? (vv20-23)
7. Read verse 24 and then Romans 3:28. How can we possibly reconcile these two verses?
8. James’s main point here seems to be that ‘faith without deeds is dead or useless’, as he repeats this idea three times (v17, 20 & 26). What are the signs of a *living* faith?
9. What is one new way in which your faith might be demonstrated by your deeds in the next month?



## Taming the Tongue – James 3:1-12

1. What are some of the different ways in which we can sin and do damage to ourselves and others with our words?
2. Why does James say that if we are able to control our tongue we will be 'perfect'? (v2)
3. Explain the different images that James uses for the power of the tongue in vv3-9. Why can the tongue be such a powerful source of evil?
4. Why does James think that it is so wrong that both 'praise and cursing' can come from the same mouth? (vv9-12)
5. Back in 1:26 James argued that keeping a tight rein on our tongue is one of the signs of true religion. On the basis of our reading this week, why might that be the case?
6. Why shouldn't many people become teachers in the Church? (v3)  
What are some examples of how Church leaders and teachers can do damage by what they say?
7. If 'no human being can tame the tongue' (v8), how can we become more disciplined in what we say?
8. What particular area of your speech might need to be more firmly controlled in order for you to grow as a Christian? How could this happen?

## Wisdom From Above – James 3:13-18

1. Who are some of the Christian people that you admire for their character (people that you know or historical Christian figures)?
2. Why does James say that humility comes from wisdom? (v13)
3. Why might 'envy and selfish ambition' (v16) be at the root of many kinds of bad behaviour?
4. 'Envy' is from a word that can also mean 'zeal' or 'jealousy' in a good sense. What could the difference be between 'bad' and 'good' jealousy?
5. In what ways do we sometimes consider selfish and ambitious people to be 'wise'? What are the limits of that kind of 'wisdom'? (v15)
6. Discuss the different types of wisdom that are in verse 17, what each of them mean and how they might be related to each other. Which appeals most to you at the moment as a direction for developing your own character?
7. How can we cultivate wisdom?
8. What would it look like for you to be a peacemaker (v18)?

## Whose Friend? – James 4:1-12

1. In your experience, what kind of things tend to cause conflicts between people?
2. What is the problem in the relationships that James is describing in vv1-3?
3. What qualities do you look for in a friend?
4. What does James mean when he says that ‘anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God’ (v4)?
5. Why is God so opposed to proud people?
6. According the vv7-10, how should we approach God?
7. Why should we not slander or judge one another (vv11-12)?
8. What could we do in order to be more clearly seen to be ‘friends of God’?

## Materialism – James 4:13-5:11

1. How far in advance do you plan your calendar, and in how much detail?
2. According to James (vv13-17), what can be the problem with how we go about planning our lives? Read Jesus's parable in Luke 12:16-20 for more ideas.
3. How can we determine what we should do with our lives?
4. Explain why 'you rich people' are rebuked in 5:1-6. What temptations and spiritual problems does wealth bring?
5. Do you think that there might be any way in which we (the members of this group) could be criticised for how we spend our wealth?
6. Why should Christians be patient with the difficulties of life (v7)?
7. Can you think of any examples of Christian people you have known who have suffered patiently?
8. What could you do to give over more control of your life to God, particularly with regards to the topic of money?

## Pray at all Times – James 5:12-20

1. How do you usually respond to difficulties in your life?
2. What different circumstances does James describe in vv13-16, and what are the different types of prayer that are appropriate for each one? Do you pray much when you are happy?
3. Why should we not 'swear', according to James (v12)? Compare what James says with Jesus's teaching in Matthew 5:34-37. Are they saying the same or different things? Does this mean that all kinds of vows and oaths are out of bounds for Christians?
4. What is the purpose of anointing with oil in the context of praying for healing? (v14)
5. Is healing 'guaranteed' if we pray as James describes? Why does he say that 'the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective'? (v16)
6. Look at the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 18 (especially vv41-46). What does this say about the kind of prayer that God answers?
7. Have you ever seen someone 'brought back' (v19) to faith? What encouragement does James provide for us to make the effort to do that?
8. Looking back over the series of studies, what can you do to put your faith into action in the next season of your life?

# Notes