

THE BOOK OF JAMES

Faith That Works

TERM 4 2023



ENGADINE &
HEATHCOTE
ANGLICAN

Study 1	James 1:1-8	3
Study 2	James 1:9-18	5
Study 3	James 1:19-27	7
Study 4	James 2:1-13	9
Study 5	James 2:14-26	11
Study 6	James 3:1-18	13
Study 7	James 4:1-12	15
Study 8	James 4:13 - 5:12	17
Study 9	James 5:13-20	19

LEADERS NOTES

Overview of James

What is it? (Genre)

James is a letter written to encourage its hearers to live out the faith they are confessing (1:22; 2:14)

Who wrote it? (Author)

James self-identifies as a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ (v.1). He was Jesus' brother (Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55) who was initially an unbeliever (John 7:2-5). Jesus later appeared to James after his resurrection (1 Cor 15:7) and he became a crucial figure in the early church (Acts 21:18-19, Galatians 2:9-10).

Who received it? (Audience)

The letter of James is not addressed to a singular church but to the "twelve tribes scattered among the nations" (v.1). James, however, makes no specific reference to people, places or situations and does not finish his letter with the traditional greeting, travel plans or mention of fellow workers. The intended audience is likely Christians from a Jewish background given the frequent references to Old Testament imagery such as "first fruits" (1:18), "adulterous people" (4:4) and people like Abraham (2:23), Rahab (2:25), Job (5:11) and Elijah (5:17).

When was it written? (Dating)

We don't know the exact date of writing. It could have been any time from James' rise in prominence in the early church (Acts 15:13-21), around AD 48, until his death in AD 62; many scholars think it was likely towards the end of this timeframe.

How does it fit together? (Structure)

1:1 Letter opening

1:2-18 Enduring trials

1:19-3:18 Faith within the Church

4:1-5:20 Faith and the world

Resources

James For You by Sam Allberry

WEEK 1 James 1:1-8

Big idea: God desires believers to be mature and complete, this is the point of trials.

Big Q: How do you respond to suffering?

Getting it started

What do you currently know about the book of James? Take a moment to discuss the overview together.

What thoughts come to mind when you hear the word 'trials'?

Read the passage

1. Read James 1:1-8 together, and note down what we are told about the following:
 - a. The author (& his self-perception) *Despite being the brother of Jesus, James he speaks of himself not as the brother of Jesus but his servant*
 - b. The first hearers *12 tribes scattered among the nations, facing trials*

2. Draw a flow diagram of v.2-4 using the words joy, trials, perseverance, and maturity.
 - a. Now, try to write a synonym for each of these words.
 - b. What do you notice about trials? How would you define them?
 - c. Are trials to be expected?
 - d. What is the goal of trials?

3. Why do you think James starts v.2 with “consider”? *Re-framing our thinking about suffering*
 - a. Is James simply saying – “don’t worry, be happy!”? *Be helpful to draw out the distinction between happiness and joy. Joy is the deep-seated feeling that “this is right, the way it’s meant to be.” Happiness springs from joy. And you can have joy without happiness.*
4. In v.5, James shifts to talking about wisdom; what might the connection be between perseverance in trials and asking God for wisdom? *We need God’s help to help us to live rightly in his world, especially in the face of trials.*
 - a. What is wisdom? *Read Proverbs 1:9, Job 28:12-28*
 - b. How confident can we be that God will answer this prayer?
 - c. How will God answer this prayer?
5. How is it that believers are to ask God for wisdom?
6. What might it mean to ask God for wisdom in a double-minded way? *Not believing that God’s way is necessarily the best – helpful to recognise the difference between receiving wisdom and feeling wise*

Thinking it through

How does this passage challenge us to consider what the Christian life will be like?

How might this passage shape our attitude and response towards trials in this life?

Pray.

WEEK 2 James 1:9-18

Big idea: Wisdom knows God is bringing us new life that is eternal

Big Q: Have you got the right perspective on life?

Getting it started

Thinking back to last week, what comes to mind when you think of wisdom?

Read the passage

1. What is the paradox that James starts this section with? (v.9-11)

2. Last week we saw how asking God for wisdom enables trust and perseverance in trials which leads to a change in our perspective, having a right understanding of the world and how it works, how might v.9-11 be an example of this?

3. In what sense would believers in “humble circumstances” be able to take pride in their “high position”? *They are in humble circumstances spiritually speaking but have the highest position as children of God*

4. James is speaking of the non-believing rich in v.10-11, what will happen to them?
 - a. How might this perspective help believers to persevere (v.3)?

WEEK 3 James 1:19-27

Big idea: God desires righteousness, which the word produces.

Big Q: Is your life pleasing to God?

Getting it started

Can you think of a situation in which you failed to follow instructions? What happened?

Read the passage

Read v.19-21

1. What is it that James wants his hearers to take note of?
 - a. Why should believers do this? *V.20*
 - b. How can believers do this? *V.21 we rid ourselves of sin by humbly accepting God's word. His word, that He has planted in us, produces the righteousness that He desires. We don't do it on our own!*

Read v.22-27

2. Why is merely listening to the word "deceiving yourself"? *cannot truly listen to the word without obedience to it*
3. Why do you think James uses the illustration of a mirror in v.23 to describe the word?
 - a. In what ways is God's word like a mirror for us?

4. In v.25, James describes the word as the law that “gives freedom”, why do you think he does this? *Living God's way is how we've been designed & hence gives us the greatest freedom to live in this way, like a fish being most free in water...*

5. In what ways is v.26 similar or different to v.19-20?

Similar: significance of speech for believers, unreined speech does not please God

Diff: unreined speech is self-deception in v.26

6. How does James describe “pure and faultless religion”?

a. In what ways does this behaviour make our religion “pure and faultless”?

Acceptable religion involves our words, our hands, and our hearts.

Thinking it through

Reflect, share, discuss. In what situations do you find it challenging to truly listen to God's word?

How might viewing the words as “the perfect law that gives freedom” help to shape our attitude towards and obedience to God's word?

Pray.

WEEK 4 James 2:1-13

Big idea: God has chosen the poor in the eyes of the world to inherit the kingdom

Big Q: is your view of others the same as God's?

Getting it started

Think of a time you experienced or witnessed favouritism; how did it make you feel and why?

Read the passage

1. What must believers in our “glorious Lord Jesus Christ” not do?
 - a. Why does James say “our glorious Lord Jesus Christ” rather than just Jesus, and how might this help us understand favouritism? *Cf Philippians 2:9-11 Jesus in his glory humbled himself, his pathway to glory was through humility and suffering*
2. Split up into groups to come up with the reasons James gives as to why believers must not show favouritism:

Verses	Reason
v.2-4	<i>Discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts</i>
v.5	<i>God has chosen the poor of the world to be rich in faith and inherit the kingdom</i>
v.6	<i>The rich are exploiting them</i>
v.7	<i>The rich are exploiting the name of Jesus</i>
v.8-9	<i>Breaking the law</i>

3. Try and summarise your findings above in a sentence.

4. Looking at v.10, in what sense might breaking one law be breaking all of them?

“The law is a transcript of divine character, and any violation of it is a violation of the character of God. The same evil that causes us to break one of God’s laws will, in different circumstances, cause us to break the others” R. Kent Hughes

5. How does v.12-13 show us the significance of showing favouritism? *To show favouritism is to show judgement without mercy, to live hypocritically*

a. How does the end of v.13 provide us with comfort?

Thinking it through

What are some ways you are tempted to show favouritism with Christians? *(Do you constantly talk to the same types of people or show special attention when certain people come to church?)*

- How might seeing people from God’s perspective (wisdom) shape your perception of them?

- How can you intentionally “love your neighbour” at church this Sunday? What is one thing that you will do differently?

Pray.

WEEK 5 James 2:14-26

Big idea: Faith without deeds is dead

Big Q: Does your behaviour demonstrate your faith?

Getting it started

Have you ever met someone whose actions don't match their words? How did that shape the way you thought about them?

Read the passage and note any repeated words or phrases.

1. Thinking back to what we've looked at in James, how might v.14 connect to what James has been saying through his epistle so far?
2. Looking at v.14-19, how would you describe the "faith" James is critiquing? *A verbal claim of faith*
3. Have you ever heard someone say something similar to v.18? What did they say?
 - a. How does James show us the folly of such a statement?
 - b. How might Jesus' words in Matt 7:17-20 and 13:18-23 help us see something similar?
4. Who are the two case studies that James uses to show the uselessness of faith without deeds? Let's look at them in greater detail:

Person	Passage	How does this help us understand the relationship between faith and works?
1. <i>Abraham</i>	Gen 15:1-6; 22:1-19	<i>Abraham was a man of faith, believed the LORD despite having no son (Gen 15), his trust of God led him to the point of being willing to even sacrifice even his son</i>

2. <i>Rahab</i>	Joshua 2	<i>v.9-11 heard of the LORD and who he is and this led her to risk her life to save them</i>
-----------------	----------	--

- a. Why do you think James chose these two examples? *Abraham is the man of faith, the father of Israel (Gal 3:9). Rahab is a Gentile female prostitute. They are polar opposites! Yet in both cases their faith was not merely words but demonstrated in their behaviour.*

5. Discuss the statement: "We are saved by faith alone, but saving faith is never alone."

Bonus Q: What response would you give to someone who suggests that James 2:24 contradicts the teachings of Paul? *How might Ephesians 2:8-10 help? "Paul denies any efficacy to pre-conversion works, but James is pleading for the absolute necessity of post-conversion works." Douglas Moo*

Thinking it through

How might you encourage a Christian who reads this passage and:

- Who feels guilty or worries about not doing enough?
- Who doesn't see the need to really change anything in their life?

This passage is a stark warning to express faith with actions that follow; how can we take this warning seriously without falling into the trap of thinking our relationship with God is dependent upon the works we do?

Pray.

Real faith is more than mental assent to truth. It is a belief that involves the heart. "... That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Romans 10:9, 10). It is one thing to say, "I believe this airplane will hold me," but it is quite another to fly somewhere in it. Hughes, R. Kent.

WEEK 6 James 3:1-18

Big idea: God desires righteousness, the tongue has great power for unrighteousness.

Big Q: do your words reflect a heart that is right with God?

Getting it started

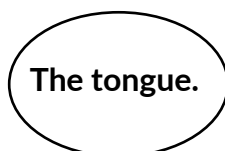
Discuss the famous saying: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me”. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Read the passage

1. What are the two warnings James gives to would-be teachers? *Will be judged more strictly and will stumble, interesting to see the connection James makes between speech and sin in v.2*
 - a. Why might he be giving these warnings, particularly to teachers?
Influence and authority of teachers

2. Looking at v.3-4, what are the two images James uses to describe the tongue being “a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts”?
 - a. How might these two images be helpful?

3. Draw a mind map with the tongue in the middle; what does this passage tell us about the tongue?



4. Is it possible to tame the tongue? *NO! not on our own*

5. In what ways is the tongue a spiritual barometer? V.9-12 *Our speech reflects who we truly are, cursing/sinful speech the sign of a heart that has not been transformed by Jesus – unchristian speech is evidence of an unchristian heart*
6. What might the connection be between speech and wisdom? V.13-18 *Wrong speech flows from a lack of wisdom; heavenly wisdom produces right speech.*
7. James contrasts earthly and heavenly wisdom – what does he say about them?

Earthly wisdom	Heavenly wisdom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - V.14 harbouring bitterness, envy, selfish ambition - V.15 Unspiritual and demonic - V.16 envy, selfish ambition -> disorder and every evil practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - V.17 pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere

- a. What does this tell us about wisdom? *It is something that is visible, not merely knowledge but action*
- b. How can we receive heavenly wisdom? *(Think back to 1:6) ask God!*

Thinking it through

What does your speech reveal about your heart? Is your heart wise?

What are ways in which you can use your tongue for gospel speech?

Pray.

WEEK 7 James 4:1-12

Big idea: God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble

Big Q: Is your life marked by humility?

Getting it started

What are some common responses when dealing with conflict?

Read the passage

Read v.1-5

1. What does James say is the true cause of any conflict we might have with a brother or sister in Christ? *Our own desires v.1, our prayerlessness v.2 which arises from a sense of independence from God. Our relationships with each other are an indication of our relationship with God.*
2. Why is friendship with the world enmity with God?
3. What spirit does James mention in v.5? Why do you think he does? *Our spirit, God longs for relationship with us. Our relationship with Him is what will transform our relationships with each other.*

Read v.6-10

4. What does v.6 teach us about God? How might this picture of God help us?
5. What does James show us about true humility?
6. How is it that we “come near to God”? *To humble ourselves and not wait to be humbled*

7. To what extent do you think this section (v.6-10) could be described as the central paragraph of the letter?

Read v. 11-12

8. Why does James conclude by saying speaking against a brother or sister is a serious sin? *It is putting yourself above the Law & taking the place of God. How you treat others is indicative of your relationship with God.*

Thinking it through

In what areas are we tempted to be “a friend of the world”?

What might it look like for you to “submit yourself to God”?

Thinking back to our opening question, how might this passage help shape our response to any conflict we might have with each other. Where ought we begin as we seek reconciliation?

Pray.

WEEK 8 James 4:13-5:12

Big idea: Jesus is returning soon; live in light of this!

Big Q: Does your life show you are awaiting Jesus' return?

Getting it started

Can you think of a moment when not knowing the time had negative consequences?

Read the passage

Read 4:13-17

1. How does James describe our lives?
 - a. Why does he describe it as such?
 - b. Is James suggesting that we should never plan for anything?
 - c. If we were to take seriously this description, how would it shape our attitudes and behaviour?

2. Given the context, what sin do you think James describes in v. 17? Is his description of sin similar or different to how you think? *V.17 not doing the good they ought to do. In the context, it seems to concern living in accordance with our own plans, instead of God's – as we know we should.*

Read 5:1-12

3. Looking closely at v.1-6, who is James addressing? *James is likely speaking to the unbelieving rich as he does not refer to them as "brothers and sisters" as he does in other places.*
 - a. What does James say about them?
 - b. How might believers knowing this about the rich impact the way they live? *Similar wisdom to 1:9-12*

4. V.7-9 What does it look like for believers to wait for the Lord's coming?

5. Looking at v.10-11, what are James's two examples of patience in suffering?

Example	How are they a helpful example of perseverance?	
1. The prophets	Face suffering with patience, awaiting what was to come	Hebrews 11:32-40
2. Job	Lost everything and yet still persevered	Job 1:21, 2:9-10; 16:19-21 & 42:7

6. Why do you think James concludes v.11 by saying, "The Lord is full of compassion and mercy"?

7. What does James want his hearers to do "above all"? (cf Matt 5:23-37)

- a. What does this say about our speech as Christians? *Our speech is to be true and trustworthy*

Thinking it through

When do you find it hard to live in light of Jesus' return? What might help you to do this?

Just as God has given us encouragement from Job and the prophets to persevere till the end, he has also given us each other! How might this shape the way we think about church and meeting together?

Pray.

WEEK 9 James 5:13-20

Big idea: The prayer of a righteous person has great power

Big Q: does your prayer life demonstrate an understanding of the power of prayer?

Getting it started

How do you find prayer? What has shaped your prayer life?

Read the passage

List out the questions in v.13-14

1. *Is anyone in trouble?*
2. *Is anyone happy?*
3. *Is anyone sick?*

What is common among the responses to these questions? *Bring it before God*

1. Looking at v.15, do you see any connection between the following:
 - a. Prayer and faith? *Prayer offered in faith is powerful*
 - b. Sin and sickness? *They seem to be paralleled in v.15 + 16*

*It is helpful for us not to go far in either direction when thinking about the connection between sin and sickness. Note especially the word: "**If** they have sinned ...".*

See also: Jn 9:1-3, Jn 5:14 & 1 Cor 11:28-30.

2. In v.16, James mentions confession to each other, discuss the following quote on the same subject:

Confession in the presence of a brother is the profoundest kind of humiliation. It hurts, it cuts a man down, it is a dreadful blow to pride. To stand there before a brother as a sinner is a disgrace that is almost unbearable. Thus, confession helps to promote a poverty of spirit which is acceptable to God.

3. Continuing in his discussion about prayer, James now turns to speaking about Elijah in v.17

	What does he pray?	What happens?
1 Kings 17:8-24	v.20 for the widow's son to be raised	He was raised! V.22
1 Kings 18:16 - 40	v.36 for fire to be sent down	v.38 fire was sent down from the LORD!
James 5:17-18 (1 Kings 17:7 & 18:41-46)	For no rain & then rain after 3.5 years	It happened just as Elijah prayed

Elijah's prayers achieved incredible things, yet James likens him to us, a human who prayed.

4. How might remembering Elijah and his prayers help shape how we pray?

5. Looking at v.19-20 why is bringing someone back from wandering so significant?

a. Why do you think James chose to finish his letter with this?

Thinking it through

How might knowing the power of prayer shape how and why we pray?

Is there anyone you know who has "wandered from the truth"? What might it look like for you to bring them back?

Spend some time in your group reflecting on what God has been teaching you through the book of James this term.

Pray.