

THE BOOK OF JAMES

Faith That Works

TERM 4 2023



ENGADINE &
HEATHCOTE
ANGLICAN

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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

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)
 - b. The first hearers

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”?
 - a. Is James simply saying – “don’t worry, be happy!”?

4. In v.5, James shifts to talking about wisdom; what might the connection be between perseverance in trials and asking God for wisdom?
 - 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?

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

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”?

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)?

5. What is the outcome of living a life of wisdom in the face of trials? v.12

6. Looking at v.13-15, will it be easy to live a life of wisdom? Why/why not? See if you can draw a diagram of what James is describing.

7. How then will believers make it to the end? v.16-18

Thinking it through

Reflect: has your life been shaped by God's wisdom?

- In what areas do you find this difficult?

- How might knowing that God has given you everything we need in his word (v.18) help you?

Pray.

WEEK 3 James 1:19-27

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?

 - b. **How** can believers do this?

Read v.22-27

2. Why is merely listening to the word “deceiving yourself”?

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?

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

6. How does James describe “pure and faultless religion”?
 - a. In what ways does this behaviour make our religion “pure and faultless”?

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

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.

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	
v.5	
v.6	
v.7	
v.8-9	

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?

5. How does v.12-13 show us the significance of showing favouritism?

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

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?

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:

<i>Person</i>	<i>Passage</i>	<i>How does this help us understand the relationship between faith and works?</i>
1.	Gen 15:1-6; 22:1-19	
2.	Joshua 2	

a. Why do you think James chose these two examples?

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?

Thinking it through

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

- a. Who feels guilty or worries about not doing enough?
- b. 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.

WEEK 6 James 3:1-18

Getting it started

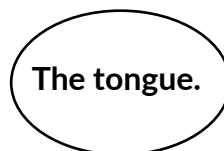
Discuss the famous saying: “*Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me*”. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Read the passage

1. What are the two warnings James gives to would-be teachers?
 - a. Why might he be giving these warnings, particularly to 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?

5. In what ways is the tongue a spiritual barometer? v.9-12

6. What might the connection be between speech and wisdom? v.13-18

7. James contrasts earthly and heavenly wisdom – what does he say about them?

Earthly wisdom	Heavenly wisdom

a. What does this tell us about wisdom?

b. How can we receive heavenly wisdom? (*Think back to 1:6*)

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

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?
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?

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”?

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?

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

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?

Read 5:1-12

3. Looking closely at v.1-6, who is James addressing?
 - a. What does James say about them?
 - b. How might believers knowing this about the rich impact the way they live?

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.		<i>Hebrews 11:32-40</i>
2.		<i>Job 1:21, 2:9-10; 16:19-21 & 42:7</i>

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?

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

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.
- 2.
- 3.

What is common among the responses to these questions?

1. Looking at v.15, do you see any connection between the following:
 - a. Prayer and faith?
 - b. Sin and sickness?

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		
1 Kings 18:16 - 40		
James 5:17-18 (1 Kings 17:7 & 18:41-46)		

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.