



James

FAITH THAT WORKS

**Eight Studies in
The Letter of James**

INTRODUCTION

The author identifies himself as James (1:1). He was probably the brother of Jesus and leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15). He addresses the letter to “the twelve tribes scattered among the nations” (1:1) by which he means mainly Jewish Christians living outside Judea. It is possible that they are those who have been scattered following Stephen’s death (Acts 8:1; 11:19). The fact that they are scattered among the nations accounts for the trials and oppression they face.

The letter seems to jump from one topic to another without an obvious connection. But one thing that connects the whole book is that it is all about Christian behaviour. Genuine faith must show itself in action in our lives. Three times in chapter 1 he warns us not to deceive ourselves (1:16, 22, 26), not to fool ourselves that our faith is genuine when our behaviour does not match God’s word. We must be doers of the word (1:22). It is no good claiming to have faith if we have no deeds to match (2:26). Our behaviour must be shaped by a wholehearted commitment to godly wisdom, not being double-minded (1:8; 4:8) and not living by worldly wisdom (3:13-17); living by friendship with God not with the world (4:4). Our godly behaviour will be shown in the everyday way we relate to other people around us. James calls for sincere repentance and a change in behaviour where we are not living God’s way (4:4-10).

Given the serious challenge James gives us to action we must honestly examine our lives in the light of God’s word as we study this book and make the changes in behaviour that God demands.

There are 12 sermons in this series but only 8 studies in this booklet. You might want to spend more than 1 week on some studies.

STUDY 1

Read the Introduction p.2.

Read 1:1-4, 12 Facing trials

1. What trials have you faced in life? How did you react to difficult times?
2. What effect does the testing of our faith have on our character? Can we consider it joy?
3. What is the promise of 1:12? What does it mean to persevere?

Read 1:5-8 Seeking wisdom

4. What is the promise of 1:5? What is the character of God described here? What sort of wisdom does God want to give us (see 3:13-17)?
5. Those who doubt are called “double-minded” (1:7). How does 4:4-8) describe “double-minded” people? Does this explain what he means by doubting in 1:6?

Read 1:9-11 Rich and Poor

6. One of the tensions the church faced was between rich and poor (1:9-11; 2:1-7; 5:1-6). How does a person’s wealth affect the way we think about them? How should we regard our financial and spiritual states?

“Do not merely listen to the word...do what it says” (1:22). What do you need to do in response to this passage? Repent? Pray for help? Act?

STUDY 2

Read 1:13-18 Temptation

1. Where do temptations come from (and not come from)(see 4:1-3)? How do they arise in us and lead into sin? In the light of this how can we resist temptation?
2. How can we be deceived (1:16)? What is the truth about God? What confidence does this give us?

Read 1:19-21 Conflict

3. What conflict situations have you been in? How would 1:19 apply? (See 3:1-12 for the power of words.) What makes it difficult to follow God's instructions here? What steps can we take to do better?
4. What is it about anger that is so destructive? Why is it so hard to control? What steps can we take to deal with anger?

Read 1:22-27 Active faith = true faith

5. How can we fool ourselves? What does this have to do with mirrors? How can we avoid falling into this trap?
6. How will the truth of our "religion" show itself in our lives (be specific)? What is the pollution of the world?

"Do not merely listen to the word...do what it says" (1:22). What do you need to do in response to this passage? Repent? Pray for help? Act?

STUDY 3

Read 2:1-13 Favouritism

1. James is concerned about issues of rich and poor (see 1:9-11; 5:1-6).
What problems do you think the church was facing? Why did they favour the rich?
2. Do we discriminate on the basis of wealth? Are there other factors that lead us to favour one group over another? What is wrong with discriminating?
3. What special status do the poor have (2:5 cf. 1:9)? Why? What is the significance of the phrase “in the eyes of the world” (2:5)?
4. Why is “Love your neighbour as yourself” called the royal law? What is 2:8-11 telling us?
5. What is the law that gives freedom (cf. 1:25)? What is this freedom? How are we judged (2:12-13; cf. 4:11-12)?

“Do not merely listen to the word...do what it says” (1:22). What do you need to do in response to this passage? Repent? Pray for help? Act?

STUDY 4

Read 2:14-26 Active faith = true faith

Paul makes it clear we are saved by faith and not by works. *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”* (Ephesians 2:8-9) But he makes it clear he is also concerned about works in the very next verse. *“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* (Ephesians 2:10) We must not set one passage of Scripture against another. We need to understand what each is saying in its context.

1. What sort of “faith” is James talking about (2:14 “such faith”; 2:17, 19, 20, 26)? What is the issue James is concerned about (See 1:26-27; 2:15-16)?
2. What issue was Paul concerned about in Ephesians 2:8-9?
3. What do the cases of Abraham and Rahab show (2:21-26; cf. Romans 4:2-3)?
4. What then is the place of faith and of deeds (works) in salvation?
5. What does this say about people who do not do any deeds, whose lives are not changed by their faith (2:14, 17, 20, 26)?
6. What sort of deeds is James concerned for (a) 1:2, 13, 5:7-11; (b) 1:19; (c) 1:21; (d) 1:27; (e) 2:1-12; (f) 3:13-18; (g) 3:17-4:12; (h) 5:1-6?

“Do not merely listen to the word...do what it says” (1:22). What do you need to do in response to this passage? Repent? Pray for help? Act?

STUDY 5

Read 3:1-12 Taming the tongue

1. What is the role of teachers in the church? Why would they be judged more strictly? Why does James advise that “not many” should presume to be teachers?
2. How do the illustrations of bits, rudders and parks help us understand James’ message about the tongue? Is 3:6 too extreme (cf. 3:8)? How is it “set on fire by hell”?
3. What are some of the wrong uses of the tongue (James doesn’t list them)? What problems can misuse of the tongue cause? Are there some circumstances where you find it hard to control your tongue (3:7-8)?
4. One way of avoiding doing the wrong thing is to concentrate on doing the right thing. What are some of the positive uses of the tongue?
5. What is the point of the illustrations about springs and fruit trees? What is James saying about both praise and cursing coming from our mouth (3:9-12)?

“Do not merely listen to the word...do what it says” (1:22). What do you need to do in response to this passage? Repent? Pray for help? Act?

STUDY 6

Read 3:13-4:3 Godly and worldly wisdom

1. What are the characteristics of worldly wisdom? How are they shown in our dealings with other people?
2. What are the characteristics of godly wisdom? How are they shown in our dealings with other people?
3. How do we learn worldly wisdom (remember the frog in hot water)? How do we learn godly wisdom?

Read 4:4-10 Call to repent

4. Why does James call them (and us?) “adulterous”? What is friendship with the world (see 3:14-16; 4:1-2)?
5. Why is God jealous (cf. Exodus 20:5; 34:4)? How is his grace shown?
6. What does it mean to be “double-minded” (4:8)? What is the response God requires from such people (look at each part of 4:7-10)?

“Do not merely listen to the word...do what it says” (1:22). What do you need to do in response to this passage? Repent? Pray for help? Act?

STUDY 7

Read 4:11-12 Slander

1. What forms does slander take? What is wrong with slander? Have you ever been slandered? What did it feel like?

Read 4:13-17 Boasting

2. Is God against planning our life? What is wrong with this boasting?
3. How should we make plans (cf. Proverbs 3:5-10)?

Read 5:1-6 Rich oppressors

4. Is it wrong to be rich? What is the evil James opposes here (cf. 2:6)? What warning is given to the rich?
5. In a modern economy (such as Australia) how might we be guilty of such sins?

“Do not merely listen to the word...do what it says” (1:22). What do you need to do in response to this passage? Repent? Pray for help? Act?

STUDY 8

Read 5:7-11 Patience in suffering

1. What is involved in being patient in suffering (cf. 1:2-4, 12)? How are farmers, the prophets and Job examples for us?
2. How is Christ's return an encouragement to be patient (both positive and negative)?

Read 5:12 Swearing

3. What is meant by this verse (cf. Matthew 5:33-37)? Is it permissible to swear an oath in court, etc.?

Read 5:13-20 Intercessory prayer

This is the conclusion of a letter that is all about behaviour, good and bad. The main focus of these verses seems to be on responding to a brother or sister who has sinned (See 5:15-16, 19-20).

4. Is there a connection here between sin and sickness? Whose prayers will be effective?
5. What should our concern be for a brother or sister who has wandered from the truth? What should we do?

"Do not merely listen to the word...do what it says" (1:22). What do you need to do in response to this passage? Repent? Pray for help? Act?

NOTES

