# JAMES





Welcome to BSF's two-week study of James! We hope God speaks to you through His Word and your group discussion.

#### Here's how the Bible study works:

#### Week One

- Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day.
- Discuss your answers with your small group at the end of the week.
- Listen to a podcast teaching on the week's passage.
- Read the notes with the passage's historical background and life application.

#### Week Two

• Repeat!

We hope you enjoy using this four-fold approach to exploring God's Word in community with others.

Thanks for choosing to read James with Bible Study Fellowship!

# Week One

# Authentic Faith

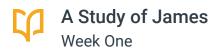
James 1-2



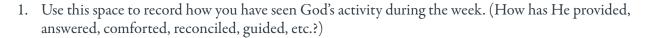
# Scripture Memory Verse

So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.

Acts 27:25



## Day 1

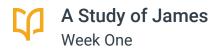


2. What from the notes, lecture, group sharing or personal study impacted you most in the past week? *Note: Groups will discuss the previous week's passage (Acts 27-28).* 

# **Day 2 – James 1:1-18**

James called for perseverance in trials and temptations.

- 3. a. What assurance does James offer for believers who endure trials?
  - b. What do you learn about temptation?
- 4. What do you learn about God related to trials and temptation?
- 5. How has God grown and/or sustained you through trials and temptation?



## **Day 3** – James 1:19-27

James challenged believers to live out faith.

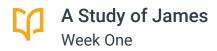
- 6. Which commands stand out to you and why?
- 7. What impact is Bible study having on your attitude and actions?

8. How can you help the needy and marginalized in your community?

# **Day 4 – James 2:1-13**

James warned believers against favoritism.

- 9. Why is it wrong for believers to show favoritism?
- 10. a. How do believers show favoritism today?
  - b. How is loving your neighbor the solution to favoritism?



11. How has God shown mercy to you? How can you extend His mercy to other
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# **Day 5 – James 2:14-26**

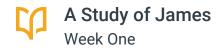
James explained works are evidence of faith.

- 12. How does James describe true faith?
- 13. What's the difference between intellectual belief and true faith?

14. How does this encourage or challenge you to live out your faith?

# **Day 6 – James 1-2**

- 15. How has this week's study impacted your thinking about trials, temptation and faith?
- 16. Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for group and administrative leaders: James 1-2





# Overview of James

God's inspired Word through James describes authentic faith. The teaching includes examples of actions, so readers both see and hear the way to live. Questions remain about the author and timing. But the message is clear. God-given faith is a faith that works in loving response to salvation.

# **Original Audience**

The letter seems written to circulate among Jewish Christians outside Jerusalem. They were:

- from a **Jewish** background.
- among the working **poor** in their communities.
- immature in faith.
- oppressed by people and circumstances.

#### Author

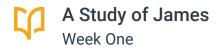
Among the four men named James in the New Testament, James the Lord's brother is the most likely author. However, there are other valid opinions on this point. According to Scripture, Jesus' post-resurrection meeting with James transformed him. He went from unbelief to a spiritually mature leader in a short time.<sup>1</sup>

#### Occasion

Context favors dating the letter between A.D. 43 and A.D. 50. This means the letter, written within the first 20 years of the Church, is the earliest epistle preserved in the New Testament. When the Holy Spirit came in power on the Day of Pentecost, more than 3,000 Jews believed Peter's gospel message.<sup>2</sup> They returned home and shared the good news in their synagogues. Waves of persecution drove more Jewish Christians from Jerusalem. These new Christians needed leaders and teaching to mature in their faith.

# Main Message

James states his purpose is to help believers live out their faith. He warns stragglers who stray from truth. He encourages stronger believers to return these strays to the fold. James calls all believers to see life as a series of tests. Each test offers the choice to faithfully trust the Spirit and obey God with the love of Christ. 4





#### **Focus**

"As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." – James 2:26

#### This Lesson

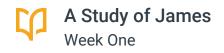
- A. Overview of James
- B. Trials and Temptations James 1:1-18
- C. Self-Deception and Favoritism James 1:19-2:13
- D. Faith Produces Works James 2:14-26

#### Engage

What confusion do you have about your life and your place in the world? Do you struggle to live out what you say you believe? How often do you substitute feelings, fear of consequences, majority opinions, past outcomes, cultural norms or governmental laws for God's wisdom? Instead, James' message is, "Seek God. Get wisdom. Do the Word."

James confronts **life's most important issue – authentic faith in a deceitful world.** His first audience faced trials similar to what believers face today. Gentile majorities mostly looked down on Jewish people. Both Gentiles and Jews increasingly opposed Christians. Families and churches were persecuted and often torn apart. Believers lacked money, influence and ability to bring social or government reforms. They worked under oppressive greedy leaders. They battled sinful habits.

God knew everything about each one as He does today. They had faith but needed correction and leaders devoted to Him. God provided a practical book by a practical leader with mature faith. How can James help you clear up your confusion and mature your confidence in God as a disciple of Jesus Christ?



# Trials and Temptations – James 1:1-18

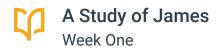
#### Salutation - 1:1

Letters in James' day commonly began with the author, recipients and a greeting. James identified himself as a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek word *doulos*, translated as *servant*, suggests wholehearted devotion to another's will. Mary, the mother of Jesus and James, identified herself by this same term when Gabriel foretold Jesus' birth. This choice highlights relationship to the Lord through faith, equal to other believers. James never sought

# special honor as one of Jesus Christ's physical family members.

James chose to call the recipients "the twelve tribes scattered among the nations." It is thought this term identified them as Jewish Christians. Jewish people of Israel were scattered among the nations – some by oppressors in earlier times while others emigrated voluntarily. Many chose to remain in those places. Jewish Christians from Jerusalem went to them. Paul took the gospel to many synagogues as well.





## Trials of Many Kinds – 1:2-18

Believers face temptation to focus on self in every trial. "Why did this go wrong? Why did God let this happen? Why did this happen to me?" Through James, God gives some answers to these questions. But James commands believers to move past "Why me?" to ask "What will I do now?" His answer is to live by faith. James gives God's will for those who seek Him in our troubles.

- Respond with joy. This joy comes when believers trust and obey the Spirit regardless of circumstances.
- **Persevere in faith.** Spiritual maturity develops by tests (practice) to respond God's way to situations.
- Gain wisdom. God fills in when tests reveal doubts, weaknesses and confusion about how to proceed.
- **Be humble.** Who has Christ yet feels sorry for self? Pity the "rich" who take pride in things that end.
- Expect blessing. Perseverance shows the power of salvation and grows anticipation to see Jesus.
- **Resist deception.** God never tempts anyone. God never desires any person sin.
- Trust God. Nothing good can be gained apart from God. Nothing bad comes from His hand.

Tests occur all day. Believers almost constantly get to choose God's way or their old way of life, the way of the world. James calls believers "a kind of firstfruits of all he created" (1:18). Nonstop testing proves God's patience to grow His children in faith. Jesus told His closest disciples they would remain in the world, but not of the world.<sup>6</sup> They are to show all people everywhere the love of God.

## Why Does God Allow Suffering?

Why do such terrible things happen? There is no simple answer to the horror of sin. Its consequences bring suffering of many kinds to all God's creation. James says **temptation** and sin come from evil, never from God.<sup>7</sup> Adam and Eve first revealed "their own evil desire" enticed them to sin.<sup>8</sup> The wages of sin is death.<sup>9</sup>

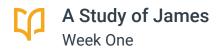
We think only of ourselves in the moment we sin. Only God knows the depth and extent of suffering that will result from our choices. We often suffer from others' sins and evil corrupting the world. God created people to be united in peace, but sin unites us in suffering instead. Jesus Christ will bring sin and suffering to an end when He returns. In the meantime, the Bible gives some reasons God allows suffering to occur.

Some suffering is common. Job said, "Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward." He meant sin corrupted everything in God's world. Bad things happen in nature and among people. Jesus reminds His followers such suffering does not prove guilt but urges all to turn to God. 11

**Some suffering is corrective.** The psalmist wrote, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word." God allows some suffering to guide His children back to the path of true discipleship.

**Some suffering is constructive.** God allows some suffering to increase believers' faith and the power of their witness to the world. James and Paul both teach the Spirit matures us into Christ's likeness through suffering. <sup>13</sup>

Some suffering is cosmic. Some suffering is to bring God glory, as Jesus explained in the case of the man born blind. Faith in response to suffering amazes both the good and fallen angels in the invisible, spiritual realm. This testimony is the point of what happened to Job. Testimonies to God's ultimate triumph over suffering will be celebrated forever.



# Self-Deception and Favoritism – James 1:19-2:13

James echoes Jesus' teaching from the Sermon on the Mount. His words cut to the heart. These words are for believers. The Spirit gives truth and guidance to become Christlike. Therefore, James calls believers to action. "Take note, be quick, be slow, get rid of and humbly accept" are actions directed by James. Doing God's Word God's way brings about humility, impartiality and compassion.

# Self-Deception – 1:19-27

When believers joyfully submit to God, they are not deceived. God is God, and believers are grateful and dependent for life. Their relationship with Him will be evident in their words, temperament, integrity and priorities to serve others, especially the needy.

Controlled speech: James' letter teaches the value of speech like no other biblical writer. He openly denied and ridiculed Jesus Christ's claim to be God until after His resurrection. <sup>17</sup> So, he knew how much suffering could be caused through words. Here, he says words spoken in anger cannot produce God's righteousness. Jesus said angry words are evidence murderous desires are at work in the heart. <sup>18</sup>

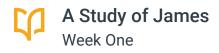
Righteous life: How are we to live? God desires believers "get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent." God's Word reveals the problem of our moral corruption and the solution – turn to God in faith for cleansing from sin. James says the Bible is like a mirror. It shows us our true condition. If believers see their sin but do not turn from it through God's power, they are fools of a worthless religion.

Care of the needy: Faith is "true religion" when believers enter into others' suffering to give the love of Christ. This sacrificial investment for God's glory is how Christ came for us. Orphans and widows represent the lowest ranks within **greedy societies.** When we care for the truly needy, nothing can be expected in return.

Believers are also to resist entering into sin or enjoying any aspect of its presence in the world. This command calls for honesty and responsibility. In both helping others and resisting sin, believers cooperate with the Spirit and obey God's Word to "keep oneself" from being polluted by the world.

The terms translated "religious" and "religion" in 1:26-27 refer to reverence or fear of God shown through conduct. Authentic faith or "true religion" shows the joy of salvation through service. This is the religion of those who not only hear the Word, but also do the Word. Hearing without doing is likely to produce self-deception. Doing without hearing is often works-based attempts to earn favor with God.







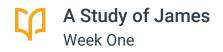
#### **Favoritism – 2:1-13**

James condemns favoritism (discrimination). It is sin, not discernment and not love. The Lord of glory laid aside His divine prerogatives to identify with and save us – sinners with no merit at all. <sup>19</sup> The unchanging Lord is known in both humility during His earthly ministry and in glory with the Father. James must have seen such self-serving, judgmental treatment of rich and poor. Evil thoughts about what we can get from fellow believers must be rejected. Instead, God is to be glorified for what He has freely given to all.

Be impartial: The Lord is impartial,<sup>20</sup> but Christians are often lowly and looked down on by the elite of their societies.<sup>21</sup> With an ironic twist, James reminds his readers the wealthy, powerful people to whom they give such deference have not always treated them well. The church members were exposed to exploitation, arrests, court hearings, fines and blasphemies against Jesus Christ from those judged noble in their own eyes.

Be loving: James quotes, "Love your neighbor as yourself." This "royal law" is part of what Jesus called the greatest command. James is wise to anticipate those who discriminate may be quick to reply they simply love their neighbor. Self-deception may cause others to say their actions are about personality, not prejudices. James' point is the royal law extends to all neighbors equally – rich and poor. God's Word convicts those who flatter the rich and mistreat the poor. Neither action is God's love.

Be obedient: James says partial obedience is disobedience. When we break one part of the law, we break the entire law as well. The royal law is part of the Christian's law of liberty. By God's grace, believers have the freedom to choose not to sin. Believers can submit to the Spirit and offer God's mercy instead of human judgments. God, who looks upon the hearts of all people, is rich in mercy. How much more should His people, who can only see outward appearances, delight to offer His mercy instead of wrong, partial judgments?



# Faith Produces Works - James 2:14-26

#### Authentic Faith - 2:14

James sets out this truth: authentic faith is a faith that works. Sometimes confusion arises when people compare the teachings of James and Paul about faith and works. When Bible students consider all that both men wrote that is contained in God's Word, confusion is resolved.

- Context is crucial. Paul wrote largely to Gentile believers, and James wrote largely to Jewish believers.
- Paul focuses on how works have no relation to our justification, or establishment in salvation.
- James focuses on how works necessarily relate to our sanctification, or experiences of our salvation.
- Paul's audiences often distrusted grace, so they fell into legalism and earning favors from God.
- James' audience often distorted grace, so they fell into denying works were necessary in the Christian life.

# Examples of Faith - 2:15-26

James gives examples of both false and authentic faith. The examples have to do with outward actions. The conclusion in verse 26 could not be clearer, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."

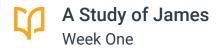
#### **False Faith**

James first addresses false faith, a faith of empty words. False faith has several characteristics.

Powerless: False faith "knows" about saving truths but is a stranger to living by their power. God-given faith includes transformation in accordance with proclamations. Tragically, people can say they have faith but not have saving faith in Jesus Christ alone. James says in effect, "If your faith is only an intellectual faith, you are at the level of demons and Satan." What we "know" and how we feel are not proofs of salvation.

Useless: False faith does nothing of value. It produces no results. When our Lord talked about the Holy Spirit, He said the Holy Spirit was like the wind. "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." God the Holy Spirit is invisible, yet He is observable in His effects. In the same way, authentic faith, which produces fruitfulness as believers cooperate with the Spirit, is also observable in its effects.

**Dead:** False faith is a dead faith. **A faith without** works is not God-given faith that saves. Dead faith can deceive its owners into believing they have life. The distressed orphans and widows James already mentioned can be seen again in his commands against favoritism (discrimination) and in giving empty words but nothing to live on to "a brother or a sister without clothes and daily food."



#### **Authentic Faith**

Authentic faith of Abraham: James contrasts the false faith with Abraham's authentic faith. Such faith is complete – words and deeds working together. James is not saying Abraham was justified on the basis of his works. He is saying Abraham's faithful obedience when God commanded he sacrifice Isaac proved his faith. God had already declared Abraham justified – declared righteous.<sup>27</sup> The evidence of action outwardly confirmed faith for Abram and Isaac's benefit. Faithful action also serves as a testimony from God's people to encourage one another and to display God's power to the world.

Authentic faith of Rahab: James directly confronts the original audience's discrimination. He upholds the Gentile prostitute Rahab as equal in authentic faith to their beloved patriarch of the covenant, Abraham. Look how the unifying power of Christ exposes and overcomes worldly prejudices in race, gender, heritage, education, profession, class and past behaviors! By grace through faith, Rahab also believed God. He credited her with righteousness. She spoke her beliefs and confirmed with self-sacrificing actions. Her family legacy includes her own Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>28</sup>

Faith works! Faith lives in hearts born for obedient service through a saving union with Jesus Christ. If such works are not present to express our union with Christ, then James denies the reality of the union. James' unavoidable point is the nature of God-given faith is to work in cooperation with the Spirit to please God.



#### The Confusion About Works

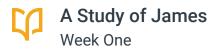
# Works as an attempt to earn salvation or favor with God is false faith.

Ephesians 2:8-10 clearly teaches against such works. God inspired Paul to clearly state, "It is by grace you have been saved ... not by works, so that no one can boast." No one can be saved (in the sense of justified) by human works. In Galatians, Paul even pronounces a curse on anyone who would dare to teach differently.<sup>25</sup>

However, Ephesians 2:8-10 also includes, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works." Here, Paul speaks about works to be done by those already justified in salvation. In this case, works are absolutely necessary. This proves God ordains works for all who are born again. These are the works James is focused on in relation to the audience who first received his letter.

Tragically, some people believe saying words without being careful to live by them is salvation. They believe conduct is irrelevant. James disputes this thinking. He says **God-given**, saving faith is a living faith, a faith that works in obedience to God's Word through the Spirit after the example of Christ.

If works are not present, **people with "such a faith" do well to examine themselves.**Seek wisdom through the Holy Spirit about salvation. A sincere profession of faith followed by a changed life with good works, not a mere profession alone, is confirming proof of a person's salvation.<sup>26</sup>





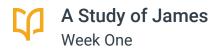
# Take to Heart

#### **Hold Fast**

God knows and cares about every heartache and hardship. This is why the Father gave His Son. He promises to remove sin and renovate His creation and His people. Suffering warns everyone death is coming and has come. Sin separates us from God's plan for everlasting bliss. God extends His gracious invitation to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." God's grace is greater than our sin. His glory outweighs all suffering.

It is often easy to find fault with others, but we must confess and address our own acts of favoritism. James gives wisdom to deal with sinful discrimination between supposedly "important" and "unimportant" people in our churches, workplaces and social circles. Stop viewing the rich as potential sources of money for paychecks, projects or pleasures. Stop lavishing attention and flattery on people for what they have or how they look. Stop being barely courteous to those who are plain, quiet, without wealth, lonely or difficult. If we look to God's glory and see people His way, we will never make such distinctions.

James agrees with Paul and all great teachers of the Church about three elements of authentic faith. God-given faith includes content, assent and **commitment.** There is no such thing as a saving faith apart from knowing Jesus Christ, eternal and fully Son of God, who became fully man to live without sin, die on the cross for our salvation, be buried and resurrected three days later. He ascended, sends the Spirit to indwell believers and will come again. New life empowers assent, "I agree it is true. The triune God worked salvation for me!" New creatures in Christ commit to this assent by following Jesus to become like Him through the Spirit. Authentic faith is God-given faith that reveals content, generates new life to agree with and live by what is true. Does this truly describe your life?





# Apply It

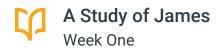
Have you woken up to the reality of moral filth described by James? The overwhelming sights, sounds and smells of suffering, death, devastation and loss are unavoidable. James says believers avoid moral pollution by being consumed with the glory of Jesus. Yet, avoiding contamination is not believers' greatest truth. Our greatest truth is Jesus saves! Commitment to long-term, self-sacrificing, loving service to our neighbors is required. Who knows the grace of God, the freedom of forgiveness, the love of Christ, the dignity of personhood, unmerited hospitality, a kind word and practical, material help from you because Jesus loves to save?

Why is there desertion by a spouse, illness, the death of loved ones, terrorism or bigotry? Such things are profoundly troubling; even the strongest Christians ask why God allows suffering. There is truth we can know. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created." Do you trust God's character? Do you trust He knows all things and what is best? Do

you believe He delivers our ultimate good as part of His new creation? Do you persevere with confidence in His love?<sup>30</sup> Even when suffering is not fully understood, will you take comfort in His presence, His love and promises of future glory?

God brings His glory to bear on all creation. God the Father, Son and Spirit is truth. His truth speaks to cosmic mysteries and every common, practical matter. Is this the God you honor throughout your day? Do you share James' priority of "doing the word" in devotion to God? Do you trust His good will above all things? What have you learned through BSF to mature your faith so far this year? How are you better equipped to recognize evil and seek wisdom?

James' questions about favoritism call for serious reflection. Has God given you material benefits? If so, do you selflessly use them to help others? Do worldly desires for wealth and fame tempt you to flatter the rich and ignore the poor? Is your focus on the Lord Jesus who gave everything for you? If so, you will be known among your church family as content, gracious, delighted to share and humble to ask others for help when needed.



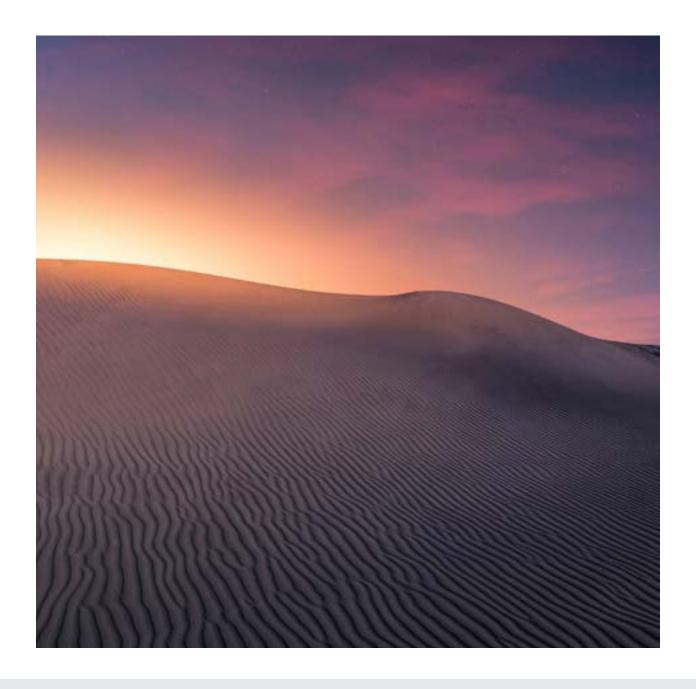
## Go Deeper

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God's Word in this week's lesson.

- James' belief: John 7:1-5; Acts 1:14; Acts 15; 1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 2:9
- Pentecost: Acts 2
- Return to the fold: James 5:19-20
- 4: Love covers sin: Proverbs 10:12; John 13:34-35; 1 Corinthians 13; 1 Peter 4:8
- Mary as servant: Luke 1:38
- Jesus' prayer for disciples: John 17
- God tempts no one: James 1:13
- Sin: Genesis 3:1-6; James 1:14-15
- Death: Genesis 2:16-17; Romans 6:23; James
- 10: Trouble: Job 5:7

- 11: Suffering: Luke 13:1-9
- 12: Suffering and obedience: Psalm 119:67
- 13: Christlike in suffering: Romans 5:3-5; 8:18-30; Philippians 2:5-11; James 1:2-4
- 14: **Glory:** John 9:1-3
- 15: **Job's suffering:** Job 1:6-12, 20-22; 2:1-10
- 16: Eternal triumph: Revelation 6:9-11; 7:13-17
  17: James' unbelief: John 7:5
- 18: Angry words: Matthew 5:21-22
- 19: Attitude of Christ: Philippians 2:1-11
- 20: God is impartial: Deuteronomy 10:17; Acts 10:34-35
- 21: Lowly Christians: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

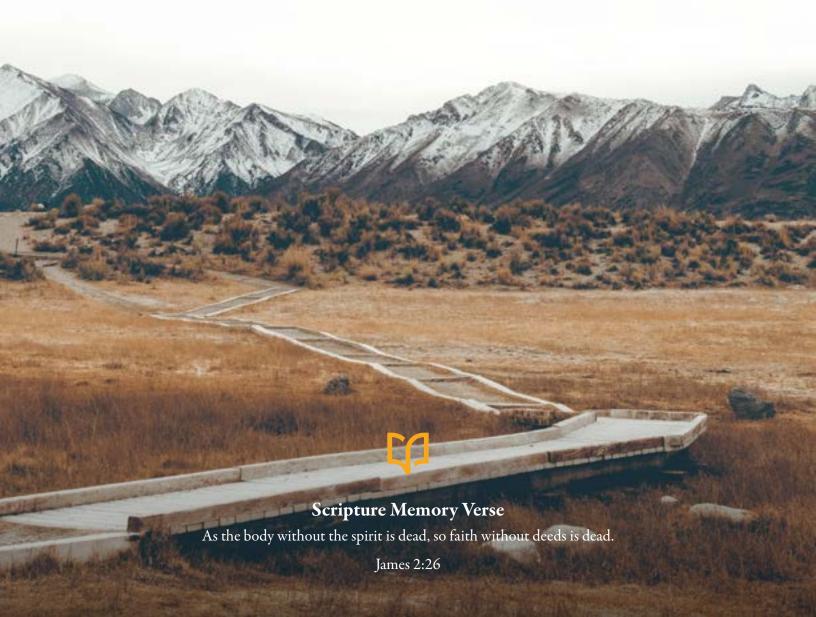
- 22: Love your neighbor: Leviticus 19:18
- 23: Greatest command: Matthew 22:36-40
- 24: Born of the Spirit: John 3:8
- 25: Curse for false gospel: Galatians 1:8-9
- 26: Proof of salvation: Romans 11:6; Galatians 2:16; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:4-8; James 2:14-18; 2 Peter 1:5-11
- 27: Abram credited as righteous: Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3
- 28: Rahab: Joshua 2:1, 8-14; 6:22-25; Matthew 1:1-17; Hebrews 11:31
- 29: Death and life: Romans 6:23
- 30: Belong to God: Romans 8:28-29



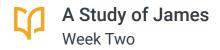
Week Two

# Living as a Christian

James 3-5

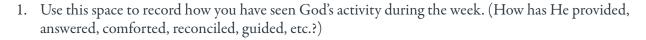






James 3-5

## Day 1



2. What from the notes, lecture, group sharing or personal study impacted you most in the past week?

# **Day 2 – James 3**

James rebuked ungodly speech and commended wisdom.

3. a. What does our speech reveal?

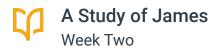
b. Why is our speech important?

4. How are you personally challenged in regard to your speech?

5. a. What do you learn about wisdom?







b. How does your wisdom compare to this passage? How and with whom could you practice heavenly wisdom?

## **Day 3 – James 4:1-10**

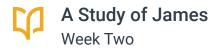
James revealed the root of conflict and encouraged submission to God.

- 6. What is the root cause of fights and quarrels? What does James say is the solution?
- 7. What do you learn about humility and submission?
- 8. What does humbling yourself before the Lord look like in your life?

# **Day 4 – James 4:11-17**

James warned of boasting.

- 9. What underlying sins does James address in this passage? With which one do you struggle?
- 10. Who or what is central to your planning process? How can believers engage in wise planning while acknowledging God's sovereignty?



11.	How could	l this	passage impact	the way you	interact	with	others:
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## Day 5 – James 5

James encouraged generosity, patience and prayer.

12. How do people abuse or misuse privilege today?

13. How are Christians to live while waiting for Jesus' return? How do the examples in this passage encourage or challenge you?

14. What lessons do you learn about prayer in this passage? How will you put them into practice?

# **Day 6 – James 3-5**

15. Through this week's lesson, how is God moving you to engage with the world, share a truth about His Word or sacrificially show His love and kindness?

16. Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for group and administrative leaders: James 3-5



#### **Focus**

"With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness ... My brothers and sisters, this should not be." – James 3:9-10

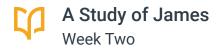
#### This Lesson

- A. The Tongue and Two Wisdoms James 3
- B. Overcoming Troubles and Temptations James 4
- C. Responding to Injustice James 5

## Engage

How often do competing goals, interests, personalities and needs pull you in various directions? It's one thing to choose what seems best among good options. However, worldly pressures, evil influences and our own sinful desires constantly urge us to choose what is wrong over right. Do you react to this tension by stumbling through days with selfish choices, harsh words, angry deeds or envious thoughts? James says you are not alone. God is near that we may draw near to Him. He loves His children and leads them into responding to trials with faith.

The source of our identity empowers our choices. Parents encourage children to "remember who you are." How much more our Creator and Sustainer God, the Giver of Life, calls us to remember all people are made in His image with purpose, value, dignity and worth. How we see others and ourselves matters. Authentic faith proves we are God's children. God-given faith includes power to transform our thoughts, priorities, decisions and relationships. Will you accept conviction and renew your commitment to live by faith in response to God's wisdom through James?



# The Tongue and Two Wisdoms – James 3

# Speech of the Tongue – 3:1-12

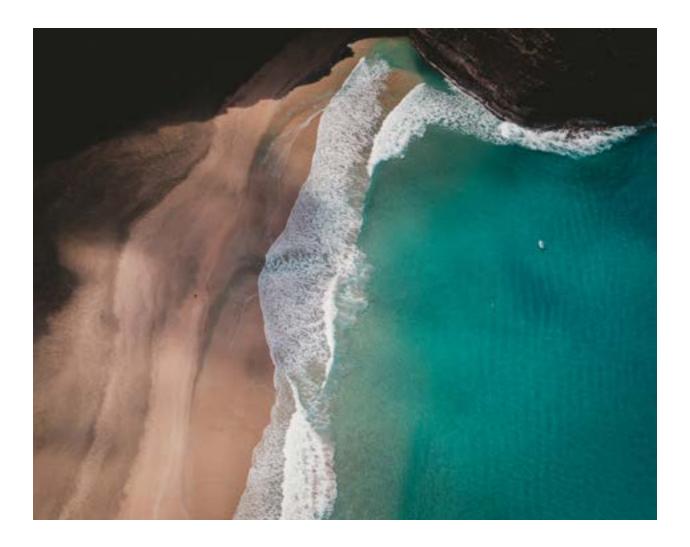
James returns to speech as a key test of authentic faith. In Chapter 1, James said those who "do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless" (1:26). Now, James warns of judgment for believers who speak sin. James means speaking the moral filth, dead faith, hypocritical words, favoritism and false gospels he has already condemned. This judgment is even stricter for teachers because the position imparts greater influence and authority. Growth in character and spiritual maturity can be measured by how and how often we dishonor God, others and ourselves with our words.

The tongue is small. But it has power for greatness or catastrophe. James uses three common experiences to show how some small things influence and direct much larger objects.

- Bit in a horse's mouth
- Rudder on a ship
- Spark in a forest

The wise question is, "Who can control such small objects to overcome the powerful forces at work?" James' point is **the tongue is humanly uncontrollable.** People use and abuse their power to subdue animals of every kind but cannot tame their own tongues.





The test of our tongues proves speech issues are heart issues. Christians stumble by going back to their old heart natures (salt water) to give out lifeless and corrosive words. Instead, they must depend on the Spirit's power in their new natures (fresh water) to speak words of life, hope and healing. James makes it clear – no plan, external efforts, self-will, behavior modification or rules can create fresh water from a salt spring.

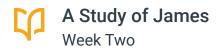
# True and Faulty Wisdom – 3:13-18

James connects the test of speech to reveal the type of wisdom. The wise and understanding cooperate with the Spirit to control their tongues. This faith in action hears and applies true, heavenly wisdom. Faith rejects faulty,

worldly wisdom. James' stark contrast shows all people can judge their own thoughts, words and deeds. What words spoken today have shown true or faulty wisdom?

What does true wisdom look like? True wisdom is humble, considerate, fruitful, pure, submissive, impartial, peace-loving, merciful and sincere. This contrasts with faulty wisdom, which is boastful, selfishly ambitious, bitter, disruptive, envious and evil.

James states the value of depending on God for truly wise speech and deeds: "Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness" (3:18). He goes on to show how God's peace overcomes troubles and temptations.



# Overcoming Troubles and Temptations – James 4

James' teaching on true and faulty wisdom seems to answer his next questions, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" **Troubles among Christians point out our lingering sinful natures.** We need to humbly examine ourselves. We, not other people, are most often the problem or a key part in preventing resolution.

#### Discontentment

"You do not have because you do not ask God ... you ask with wrong motives." James addresses the sin first seen in Adam and Eve. Discontent tempts those not given what they decide they want. Discontentment claims God owes us or does not know what is best. Unchecked, it leads to taking what is forbidden or not offered to us as our own. Grumbling and complaining speech signal the presence of this sin.

# Anger

The "killing" James condemns here and in Chapter 5 reflects the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus equates anger toward a fellow believer with murder.<sup>2</sup> John calls out hatred as murder occurring in the heart.<sup>3</sup> Prejudices, gossip, grudges and threats of retaliation stoke anger's flames. Hateful and angry words can, in fact, lead to physical violence, suicides and murders, causing disasters across families and communities.

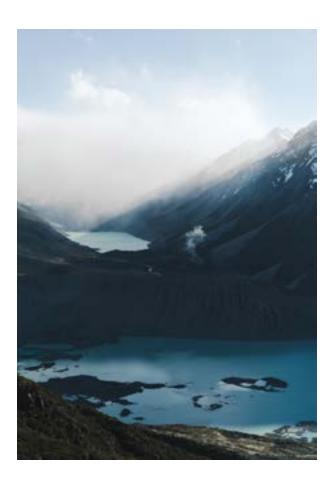
# Adultery

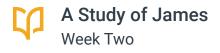
James echoes Old Testament language to speak of "adulterous people." They have **spiritually gone outside God's covenant to find contentment in lies, sin or idolatry.** "Friendship with the world" betrays "the religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless." This relates to those James rebuked who denied the requirement to

be transformed and do works by faith. They deny God's rule over speech and deeds. They feel free because they spoke words to be saved to go along with the world.

#### Slander

Slander is "against the law" because it is "false testimony." By definition, slander is a false word about another person to damage their reputation. Slander says false things to bring about a judgment on someone we decided they deserve. We try to impose our will over their identity and destiny. God alone is the "Lawgiver and Judge." False words spoken privately to one or through global news and social media show the power of slanderous tongues.





#### **Boasting**

When we boast, we present pride and arrogance, not humility. James says we must remain humble and submitted to God. James pictures life like a thick fog. It seems substantial yet disappears quickly as soon as the sun is up. People cannot guarantee even one moment of life. Therefore, boastful words only prove faulty wisdom.

# Responding to Injustice -

James 5

The Bible says riches are neither good nor evil. However, wealth often stimulates and exposes sins such as discontent, greed, selfish ambition, gluttony and idolatry. Consider how many harsh words and angry deeds are involved with having too much or not enough food, clothing and money. James warns those who idolize (identify with) wealth will face the same eventual destruction as the objects they worship and adore.

James already condemned favoritism toward the rich. He mentioned the rich were often exploiting Christians. Here, his words about the ungodly and their wealth are as powerful as those of any Old Testament prophet. God's Word condemns the use and pursuit of wealth that includes ignoring and even oppressing the less fortunate.



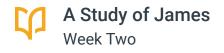
#### God Shows Us the Way Out

James speaks of three sources of troubles and temptations. Fights and quarrels come from the flesh (4:1-3); they are unspiritual (3:15). Friendship with the world and its wisdom means enmity with God (4:4); they are earthly (3:15). Others arise from demons and the devil (4:7-10); they are demonic (3:15). How do believers overcome troubles and temptation? James gives three commands.

Submit yourselves to God. God loves His people. He longs for each of His children to fully enjoy fellowship with Him in new life. The resurrected Lord and Savior Jesus Christ first revealed the new humanity. God promises believers will become like Jesus. All believers will someday fully glorify God. We will live apart from the presence of sin. Until then, believers experience the best of human dignity and purpose by living in submission to God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Resist the devil. The devil is a created being under God's sovereign control. He is not omnipresent; he cannot be every place at once. He extends temptation through demons, but they cannot be everywhere either. Jesus Christ gave the best example of how to resist the devil. Before Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, <sup>10</sup> He spent 40 days fasting and in prayer. He submitted Himself to the Father and sought to do His will. When the devil came to Him, Jesus depended on God's Word, not worldly wisdom or His senses, emotions or the needs of His flesh, to resist temptation to sin.

Draw near to God. God welcomes repentance. He greets humbled sinners with love, grace and mercy. God's gifts in salvation include His promise to draw near in full fellowship with His children. God will draw near to you. This nearness is the experience of God's love. Submission to God is voluntarily devotion to a holy, pure, loyal, loving and good God.



James says that although judgment has not yet come, the day of reckoning is nevertheless certain. God is offended by sin. He knows what happens. He will perfectly judge injustice by His righteousness. Notice what **God judges as evil:** 

- withholding proper wages those who exploit, underpay or refuse to pay workers.
- self-indulgence and luxury those who use all for self and refuse to help anyone less fortunate.
- corruption those who gain by victimizing others in socioeconomic, legal or governmental systems.

Christians are called to righteously confront injustice. However, what about the destitute, downtrodden or underprivileged Christians in the world? James has two calls to action for them: Be patient and pray.

#### Patience - 5:7-12

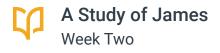
James encourages believers to persevere in trials of injustice. He does not say to be patient because it

is all the poor can do. Nor does he suggest the rich will treat the poor better for their patience. James focuses on God's promised justice. James gives the illustration of a farmer waiting for rains and crops. Remember the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son, will return with perfect judgment for a harvest of righteousness.

James also talks about God's judging of Christians. Some stumble and excuse themselves by blaming the rich. They condemn the rich for sins they share: greed, covetousness and lust. God, the perfect Judge, will examine both the ungodly and His own children. Christians will not be condemned but will face loss of reward.

Patience often appears entirely passive. But patience for the cause of Christ requires believers to "stand firm." Patience is fruitfulness through the Spirit. He enables believers to hold to truth and bear up under oppression to give testimony to the gospel. James' command to "stand firm" means to act like the prophets he calls to our attention. James also refers to Job, the classic biblical example of perseverance.





#### Prayer - 5:13-20

God hears the prayers of the righteous. The prayers of those drawing near to God are "powerful and effective." This does not mean people will get everything for which they ask. James has already taught to ask rightly. This means to persistently seek to be conformed to God's will in every circumstance.

Verse 14 speaks of anointing the sick with oil. This verse is mistaken by some as a guarantee of healing for Christians in all circumstances. God does grant spectacular healings, but nowhere in Scripture does God promise health in this world for every believer. In context, James is writing about prayer. Faithful, fervent community life and active caregiving, along with prayer, serves God's will. James already spoke against false faith to offer a prayer or blessing without meeting physical needs. <sup>11</sup>

James' closing comments sum up his purpose for this practical and challenging letter. God inspired James to confront those straying from authentic faith. Through James, God urgently and lovingly intervenes. James has faith in the believers' God-given faith. He trusts they will not only hear these words, but also take them to heart and live them out. We overcome the competing pressures of the world, evil and our old natures by cooperating with the Spirit through inward transformation. As believers take in the Word of God and stay in communion with Him and His people, they work in faith to live out the Father's good, pleasing and perfect will.

#### Reflection: Our Year of Growth in God's Word

How has the spark of God's living Word ignited your heart, faith life and ministry throughout our study of Acts and selected letters from the apostles? A moment of reflection calls to mind people, personalities and places transformed by the Holy Spirit. God designed people in His image to possess and enjoy a Spirit-filled life. The gospel life through the Holy Spirit produces joyful, fruitful testimony of God's glory.

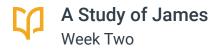
Paul's miraculous missionary journeys established churches across the known world. Their influence continues today. The power of Christ to overcome sin and human divisions is on display. Unity, intimately as members of one body under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, is unique to the human experience. Nowhere else in earth's history is God's creative diversity honored and praised while also affirming the unity of faith given to God's family. Revelation shows us a fuller picture of the unified worship of our King we will enjoy forever.

Together we have studied, discussed, practiced and prayed God's truths. What has been proven to you? Have you experienced how believers thrive under the Spirit's leading? Are you committed to love and follow Jesus faithfully until His return? In the Bible times and today, Christians follow our Savior's pattern to show the world His Kingdom is coming. His command invites all people everywhere to repent and believe by grace through faith. Lives miraculously change. Opposition results. Yet, as we suffer with Christ, He grows His Church and us.

We serve as unwritten but recorded chapters in the book of Acts. God promises to reward the faithful thoughts, words and deeds of His children. He is pleased to praise those who remain occupied with making Jesus known to a lost and dying world. Acts begins with divine promises that are the motive for all the letters to the churches;

"[Jesus] said to [the disciples]: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.' "12





# Take to Heart

#### **Hold Fast**

Trials and temptations come to all believers. Everyone stumbles in learning to live like Jesus Christ. However, the way we speak is perhaps the best gauge of how submitted we are to the Holy Spirit's power at any given moment. The tongue is used for speech and for taste. James gives illustrations of the power of our speech and of the taste of our words, salty or refreshing. The source of power and the choice of words mean life and death. The tongue is a gift of potentially great and unimaginable good when we submit ourselves to be constrained by God.

All people are quick to defend themselves. Exposed in wrongdoing, men, women, boys and girls often say, "They started it;" or "They made me angry;" or "I can't help it; that's the way I am;" or "I am not as bad as those around me." James' letter cannot be read without conviction in at least one area of life. The letter itself is like its illustration of a mirror. What realities of sin has God shown you in this mirror? Rationalization is never the pathway to transformation in the Christian life. Conviction comes with the realities of God's presence, an invitation to repent and a promise to forgive and restore.

Is it wrong to possess material goods? We find many wealthy people in the Bible who are not condemned for their prosperity – Abraham, Job and David, for instance. In Genesis, we find God created all good things so people could fully enjoy His glory. The mere possession of things is not the problem. The problem is the world, evil and our sinful desires tempt us to hoard what we get for ourselves. We often get things by sinning against others. God renews His children by authentic faith to become stewards of what He gives as He directs for His glory.



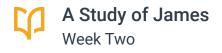
## Apply It

Global communication technology furthers the damage of uncontrolled tongues. Some people rule nations by the force of their speech. Parents and others shape the next generation in human history by their speech. What words have you spoken to contribute to wars or to peace? How can you grow in wisdom to make use of modern tools to offer the love and life of Christ to the world? How do you respond to careless criticism, gossip or angry outbursts from others? Are you quicker to confess your sins of speech and to forgive others than you are to be offended or to disengage?

James speaks of a cure for spiritual adultery: "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you." These words are for believers who have gone astray. How do we draw near to God? We draw near to God at the cross, where God has already drawn near to us. Are you drawing closer to God or drawing closer to sin? Do you depend on God's Word and faithful

friends to help resist temptation? Sin deceives us into thinking we can control its power. Who will pray with you for God's will to become your heart's desire in all circumstances?

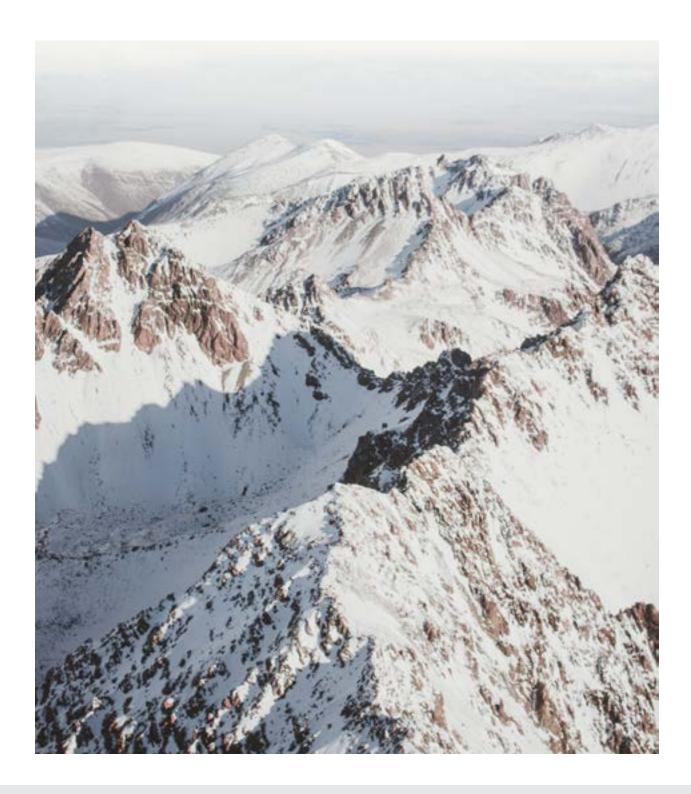
The Bible never encourages God's people to seek persecution. However, if we endure suffering for the sake of righteousness, we should remember it is not uncommon. All the prophets suffered. Jesus Christ suffered most of all. Are we to think that we will never suffer for our profession of faith? When we take a stand on God's teaching, we must reject faulty wisdom and expect suffering. God may spare us such things; but if they come, we will be tempted to think somehow God suddenly abandoned us. Not so! God's faithful men and women through history prove He stands with the oppressed and makes them able to stand in faith that overcomes the world.



# Go Deeper

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God's Word in this week's lesson.

- 1: The fall: Genesis 3
- Anger: Matthew 5:21-22
- Hatred: 1 John 3:15
- Spiritual adultery: Exodus 34:15-16; Isaiah
- Pure and faultless religion: James 1:27 Slander: Exodus 20:16
- Love of money: 1 Timothy 6:10
- Resurrection: Romans 8:19, 28-30; 1 John 3:2
- 9: Holy Spirit's work: 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 3:20-21
- 10: Wilderness temptations: Matthew 4:1-11
  11: Prayers and deeds: James 2:16
- 12: Divine promise: Acts 1:7-11







# Congratulations!

You have read, discussed, listened and explored every verse of James. We hope you have found this book soothing to your soul in this time of uncertainty. Feel free to continue exploring God's Word with your current group for as long as they are meeting.

You can also pre-register for BSF's September study of Genesis with this group. Or click here, enter your city/zip, choose a group and click **JOIN**. Complete the form and comment "James study."

Thank you for spending your precious time with Bible Study Fellowship. We pray your time in the Bible has enriched your life and we hope to study alongside you again soon!