



## Info for group leaders on the book of **James**

- Author** There are 4 Jameses in the NT. This one was James *the half-brother of Jesus*—the natural son of Joseph and Mary (Mat 13:55).  
He did not believe in Jesus until after the resurrection (Jn 7:5), when Jesus appeared to him (1 Cor 15:7). James became the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Gal 1:9; 2:9; Acts 21:18). He is believed to have been martyred in AD62.
- Date** Probably the *earliest writing in the NT*. It has a distinctly *Jewish flavour*, which suggests it was written when the church was still within the general circle of Judaism.  
It was therefore written *between AD45 and 49*, before the Council of Jerusalem described in Acts 15.
- Style** James's *intimate knowledge of the OT* is reflected in the many references to it. He quotes or alludes to 17 OT books.  
His letter contains many *concise, punchy statements*. As a result it has been called 'the Proverbs of the NT'. As such it is highly *practical*, showing how to live out the gospel in everyday life.  
Many of James's comments and statements are *similar to ones made by Jesus*, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).
- Recipients** James wrote to *believing Jews* who had been 'scattered among the nations' (1:1). After the martyrdom of Stephen, Christian Jews travelled widely 'telling the message only to Jews' (Acts 11:19). It was to such as these that he sent this letter.
- Theme** It is well-nigh impossible to specify a single theme for this letter. Different commentators highlight different aspects of it. For example:
- Its teaching on spiritual growth to maturity, based on 1:4.
  - Its teaching on wisdom, based on 3:13-18.
  - Its teaching on faith, based on 2:14-26.
- It seems best to see the book as a group of practical exhortations on *a whole range of topics relevant to the living out of the Christian life*. The following outline identifies ten of these, which form the basis of the ten study sessions.

### Breakdown of the Letter of James

1.	1:1-18	Trials and temptations
2.	1:19-27	Hearing and doing
3.	2:1-13	Favouritism forbidden
4.	2:14-26	Faith and actions

5.	3:1-12	Taming the tongue
6.	3:13 – 4:12	Wisdom: earthly and heavenly
7.	4:13-17	Boasting about tomorrow
8.	5:1-6	Warning to the rich
9.	5:7-12	The need for patience
10.	5:13-20	The prayer of faith

## General guidelines

### To your Diggers sessions in general

- While the *NIV* is the Bible version used as the basis for the study, encourage your group also to read the book in other versions they might own. This will give different insights.
  - Some people might want to comment on ‘what this passage is saying to *me*’—a *subjective* approach. While there can be value in this, it is far more important to concentrate on what a particular passage means *objectively*.
  - *Don’t dominate* the discussion by talking too much yourself. By all means contribute, but your main role is to steer the discussion forward in a helpful and purposeful way.
  - *Draw out the quieter members* of the group. If necessary mention them by name: ‘John, I wonder if you have any thoughts on this verse?’
  - *Tactfully restrain the over-talkative members*: ‘You’ve had quite a bit to say up to now, Sally, so for a while let’s hear what some of the others have to contribute.’
  - Occasionally someone might become *argumentative and contentious*. Point out that these sessions are not about winning arguments or scoring points, but about learning together what God’s Word has to teach us.
  - *Don’t pretend to have all the answers* when you haven’t. If somebody raises a question that you can’t answer, say, ‘I don’t know the answer to that one, but I’ll try to find out for next time.’ Then refer to a Bible commentary, or pass on the question to one of the elders.
- Keep it *practical*. Ideas, theories and doctrines are all fine *as long as they affect the way we live*. Keep steering things back to *life-application*. Always finish on a practical note.
- End each session with *prayer*, asking the Lord to help you all put the session’s lessons into practice.

### To James in particular

- James is a short letter. So encourage the group to *read it right through* regularly during the period of the study-series.

## Notes on the text

### Session 1 (1:1-18) — Trials and temptations

1:1	<i>Servant</i>	Literally ‘slave’.
1:1	<i>The twelve tribes</i>	A way of saying ‘Israel’, that is, ‘the people of God’—applicable now to the church.
1:2	Rejoicing in trials	See also Mt 5:10-12; Lk 6:22-23; Acts 5:41; 1 Thes 1:6.
1:3-4	<i>Perseverance</i>	The Greek word means more than just passive endurance; it means <i>active</i> refusal to give in to the pressure.

1:4-5	<i>Lacking, lacks</i>	Note how these words link verses 4 and 5.
1:9-11	Poverty and wealth	A recurring theme in James. See 1:27; 2:1-7, 15-17; 4:10, 13-16; 5:1-6.
1:10	<i>Low position</i>	The passing nature of his wealthy status. The rich person's only real hope is in an acknowledgement of his spiritual poverty and dependence on God.
1:12	<i>Crown of life</i>	Symbolic of eternal life. This does not mean that we have to persevere in order to get it, but that those who truly know the Lord <i>will</i> persevere, and so get it.
1:15	<i>Conceived...death</i>	There are 2 parallel scenarios. (1) Trial (temptation), proved perseverance, crown of life. (2) Evil desire, sin, death.
1:17	<i>Father of the heavenly lights</i>	God as creator of the sun, moon and stars.
1:17	<i>Shifting shadows</i>	Sun and moon move with the hours and seasons, resulting in changing degrees of light. But God is unchanging and constant.
1:18	<i>Give us birth</i>	Compare this with the evil conception and birth in v15.

### Session 2 (1:19-27) — Hearing and doing

1:19-21	Link with previous	Note that 'word' occurs in v18 and v21. Verses 19-21 point out some of the hindrances to receiving the word.
1:19	<i>Slow to speak</i>	This is taken up again in v26 and then at greater length in 3:1-12.
1:22	<i>Deceive</i>	Notice that this word also appears in v16 and v26. Deception is all too easy to fall for.
1:23	<i>Word...mirror</i>	The Word is like a mirror, presenting ideal Christian conduct. When we read it, it reveals our shortcomings, just as a normal mirror reveals our facial blemishes. If the user of the Word-mirror forgets what he has seen he will fail to put things right.
1:25	<i>The perfect law that gives freedom</i>	A description of the 'word' mentioned in the previous verse and v18.
1:27	<i>Religion</i>	A strong reminder that genuine Christianity is highly practical.

### Session 3 (2:1-13) — Favouritism forbidden

2:1-7	Rich and poor	Takes up the thought introduced in 1:9-11.
2:1	<i>Glorious</i>	Christ's great glory should outshine in our thinking any distinctions between worldly wealth and poverty.
2:5	<i>Poor</i>	The Bible teaches that God has a special concern for the poor (e.g. Ps 35:10; Is 61:1; Lk 6:20; 1 Cor 1:26-29).
2:6	<i>Insulted</i>	By showing favouritism to the rich, they have insulted the poor—unlike God, who shows the poor special concern.
2:6	<i>Exploiting you</i>	This implies that James's readers were among the poor.
2:8	<i>Royal law</i>	Royal because the Mosaic law comes from God, the universal King. The quotations is from Lev 19:18.
2:10	<i>All of it</i>	A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Some would consider favouritism a minor offence, but it isn't; it is a breaking of God's law.
2:12	<i>Judged</i>	In 1:12 James appealed on the ground of future reward. Here he appeals on the ground of future judgment.

2:12	<i>Freedom</i>	True freedom comes not from lack of restraint but from submitting to God's perfect will (law).
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#### **Session 4 (2:14-26) — Faith and actions**

This flows out of the previous passage on not only *hearing* the word but also *doing* it (1:22+). James is not saying that we are *saved by works* (which Paul in Eph 2:8-9 tells us is not the case) but that genuine saving faith will always be *evidenced by works*.

2:14	<i>Faith...deeds</i>	Faith not expressed in good and kind actions is no faith at all. 'Talk' without 'walk' is worthless.
2:19	<i>The demons believe</i>	They believe in the sense that they know and acknowledge the fact of God's uniqueness and greatness. But they don't have saving faith evidenced in kind actions.
2:20+	Abraham	Abraham is an example of faith expressed in action. He <i>believed</i> God's promise of many descendants through Isaac (v23 quotes Gen 15:6), even to the point of being willing to sacrifice Isaac at God's command (the story is told in Gen 22).
2:22	Faith and actions	This verse summarises the whole section. Faith and actions are inseparable.
2:24	Faith and actions	This is not salvation by works. It is salvation by faith—but because it is real faith it expresses itself in actions.
2:25	<i>Rahab</i>	Her story appears in Joshua 2:1-22; 6:22-25. There is a similar NT example of her faith in Heb 11:31.

#### **Session 5 (3:1-12) — Taming the tongue**

This section develops the theme introduced in 1:19, where James urges us to be 'slow to speak'.

3:1	<i>We who teach</i>	James clearly considered himself to be a teacher. It is a huge responsibility and people should not seek the teacher's role because of some imagined status it might bring.
3:2	<i>What he says</i>	The connection with v1 is that teaching is, by definition, a <i>spoken</i> ministry, and false or misleading teaching causes grave problems.
3:8-9	<i>Deadly poison</i>	Verse 8's reference to poison suggests a <i>snake</i> and its venom. Verse 9 then hints at the 'forked tongue'—two kinds of incompatible speech.
3:9-10	<i>Out of the same mouth</i>	A stinging rebuke of gossip and backbiting.
3:9	<i>Made in God's likeness</i>	A reference to humankind being made in God's image and likeness in Gen 1:26-27.

#### **Session 6 (3:13 – 4:12) — Wisdom: earthly and heavenly**

3:13-18	Wisdom	True wisdom is not a matter of intellectual qualifications but of living a godly life. Note how practical this section is.
3:13	<i>Wise and understanding</i>	These are ideal features of the 'teachers' mentioned in v1.
3:14	<i>The truth</i>	In the light of 1:18 and 5:19 this is almost certainly a reference to the Christian gospel.
4:1	<i>Fights and quarrels</i>	In contrast with the 'peace' mentioned in the previous verse.
4:2b-3	Prayer	Bad attitudes and behaviour breed wrongly-motivated prayer requests.

4:4	<i>Adulterous people</i>	The verse shows that this refers to <i>spiritual</i> adultery: claiming to be 'wedded' to God but being drawn more to the 'other gods' of worldly attractions. This is a common theme in the OT (e.g. Jer 3:9; Ezek 16; Hos 3:1).
4:5	<i>Or do you think...</i>	A very difficult verse to understand and interpret, so don't get bogged down in it. 'Spirit' may be the Holy Spirit, or maybe the human spirit. Is it God or the Holy Spirit who 'envies intensely'? See the NIV footnotes. The text of the NIV as it stands uses a small 's' for 'spirit', referring to the human spirit.  <i>The Message</i> translation renders v4-6 as follows: 'You're cheating on God. If all you want is your own way, flirting with the world every chance you get, you end up enemies of God and his way. And do you suppose God doesn't care? The proverb has it that "he's a fiercely jealous lover."'
4:5	<i>Scripture says</i>	Not a direct OT quotation. James is probably referring in a general way to the quotation in v6, which is from Proverbs 3:34 (a verse also quoted by Peter in 1 Pet 5:5).
4:8	<i>Double-minded</i>	An echo of the same word in 1:8.
4:8	<i>Wash your hands</i>	Not literally; this is figurative language for 'Keep your actions pure'. The pairing of 'hands' and 'heart' is common in Scripture, referring to outward actions and inner motivation respectively.
4:11-12	Judging the law	The specific reference is to the requirement to love one's neighbour, referred to in 2:8. By slandering him, you set yourself above (and so 'judge') God's commandment to love him.

### Session 7 (4:13–17) — *Boasting about tomorrow*

This is a short but important section. It follows naturally from the earlier command to 'submit to God'. Be very practical in your discussions.

4:13	Travel	In NT times, the main reason why people travelled was for business purposes—to make money.
4:15	<i>If it is the Lord's will</i>	This is the proper attitude of submission to God. It does not represent a lack of faith; on the contrary, it represents true faith, which is dependence on him and his sovereign ways.
4:17	Sins of omission	Sin is not just doing what we shouldn't do; it is also failing to do what we know we should do.

### Session 8 (5:1-6) — *Warning to the rich*

These verses condemn people who have used their riches *in an unworthy way*. They echo several OT passages, like Amos 8:4-8.

5:1	<i>You rich people</i>	The people who had made their wealth with the kind of God-despising attitude condemned in 4:13.
5:1	<i>The misery that is coming</i>	These miseries are described in the remainder of the passage. They include loss of wealth (v2-3) and suffering for selfish attitudes (v4-6).
5:2	<i>Clothes</i>	In Bible times, fine clothes were a form of wealth (e.g. Acts 20:33).

### Session 9 (5:7-12) — *The need for patience*

James returns to the topic he began with: *suffering*. Here, he stresses the need for patience in it, which must extend, if necessary, 'until the Lord's coming' (v7).

5:7	<i>Autumn and spring rains</i>	Literally, 'early and late rain'. The two important seasons for rain in Bible lands, around which farmers organised their crop management. The 'early' rain was October-November and the 'late' rain April-May.
5:8	<i>Be patient</i>	They are to be patient, not only in their sufferings, but also because the Lord's return seems to them to have been delayed. But it is 'near'. Since then, of course, some 2000 years have passed. Nevertheless, it is still 'near'—as it always is. In every generation, Christians are to live in the light of its imminence. See also Phil 4:5; Heb 10:25, 37; 1 Jn 2:18.
5:9	<i>The Judge</i>	Christ himself. This verse takes up the theme of 4:11-12.
5:11	<i>Perseverance</i>	Older Bible versions talk of Job's <i>patience</i> ; but the word <i>perseverance</i> is more accurate. It is the word used in 1:3-4 and means 'steadfastness' or 'endurance'.
5:11	<i>Finally brought about</i>	After all his sufferings, Job enjoyed the blessing of God again, described in Job 42:12-13.
5:11	<i>Full of compassion and mercy</i>	A frequent OT phrase to describe God, e.g. Ex 34:6; Ps 102:8.
5:12	<i>Swear</i>	Not in the sense of bad language but of swearing an oath. As Christians we should have a reputation for truthfulness that people will respect. When this is so, the need for phrases like 'I swear to God that...' become unnecessary.

#### **Session 10 (5:13-20) — The prayer of faith**

5:14-16	Sickness and sin	Note the link here between physical sickness and sin (cf Mk 2:3-12; Jn 5:14). Most sickness is not sin-related, but some undoubtedly is, and when the sin is confessed the body returns to health.
5:14	<i>Anoint...with oil</i>	In Bible times oil was used as a therapeutic agent. But the phrase 'in the name of the Lord' points to its symbolic rather than therapeutic use. It symbolises the presence and power of Jesus. See also Mk 6:13.
5:17	<i>Elijah</i>	See 1 Kings 17:1; 18:41-46.
5:19-20	Closing words	This closing reminder urges James's readers to look out for one another and particularly to encourage back into faith those beginning to backslide.
5:19	<i>Wander</i>	Most people backslide, not because of some crisis or decision, but because of a gradual wandering away from practical Christian commitment.
5:20	<i>Death</i>	Not eternal death, because this is one the 'brothers' (v19). It probably refers to premature physical death cause by unconfessed and therefore unforgiven sin. See note on v14-16 above.