



**JUST
FOR**

EPIPHANY

The Letter of James
2024 Study Guide

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Week 1: Words to the Wise

Watch Video

Opening Questions

1. How are you feeling as we begin this study of the Letter of James? Do you have any preconceived notions about this letter? Any underlying expectations?
2. James is full of wisdom sayings similar to the Book of Proverbs. As an ice breaker, share a piece of helpful advice that someone gave you, and why it was so meaningful.

Read James 1:1-18

3. Consider verses (vv.) 2-4 and 12-15, and the role of trials in a disciple's life.
 - a. Has there been a time that felt like a season of testing or a trial for you? Remember James says *when* not *if*. What did you learn—or how did you grow—from that experience?
 - b. Who does James say is the source of temptations and why does that matter (v.13)?
 - c. Why would James tell us to count these experiences as joy (v.2)?
4. What is the relationship between wisdom and doubt in vv. 5-8?

5. Verses 9-11 sound a bit like Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5). How is James trying to reorient our priorities to those of God's kingdom considering this passage and Jesus' Beatitudes?
6. How does this first section of the chapter encourage us to seek wisdom and patience, and how might this be applied to your life?

Read James 1:19-27

7. Does hearing before speaking come naturally to you? Why or why not?
8. James reminds us first to be "quick to hear and slow to speak" before calling us to be *doers* of the word and not only *hearers*. How does that first bit of advice inform the latter?
9. People who only hear the word and don't act on it can easily deceive themselves into a false sense of comfort, like one who looks in a mirror and then forgets what they look like. How would you characterize a *doer* of the word? What would that look like?
 - a. How does our faith inform what we do?
 - b. In the days ahead, is there a place in your life where you can take a deeper step of faith in becoming a *doer* and not merely a *hearer*? How can this group encourage you?
10. What is the biggest takeaway from this chapter for you?

Concluding Thought

In James' opinion, religion is not something that is simply done in church but is the work that every member of the church is called to! We are called to care for the least and lost just as Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are those who heed his words of wisdom.

End with Prayer

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen. ("The Book of Common Prayer," (BCP) p. 233)

Notes

Week 2: Faith That is Alive or Faith That Works

Watch Video

Opening Questions

1. The General Thanksgiving from "The Book of Common Prayer" calls for us to "show forth our praise" for God's immeasurable love in sending his Son Jesus Christ to redeem the world "not only with our lips, but in our lives." In what ways are we called to "live out" our faith in Christ?
2. How would you explain the relationship between "faith" and "works" in Christian life?

Read James 2:1-13

3. Can you think of a time when you acted out of favoritism or were on the receiving end of favoritism?
4. What do you make of the special place of the "poor" in the eyes of God witnessed in Scripture? How do we as followers of Jesus embody God's ethic for special concern for the poor and the helpless?
5. Why do you think it is the case that "God [has] chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? (v. 5)
6. What do you think James means when he exhorts us to "speak and act" as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty (v. 12)?

Read James 2:14-26

7. How does James use the illustration of the body and spirit to describe the relationship between faith and works?
8. In this section, James again reiterates the role of caring for the poor and most needy. How does giving of ourselves to the poor demonstrate faith? In what ways can we live out this quality of “living faith?”
9. James chooses a curious combination of Old Testament figures to illustrate his arguments about faith and works: the patriarch Abraham (Genesis 22) and the pagan prostitute Rahab (see Joshua 2:1-21). What do you make of James’ choice? In what ways do each of them highlight the connection between faith and works?
10. What about this chapter challenged or inspired you? What would it look like for us to truly incorporate its teachings into our daily lives?

Concluding Thought:

In many ways, works that come from a “living faith” in Christ are manifestations, small “epiphanies,” of Christ’s glory and redemptive presence in our world. In what ways do you wish to grow and magnify Christ in your own life?

End with Prayer

Eternal God, we give you thanks and praise for the cornerstone of our faith – Your inestimable love shown to all humankind in the redemption of the world by your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Give us such an awareness of your mercies that we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days. Amen. (Adapted from the *General Thanksgiving*, BCP, Rite II)

Notes

Week 3: Starting Forest Fires...

Read James 3:1-12

Opening Thought

As we begin to look at this portion of James, our author begins, not by trashing teaching as a profession in 3:1, but by highlighting both the difficulty of controlling our tongues and the consequences of our failure to do so. For if we cannot learn to do so, we should not be in such an important leadership role in our community as a teacher was in James' community!

1. James 3:2 – The Greek word translated as “perfect”¹ in our English translations also means “mature” in the original Greek. So...rather than James saying that perfection is possible, perhaps James is saying that the mature Christian will have learned to guard or hold their tongues. How might this translation be more realistically achievable to us than “perfection?”
2. James 3:3-4 – James appears to be encouraging us to think that small checks on our tongues, akin to a horse's bridle and a ship's rudder, can control the tongue. After all, bits and rudders are small objects used by riders and sailors to maintain control over their horses and boats. What small things or spiritual practices could we employ to help us develop and grow in the spiritual gift of self-control?
3. James 3:5-8 – Whoa! James brutally points out that, although the tongue may be a small member of our bodies, it has outsized power, leading to destruction, and evil. Do these verses give James 1:19, an over-quoted and often-read passage, a stronger sense of

poignancy or urgency? How about James 1:26?

4. James 3:9-10 – James puts a spotlight on the hypocrisy of Christians who give praise to God, yet with the same mouth, demean or belittle other bits of the human creation made in the image and likeness of God. How is this teaching in contrast with our own culture that emphasizes the individual’s freedom of speech even if it might be at the expense of our neighbor?

5. James 3:11-12 – Throughout James, the author refers to “double-mindedness.” Through his questions in these two verses, James is identifying that if we have grown fully “mature” (see question #1 above), the spring in our hearts will put forth fresh water, not salt water. The fig tree will produce figs, and the grapevine grapes. In essence, what is in the heart comes out of the mouth. Was Jesus speaking of this same “double-mindedness” in Matthew 15:18-19?
 - a. How might we become that spring of fresh water for ourselves and others?

Read James 3:13-4:12

James continues to look at our participation in growing into Christian maturity, developing more “single-mindedness” as those who are friends with God. In this section, our author contrasts those guided by the wisdom “from below” with that “from above” while urging us forward in our conversion into the likeness of Christ. For conversion is an ongoing process, and our participation in it is essential.

6. James 3:13-16 – James is returning to the qualities required of a mature leader in his Christian community. Where does personal ambition fit into his view of Christian leadership? What seems to be the “fruit” of such ambition, and does it build up the Church?
7. James 3:17-18 – James is finally beginning to give us a hint of the conversion in which we all must take part to achieve wisdom and become that life-giving spring of water which we read about in v. 11. In your maturation in and through Christ, how have you grown to harvest peace, gentleness, mercy, and righteousness? What might be ways in which to encourage this aspect of our conversion into that fresh water that nourishes others?
8. James 4:1-6 – Surely James doesn’t believe his fellow Christians are fighting, committing murder, or could even really be adulterers! Perhaps this is hyperbole, but what might these “cravings that are at war within you” he speaks of in v. 1? Could these behaviors be seen as being “a friend of the world” as mentioned in v. 4? How might we become more aware of God’s Spirit “that he made to dwell in us” (v. 5)?
9. James 4:7-10 – James spells out human behaviors necessary in the process of conversion in these verses: “Submit...resist...draw near...cleanse...and purify, lament and mourn and weep...humble yourself.” In other words, repentance is required...over and over and over again. How might God be inviting you into deeper conversion, developing the single-mindedness needed as a “friend of God?”

10. James 4:11-12 – When we slander (“speak evil of”) another, we have set ourselves up as that person’s judge. We become the judge, jury, and interpreter of the law. In doing so, we place ourselves over and above the other, as well as the One who made the law. And so, James asks us, “Who are you to judge...?” Why is it that we humans are so quick to judge?

11. What is your key takeaway from this discussion?

End with Prayer

Notes

Week 4: Planning, Money and Prayer

Watch Video

Opening Question

1. BEFORE YOU READ: As a group decide what you think the key messages have been so far. Write these down.

Read James 4:13–5:20

Consider James 4:13–4:17

2. What does this text tell you about making plans? What do you think God intends you to plan for?
3. Where might your planning start to invade the ability for God to be at work in your life? How can you identify this?

Consider James 5:1-12

4. Compare and contrast James 5:1 and 5:11. Describe what you think James means about the Lord's mercy.
5. Why does this passage speak so harshly about wealth? What do you think the writer means by 'wealth'?
6. Is v. 12 familiar? Why is it important?

Consider James 5:13-20

7. What is the tone of this final section? How does it compare with the two preceding paragraphs?
8. What are vv. 16 & 17 there to teach us? How does this change the way we read vv. 18-20?

9. Go back to your answer to question 1. Is there anything you want to add to the list?
10. In light of your answer to question 9 – how would you describe James’ heart for all his readers?
11. Reflecting on this series, what one thing will you take away from this? If you’re happy to, please answer individually!

Concluding Thought

It’s easy to think of James as this man with impossibly high expectations to which no person could ever live up. We hope that as you have worked through this study you have seen that James’ hope is that no one would have pockets of spiritual blindness about their conduct. He writes to encourage the flock to live wholeheartedly in faith, holding nothing back, and not going along with the ways of the world without a hearty assessment of the impact on both self and others.

But he ends in hope. And his hope is in Christ. That through our deepening relationship with Jesus in prayer, and by holding those we love before him, and desiring only the best for our fellow believers that not one member of the flock would be left floundering in their sin. It’s a picture of what loving, true friendship and community looks like – unafraid of hard conversations borne out of a deep love.

We hope and pray that this is what your group has been to you this Epiphany.

End with Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this letter of James. We thank you for our community. We thank you that you are with us in every trial, refining and reshaping us, and that you never leave us alone as you do it. Give us courage to examine our lives and take to heart these words from James. Give us tenderness as we journey alongside others who are discovering their weaknesses too. Help us to pray earnestly and diligently for ourselves and those around us. Amen.

Notes

Small Group Resources

Videos: Each lesson includes a video that should be watched before the group meets or at the beginning of each gathering. This will set the context of the passage that is read. You can either search “Just For” on our website or find it here: smec.org/just-for/.

Recommended Resources:

Moo, D. J. (2021). “The Letter of James” (2nd ed., Ser. The Pillar New Testament Commentary). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Wright, N. T. (2011). “The Early Christian Letters for Everyone: James, Peter, John and Judah”. SPCK Publishing.

Gathering Expectations: Building relationships and growing in faith are the two main goals of this small group series. Weekly gatherings should be roughly 20-30 minutes for socializing, 30-40 minutes for Bible study, 10 minutes for prayer.

Small Group Covenant: We are committed to maintaining a welcoming atmosphere in which each person can be open and honest in the pursuit of the knowledge of how God loves us and cares for us. We will establish this atmosphere by doing the following:

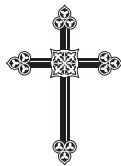
- We will always maintain the confidentiality of what is said in the group.

- We will pray for each other regularly and seek to support each other spiritually both inside and outside of our meetings.

- We will seek to be open and honest with each other and be our true selves. We will, however, not overshare or treat the group as a therapy session.

- We will not frog, hog or bog. Meaning, we do not jump quickly from one subject to another, hog the conversation, or perpetually get stuck on one subject.
- We will open and close our meetings with prayer, calling on God's promise to be with us when two or more gather in His name, through the presence of His Holy Spirit. We will be open to the mystery and surprise of God's presence in our group and in our lives.
- We accept that God will speak to all of us through each one's thoughts, and we will listen deeply with our hearts to new perspectives, seeking always to determine God's truth in them.
- We will avoid divisive topics, such as politics, that are not directly relevant to our spiritual journey. We will honor the diversity of thought and feeling among us, and we will treat each other with the utmost dignity and respect at all times. Should conflicts arise, we will respectfully resolve them. We will give advice only when requested.
- We will seek to have all others know us by our love of God and our neighbors. We will seek to become closer to God by listening and sharing within the group and by serving others outside of the group.

*This study was written by the Rev. Wesley Arning (Week 1),
Mr. Ryan Presley (Week 2), the Rev. Sharron Cox (Week 3),
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