

James

Core Group Study Guide

By the Chi Alpha Staff at UVa

The purpose of this study is to discuss and encourage one another to live out the core realities of a mature Christian life. Studying James will help us understand how to be believers who possess a consistent and undivided commitment to God.

Few books of the Bible have been more maligned than the little Book of James. Controversy has waged over its authorship, its date, its recipients, its canonicity, and its unity. It is well known that Martin Luther had problems with this book. He called it a “right strawy epistle.” But it is only “strawy” to the degree it is “sticky.” There are enough needles in this haystack to prick the conscience of every dull, defeated, and degenerated Christian in the world. Here is a “right stirring epistle” designed to exhort and encourage, to challenge and convict, to rebuke and revive, to describe practical holiness and drive believers toward the goal of a faith that works. James is severely ethical and refreshingly practical.

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Overview of the Study

Author

It seems clear therefore that the author is James, the half brother of the Lord, who became the recognized leader in the Jerusalem church. This conclusion is supported by the authoritative tone of the letter and by the marked similarities in Greek between this epistle and the speech by James recorded in Acts 15. Though James was reared in the same home with the Lord Jesus, he apparently did not become a believer until after Christ's resurrection. John wrote, "For even His own brothers did not believe in Him" (John 7:5). James' encounter with the risen Lord may have brought him to saving faith. Christ "appeared to James, then to all the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:7). Paul later listed James, Peter, and John as "those reputed to be pillars" of the church (Gal. 2:9). The strongest evidence for the authorship of the Epistle of James clearly favors the half brother of Christ. Furthermore, Origen, Eusebius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, Augustine, and many other early writers support this view.

Date Written

Flavius Josephus, first-century historian, records that James was martyred in A.D. 62, so the epistle must have been written prior to that date. Since no mention is made of the Jerusalem Council (A.D. 49) in which James took so active a role, it is likely that the letter was written between A.D. 45 and 48. James is probably the earliest of the writings of the New Testament and therefore can hardly be seen as a polemic against Paul's letter to the Romans, which was written later. Romans, however, is not a refutation of James. It is apparent from Paul's relationship with James (Acts 15:13; 21:18) and his recognition of James (Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12) that Paul held James in high respect. Together Paul and James give the full dimension of faith. Paul wrote about inner saving faith from God's perspective. James wrote about outward serving faith from man's perspective. The true seed of saving faith is verified by the tangible fruit of serving faith. James' point is that biblical faith works.

Recipients:

Clearly addressed to "the 12 tribes scattered among the nations" (James 1:1), this letter has a marked Jewish flavor. The book has the substance and authority of the Prophets and the style and beauty of the Psalms. He refers to "firstfruits" (1:18; Lev. 23:10), the synagogue or "meeting" (James 2:2), "our ancestor Abraham" (2:21), Gehenna or "hell" (3:6), "the Lord Almighty" (5:4; cf. Gen. 17:1), and to the early and latter or "fall and spring rains" (James 5:7; cf. Deut. 11:14). Though some suggest that the "12 tribes" may be taken metaphorically as the Gentile church scattered throughout the Roman Empire, it is far more logical to take the statement in its normal sense. The letter is definitely to a Jewish constituency. Though the letter demonstrates careful Greek diction, it is nonetheless filled with extensive Hebrew symbolism.

Objective of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to discuss and encourage one another to live out the core realities of a mature Christian life. Studying James will help us understand

how to be believers who possess a consistent and undivided commitment to God.

Week One: Introduction & James 1A

Outline of Chapter One

- I. Stand with Confidence (chap. 1)
 - A. Salutation and greeting (1:1)
 - B. Rejoice in diverse trials (1:2-12)
 1. Attitude in trials (1:2)
 2. Advantage of trials (1:3-4)
 3. Assistance for trials (1:5-12)
 - C. Resist in deadly temptation (1:13-18)
 1. Source of temptation (1:13-14)
 2. Steps in temptation (1:15-16)
 3. Solution for temptation (1:17-18)
 - D. Rest in divine truth (1:19-27)
 1. Receptivity to the Word (1:19-21)
 2. Responsiveness to the Word (1:22-25)
 3. Resignation to the Word (1:26-27)

Opening Question:

1. How do you normally react to trials that come into your life?
2. Has your reaction to trials changed any since being in college/being closer to God?

Body of this week's study:

(A general overview of the book will need to be given during this week. We have provided you with the basic historical context, but additional information can be found using a good Study Bible or Bible Dictionary/Encyclopedia.)

Text Questions:

Please add or alter any text questions to fit the needs of your group.

Read 1:1-8

Why do you think God allows trials to come into our lives? (v 2 says "whenever" not "if" you face trials.

-These problems are here to develop Christian character produce christlikeness in each of His children, which involves suffering, frustration and perplexity

-Trials yield fruit

What is the difference between trials & temptations?

Trials and Temptations

- v 2-12 = holy trials/problems sent from God
- V 13-17 = unholy temptations come from w/in which lead to sin

Read vs. 2-8 again

From vs. 2, what are some things that stand out to you?

- That we're to consider trials PURE JOY
 - That we'll all face trials of many kinds, not if, but when
- How does this make you feel? What do you think about that?**

- Overwhelmed? Confused? Happy?

How do you react to problems?

- Do you grumble, complain, think the world/ God is against you, grin and bear it, or think it's the best thing that's happened to you?

What is the progression that we see from vs. 3-4?

- Testing – perseverance – mature and complete

Has anyone experienced this progression in their own lives?

Can you look back on those trials and be thankful for the good that's developed in you?

- I think that may be the beginning of developing the pure joy that vs.2 talks about.

Why do you think the text moves into talking about wisdom next in vs. 5-8? What's the connection to trials?

- Although we always need God's wisdom, we need it especially in trials/ challenges.

What do we learn in vs. 5 about God's character?

- That He's generous, and He's just – He responds to ALL the same, that He answers prayer.

Read vs. 6

In view of vs. 5, what is it, do you think, that we should not doubt?

- God's character, that He's good, that He loves us and that God can do anything
 - When a trial comes, the enemy will try to plant a lie in our minds. Something that will cause us to doubt God – like God doesn't care, God doesn't love us, God can't or won't do anything about our situation, God's not good, etc. That's the point where we need to ask for God's wisdom and come against the enemy's lies with God's truth.

Read vs. 9-12

What do you think these verses are trying to show us? Why the illustration of the rich/ poor?

- Look to eternal, not temporary – riches fade away
- Each one should rejoice in own blessings and responsibilities from the Lord – not long for someone else's position, circumstance, etc.
- Bloom where you're planted, so to speak. Don't wish for circumstances you don't have or can't have.

Read vs. 13-15

In vs. 14-15, what is the progression of sin?

- Own evil desire – temptation (conception) – birth of sin – sin full grown – death

Sound familiar from any other scriptures you know?

- Rom. 6:23

How do we overcome the progression of sin?

- Submit to God to change our evil desires
- Avoid temptation – ex. If struggle with purity, don't put self in compromising situation with boyfriend/ girlfriend
- Come against temptation/ thought with God's truth

Read vs. 16-18 – Don't be deceived, here's the truth...

In vs. 17, what do we learn about God and His character?

- Only God gives good and perfect gifts, God doesn't change

Application Questions:

1. ***Because of James, how will you face trials differently now?***
2. ***Is there a certain trial you have been going through that we can partner with you in prayer about? OR Qtn 3.***
3. ***What spoke to you most in these verses that you'd like us to agree in prayer with you about?***
 - Are you in the midst of a trial? Need wisdom? Perseverance? Faith?
 - Need help overcoming a temptation/ weakness in your life?
 - Need help keeping your priority on eternal not temporary things?
 - Maybe need help believing in an area of God's character?
 -
4. ***When we are tempted what should we do in light of James?***

Memory Verses:

Memory verse –choose one- James 1:2-4, or James 1:5, or James 1:12, or James 1:17

Week Two: James 1B

Opening Question:

Tell us about a time when you wish you would've followed someone's advice/ directions, but you didn't.

Tell us about a time you put your foot in your mouth – you wish you hadn't spoken so quickly?

Text Questions:

Please write your own text questions (in order to shape them according to the needs of your specific group)!

Read verse 18 to the end of Chapter 1.

*** According to V 18, how and why were we created?!**

· created by the word of God – of his own free will – bible instrument of the new birth so we might be firstfruits of all his creation

what does firstfruits mean?!

- harvest terms – first sheaf of ripened grain – first believers of the Christian Dispensation
- first fruits were offered to God in gratitude for His bounty - all believers present themselves to God as living sacrifices (Rom 12: 1-2)
- firstfruits were pledge of the full harvest to come – first followed by others to come = wrote to them to say they were to be the examples others are suppose to follow – Rom 8:19-23 –

Read the rest of Chapter–

? summarize the rest of the chapter 's points/what do you think the point of rest of the chapter is

· practical instructions as to how we can be firstfruits of God

Read vs. 19-27

Draw two columns – one for what we are told to do from these verses and one for what we are not to do or told to keep from doing. Either have ½ group look at “to do” and write them down and ½ group look at “don't do” and write them down, or have each person do their list individually

What's on your list?

Do

Quick to listen

Don't do/ refrain from

Rid of moral filth and evil

Slow to speak
Slow to become angry
Humbly accept the word
Do what word says
Keep a tight reign on tongue
Take care of the needy

Don't merely listen to the word
Don't be polluted by the world

How do you see we should be first fruits?

- 1. be swift to hear – be ready to hear the word of God as well as godly counsel
- 2. slow to speak – be cautious and guarded in our conversations Proverbs 13:3 –(Solomon's words) also proverbs 10:19
- 3. slow to anger – why? b/c v 20 – and Prov 16:32
- 4. get rid of all filth/evil
 - what does filthiness mean? – every form of impurity, spiritual, mental and physical – in order to receive the truth of the word of God, we must be morally clean
- 5. be humble/reception of divine truth needs meekness v 21
 - possible to read bible w/out letting it speak to us – we can study it w/out being affected by it
 - **why do you think we need humility?**
 - so we can accept God's word **why?**
 - because the word can save us – accept word that is planted in you, which can save you
 - **how the word is saving?!**
 - saving the soul from penalty of sin, and the power of sin
 - save from damation in eternity and this life – continuing aspect of salvation
 - word is sacred deposit in Christian's life when we are born again -
 - our pride and sin can make us unreceptive and unresponsive – only w/ submissive humble spirits can we have max benefits from scripture – Psalm 25:9

Its not enough to receive the word, we must OBEY the word – & desire to hear

- never go into the bible w/out willingness to let it change us
- read and obey the word implicitly
- apply the word to everyday life

Which do you think above is your strongest trait?!

Which of the above do you think you need to work the most on in order to be a better first fruit?!

-What would happen if you did not listen to the word? (or do not apply the word)

* Not Listening to Word: no benefit from the word, but forgets what it says – like the man who saw reflection in the mirror

- Not Applying Word: easy to read the bible casually / b/c of a sense of duty w/ out being affected - we see what we ought to be, but quickly forget it and live as if we have before
- Prevent spiritual progress
- kind of wasting time in a way b/c you won't get anything out of just reading the bible w/out application of it

What will happen to someone who DOES apply the word and want to become a first fruit according to the word?!

As he obeys, he finds true freedom “the truth will set you free”

- doesn't forget the Bible, but rather seeks to live it out in daily practice
 - o simple childlike obedience brings blessing to his soul – be blessed in what he does

~ **What do you think v 26, and 27 are summing up about Religion?!**

God is not satisfied w/ w/ rituals he is interested in a life of practical godliness and uses tongue as an example to show how God doesn't like rituals

- tongue is an example of futile religion any behavior inconsistent w/ the Christian faith is worthless

What do you think God is looking for in an honest Christian?

- compassion for others
- keep own life clean – pure and undefiled religion
 - as examples – James praises people who visit needy orphans and widows – and who keeps themselves unspotted from the world

Application Questions:

1. How do you demonstrate that you are Christian/first fruit/reborn, etc?

- practical outworking of the new birth found in “acts of grace and a walk of separation”
- practical love and practical holiness
- put our own faith on trial w/ questions?
 - o Do I read the bible w/ humble desire to have God rebuke me/ teach me/change me?
 - o Do I justify my temper or want victory over it?
 - o How does my faith manifest in deeds of kindness?!

2. How do you think you can best show what has God done in your life?! or show how you are not of this world but transformed from this world?

3. How do you think your fellow Christians can help you with by doing so?

Memory Verses:

Memory verse: 2:19-20

Week Three: James 2

Opening Question:

Text Questions:

Please rewrite your own text questions (in order to shape them according to the needs of your specific group)!

James 2:14-26

Read vs. 14-26

On your first reading, what seems to be James' main point?

In vs. 14-19, what two examples does James give us of empty faith?

- Prayer, but no help for physical needs
- Demons believe

Why do you think James gave this first example?

- Targets complacency of Christian – no legs to claim of belief in Christ

How about the second example, what do the demons believe about God?

- That He exists

What's wrong with the demon's belief/ "faith"?

- Belief needs to go beyond head knowledge to giving over oneself to the Lordship of Christ – faith effects every fiber of my being and all my way of life

How is the demon's belief like human faith that produces no good deeds?

Describe a recent situation where you observed people doing exactly what James is describing.

There are 4 types of people described here in James – give an example of what each person's life might look like

- Faith, but no works
- Works, but no faith
- Faith and works that grow naturally out of faith
- No faith, and no works

Let's read Eph. 2:8-9. How do you reconcile this verse with James?

- To me, it's a paradox, it's a both/and not an either/or. Our salvation is by grace – there's nothing that we can do to earn our salvation – our salvation is purely and only because of Jesus' sacrifice for us and our acceptance of His gift of eternal life on His terms. However, when we're alive, we grow – and there are all kinds of "signs of life" in us – a pulse, physical growth – our hair grows, our nails grow, our insides are all working together, our nerve endings are sending signals all

around, etc. As we grow Spiritually, we should see growth and transformation in ourselves and also in others. Spiritual growth starts from the heart, then works it's way out. The goal of our Christian life is to be more transformed by the Holy Spirit every day – to welcome Christ into every aspect of our lives and let Him change us to become more like Him so that our “light” shines more brightly and more clearly to our lost and dying world – to then share the awesome news about Christ with them!

- Paul shows us how to get into God's kingdom...James shows us what it looks like when God's kingdom gets in us.
- Give an example from your own life of how this works out in reality.

What is one area where you have seen God changing and transforming your life over the past few months?

Looking at vs. 21-23, what were some “signs of life” in Abraham that gave witness to the fact that he had genuine faith? Let's look up the whole passage in Gen. 22 1-12

- Faith and actions working together, Abraham offered Isaac – his precious and only son

Has God asked you to give up/ offer Him something “precious” to you? Tell us about it and where you're at in your faith walk – starting the journey, walking up the Mt., seeing God's good fulfillment, etc.

What are some “signs of life” in Rahab that showed her faith was genuine?

- The whole passage is from Josh. 1-24. Summarize Rahab's situation or ask if someone would like to summarize Rahab's story.
- **(you don't need to even address this if you don't want to, or if it doesn't come up as a question)**The part where Rahab lied has always been a bit strange for me to figure out. Here's what I've come up with – Rahab wasn't perfect, and she didn't know all that there was to know about God and His ways and also the Holy Spirit works on each of us at a different pace. I don't think God needed Rahab to lie to accomplish His plan, and I think her heart was to help the Israelites who were in need and to lay it all on the line for God. So, I don't think God thinks lying is okay, but I do think that we follow God's law first and sometimes that will put us in the position to respectfully deny/ rebel against man's laws. (Rahab rebelling against the king's command to hand them over, Daniel praying when the king's command was to not pray, the early church and much of Christianity today – meeting in hostile environments in secret) So, I think Rahab still could have respectfully rebelled against the king and not compromised God's standards – who knows, if she hadn't lied, maybe God would have done an incredible miracle – like striking all the guards blind, or sending an earthquake or freeing them in some way only God could have done.
- Rahab laid it all on the line to choose God, and she gave of her resources to care for the Israelites/ righteous people in danger

So, in summary, why is faith that is not demonstrated with deeds dead?

Summarize for me the relationship between faith and works.

Application Questions:

As we close in prayer, let's pray for the area that we brought up that we're presently in a faith walk about. Is there anything else that God's pricked your heart from this passage, that you'd like prayer for? Other prayer requests?

Memory Verse:

2:21, 22 OR 2:26

Week Four: James 3:1-18

Opening Question:

How did processing last week go? (reiterate the closing question and ask about progress with the application also don't forget to go over the memory verse)!

Text Questions:

Please write your own text questions (in order to shape them according to the needs of your specific group)!

Read vs. 1-12

1. Why is it such a big responsibility to be a teacher, especially of the scripture?
Given much, much is required

Perfect in vs. 2 is the same Greek word that was translated as mature and complete in 1:4. With this in mind, put this verse in your own words.

2. In vs. 3-6, what three images are we given that the tongue is like? What do they have in common? What do you think are their similarities to the tongue?
3. Describe a time when the words of another person had a lasting impact on you – in either a positive or negative way.
4. Looking at vs. 9, why is it especially horrible to curse or verbally abuse a human being?
Because they're made in God's likeness
5. What does it mean that we/ all people are made in God's likeness?
6. There's usually an openness to the Holy Spirit to convict us when we speak badly of others, but how about how we speak of ourselves? Do we have the right to speak badly of ourselves, since we too have been made in God's likeness?
7. In vs. 11, what would happen to the fresh water is both the fresh and the salt water flowed from the same spring? How is this like what happens to our witness if both praises and curses come from our mouths? How do you see this common struggle against hypocrisy in your own heart, life and words?

**Could be a place for affirmation – in light of how important words are, we're going to use our words to bless one another... and choose your affirmation method*

Read vs. 13-18

8. How can you recognize a wise person?

Good life, deeds done in humility

9. How would you describe/ define bitter envy and selfish ambition?

10. Have you seen either of these things in the life of someone around you or in your own personal experience? Tell us a little about your observations and how this bitter envy or selfish ambition affected them/ you?

11. What do you think vs. 18 means?

Application Questions:

1. Is there one quality that sticks out to you that you'd like to grow more in? In closing, let's all ask God to grow these attributes in us. (Maybe talk out how growth in that area could occur. Great time for others in group to give feedback to each other. Don't forget to check in next week about how they're doing in this).

Memory Verse:

Choose one for this week :)

Week Five: James 4:1-17

Opening Question:

1. Who do you find that you quarrel with the most? Why do you think that is?

Text Questions:

Please write your own text questions (in order to shape them according to the needs of your specific group)!

Read vs. 1 – Who do you quarrel with the most? What causes you to quarrel – from vs.

- 1, What are the “desires that battle within you”, do you think?

Read vs. 2-10

1. Those are some pretty potent scriptures... What stands out to you most from these verses and why?

2. Looking at vs. 2-3, have you experienced these things in your own life? Tell us about one...

- Wanting something, but not getting it because of wrong motive
- Not asking God for something, so therefore not getting it

3. Looking at vs. 4, from your experience and knowledge of scripture, what are some of the symptoms of friendship with the world?

4. Why is friendship with the world equivalent to hatred towards God?

5. Scripture also tells us that we are to be in the world, but not of the world – (John 17:13-19, 1 John 2:15-17, 2 Cor. 10:3) How does this play out in your own life? What areas have you wrestled with and where are you in your decision making process? How are you doing with this balance? Which side do you tend to err on – not being in the world enough, or being of the world too much?

6. What questions do you ask when deciding? (from Navigating Crossroads Message – the 6, 8, 10 principles)

- 1 Cor. 6:12 – What affect would this have on me? What would the Butterfly affect be on my life?
- 1 Cor. 8:7-13 – What affect would this decision have on others? Would it cause other Christians to stumble? Would it help or hinder non-Christians coming to Christ?
- 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1 – What’s my motive? Would it glorify God or is it just for my “worldly” pleasure?

7. Looking at vs. 6-10, what are actions that we take, and what are actions that God takes?

8. How do these actions relate with pride and humility? What is their connection/ relationship with pride and humility?

9. How would you define submission?

- I think of it as a gift that only I can give. It's my heart motive, my attitude – I can do what looks like outward obedience, but really be full of rebellion in my heart.

10. How would you summarize vs. 1-10?

Read vs. 11-12

11. Vs. 11 says that to slander or judge a brother is to criticize and judge God's law. That's a pretty intense statement. Why do you think this is?

12. How is constructive correction different than slander?

13. What questions should you ask yourself before you talk about someone?

- What's my motive? - Do I want to boost myself up, be liked more by making someone else liked less?
- Would I say this in front of the other person?
- Is what I'm saying undermining someone's authority in my life?
- Will what I'm saying build up/ edify this other person, or am I spreading their "dirty laundry"?
- Would it help the person I'm talking to, to know this situation and learn from it?

Read vs. 13-17

14. Describe what you think the Biblical situation was like from these verses? Why were they given this reproof?

- Sounds like living life for self and own pleasures – vs. 13 to make \$\$\$
- Wrong priorities – not putting God first, but putting selfish desires first
- Put God first (vs. 15), submit life to God's plans
- Avoiding doing good for God – just advancing self
- Boasting and bragging – probably on self-success

15. It's one thing to be unsure of God's plan, but another to KNOW God's plan and desire in our heart and reject it in pursuit of our own selfish gain.

16. What is a person saying about God and self when she makes plans without consulting God?

17. Is God saying that planning for the future is wrong?

- I don't think so – it's just about the heart attitude in the process. Having submission to God first – being able to say – “God, whatever You want for my life, it's Yours.” God created us and He's the one that gave us our talents and giftings and interests/passions in the first place. He loves us and has GOOD plans for us (Jer. 29:11) God knows us better than we know ourselves, and His plans are better than any that we could try to make.

Application Questions:

1. What is one aspect that you'd like to apply to your own life?
2. How do you need God to help you grow in this area?
3. How can you start implementing this in your life now?

Memory Verse:

Week Six: James 5:1-20

Opening Question

Text Questions:

Please write your own text questions (in order to shape them according to the needs of your specific group)!

In general do you focus on God's mercy or His judgment in your life?

Vs.1-6

1. According to these verses, what have some rich people done to get in big trouble? List as many attitudes and actions that you can find.
2. Does James seem to be condemning all rich people?
3. How can one be a good rich person?
 - By being givers/ generous with our \$\$\$
4. What's your goal in giving financially? If you don't currently have one, what would you like your goal to be?
 - My goal is to give a tithe of all salary and money given for living expenses, and also give an offering of all gift \$\$\$\$. Another goal is to give monthly to missions at least as much as we save each month.
5. How can you begin practicing giving now? What \$\$\$ do you have to work with?

Vs. 7-12

6. Do you think much about the Lord's coming? Do you think it's important to think about it?
7. What are you looking forward to most about the Lord's coming?
8. How are Christians to behave during this waiting time before the Lord's return?
9. Why does grumbling at others lead to judgement?
10. What does it mean to stand firm and how can we do this?
11. Where in your life do you need God's help to patiently persevere?
12. How do you do at keeping your work – at letting your yes be yes and your no be no?

Vs. 13-20

13. What does James counsel us to do when we're in trouble, happy or sick? Why do you think this is wise counsel?

14. What is the point of James illustration about Elijah?

15. When you see a fellow Christian stray from God, are you prone to watch in disappointment, keep your distance so you're not negatively influenced, or do you seek ways in which God would have you help bring this person back?

16. Whose responsibility is it to do something if we see a fellow Christian wandering from the truth?

17. What are some practical steps a person can take when she sees someone wandering from the truth?

18. What one truth seems most significant to you from James 5?

Application Questions:

What one truth seems most significant to you from James 5?

How can you apply this to your life?

What have you appreciated most about James? What truths has God given you/ insights that you will not forget?

How can we partner with you in prayer this week?

Memory Verses:

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