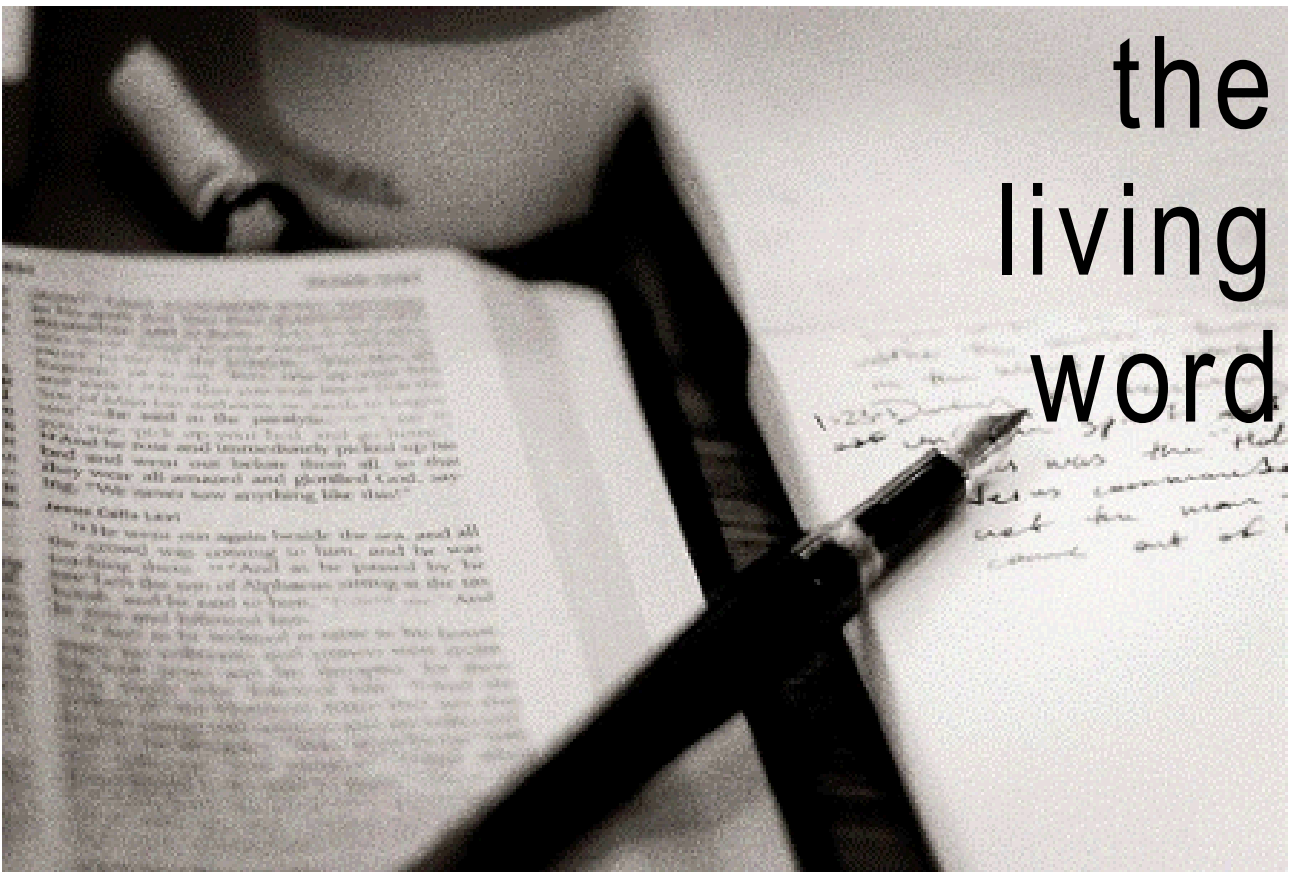


# James



Integrated Bible Study Guide

## **2** | **James: The Living Word**

### **Contents:**

<b>Introduction</b>	Page 3
<b>Study 1: Trials &amp; Maturity</b> James 1:1-18	Page 4
<b>Study 2: Favouritism &amp; Faith</b> James 1:19 - 2:26	Page 7
<b>Study 3: Teaching &amp; Wisdom</b> James 3:1 - 4:3	Page 10
<b>Study 4: Friendship &amp; Submission</b> James 4:4-14	Page 12
<b>Study 5: Wealth &amp; Tomorrow</b> James 4:13 - 5:11	Page 14
<b>Study 6: Prayer &amp; Promise</b> James 5:12-20	Page 17



## How to get the best out of these Studies...

The letter of James is an attractive New Testament book because it is so practical. It has a lot to say about things like gossip, church fights, materialism, faith, prayer, perseverance and favouritism. However, when looking for a theme that integrates the letter, it can be a bit difficult. At first glance James can seem like a range of pastoral concerns have been randomly thrown together.

If you are studying this in a group context then one of the best things to do is to read the letter together as a whole and see if you can spot the ideas that are repeated. Better still, as it's a short letter, you could encourage your group members to read it through each week before coming to the bible study. As for this Study Guide, we have chosen the theme of '**The Living Word**' because that seems to be the constant of the author throughout its pages. James sums this up when he says in chapter 1 and verse 22:

***"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.  
Do what it says."***

Another issue reading through James is the fact that there is very little reference to Jesus. He is only mentioned a couple of times. The letter seems to have a decidedly Jewish flavour (James 1:1) to it which probably gives us a hint about who the letter was written to. It is clear from the outset though that the author is a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are a couple of theological questions that have led to considerable discussion. In chapter two the relationship between *faith* and *works* arises. James seems to argue in terms that contradict what Paul says in the book of Romans ie *justification by faith alone*. In chapter 5, there is a discourse on sickness, healing and prayer that at first glance seems to be a '*name it and claim it*' passage. These are important issues for God's people to think through, and we hope the studies will enable this.

In summary, the great challenge of this letter is to put what we believe into action, to accept God's instruction about this world and our lives and to incorporate it both into our thinking and practice. From that point of view, whether you are using this guide in a group situation or individually, then it is important that you spend time praying about motivation, thinking, and changes that need to be made as you work out the gospel in your life.

1

## Trials & Maturity

### James 1:1-18

#### *Getting Started...*

1. One of the most difficult things for non-Christians to come to terms with about the Christian faith is the problem of evil in the world. This gets raised in chapter one of James as he talks about trials and testing. So why should Christians suffer? Shouldn't God protect us from this?
2. What are some of the biggest temptations that face Christians in 2013?

#### *Maturity in Trials...*

In this passage the words *trial* and *tempt* are both used. In verses 2 & 12, the word *trial* is used to express an *external* struggle eg. poverty, sickness, persecution etc. In verses 13 & 14, the word is translated as *temptation* and refers to a *difficulty within*, eg. discrimination against the poor etc. The two can be linked, but we should pick up the distinction in the passage.

3. Why do you think James writes to "the twelve tribes in the dispersion"? Who is he most likely addressing the letter to?
4. What do you think James means when he says 'consider it pure joy' whenever you face trials? What is the source of the joy? (verse 5)

5. How do trials contribute to my growing to maturity? (verse 4)
  
6. Verse 5 speaks about the wisdom we need to live the Christian life. What is wisdom? You may find it helpful to look up Proverbs 1:1-7 and Proverbs 3:5-8.
  
7. In this passage, what is God like? (James 1:4, 13, 17, 18)
  
8. In verses 9-11, a trial is mentioned. What is it? How will God's wisdom help us deal with it?
  
9. What is a wrong way to respond to trials eg verse 13? If we respond to trials the right way, what will be the result? (see also James 1:3, 4, 12)
  
10. How are we 'the kind of first fruits of creation'? (verse 18)



## 2

**Favouritism & Faith****James 1:19-2:26*****Getting Started...***

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said "One act of obedience is better than a hundred sermons". Discuss.

**Receiving the Word means Living God's Way...**

2. In James 1:21 we are instructed to "humbly accept the word planted in you". From verses 19-21, how does God enable this?
3. In verses 22 - 25 we are told to do what the word says. What are the consequences if we don't, and what do you think is the "perfect law that brings freedom"? (You may want to look at 2:8 and 2:12)?
4. How does God treat the rich and the poor? (2:1-7) Why is it foolish/unwise for us to treat the rich and poor differently based on their assets?



9. How does the faith James speaks of square with the faith Paul speaks of in Romans 3:28?

***How this is relevant...***

10. In which areas or over what issues are we likely to show favouritism in our relationships in our church community? Does this passage mean we should never make distinctions between people?
11. Is James critical of bible study ie too much head knowledge and not enough action? How does this tie in with 1:21 and the implanted word?
12. John Calvin said "We are saved by faith alone, but saving faith is never alone." Discuss.

## Teaching & Wisdom

### James 3:1-4:3

#### *Getting Started...*

1. What expectations should we have about those who would teach in the Body of Christ?

#### *Those who teach must choose wisely...*

2. Why do you think teachers are judged more harshly? (verses 1-2)
3. What do ships, horses and forest fires have in common? (verses 3-6)
4. Does the tongue reflect what is in our hearts or 'direct' what is in our hearts? (verses 3-5)
5. Verse 8 seems to paint a very pessimistic view of the ability of anyone to control their tongue. What do you think?
6. What is the rationale in verse 9 for why we are not allowed to 'curse' others?

7. What reason is provided for controlling the tongue in verse 11?
  
8. In 3:13-18 two types of wisdom are contrasted. What are the two wisdoms and how are they different?
  
9. What causes fights among Christians? (3:16, 4:1-3)
  
10. What are the qualities of a Christian community that lead to peace? (3:17ff)

***How this is relevant...***

11. When you are aware of Christian brothers and sisters disputing, what role do we have to play in these situations?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. If a Christian friend passes on to you a confidential negative thing said to them by a third party about you, how do you respond to this:
  - with the person who said it?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - with the person who told you?

4

## Friendship and Submission

### James 4:4-12

#### *Getting Started...*

1. Jesus spoke about not being able to serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). Do you think living in a western democratic society makes this easier or harder to do?
2. Do you think our government ought to uphold Christian principles in its leadership of the country?

#### *You can't have it both ways...*

3. If we are disputing among ourselves what does this tell us about who we are ultimately serving? (4:4) Why would James call this adultery?
4. In 4:6-10, what is demanded of us?
5. In 4:6-10, what is promised to us?
6. What is the basic problem that James is addressing in these verses?

7. What is the impact of slander on the brother or sister in Christ? What law is James referring to (compare with 2:8-13)?
  
8. Given James has already spoken on the tongue in 3:1-12, why do you think he returns to this matter in verses 11-12 after the call to repentance in verses 7-10?

***How this is relevant...***

9. How can we humble ourselves before God? How has James already suggested we do that in 1:18-22?
  
10. In what ways do you see friendship with the world unhelpfully influencing:
  - a. your own life?
  
  - b. the life of your local church?
  
  - c. the denominational structure your church belongs to?

## Wealth & Tomorrow

James 4:13-5:11

### *Getting Started...*

1. Read through 4:13-5:11. What do you think was the main problem among the Christian community from this passage?
2. What are some of the reasons that we desire to have more than what we have?

### *The Danger of Self Sufficiency...*

3. Who is this section primarily written to? (4:13 and 5:1)
4. Is the issue of wealth only a problem for the rich? How are the poor affected by it?
5. What is the particular problem being addressed in 4:13-17?

6. What are the rich being criticised for in 5:1-6? Why would the rich be less likely to ask God for wisdom in the handling of their wealth?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. What is the future promise for the unwise wealthy: for their wealth and their person?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. In 5:7, the focus shifts to the poor. How can wealth be a stumbling block for the poor? What helps the poor in dealing with their circumstances?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. Why are the readers being urged to be patient in 5:7?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. How is Job a good example of how to use your tongue correctly in verses 10-12?



# 6 Prayer & Promise

James 5:12-20

## *Getting Started...*

1. It's because we don't pray with enough faith that we don't see more healing today. Discuss.
2. Do you think people are sent sickness by God as a punishment for their sin? Why/why not?

## *The promise of prayer...*

3. From James 5:12-20, what is the appropriate response in trouble?
4. What is the appropriate response when things are going well?
5. What is the appropriate response in times of sickness?
6. What will be promised for the sick person in verse 15?
7. What should the whole congregation do in verse 16?





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