

# Seeing Things God's Way

Studies from the book of James

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## Take Away Value...

- 11 What would it tell you about how wise you were if you, when faced with illness, made an appointment with a doctor before you prayed to God?
- 12 If we are aware of unchecked sin in our Christian community then what responsibility do we have to each other in respect of this? Do you think we exercise proper responsibility for one another around Trinity City when it comes to brothers and sisters who are falling away?
- 13 What changes will you make to your prayer life as a result of reading this passage?

8 Are sickness and sin linked? (vv15-16) (You may want to also look at John 9:1-3 and 1 Cor 11:29-32.)

9 Chapter 5 seems to be riddled with references about the coming judgement and persevering to the end. (eg v19) Most translators have opted for a translation that focuses on physical sickness in verses 13-16. However, the passage could easily be talking about people who are not so much physically sick but weak in their faith eg in v14 the word translated as 'sick' is the same one used in Romans 14:1 and 1 Cor 9:8 for a weakness in faith. In v15, a different word for sickness is used and only comes up on two other occasions in the NT ie Heb 12:3 and Rev 2:3. In both the other references it is a way of talking about those who are spiritually weary.

The word for saved in v15 is also used for spiritual restoration in Romans 5:9 and 1 Peter 1:5. In the light of these do you think the context fits for physical healing or the restoration of the person who is spiritually falling away?

10 Given the above, how does the example of Elijah tie in? Was Elijah's prayer to do with healing or spiritual restoration?

## How to get best value out of these studies...

Welcome to a new series of New Testament studies in the book of **James**. These Study Guides are designed in a three part format...

- 1 Opening questions to get you thinking are listed as **Appetisers**.
- 2 Those which get you to investigate the text are contained in the **Main Course**.
- 3 The **Take Away Value** section prompts you to reflect on what you've looked at and consider how it will change you and those in your group.

**If you're using these Guides in a Small Group**, it is vital that you have done preparatory work *before* you get to your meeting. This will be of great benefit not only to you, but to the other members of your group.

**If you're doing these studies individually**, make sure you let someone know you are doing so, and arrange a time to meet with them when you've finished (or even before) to let them know how your life is being changed by God's Word.

If you're after good commentaries or resources to complement your looking into the bible, speak to your Small Group Leader or one of the staff, and we'll try to be as helpful as possible. Most people aren't going to spend lots of dollars on theological works, so we're constantly on the look out for good quality titles that will result in money well spent.

We trust you'll find the guides helpful, and we welcome any feedback you can give us as you use them.

Always surround your time looking into God's Word with **prayer**, asking God to change your heart and life so that you – with God's people – might become more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Recommended Reading:**

Alec Motyer, *The Message of James*, The Bible Speaks Today, IVP 2000  
Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James*, NIGTC, The Paternoster Press, 1982.

## An introduction to James ...

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 or thesis that ties the letter together, it can be a bit difficult. At first glance James can seem like a letter whose range of pastoral concerns have been 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 run through the whole letter.

Another issue that is obvious when 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 to it which probably gives us a hint about who the letter was written to.

There are a couple of theological questions that have led to considerable ink being spilt. In chapter two the matter of faith and works arises. James seems to argue in terms that contradict what Paul says in the book of Romans. 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.

In the end though, 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.

## 7 Praying with Power

### James 5:7-20

#### Appetisers...

- 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?

#### Main Course...

- 3 What would you say are the main themes that have come up through the course of reading this letter? You may like to have a quick read through the letter and summarise these.
- 4 Why are the readers being urged to be patient in 5:7?
- 5 How is Job a good example of how to use your tongue correctly in verses 10-12?
- 6 Why does the wise person pray in all circumstances? (vv13-14)
- 7 The passage from verses 13-16 seems to make some amazing promises about healing. It would be good to get a few different translations of the bible and compare them at this point e.g. RSV, NIV, King James.

- 14 Can you think of a time when you were/are tempted to be jealous of someone who had more than you materially? How does the wisdom of God in this passage help you deal with this sort of problem?
- 15 Is the bible against wealth or the pleasure associated with it? So what is the heart of the issue then?
- 16 How should knowledge of the coming judgement shape the way we think about and use our wealth?
- 17 What practical steps can we take to actively 'store up treasure in heaven'?
- 18 We live in an affluent society. This can cause us to operate with a certain degree of arrogance. How can we avoid living independently of God?

## 1 Aiming at Maturity

### James 1:1-18

#### Appetisers...

- 1 One of the most difficult things for non - Christians to come to terms with about the Christian faith is that there is the problem of evil in the world. An issue that gets squarely raised in chapter one of James is the problem of suffering (trials/testing). Here, the Christian is instructed about how to face trials. But why should Christians suffer? Shouldn't God protect us from this?
- 2 Spend some time thinking about the trials that are common for Christians to face in our society. Maybe talk about some of the difficulties you are facing.
- 3 What are some of the biggest temptations that face Christians in Adelaide today?

#### Main Course...

*NOTE: in this passage the words trial and tempt are both used. However, it is important to note that the same Greek word is translated differently in each instance. This is a legitimate thing to do. In verses 2 & 12, the word trial is used to express the notion of an external struggle e.g. poverty, sickness, persecution etc. In verses 13 & 14, the word is translated as temptation and refers to an internal difficulty we struggle with, e.g. discrimination against the poor etc. The two can be linked but we should pick up the distinction in the passage.*

- 4 Why do you think James writes to "the twelve tribes in the dispersion"? Who is he most likely addressing the letter to? Why?

- 5 How is it possible to face trials with joy? What does it mean? eg should we throw a party every time our house burns down? What is the source of the joy?
- 6 How do trials contribute to my growing to maturity (v4)?
- 7 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.
- 8 In v6, it speaks about asking God for wisdom and not doubting. The trouble is most of us have doubts at least to some extent every time we ask God for anything. What do you think the difference here is between having personal doubts, (which every Christian has,) and being double - minded (v8)? (You may like to look also at James 4:8 where double - mindedness is referred to again.)
- 9 In verses 9-11, a trial is mentioned. What is it? What is the poor man tempted to think about himself? What is the rich man tempted to think about himself? How will God's wisdom help us deal with these wrong views?
- 10 What is a wrong way to respond to trials? e.g. v13 What is the correct way? If we respond to trials the right way, what will be the result? (1:3, 4, 12)

- 7 What is the content of the bragging and boasting spoken of in 4:16? How does this tie in with the humility and submission spoken of earlier in James 4?
- 8 What are the rich being criticised for in 5:1-6?
- 9 Why would the rich be less likely to ask God for wisdom in the handling of their wealth?
- 10 What is the future promise for the unwise wealthy –for their wealth and their person?
- 11 In 5:7, the focus shifts to the poor. How can wealth be a stumbling block for the poor?
- 12 What helps the poor in dealing with their circumstances?

**Take Away Value...**

- 13 What makes someone wealthy or poor? How can we get an accurate feel for where we are in the scheme of things?

# 6 Wealth and Poverty from God's Perspective

## James 4:13 - 5:11

### Appetisers...

- 1 Have a quick read through 4:13-5:11. What do you think was the main problem among the Christian community from this passage?
- 2 We live in an incredibly wealthy society and yet statistics indicate that many marriages fail because of financial pressures. How could it be that we have more than any other generation and yet it still isn't enough?
- 3 What are some of the reasons that we desire to have more than what we have?

### Main Course...

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

- 11 Why do you think it is important to understand that no one is tempted by God? (v13)

### Take Away Value...

- 12 How can we encourage each other when it comes to putting into practice the wisdom of God?
- 13 Do you think that the trial spoken of here in chapter 1, ie the way we view rich and poor, is a problem for us? In what way? How do we need to rethink our attitudes and change our practices?
- 14 Trials are by definition difficult and painful times. How then can we see them as pure joy? How do we help each other do this?
- 15 Do you think there is any link between God's wisdom and our desires? ie Will having the wisdom of God change our desires?
- 16 Should our joy be evident to others when we are facing trials? You may like to look at some instances in Acts e.g. Acts 5:41ff.
- 17 In what sort of situations are you tempted to give up hope and lack the wisdom and perspective of God?

## 2 Seeing People God's Way

### James 1:19 - 2:13

This section focuses our attention on the importance of 'listening' to the word of God and then putting it into practice. In particular we are asked to consider the way we treat others and whether this reflects the faith we profess in Jesus.

#### Appetisers...

- 1 What do you find is the most effective way for you to learn things? eg books, hands-on, etc.
  
- 2 Most of us come from families where different values were emphasised. Spend time in your group giving people the opportunity to give a value that was impressed upon them as they were growing up. eg the importance of saving, education, a good job, family etc.

#### Main Course...

- 3 In 1:21 we are instructed to "humbly accept the word planted in you". What does this mean? What could stop us receiving this word? How does this relate to what we saw in our previous study on the "double-minded person"?
  
- 4 In verses 22 - 25 we are told to do what the word says. If we don't put what we know from God's word into action, how does that affect our ability to humbly receive the word?
  
- 5 What do you think is the "perfect law that brings freedom"? (You may want to look at 2:8 and 2:12).

7 Why do we get told about failed prayer in 4:2-3? (cf Ps. 66:16) How does this fit with what is said in James 1:5-8?

8 In 4:6-10, instructions are given on how to avoid Christian fighting. What are the keys? What is humility and submission here in verses 6-7?

#### Take Away Value...

- 9 What does it tell us about our own motivation if we are involved in disputes with other Christians?
  
- 10 When someone does something to hurt or offend you, do you find your immediate response is to pray? Why/why not?
  
- 11 How does 'humbly accepting the implanted word' (1:21) help us in our relationships with each other in the Christian community?
  
- 12 How should what we covered in this study affect our prayer life?
  
- 13 When you are aware of Christian brothers and sisters disputing, what role do we have to play in these situations?

We should obviously be asking God to give us wisdom. How will we know if he is answering our prayer?

## 5 Why do Christians Fight?

### James 3:13 - 4:12

#### Appetisers...

- 1 Think back over some church fights you have witnessed (or participated in!) What have they been over? As you reflect on them, would you say that they were generated by theology or personality, or a combination of the two?
  
- 2 The staff and leaders of the church of Trinity City decide that choruses are not 'of sufficient theological substance' and therefore decide to ban them from the church. Immediately, a fairly large group starts to grumble quietly about the decision. You know that a large number are even talking about leaving the church over the issue. What do you do about it?

#### Main Course...

- 3 In 3:13-18 two types of wisdom are contrasted. What are the two wisdoms and how are they different?
  
- 4 What causes fights among Christians? (3:16, 4:1-3)
  
- 5 What are the qualities of a Christian community that lead to peace? (3:17ff)
  
- 6 If we are disputing among ourselves what does this tell us about who we are ultimately serving? (4:4)

- 6 Why shouldn't we show favouritism? (2:1ff)
  
- 7 Often people say "we mustn't judge!" Is that what is being said here? In what ways are we supposed to judge? What sort of judgement are we to avoid?
  
- 8 How does God treat the rich and the poor? (2:5-7) Why is it foolish/unwise for us to treat the rich and poor differently based on their assets?
  
- 9 How does favouritism go to the heart of the 'Royal law'?

#### Take Away Value...

- 10 How does a humble acceptance of God's word prevent us from being double minded?
  
- 11 Think through some practical ideas on how we can allow God's word to shape us. How can we put these things into practice?

- 12 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? eg we have a governor's pew in our church building. Is it wrong when the governor visits to give them their front row pew?
- 13 What is the right attitude to have when it comes to others? i.e. how should we 'see' them? What is the point in verses 12-13 about mercy and judgement?

- 15 When do you find you are most tempted to slander people? What is the heart problem that tends to give rise to this destructive speech?
- 16 How does James 1:21 help us to challenge our tendency to speak inappropriately?

- 7 Does the tongue reflect what is in our hearts or 'direct' what is in our hearts? (vv3-5)
- 8 Verse 8 seems to paint a very pessimistic view of the ability of anyone to control their tongue. What do you think?
- 9 What is the rationale in v9 for why we are not allowed to 'curse' others?
- 10 In what way can our tongue be described as full of deadly poison? (v8)
- 11 What reason is provided for controlling the tongue in verse 11?

### Take Away Value...

- 12 What are some practical suggestions that will help us to address our failure to speak appropriately?
- 13 Say that a Christian friend passes on to you a confidential negative thing said to them by a third party about you. How do you handle this with the friend who told you? What about the person who gossiped to the person who passed it on to you?
- 14 Australians tend to 'knock' each other as a way of showing affection. What do you think about this particular use of the tongue?

## 3 Faith or Works

### James 2:14-26

This passage has been a controversial section of the Bible because it seems to pit James against Paul when it comes to the issues of faith and works. James emphasises the need for works to complete faith. Paul on the other hand pushes the fact that we are justified by faith alone. eg compare James 2:24 with Romans 3:28. While the vocabulary is similar, the two books are addressing different questions and therefore their messages are compatible.

### Appetisers...

- 1 What are some of the different ideas people come up with when 'faith' is raised?
- 2 Many believe that God exists. Why doesn't this belief save them?

### Main Course...

- 3 After reading 2:14 what would you say is the likely problem that has caused James to write this passage?
- 4 What is the difference between living faith and dead faith? How do you know if yours is alive? (2:15-17)
- 5 What is defective about demonic faith? (v19)
- 6 How does the account of Abraham illustrate true faith? (It would be good to read Genesis 22)

7 Rahab was a prostitute living in the town of Jericho when the people of God were about to invade. Why is she an example of faith? What was the difference between the 'faith' of Rahab and the 'faith' of her fellow countrymen? (Joshua 2:8-13) What was the difference in the outcome? (Joshua 6)

### Take Away Value...

- 8 What implications does this passage have for our community relationships - the way we treat each other? How will our faith work itself out in our relationships? Can you think of particular areas where we are not good at working out our faith with each other?
- 9 Is this passage 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?
- 10 How will what we read about here affect our thinking about evangelism?
- 11 Where are the areas in your life where you could identify a gap between what you 'believe' and the way in which you are living? What steps can you take to address these?
- 12 How does true faith fit in with the Royal law back in 2:8?
- 13 Faith is costly. Discuss.

## 4 Taming the Tongue

### James 3:1-12

#### Appetisers...

- 1 How should we assess Christian maturity?
- 2 Normally, the way people speak doesn't seem to figure in our thinking about Christian maturity unless they swear all the time or have a gross gossip problem. Why don't we see the way we talk as being as significant as James paints it here in James 3?
- 3 When do you find you are tempted to 'bend the truth'? What motivates your action at these points?

#### Main Course...

- 4 Why do you think teachers are judged more harshly? (vv1-2)
- 5 Given what was said about faith in our last study, do you think that a teacher is judged just according to their words, or is their lifestyle taken into account as well? What from the text or the wider New Testament would tend to confirm this view?
- 6 What do ships, horses and forest fires have in common? (vv3-6)