HOME CHURCH LESSON SERIES

The Book of James

Faith That Works

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

James 1:22

A Home Church Resources Lesson Series

homechurchresources.org

Who We Are

We are a Christian ministry that helps people start home churches through providing support to potential and current home church leaders. You don't have to spend years on a church staff and have college degrees in ministry (although they are welcome to help!) to be qualified. You can be a mechanic and start a home church…a teacher and start a home church…retired and start a home church.

We are here to help you get the support you or others you know need to get started!

How We Help

We provide the resources needed to help you get started. This includes:

- An online community for encouragement
- Online training that combines our best resources in one streamlined pathway
- Dozens of PDF tools to equip you to succeed
- Coaching to tackle the specific issues you face.
- Training for your home church members so they have ministry skills and disciplines

You can join a community where people interact, encourage and pray for each other as they live out the home church planting life together.

All of this is done through an online learning community where you can quickly and easily connect with all of the resources we have developed that are helping home church leaders around the world.

How to Start

Anyone can start, no cost, to start a home church. Our Prepwork will help you lay a biblical foundation for a home church and assembly the building blocks you need for a solid foundation to start a home church. You will also learn a few things to help you prayerfull consider if starting a home church is right for you in this season. This Prepwork comes with a Field Guide, which is a fillable PDF, so that when you are done you will have a guidebook in your hand that you have created, specific to the vision you are finding in scripture and through prayer.

Take the Prepwork Here

James 1:1-8 Study Guide

The letter of James is written by Jesus' half brother "to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations." (James 1:1).

- "the twelve tribes" is a reference to Israel and so the letter is addressed to Jewish Christians.
- "scattered among the nations" is a reference to Jews that never returned to Israel after the exile and instead settled in other lands. This is what we talked about in class when we talked about their being Jews/synagogues all over the world that made the spread of Christianity easier in the first century.

What strange thing does James tell them to have joy over? (1:2)

James 1:2 implies that his audience is undergoing some serious trials and James is writing to encourage them so that instead of having their faith be undermined, their faith can be strengthened.

What does James say is the goal of perseverance? (1:4)

It was typical in the ancient world for Jews and Christians to face local persecution due to their faith. James is probably not referring to official Roman persecution that happened in later years. Christians and Jews alike had customs and beliefs that were very foreign to the world around them that made them the target of persecution. For instance, Romans didn't understand worshipping only one God and saw them as unpatriotic for not worshipping the emperor. They also believed Christians were incestuous because they called even their own spouses "brother" and "sister." Some believed Christians were cannibals because they came together each week to eat the body and drink the blood of the Lord. These matters of living in a totally pagan society takes wisdom (James 1:5)

What does James say someone who asks God and then doubts the answer is like? (1:6-8)

Have you ever doubted that God would answer your prayer? Have you ever prayed a prayer and was certain that God would answer but it seems like He never did? What do you do with that?

- God answers yes, no, or not yet. The answer God gives to our prayers is not always seen immediately because His timing is better than our own.

Have you ever prayed something and later found out it would have been terrible if God had said "Yes" to your prayer?

What trials are you going through know that you believe God could be using to help your faith grow?

How does seeing the struggle from that perspective make it easier to bear?

James 1:9-11 Study Guide

James seems to shift his focus from wisdom to the rich and poor in verse 9. As Hank mentioned in class last Sunday, some people refer to James as the Proverbs of the New Testament. Like the book of Proverbs, some times the topics covered in James don't seem very connected or are very loosely connected with each other. James writing about trials and wisdom in 1:1-8 is connected with his discussion of rich and poor in 1:9-11.

James just finished talking about wisdom (1:4-6). One of the topics seen over and over in Proverbs is handling of money, boasting, and treatment of the poor.

How does James switch the position of the rich and the poor compared to the way the world operates?

James implies that the humble poor will outlast the arrogant rich by saying that the arrogant rich will "pass away like a wild flower." (1:9-10) *The question arises…which is more important riches on earth or living a life that will last. Why?*

What is it about riches that makes it difficult to keep a godly perspective?

What blessing is there in poverty that maybe we, as such a rich nation, don't always appreciate like we should?

"Both poverty and wealth are tests of character-they are trials to be endured and properly responded to." – Luke Timothy Johnson

How does this quote apply to what James writes in these verses?

How does this tie this discussion of rich and poor, humble and arrogant back into James' discussion of trials in 1:2-4?

James 1:12-18 Study Guide

James comes back to talking about talking about difficulties in life. This time he gives us a little more information. He says that our testing does more than produce perseverance. He says that it results in something greater.

What greater thing does undergoing trial lead us to? (1:12)

It helps us undergo trials and difficulties if we just know why. Knowing why helps us realize that what we are going through is worth it and that there are greater things in store for our life. So when we overcome trials it leads to life. But then James talks about the other side of the coin. When we give into temptation is leads to death (1:15). That doesn't mean that every time we sin we are lost. He is talking about the natural course of life and the seriousness of sin in our lives.

So where does temptation come from? Where does it not come from?

Temptation does not come from God but God can use our rejection of sin to increase our faith.
Instead of temptation, what does come from God? (1:16-18)

How do you deal with temptation? Do you look for a way out or a way to not fall into sin? **Read 1 Cor 10:13**.

What does God do to help us deal with temptation?

What are some things you struggle with and what might be some alternatives God is putting in your path to keep you from sinning?

James 1:19-27 Study Guide

In this last section of chapter one, James has a lot to say about the Christian life in relation to the words we use. He starts with three things: listening, speaking, and anger. We have all known people who are slow to listen, quick to speak and quick to get angry. It is clear the three are related. In 1:20-21 he ties all of this to righteous living.

How would ridding our lives of "moral filth" and "evil" help us live righteously?

If we fill our lives up with evil, it is only natural that it will show up in the way we speak and how quickly we get angry with our brothers. Our words and our temper are two quick ways to take our spiritual temperature to see if we are spiritually sick. *When you think about your temper and your words toward others, do they appear to show you to be healthy or sick spiritually?*

What things need adjusting in your life to enable you to have "the righteous life that God desires"? (1:20)

The next few verses (1:22-25) a re about listening to God. Not only are we quick to listen to other people, we should be quick to listen to God. We show we are listening best when we act on what we hear.

What advice does James give in 1:22 that relates to that?

How does acting on what we hear show we are listening?

What result does James say comes from looking at God's word (law) and doing it? (1:25)

How can someone be "very religious" and have a filthy mouth?

Last he mentions the kind of religion God is looking for. This is paired against a religion that is so impotent that it doesn't seem to affect the way we live and speak (1:26).

What three things does James make a priority for the Christian life in 1:27? And *Do we do a very good job in those three areas?*

James 2:1-13 Study Guide

Background: The first Christians lived in a world that was based on a system of honor and shame. Honor was due to those who were able to benefit you. Those who would try to disgrace you or bring your status down were to be shamed. It was all a status game just like we have today. All the way back then people were trying to get ahead of each other and value each other based on what someone else could or could not do for you.

James starts off with a command. He tells them not to show favoritism toward certain people (the more wealthy in particular). James reminds them that they are "believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ."

Why would it be hard to show favoritism to people if we remember who we are as Christ followers?

James gives two examples of a rich and poor man who walk into church or their home. *Why would someone show favor toward a rich man and disdain toward a poor man in the manner James describes?*

James says that when you differentiate between people based on their wealth you become judges.

But not good judges…what kind of judges? (2:4)?

In verse 5 James tells them how things tend to go with the rich and the poor. *Why might the poor have an easier time embracing the kingdom of God than the rich?*

James' point is that we judge by earthly standards we come to a different conclusion than God does. *Do you think someone treated like the poor man in 2:3 would feel insulted? Why?* And yet it is the rich, in their day, who were causing them more harm than good (2:6-7).

James appeals to all men and women as "neighbor" in 2:8. Rich and poor are to be loved alike and when we start seeing people on a level playing field we will treat them right.

How does favoritism keep us from "loving our neighbor"?

Last, James appeals to us to see others through the lens of mercy. When we judge others harshly, the mercy we hope for is forfeit.

How have you seen "mercy triumph over judgment" lately?

What areas of your life could use more mercy?

James 2:14-19 Study Guide

In this section James discusses deeds as the outward expression or evidence of our faith. James' point is that living and active faith in us will show itself through the way we live. Imagine believing in Jesus and claiming to be a Christian but having never changed the way you lived since you were baptized.

Why would that not make sense?

James is not saying that we are saved as a reward to our deeds. He is not saying God will save us if we do enough good. He does say that living and active faith will be demonstrated by visible deeds and a difference in the way we live. James uses the example meeting someone who is hungry and needing clothing.

What does James say is an unacceptable way to treat that person?

What makes that unacceptable for a Christian to treat someone that way?

The way we act reflects what is on the inside. Someone who treats another person poorly does not understand just how valuable that other person is to God and shows that their faith is weak or non-existent.

What does James say that faith without action is?

That would imply that a living, active, and vibrant faith would be one that is outwardly visible and accompanied by action. Jesus was not a well wisher. Jesus was a man of action and his action was based on his mission and how he valued others.

What does it mean to be a "disciple of Jesus Christ"?

If Jesus was a man of action, then we are to be people of action. If Jesus embraced the poor and hurting then we too need to embrace the poor and hurting. When our faith produces action, we are showing that we understand what it means to have faith in Christ and be a follower/disciple of Christ.

What areas of your faith need strengthened?

In what areas do you believe your faith is strong?

What opportunities do you have before you to let your faith show through with good deeds?

James 2:20-26 Study Guide

In these verses James continues to talk about how faith and works goes hand in hand. He uses two examples. The first example is Abraham.

What did God tell Abraham to do? (James 2:21 & Genesis 22:2)

How would that be a tremendous test of faith?

Previously, God promised Abraham that he would have a son and that son would have children that would eventually turn into a great nation (Genesis 15:1-6). Abraham believed this promises as it says in Genesis 15:6. So when God told Abraham to take Isaac, who did not yet have children of his own, and sacrifice him Abraham had enough faith to do what God said.

What would it say about Abraham's faith if he said, "God I believe your promise that I will have descendants through Isaac…but I don't believe you enough to sacrifice him like you told me to do."?

Elsewhere we learn that Abraham believed so strongly in God that he figured God would raise Isaac from the dead if he sacrificed him (Hebrews 11:18-19). Faith i s only faith if it is active. Faith must produce new actions within us.

Do you believe the promises God has made to you? Do you believe he will forgive your sins? Do you believe he will resurrect you from the dead in the last day? Do you believe just in your head…or does can your belief be seen in the things you do?

The second example of faith in action James points to is Rahab (James 2:25).

What did Rahab do that showed she had faith?

What if Rahab had just thought, "well, God can save you. I better not involve myself in this." The spies in Joshua 2 & 6 would have died. Remember what James said in 2:16 – we can't just say to poor people to be well fed and clothed. We have to take action and realize that we have responsibility because of our faith in God and Christ.

What responsibilities do you have because you believe in Christ?

What areas have you been quick to take action in and which areas have been slower?

James 3:1-12 Study Guide

In the first two verses James talks about the possibility of being condemned.

Why do you think James would say teachers will be held to a higher standard?

In 3:2 he says that the tongue can get us in a lot of trouble or keep us out of trouble.

What does James say is the result of someone who is in control of the words they use (the tongue)?

Next come three examples James uses to help us get a handle on just how powerful the tongue really is. He mentions a powerful horse that is controlled by a small piece of metal in its mouth, a huge ship that can change course based on one of its smallest parts and a small spark that starts small but can burn an entire forest.

How is our tongue like each of these three things?

Bit in a horse's mouth:

Ship's Rudder:

Spark that starts a forest fire:

What does he say the tongue is full of in 3:8? How is the tongue like that?

There are many ways our tongue can be like a wild animal. Some struggle with cursing or profanity. Others struggle with gossip. Still others have an issue with boasting about themselves.

In what ways have you found it difficult to keep control of the words you choose to say?

Notice how that last question was worded. Our words are a choice we make and it is important we chose our words to be thoughtful and considerate of how they might impact others.

Have you ever typed an email only to read and re-read it to make sure it comes across right and you don't upset the person you are writing to? Why is it important we choose our words wisely?

Last, he mentions the possible hypocrisy of our words. From the same mouth comes sweet praises to God and bitter curses and hostility toward others.

Have you ever wrestled with that? In what ways this week can you make a conscious effort to let your words be a blessing to others?

James 3:13-18 Study Guide

James continues his talk about living a wise life (see back to 1:5) by talking about the kind of life wise people live. The type of life we live shows either of two types of wisdom. There is wisdom that comes from God/heaven (3:17) *and then there is "wisdom" that comes from where? (3:15)*

Notice the contrast between the two types of lives.

How does the person with godly wisdom live? (3:13, 17)

How does the person with worldly "wisdom" live? (3:14-16)

It is important we ask ourselves which type of wisdom we have. The way to tell is which of the two lists you just made sounds more like your life?

Why do you think it is so easy for Christians to look, talk, and act just like the rest of the world?

Being humble and leading a good life are not modeled very well for us in the movies or on television. People just don't seem to think there is much adventure or excitement in that.

Do you think that Christians can live wise, humble lives and still have fun and excitement? How?

Look at the list in 3:17 and write (or say to the group) next to each characteristic of godly wisdom how you see it in your life:

Purity -

Peace-loving -

Considerate –

Submissive –

Merciful –

Sincere –

How do you feel like you can be a peacemaker right where you live and with the people you are around most often?

James 4:1-6 Study Guide

Isn't it amazing that James is writing to a group of Christians and refers to fights and quarrels among them. It sounds pretty serious! So he is going to address the kind of attitude and spirit within us that would lead people to treat each other this way.

Where does James say these types of quarrels come from? (4:1)

Then where does he say those desires result in? (4:2)

There is one word that stands out in the list of things evil desires lead to in the life of a Christian. It is in 4:2. "You kill and you covet." I don't know if there were any murderers in the church. But James seems to be talking like this is going on all over the place. Maybe he is saying that by the way you view others you are basically murdering them with your thoughts. See Matthew 5:21-22.

Why is being angry with someone on level with murdering them?

When we treat people like they don't matter it is as if they are dead to us. James says in 4:2-3 that the solution is to turn to God with our desires and to make sure they are for the proper things. If our desires line up with God's desires then surely there won't be room for fighting, quarreling and murdering each other.

How does James say we should ask God? (4:3)

How does that prevent us from asking for selfish things?

Last in this section he talks about the separation between the world and God.

What do you think it means to be a friend of the world?

James is not just talking about being friends with people in the world. He is talking about being friendly toward the way the world operates. James says that is basically committing adultery against God (4:4) because it shows we don't trust God's way of doing things and lose our commitment to God by attaching ourselves to the world.

Last, what good thing does God provide to make up for our failures? (4:6)

James 4:7-12 Study Guide

In this section James is talking about the need for repentance, especially due to being judgmental toward other Christians.

What two things does James tell them to do in verse 7? How are they related/connected?
1.
2.

Why would submitting to God lead to being able to resist the devil?

Verse 8 presupposes that some reading this letter are far off from God that they would need to come near to Him again. In verse 8, James gets pretty serious. He calls them "sinners" and that they need to clean up their act! He calls them "double-minded." Pair that with what he just wrote about their need to be near to God but far from the devil and it sure seems like there were people in his audience who were trying to "have their cake and eat it too." They were trying to have blessings from God while still being "of the world" or pulled in by the desires of the world.

Why is that a dangerous and impossible thing to try to do?

Verse 9 shows just how serious we should treat sin. If we are in sin, we should realize the seriousness of our situation and bring us to tears. Apparently they had not been seeing sin so seriously. Not only are they to submit to God (vs. 7),

W*hat else does James tell them to do in verse 10?*

Based on these next verses, it seems one of their most serious issues was how they were dealing with each other.

What does it sound like they were doing to each other?

What things does James remind them of to motivate them to view their fellow Christians through a lens of respect and love?

How does being reminded that others are our neighbor help us treat them right? (see vs. 12 and Matthew 22:39)

James 4:13-17 Study Guide

This section in James is about boasting as if we know what tomorrow holds for our lives. It is an interesting section because obviously God wants us to make plans and to try to be successful in his kingdom and yet if we do that in a way that we lean more on ourselves and our own planning abilities than we lean on Him, we will have problems.

What are some ways you can lean on God as you plan for tomorrow?

What are some signs that would show you that you are leaning on yourself more than on God?

What would it look like in your life to give more dependence on God with your plans and future?

James says we are a "mist" *how does that put your life in perspective?*

James says that in our planning we should seek out the will of the Lord (vs. 15). I think it is interesting that he says failing to consider God in our plans is boasting. Read again 4:13 to hear what the people were saying. On the surface it doesn't sound like a boast…but the attitude that lies behind the statement assumes either they know more than God about what they needed or they weren't that interested in what God thought about their plans.

What does James think about that kind of boasting?

The last verse is one we quote a lot – "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." This verse feels very much out of place here. In a way, this seems to go against what James just wrote…isn't it possible to plan to do good even though we don't know whether or not we will be around to get it done?

What do you think is James' point in saying this at this point in the letter?

I believe James is contrasting the boasting and bragging of 4:13 with doing good instead. God is never upset when we plan to do holy, righteous things because in those very acts we show that we lean on God and depend on him.

James 5:1-6 Study Guide

In this section James has some words to say toward those who exploit others to make themselves wealthy and/or those who have wealth but fail to use it in a way that honors God. If you read 5:1 by itself, without consider the specifics he gives to follow you would come to the conclusion that riches are evil and that all rich people will face severe judgment. But if you read the rest of this section there is more to the story.

5:4-6 tells why that harsh judgment will be brought upon them. Let's look at these first and then see the result:

- 5:4 – Oppressing those who have earned their wages
- 5:4 – Those they ripped off cry out to God and God hears
- 5:5 – They have placed a high priority on self-indulgence at the expense of those who have made them wealthy (the workers)
- 5:6 – they were murderers. Not sure if this is literal or figurative but it seems pretty literal here.

5:1-3 tell what will happen to them and their wealth:

- 5:1 - They will wail in misery
- 5:2 – Their wealth will rot away
- 5:3 – they themselves will be consumed just like their wealth

Clearly James is not teaching that all rich people are evil or self-indulgent.

What is he teaching us about wealth?

James is telling us that wealth has to be used ethically or else it will testify against us. To put things in perspective, we often think of wealthy people in the U.S. as having a huge home, nice cars, and at least $1 million+ in the bank. But by the world's standards, even the poorest American is wealthy. If you are reading this on a computer that has an internet connection, in a place with electricity and you know how to read English, you are in the top 5% of the world's population when it comes to wealth. So the call is not just on the few among us who have a tremendous amount of wealth relative to the rest of us. This call is to all of us to use what we have ethically, wisely, and in a way that pleases God.

In what ways can you use what you have to be a blessing to others?

In what ways has it been a challenge to you to use your wealth to bless others?

What is hardest for you to let go of, money, time, or talents?

James 5:7-12 Study Guide

Here James talks about the blessing that comes from persevering through troubles. He gives us reason to be patient.

What reason does James mention a couple of times that gives us good reason to persevere and wait?

On the positive side He gives the illustration of a farmer who has to wait in order to be rewarded. He can't throw seed on the ground and the same day harvest his reward. He has to wait.

How are we like that and what blessings do we have to wait on?

On the negative side, James gives us a little warning about the judgment that comes on those who grumble against each other. It sounds like the people he was writing too certainly had their issues and if we lived then and there we would understand a little more why James is telling them these things specifically. He goes on to give an example of someone who was blessed through persecution and who showed perseverance.

Who does he mention? (James 5:11)

What trials did he face? (Job 1:12-22, Job 2:1-10)

How was he blessed? (Job 42:10-16).

In 5:11 he says there is blessing that comes through perseverance. On the flip side, we can rob ourselves of a blessing if we decide not to persevere. Remember what he said in 5:8…"the Lord's coming is near"

How does lacking perseverance under trial result in possibly missing some things God has in store? For instance, our faith will never grow if we never have anything to persevere through.

James 5:13-20 Study Guide

This last section is one of the most famous in James. In this section James gives us a series of things to do under various circumstances. The one that comes up the most is prayer.

What things does James encourage them to pray about in these verses?

James is saying prayer is effective. It is hard to tell because sometimes we pray to God and don't see instant results and sometimes never get an answer. Sometimes we pray for sick people but do we really expect God to heal them through a prayer more than through a doctor or a medication? Obviously God can use doctors but the point is, our faith is in God and so we pray to him for help and healing. James is saying in 5:15 that prayer really does work…there can be a visible, physical result because of God answering our prayers for the sick.

What other kind of healing does he say prayer can bring in 5:16? Do you pray more for physical healing or spiritual healing (from sin)? Why?

"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (5:16). That is one of the most quoted verses in James. Obviously this is true of women as well and not just of men.

How does it make you feel that when you pray, something really is happening?

He concludes talking about bringing reconciliation of other people with God.

What is the result of bringing someone to repentance (5:20)?

Does this motivate you to talk to the people you know who need God the most?

Concluding questions:
What has stood out most to you in the book of James?

What is something you learn that changes the way you see God, others, or yourself?

What one thing can you put into practice that is in line with what James has taught us in this letter?

Who We Are

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