

Bible Study on James *5 lessons,* *one chapter each*

The letter of James is the Bible's most practical book: short, direct and full of pictures from everyday life. It was written by James, a leader of the church in Jerusalem traditionally identified as the brother of Jesus, to believers scattered among the nations. This Bible study on James takes one chapter a week for five weeks: joy in trials and doing the word, faith that shows itself in deeds, taming the tongue, humility before God, and patience and prayer.

James is a good first book study for a new group, a men's or women's study, or a student group. Each lesson prints the whole chapter from the Berean Standard Bible, then gives the big idea, notes for the leader, questions to observe, understand and apply, a memory verse and a prayer.

Be doers of the word, and not hearers only. Otherwise, you are deceiving yourselves.

— James 1:22 (BSB)

LESSON 1 OF 5

Trials, wisdom and doing the word

Read James 1:1-27

The big idea: Trials test and grow our faith; God gives wisdom generously and every good gift; we must not only hear His word but do it.

Read

¹ James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes of the Dispersion: Greetings. ² Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you encounter trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Allow perseverance to finish its work, so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵ Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But he must ask in faith, without doubting, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸ He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. ⁹ The brother in humble circumstances should exult in his high position. ¹⁰ But the one who is rich should exult in his low position, because he will pass away like a flower of the field. ¹¹ For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its flower falls and its beauty is lost. So too, the rich man will fade away in the midst of his pursuits. ¹² Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him. ¹³ When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone. ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when by his own evil desires he is lured away and enticed. ¹⁵ Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, with whom there is no change or shifting shadow. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we would be a kind of firstfruits of His creation. ¹⁹ My beloved brothers, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, ²⁰ for man's anger does not bring about the righteousness that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and every expression of evil, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save your souls. ²² Be doers of the word, and not hearers only. Otherwise, you are deceiving yourselves. ²³ For anyone who hears the word but does not carry it out is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror, ²⁴ and after observing himself goes away

and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom, and continues to do so—not being a forgetful hearer, but an effective doer—he will be blessed in what he does. ²⁶ If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not bridle his tongue, he deceives his heart and his religion is worthless. ²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

– James 1:1-27 (BSB)

Notes

James begins with a surprising instruction: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you encounter trials of many kinds.” Not because trials are good in themselves, but because the testing of faith develops perseverance and makes us mature. When we do not know how to get through, we can ask God for wisdom, and He “gives generously to all without finding fault.”

The chapter’s key line is verse 22: “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.” Hearing without doing is like looking in a mirror and forgetting your own face. James ends by defining real religion: controlling the tongue, caring for orphans and widows in their distress, and keeping oneself unpolluted by the world.

Questions

OBSERVE What does the passage say?

1. How does James tell us to consider trials, and why (vv. 2–4)?
2. What does James say about God in verses 5, 13 and 17?
3. What picture does James use for someone who hears the word but does not do it (vv. 23–24)?

UNDERSTAND What does it mean?

1. How can a trial be a reason for joy without pretending it does not hurt?
2. Where does temptation come from, according to verses 13–15?
3. Why does James connect religion with the tongue and with orphans and widows (vv. 26–27)?

APPLY What will I do with it?

1. What trial are you in right now? Ask God for wisdom in it this week.
2. Which recent sermon or Bible reading have you heard but not yet done? Do one thing about it.
3. Who is an ‘orphan or widow in distress’ near you? How could you care for them?

Memory verse

Be doers of the word, and not hearers only. Otherwise, you are deceiving yourselves.

— James 1:22 (BSB)

Pray

Father of the heavenly lights, every good and perfect gift comes from You. Give me joy in trials and the wisdom I lack. Make me quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger. Let me be a doer of Your word, and not a hearer only. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

LESSON 2 OF 5

Faith that works

Read James 2:1–26

The big idea: Faith in Christ shows itself in how we treat people: no favoritism toward the rich, mercy

for the poor, and deeds that prove faith is alive.

Read

¹ My brothers, as you hold out your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, do not show favoritism. ² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. ³ If you lavish attention on the man in fine clothes and say, “Here is a seat of honor,” but say to the poor man, “You must stand” or “Sit at my feet,” ⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers: Has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom He promised those who love Him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the noble name by which you have been called? ⁸ If you really fulfill the royal law stated in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ Whoever keeps the whole law but stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹ For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. ¹² Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom. ¹³ For judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment. ¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith, but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you tells him, “Go in peace; stay warm and well fed,” but does not provide for his physical needs, what good is that? ¹⁷ So too, faith by itself, if it does not result in action, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one. Good for you! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. ²⁰ O foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is worthless? ²¹ Was not our father Abraham justified by what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith was working with his actions, and

his faith was perfected by what he did. ²³ And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called a friend of God. ²⁴ As you can see, a man is justified by his deeds and not by faith alone. ²⁵ In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute justified by her actions when she welcomed the spies and sent them off on another route? ²⁶ As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

– James 2:1-26 (BSB)

Notes

James starts with a scene from church: a rich man is given a seat of honor and a poor man is told to stand. That favoritism contradicts faith in “our glorious Lord Jesus Christ” and breaks the royal law, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” God has chosen “the poor of this world to be rich in faith.”

Then James asks, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith, but has no deeds?” He is not contradicting Paul, who says we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Paul answers how we are made right with God; James answers what real faith looks like. Living faith works. “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

Questions

OBSERVE What does the passage say?

1. What happens in the meeting described in verses 2–4?
2. What is the royal law (v. 8)?
3. What two examples of faith shown by deeds does James give (vv. 21–25)?

UNDERSTAND What does it mean?

1. Why is favoritism incompatible with faith in Jesus?
2. What does James mean by ‘faith by itself’ in verse 17?
3. How do James 2 and Ephesians 2:8-10 fit together?

APPLY What will I do with it?

1. Who are you tempted to treat as more important than others? How could you honor someone overlooked this week?
2. Is there a need you have only answered with words (v. 16)? Meet it with action.
3. What is one deed that would show your faith is alive this week?

Memory verse

So too, faith by itself, if it does not result in action, is dead.

– James 2:17 (BSB)

Pray

Lord Jesus, forgive me for the times I have shown favoritism and answered needs with words alone. Make my faith alive and working. Help me love my neighbor as myself, and show my faith by what I do. Amen.

LESSON 3 OF 5

Taming the tongue

Read James 3:1-18

The big idea: The tongue is small but powerful, able to bless or destroy; true wisdom from above is shown in pure, peaceable, gentle living.

Read

¹ Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ² We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to control his whole body. ³ When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can guide the whole animal. ⁴ Consider ships as well. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot is inclined.

⁵ In the same way, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it boasts of great things. Consider how small a spark sets a great forest ablaze. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of wickedness among the parts of the body. It pollutes the whole person, sets the course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. ⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ⁸ but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With the tongue we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, this should not be! ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers, can a fig tree grow olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. ¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good conduct, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you harbor bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast in it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such wisdom does not come from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every evil practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peace-loving, gentle, accommodating, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere. ¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace reap the fruit of righteousness.

— James 3:1-18 (BSB)

Notes

James uses vivid pictures: a bit in a horse's mouth, a ship's rudder, a spark that sets a forest ablaze. The tongue is small, but it steers and burns. "No man can tame the tongue." And it is inconsistent: "With the tongue we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness."

The second half of the chapter shows where words come from: the heart. Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition produce disorder. "But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peace-loving, gentle, accommodating, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere." What no man can tame, God can change from the inside.

Questions

OBSERVE What does the passage say?

1. What three pictures does James use for the tongue (vv. 3–6)?
2. What inconsistency does James point out in verses 9–10?
3. List the qualities of the wisdom from above (v. 17).

UNDERSTAND What does it mean?

1. Why do you think James says teachers will be judged more strictly (v. 1)?
2. How are our words connected to our hearts (vv. 11–14)?
3. If no man can tame the tongue, what hope do we have?

APPLY What will I do with it?

1. When is your tongue most likely to start a fire: online, at home, at work?
2. Is there someone you have hurt with words? Ask their forgiveness this week.
3. Choose one quality from verse 17 to ask God for every day this week.

Memory verse

But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peace-loving, gentle, accommodating, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere.

— James 3:17 (BSB)

Pray

Lord, You know how quickly my tongue can bless You and curse people made in Your likeness. Set a guard over my words. Take away bitter jealousy and selfish ambition, and give me the wisdom from above: pure, peace-loving, gentle and full of mercy. Amen.

Humble yourselves before the Lord

Read James 4:1-17

The big idea: Quarrels come from desires at war within us; God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble, so we submit to Him, draw near and plan humbly.

Read

¹ What causes conflicts and quarrels among you? Don't they come from the passions at war within you? ² You crave what you do not have; you kill and covet, but are unable to obtain it. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ And when you do ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may squander it on your pleasures. ⁴ You adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever chooses to be a friend of the world renders himself an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you think the Scripture says without reason that the Spirit He caused to dwell in us yearns with envy? ⁶ But He gives us more grace. This is why it says: "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." ⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Grieve, mourn, and weep. Turn your laughter to mourning, and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you. ¹¹ Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. And if you judge the law, you are not a practitioner of the law, but a judge of it. ¹² There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor? ¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business, and make a profit." ¹⁴ You do not even know what will happen tomorrow! What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord is willing, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your proud intentions.

All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do, yet fails to do it, is guilty of sin.

– James 4:1-17 (BSB)

Notes

James traces conflict to its source: “the passions at war within you.” We crave what we do not have, and either we do not ask God, or we ask with wrong motives. Then comes hope: “He gives us more grace.” “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

So James gives a string of commands: submit to God, resist the devil, draw near to God, cleanse your hands, humble yourselves. The promise: “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.” The chapter ends with our plans. Life is a mist, so we say, “If the Lord is willing, we will live and do this or that.”

Questions

OBSERVE What does the passage say?

1. Where do quarrels and fights come from, according to verses 1–2?
2. List the commands in verses 7–10.
3. What should we say when we make plans (v. 15)?

UNDERSTAND What does it mean?

1. What does it mean that ‘friendship with the world is hostility toward God’ (v. 4)?
2. Why does God oppose the proud and give grace to the humble?
3. Is James against making plans? What is he really warning about (vv. 13–16)?

APPLY What will I do with it?

1. What conflict in your life might come from something you want too much?
2. What would drawing near to God look like for you this week, specifically?
3. Look at your plans for this month. Pray over them, saying, 'If the Lord is willing.'

Memory verse

Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.

— James 4:8 (BSB)

Pray

God, You oppose the proud but give grace to the humble. I humble myself before You. Show me the desires at war within me. I submit to You and resist the devil. Draw near to me as I draw near to You, and hold my plans in Your hands. If You are willing, I will live and do Your will. Amen.

LESSON 5 OF 5

Patience and prayer

Read James 5:1-20

The big idea: James warns the oppressive rich, calls believers to patience until the Lord comes, and urges prayer in every situation, for the prayer of the righteous is powerful.

Read

- ¹ Come now, you who are rich, weep and wail over the misery to come upon you.
- ² Your riches have rotted and moths have eaten your clothes. ³ Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and consume your flesh like fire. You have hoarded treasure in the last days. ⁴ Look, the wages you withheld from the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts. ⁵ You have lived on earth in

luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in the day of slaughter.

⁶ You have condemned and murdered the righteous, who did not resist you. ⁷ Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer awaits the precious fruit of the soil—how patient he is for the fall and spring rains. ⁸ You, too, be patient and strengthen your hearts, because the Lord's coming is near. ⁹ Do not complain about one another, brothers, so that you will not be judged. Look, the Judge is standing at the door! ¹⁰ Brothers, as an example of patience in affliction, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ See how blessed we consider those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen the outcome from the Lord. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. ¹² Above all, my brothers, do not swear, not by heaven or earth or by any other oath. Simply let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, so that you will not fall under judgment. ¹³ Is any one of you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone cheerful? He should sing praises. ¹⁴ Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick. The Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power to prevail. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth yielded its crops. ¹⁹ My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, ²⁰ consider this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

— James 5:1-20 (BSB)

Notes

James warns rich people who hoarded wealth and withheld their workers' wages: "The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts." To believers who are suffering, he says, "Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming," like a farmer waiting for rain. Job is the example: "The Lord is full of compassion and mercy."

The letter ends with prayer for every situation: suffering, cheerful, sick, sinning. "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power to

prevail.” Elijah was “a man just like us,” and God heard him. James closes by urging believers to bring back anyone who wanders from the truth.

Questions

OBSERVE What does the passage say?

1. What wrongs does James accuse the rich of in verses 1–6?
2. What examples of patience does James give (vv. 7–11)?
3. What should a person do when suffering, cheerful or sick (vv. 13–14)?

UNDERSTAND What does it mean?

1. How does knowing the Lord’s coming is near help us be patient?
2. Why do you think James links confession and prayer for each other (v. 16)?
3. Why does James say Elijah was ‘a man just like us’?

APPLY What will I do with it?

1. In what situation do you need patience right now? Read verses 7–8 each day this week.
2. Is there someone you trust with whom you could confess and pray?
3. Do you know someone who has wandered from the truth? Pray for them and reach out.

Memory verse

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power to prevail.

– James 5:16 (BSB)

Pray

Lord of Hosts, You hear the cries of the oppressed. Make me patient until Your coming, and keep me from complaining against others. Teach me to pray in suffering and to praise in joy. Make me honest to confess my sins, faithful to pray for others, and bold to bring back those who wander. Amen.

Tips for leading this study

Read the chapter aloud. Each chapter takes about four minutes to read. Read it aloud at the start, even if people read it at home.

Handle James 2 carefully. Some may worry James contradicts salvation by grace. Read Ephesians 2:8-10 alongside it; both teach that real faith produces good works.

Make it practical. James is about doing. End each week by asking each person what they will do, and follow up.

Use the prayer in James 5. Close the final lesson by praying for each other as James 5:16 says.

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