

# James: Faith That Works (LifeGuide Bible Studies)

## Session 1 - Dependable or Double-minded?

James 1:1-18

No pain. No gain. Or so the saying goes. Athletes remind themselves of this to get their best possible performance. Sometimes they have to go through gruelling training. Without it, there is no improvement. James suggests it is the same for Christians.

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1. "Getting in shape is simple. Just eat right and exercise regularly." Why do you find this easier said than done?
2. Read James 1:1-18. Why does it seem strange that we should "consider it pure joy" whenever we "face trials of many kinds" (James 1:2)?
3. How are perseverance and maturity developed in us by enduring trials (James 1:3-4)?
4. What difficult experiences have increased your perseverance and maturity?
5. How might trials expose our need for God's wisdom (James 1:5)?
6. Under pressure, how does the faithful Christian (James 1:5-6) contrast with the person described in James 1:6-8?

7. In the context of trials and perseverance, why does James contrast rich and poor Christians (James 1:9-11)?
8. In what ways do you tend to rely on your possessions?
9. How are temptations different from trials (James 1:2-16)?
10. What role does God play when we face trials and when we face temptations (James 1:2-16)?
11. How is God the ultimate example of goodness and dependability (James 1:16-18)?
12. How is this a source of joy and hope for you?
13. Think of trials or temptations you are currently facing. How can this passage encourage you to depend on God?
14. Take time now to talk to God about your needs. Ask him to help you be like him in his goodness and dependability.

## Session 2 - Words, Words, Words

James 1:19-27

We all do it. It's as common as flies around a horse. While someone else is talking, we're thinking about what we're going to say next instead of about what is being said to us. We know others are worth more care and attention. But the habit is hard to break.

God wants us to slow down and listen too. But even when we've really listened to him, we're still not done. This study gives us practical help on listening and more.

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1. How do you feel when someone really hears you?  
Why is it so difficult to be a good listener?
2. Read James 1:19-27. How can being quick to listen and slow to speak help us be slow to become angry (James 1:19)?
3. How could the commands in James 1:19 affect the way your small group or Christian fellowship interacts?
4. When have you experienced the truth that "man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires" (James 1:20)?
5. James tells us that God's word was planted in us. What weeds can choke that word and keep it from growing (James 1:21)? Explain.

6. In your own words explain how the person who merely listens is different from the one who puts God's Word into practice (James 1:22-25).
7. Why is there a tendency for Christians to listen to and yet not to follow God's Word? How can you avoid this tendency?
8. According to James 1:26-27 how do people who think they are religious differ from those who are truly religious?
9. Give some specific examples of how your religion could become more "pure and faultless".
10. Based on what you've read in this chapter, do you think James would be satisfied with good works without also the listening to and receiving of God's Word? Explain.
11. Ask God to help you become a better listener and doer of his Word.

## Session 3 - Who's the Judge?

James 2:1-13

Labels are found in more places than on soup cans. We put them on people all the time. Funny or dull. Educated or uneducated. Friendly or cold. There are all kinds of ways we can categorize people. And our categories can have a profound influence on the way we treat people. As you might suspect, James has a few words to say about favouritism.

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1. What kinds of things make you favour one person more than another?
2. Read James 2:1-13. Why should believing in "our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" (James 2:1) keep us from showing favoritism?
3. How would you react if someone came into your church who wore sloppy clothes, was dirty or had body odour (James 2:2-4)?
4. Why do many people give preferential treatment to those who have money? Why is it wrong to make distinctions in this way (James 2:4)?
5. James 2:5 says God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith. Is God guilty of showing favouritism in this way? Explain.

6. Is it easier to have faith when you are poor than when you are rich?
7. From a practical standpoint, why was it foolish for early Christians to favour the rich over the poor (James 2:6-7)? To what extent is James's description of the rich valid today?
8. How can "the royal law" (James 2:8) guide our treatment of both poor and rich?
9. How do James 2:9-11 emphasize the seriousness of treating people unequally?
10. In what sense is violating one law as serious as breaking every law?
11. How will the way we speak and act toward others affect the way God treats us (James 2:12-13)?
12. How can the cross, the ultimate example of mercy triumphing over judgment, be a model for the way we interact with others?
13. Think of ways in which you show favouritism. Ask God to help you change your attitudes and actions.

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### Session 4 – Just Works

James 2:14-26

"It is easier said than done" is a cliché that certainly applies to our Christian life. It is much easier to talk about God than to obey him. James said, "Even the demons believe there is one God." But that certainly does not make them Christians! That's why someone can have all their doctrine perfectly straight and still have missed out on God's will. James helps us stay on target.

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1. What are some ways we don't put actions behind our words?
2. Read James 2:14-26. According to James, what good is faith without deeds (James 2:14-17)? Explain why.
3. What objection does James anticipate (James 2:18)? How does he answer it (James 2:18-19)?
4. Why is mere intellectual agreement to truth not enough (James 2:19)?
5. James gives two Old Testament examples of faith in action. The first is the familiar story of God testing Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham obeyed but was stopped by an angel at the last minute (see Genesis 22). How was Abraham's faith made complete by what he did (James 2:21-24)?

6. The second example is Rahab, the prostitute who hid two Israelite spies sent to Jericho before Israel's attack (see Joshua 2). How did Rahab's belief affect her (James 2:25)?
7. How do your actions demonstrate the reality of your faith?
8. How does James's closing analogy (James 2:26) summarize his teaching on faith and actions?
9. Does James ever say that works without faith can save? What does this imply about faith?
10. In what ways can you bring your actions more in line with your beliefs?
11. Talk to God about ways he can lead you into a more consistent Christian life.

## Session 5 - On Preventing Forest Fires

James 3:1-12

One of the most distressing crises is a fire out of control. The pain of seeing the resulting destruction can be almost unbearable. Personal belongings going up in smoke. The beauty of nature destroyed. Even loss of life itself. In this passage James compares the destructive power of the tongue to that of a forest fire.

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1. How do you respond to the adage, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me"?
2. Read James 3:1-12. James suggests that not many people should become teachers (James 3:1). What examples come to your mind of religious teachers whose lives people judged more strictly than others? Why were they judged more harshly?
3. Why do you think people often give advice they don't follow themselves?
4. James compares the tongue to a bit and a rudder (James 3:3-4). Why do you think the tongue has such control over our lives?
5. James also compares the tongue to a fire and to a world of evil (James 3:5-6). What is the point of these two comparisons?

6. James 3:7-8 emphasize what a challenge it is to control the tongue. What makes this so difficult?
7. In what ways can the tongue poison people and relationships?
8. In James 3:9-12 James uses a series of analogies from nature (springs, trees, vines). How do they highlight the inconsistencies of the tongue?
9. James has focused primarily on the destructive power of the tongue. In what ways can the tongue also bring refreshment and healing?
10. What can you do to give God more praise? Be specific. How can you give more praise to those you come in contact with each day?
11. Ask God to make your tongue a source of life rather than a source of destruction.

## Session 6 - Makers and Breakers of Peace

James 3:13-4:10

Why do people who love each other the most often fight the most too? Husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters—it's all too common. James offers a valuable remedy for this sickness.

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1. Does your family ever quarrel? Why do these fights and arguments erupt?
2. Read James 3:13-4:10. In James 3:13-18 James discusses earthly and heavenly wisdom. What are the characteristics of each?
3. How might earthly wisdom provoke fights and quarrels?
4. How might wisdom from heaven help us resolve conflicts we face?
5. What does James say is the source of quarrels (James 4:1-2)?
6. In Buddhist philosophy, desire is said to be the source of all suffering. To combat suffering we should simply stop desiring. In contrast, how does James say we should deal with our desires (James 4:2-3)?

7. James says we don't receive even when we ask because we ask with wrong motives (James 4:3). What might be some examples of right and wrong motives in prayer?
8. What else does James say is necessary in order to come to God in prayer (James 4:4-10)?
9. What does it mean to be humble, to submit to God (James 4:6-7)?
10. In James 4:7-10 James gives several suggestions for humbling ourselves before God. How does each contribute to a humble spirit?
11. Are there situations where humility could help you become a source of peace this coming week? Explain.
12. Take a few minutes to quietly humble yourself before God. Ask him to help you become a peacemaker during the next few days.

## Session 7 - Getting Perspective

James 4:11-17

I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul." How subtly we convince ourselves that we control our lives. Sometimes only a crisis or even death itself convinces us otherwise. If we are truly wise and humble, we will listen carefully when James says, "You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."

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1. If you knew you were going to die tomorrow, how would your attitude toward life today be different?
2. Read James 4:11-17. Why does James say we shouldn't slander or speak against a Christian brother or sister (James 4:11-12)?
3. How do we tend to build ourselves up by criticizing others?
4. If we judge the law, what does this say about our attitude toward the lawgiver?
5. How can a proper attitude toward God (James 4:12) enable us to have a proper attitude toward others?
6. How would you describe the two attitudes toward the future found in James 4:13-17?
7. James compares life to a mist (James 4:14). How does a sudden death, especially that of a famous person, help us to realize this?

8. How do you feel about your life being like a mist?
9. If our life is like a mist, what should be our attitude toward tomorrow? Is James saying it is wrong to plan for the future? Explain.
10. How does our attitude toward the future relate to what James has said previously about humility?
11. In James 4:17 James says it is a sin not to do good when we know we should. How is this sin like boasting?
12. Ask God to help you love those around you rather than judge them. Humbly commit your future plans to the Lord.

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### Session 8 - What Awaits

James 5:1-11

You have probably heard of the young man who cried out, "Lord, I want patience and I want it now!" James encourages us in this passage to wait on God, to be patient, and warns us against wanting it all now.

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1. How does our society encourage impatience?
2. Read James 5:1-11. Into what two sections is this passage divided, and who is addressed in each?
3. James declares that misery awaits rich people. What crimes have they committed (James 5:1-6)?
4. How will their wealth testify against them in the last judgment? Is James condemning all rich people? Explain.
5. How is piling up riches the opposite of patience that waits in faith for God to provide?
6. When are you tempted to hoard rather than to give and wait on God?
7. Why do you think James begins the second section in James 5:7 with, "Be patient"?
8. James goes on to give three examples of patient people: a farmer, the prophets and Job. How is each an example of patience?

9. In what areas of your life are you impatient? In what ways could you learn patience from the three examples James mentions?
10. The Lord's coming provides a backdrop for James's word to the rich and to those who suffer. What different reactions would you expect each group to have to the prospect of the lord's return (James 5:7-9)?
11. How can Christ's return affect such practical matters as our use of wealth and emotional matters as our response to suffering?
12. Thank God for the practical help James gives in becoming more patient. Ask God to help you apply his message to the areas in your life that need patience.

## Session 9 - Making Others Whole

James 5:12-20

Broken homes, shattered relationships, damaged emotions—we live in a fragmented and hurting society. As we see all the wounded people around us, we long to help, to offer a healing touch. James gives us very practical suggestions for helping people to become whole.

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1. Why do you think our society is so fragmented?
2. Read James 5:12-20. How does James 5:12 reinforce the themes of the tongue (James 3:1-12) and of patience (James 4:9-11)?
3. Do you pray more when you are in trouble or when things are going well? What balance does James suggest in James 5:13?
4. In James 5:14-16 James discusses physical and spiritual healing. What are the steps in this process?
5. How is physical healing connected with forgiveness of sins?
6. Would you call elders for anointing, prayer and confession? Why or why not?
7. How can we provide other opportunities for mutual confession and prayer (James 5:16)?

8. How does Elijah illustrate the effectiveness of prayer (James 5:17-18)?
9. What different types of prayer are mentioned in James 5:13-18?
10. What steps could you take to make one of these types of prayer more a part of your life?
11. According to James 5:19-20, what responsibility, if any, do we have for our brother or sister?
12. Summarize what James 5:13-20 teach us about how we can help people to become whole physically, emotionally or spiritually.
13. Ask God for grace in this ministry.

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### **Session 10 - Faith That Works:**

#### James 1-5

You have endured. You have persevered. You have been dependable. You have made it through James! May your faith be stronger as a result of your time in this letter.

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1. What changes have you seen in yourself since you began this study?
2. Quickly reread James 1-5. What major topics were discussed in this letter? How do these topics help us understand James's view of Christian maturity?
3. What unifying theme, if any, did you see in James?
4. Why is perseverance so important for Christians (see especially James 1:1-18)?
5. How is James's view of religion (James 1:26-27) developed in other chapters?
6. Some people claim that James is an antifaith letter. How would you respond to that claim?
7. What examples does James give of faith and actions working together?
8. How does James 5:7-20 act as a summary of the letter?

9. From your study of James, what one area of your Christian life is in most need of endurance and consistency?
10. What steps are you taking (will you take) to work on that?
11. How have you been encouraged by studying this letter?
12. Thank God for what you have learned from studying the book of James.