

FAITH IN ACTION

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CHRIST OUR PERFECT VISION

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DAILY WITH GOD

— A STUDY OF THE LETTER FROM JAMES



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CHRIST OUR PERFECT VISION

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CHRIST OUR PERFECT VISION

INTRODUCTION

Reading the book of James has always caused some discomfort in believers. Some feel that the book is too harsh and direct. They prefer the books of John, who speaks of love; or those of Paul, who speaks of Christ. Others feel that James put too much emphasis on good works, and that it takes away from the message of Salvation.

However, James makes it truly clear that Christians do not have the luxury of believing one way and living another. He spurs us on to put activate our faith and love God with our lives.

Who was James?

In his book, James calls himself simply *a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*. In the New Testament there were several men called James. Most church scholars believe that this letter was written by James, the brother of Jesus, as the apostle James died to early (AD44) to have done it. While James rejected Jesus during his earthly ministry, he started following Jesus after his resurrection and soon became the head of the church in Jerusalem.

What does this book teach us?

James wrote from his unusual experiences: He was the brother of Jesus (they had the same mother, but James was Joseph's son, while Jesus was born through the Holy Spirit) and they grew up in the same house. He was well schooled in the Old Testament Law and prophets. He watched the church grow and saw the Gospel spread to the outskirts of the Roman empire. The believers were faced with the question: "How to show Christianity in our everyday lives."

James wrote in a very distinctive style; he was direct and outspoken about displeasing God. He wanted people to consider their attitudes and actions.

James was very practical; some people even feel too practical. He knows that nobody's life is perfect. He knows that we will face troubles and hardship. He does not teach us to live trouble-free, but how to live when trouble befall us.

He knows that all of us talk and sometimes say things that we wish we had not said. Therefore, he teaches us to use our words constructively and to be more careful!

Throughout the letter James talks about faith that works. He wants to encourage believers to face up to the challenge of faith – faith that is anchored in the knowledge of salvation through Jesus Christ. Real faith is not seen in what we say we believe, but in how we live. James is calling us to a consistent Christian life, a practical faith.

You can expect this study to be difficult, not because of the language or studies, but because it will force you to take a deep look at yourself and your faith.

We pray that, as you do this study, you will discover the beauty and practicality of genuine Christianity. May you be encouraged to grow in your faith.

Soli Deo Gloria!

FAITH IN ACTION

Week **1**

Joyful perseverance

Memory verse:

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,
whenever you face trials of many kinds,
because you know that the testing of your faith
produces perseverance.*

James 1:2-3 (NIV)

DAILY WITH GOD 9

— A STUDY OF THE LETTER FROM JAMES



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CHRIST OUR PERSONAL STUDY PERFECT VISION

Read James 1:1-12

OPENING REMARKS:

In his book, *The Road less travelled*, Dr. Scott Peck observes that life is difficult. Very often unannounced, painful problems whirl us into a panic or into angry resentment.

Many people throw up their hands in frustration and exclaim, *"I have tried doing what the Bible says, but it just doesn't work. I have tried praying. I have tried asking God to give me the strength to do the right thing. I've tried; and it just doesn't work!"*

It simply is not true that God's ways do not work. God's ways always work. So, what is the problem then? It is that we too often believe, at the most fundamental level, that God's way is not truly the best. We too often believe that God's wisdom is just as valid as the world's way of solving our problems. Deep in our hearts we think: *"Maybe God's way of solving this problem is the way to go, but then, maybe it isn't. If God would just show me what He wants me to do in this difficult situation, I can look at it and*

consider it. Maybe I will decide to do what He says. But sometimes His way is a rather difficult one. I am not ready to commit to it yet. I'm just not sure what I'm going to do; and I want to keep my options open."

If we were to ask God for wisdom in such a frame of mind, we would be doing so in an insincere manner, because we would not really intend to follow it. Much of our battle in Christian life is won or lost right here.

There is a saying: *"No pain, no gain."* Athletes remind themselves of this to get through gruelling training. James suggests that it is the same for Christians.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

How would you describe your current spiritual condition?

Notice the three themes we find here: hardship, perseverance and wisdom. What does James say is the purpose of hardship (trials)? (Also read Romans 5:3-5 and 1 Peter 1:6-9)

How do you respond to James's radical idea that we should consider it pure joy whenever we face trials (verse 2)? How does this differ from the way we normally view suffering?

Read Acts 16:22-25. How does the example of Paul and Silas bear testimony to this truth?

What does a tested faith produce (verse 3)? What does this mean?

How might trials expose our need for God's wisdom? How do you gain God's wisdom (verse 5)? (Also read Proverbs 2:1-6)

Read Proverbs 3:5-6. Compare and contrast this passage with James 1:5-6. What helpful principles about wisdom do you find here?

What warning does James give in verses 6 – 8? How does “double-minded” (verse 8) help us to understand what he means by “doubt” in verse 6?

In the context of trials and perseverance, why does James contrast rich and poor Christians? (verses 9-11)

Define the word “perseverance”.

Why is it imperative that we persevere? (verse 12)

What difficult experiences have increased your perseverance and your maturity?

Is there a trial in your life that you have not considered as “pure joy”? What stops you thinking of it like that?

What would change in your life if you thought of your trial(s) in a joyful way?

CLOSING REMARKS:

James’s major emphasis in this section is: if a person’s faith is genuine, it will prove itself during times of trouble.

To test the genuineness of a diamond, jewellers often place it in clear water. This causes a real diamond to sparkle with special brilliance. An imitation stone will have almost no sparkle at all. When the two are placed side-by-side, even an untrained eye can easily tell the difference.

In a similar way the world can notice the difference between genuine Christians and those who merely profess faith in Christ. This is especially true in difficult times. Many people have great confidence in their faith until it is severely tested by hardships and disappointments.

How a person handles trouble will reveal whether his faith is alive or dead, genuine or imitation, saving or non-saving. Understanding how we should react is only the first step. Putting this into practice is much more difficult.

We need to pray that God will give us His wisdom so that we will persevere during trials and not grumble but consider it a joy instead.

PRAYER:

Talk to Father about your trials.

Ask Him to give you the wisdom to meet your trials with joy and to persevere.

Ask Him to teach you how to be like Him, in His goodness and dependability.

CHRIST OUR GROUP DISCUSSION PERFECT VISION

Prayer

Memory verse:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

James 1:2-3 (NIV)

Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

Scripture Reading:

Read James 1:1-12, Romans 5:3-5, 1 Peter 1:6-9 and Matthew 21:21-22

Discussion questions

In James 1:1-12 we find three themes: hardship, perseverance and wisdom? What does James say is the purpose of hardship? What does he tell us about perseverance? (Refer to Romans 5:3-5 and 1 Peter 1:6-9)

James says we should ask God for wisdom. What effect does doubt have on you when you pray? When do you find it the hardest to pray? (Refer to Matthew 21:21-22)

Discuss.

What is the “spiritual contradiction” raised in verses 9-11? How does God’s view of wealth differ from the world’s view? Discuss.

Applying the text

Encourage each other to apply the text that we studied in our lives. Share and discuss the following personal questions with each other:

Is there a trial in your life that you have not considered as “pure joy”? What stops you thinking of it like that?

What do you think would change in your life if you thought of your trial(s) in a joyful way?

Close in prayer

FAITH IN ACTION

Week **2**

Understanding Temptation

Memory verse:

God is never tempted to do wrong, and He never tempts anyone else.

James 1:13b (NIV)

DAILY WITH GOD 21

— A STUDY OF THE LETTER FROM JAMES



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CHRIST OUR PERSONAL STUDY PERFECT VISION

Read James 1:13-18

OPENING REMARKS:

The Greek word *peirasmos* has the basic meaning of trying, testing or proving and can have negative or positive connotations, depending on the context. In verse 12 the word is used in the sense of trials or tests. But in verse 13 the word is used in the sense of temptations, and the person's response to it.

Trials around us can prompt all manner of temptations within us. If a believer responds in faithful obedience to God's Word, he successfully endures a trial. However, if he succumbs to it in the flesh, doubting God and disobeying, he is tempted to sin. The right response leads to spiritual endurance, righteousness, wisdom and other blessings. The wrong response leads to sin and spiritual death.

It is human nature to deflect responsibility. We see this from the very beginning of creation when God confronted Adam and Eve with their sin in the Garden of Eden. Adam

blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent. James explains the nature of evil, the nature of man and the nature of God. He provides strong proof that God is not responsible for our temptations nor for our weakness in succumbing to sin.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

Think of a time when you have done something wrong, big or small, and tried to pass the blame. What are some “excuses” you have given for doing something that is clearly wrong?

Where does temptation come from? Where does it not come from? (verse 13-14)

In your own words, describe the progression from temptation to sin.

How should we deal with temptation? (Read also Matthew 4:1-11; Hebrews 4:15 and 2 Timothy 2:22)

James warns the believers not to be deceived (verse 15). In what ways can we be deceived when it comes to temptation?

Temptation does not come from God. What does come from Him? (verses 17-18)

What does James mean when he says that God “*does not change like shifting shadows*”? (Also read Malachi 3:6 and Hebrews 13:8)

James makes it clear that God and His Word is permanent and will last. How can the Word of God protect us from various temptations?

When God speaks, things happen. The Word of God is like medicine which goes down deep inside, healing our inner hurts and changing our inner motivations, so that we become different people (verse 18). Where in your life, do you need the Word of God to heal hurts or change motivations now? Be honest with yourself.

What thought process have verses 13-18 taught you to go through when temptation comes? How can you encourage others to use this process?

CLOSING REMARKS:

God is not responsible for temptation. The testing comes from within yourself. None of us starts off with a pure heart and pure impulses, hopes and fears. The challenge for each of us is to choose wisely which impulses and desires we will follow and which ones we will resist.

James says that some desires starts a “family of its own”. God promises us eternal life, but those desires lead to the opposite, eternal death.

God’s character is always trustworthy and reliable. Nothing can block God’s goodness from reaching us. His giving nature is constant and consistent. He is undaunted by our inconsistencies and unfaithfulness.

Those believers in whose lives the Word is doing its work are just the start. God wants to transform the whole creation through His Word, filling heaven and earth with His rich, wonderful light and life.

PRAYER:

Reflect on the truth about God we learned from this passage.

Praise Him for being a generous giver and for being constant.

Ask Him to reveal to you your inner motivations that are not pleasing to Him.

Share the temptations that you are facing with Him and ask Him to deliver you from temptation and sin.

CHRIST OUR GROUP DISCUSSION PERFECT VISION

Prayer

Memory verse:

God is never tempted to do wrong, and He never tempts anyone else.

James 1:13b (NIV)

Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

Scripture Reading:

Read James 1:13-18, Psalm 1:1-3, Matthew 4:1-11 and Malachi 3:6

Discussion questions

What is the difference between a “trial” and a “temptation”?

Where do temptations come from? Where do they not come from?

Read Psalm 1:1-3 and James 1:14-15. Discuss the progression from temptation to sin. How should we deal with temptation? (Also refer to Matthew 4:1-11)

Read James 1:17 and Malachi 3:6. What does James mean when he says that God “*does not change like shifting shadows*”? What hope does this give you regarding temptations?

Applying the text

Encourage each other to apply the text that we studied in our lives. Share and discuss the following personal questions with each other:

Where in your life, do you need the Word of God to heal hurts or to change motivation? Be honest with yourself and the group.

What thought process have verses 13-18 taught you to go through when temptation comes? How can you encourage others to use this process?

Close in prayer

FAITH IN ACTION

Week **3**

CHRIST OUR Listening and Doing PERFECT VISION

Memory verse:

Do not merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

James 1:22 (NIV)

DAILY WITH GOD 33

— A STUDY OF THE LETTER FROM JAMES



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CHRIST OUR PERSONAL STUDY PERFECT VISION

Read James 1:19-27

OPENING REMARKS:

Obedience is often viewed as something nice and necessary for children or dogs, but we see it as stifling for individuality and independence. James has an issue with this line of thinking as we will see in this part of his letter. Here he focuses on the power of God's Word and the need for believers to respond to it in obedience.

Bible knowledge is vastly different from academic knowledge. Whether or not you pass an academic exam depends only on what knowledge you have in your head, not on how you act on the way to the exam. For the "exam" about Bible knowledge, your whole life counts. You cannot merely learn it as a body of information. Understanding it properly means that you must live it.

James wants his readers to understand that truth is not just something you know in your head – it is something you live. God's truth is found in action. If you do not live God's truth, you have not really learnt it.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

What do you think characterizes a good listener?

What clear directives does James give in verse 19?

Why do you think James emphasizes the danger of human anger? What does human anger lead us into? (Also read Proverbs 14:17, Psalm 37:8 and Ephesians 4:26-27)

What can anger never accomplish? Why not? (Refer to verse 20)

What must we do to properly receive God's Word (verse 21)? How do we do this? (Also read Romans 13:12-14, Ephesians 4:22-24 and Hebrews 12:1)

Listening to the Word is only the first step. What happens if we do not act on what we hear (verse 22-24)?

What are the differences between the life of a mere listener and the life of someone who puts into practice what they have heard (verses 22,25)?

What freedom or blessing does doing God's will provide? (Also read Romans 8:2)

What does the world think that the word "religion" means? (when someone is described as religious on the street, in a book or on a TV show.)

According to verses 26 and 27, how do people who think they are religious differ from those who are truly religious?

What does James say is the key characteristic of religious behaviour?

In what situations do you find yourself quick to speak and quick to become angry? How can you change your behaviour in these situations?

Reflect on your life and habits. Do your actions show that you have received Christ and are following Him in obedience?

CLOSING REMARKS:

We all do it. While someone else is talking, we are thinking about what we are going to say next, instead of really listening 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. And when we really listen to Him, we must obey the commands given to us.

As Christians we are called to humbly accept what we hear in God's Word and put our faith into action. This obedience does not restrict us, but it results in us living with freedom and blessing.

PRAYER:

Reflect on what we learned from this passage.

Praise God for the work He is doing in us as He transforms us to be more like Christ every day.

Ask God to help you to become a better listener and to obey His will.

Ask Him to help you clear your mind and focus on His Word.

CHRIST OUR PERFECT VISION

GROUP DISCUSSION

Prayer

Memory verse:

Do not merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

James 1:22 (NIV)

Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

Scripture Reading:

Read James 1:19-27, Isaiah 55:7-9, Luke 6:46-49, Jeremiah 7:5-7 and 1 Timothy 5:3

Discussion questions

What is the relationship between anger and righteous living? When you lose your temper and display anger, how does this affect your witness as a Christian?

In the arena of faith, how are the actions of “hearing” and “doing” different, and how are they related?

How does obedience to God provide freedom? (Also refer to Isaiah 55:7-9 and Luke 6:46-49)

What examples does James give of behaviour indicative of true faith (see verses 26-27)? Why do you think he chooses these actions? (Also refer to Jeremiah 7:5-7 and 1 Timothy 5:3)

Applying the text

Encourage each other to apply the text that we studied in our lives. Share and discuss the following personal questions with each other:

In what situations do you find yourself quick to speak and quick to become angry? How can you change your behaviour in these situations? How does this affect your witness as a Christian?

Talk about instances when you only paid momentary attention to God's message (such as the last time you read the Bible for yourself). Why do you fail to put in practice what you heard? How can you change this?

Close in prayer

FAITH IN ACTION

Week **4**

Faith that passes the test

Memory verse:

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

James 2:26 (NIV)

DAILY WITH GOD 43

— A STUDY OF THE LETTER FROM JAMES



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CHRIST OUR PERSONAL STUDY PERFECT VISION

Read James 2:14-26

OPENING REMARKS:

In this study we will look at one of the most debated issues in the Church – faith versus works. People argue that faith happens in the spiritual dimension and works in the physical dimension. But James wants to teach us that the one without the other is not possible; that what we do reveals who we are and what we believe.

Having genuine faith means having God’s Spirit residing within us. We cannot help but produce deeds pleasing to God.

Living a life that is true to what we believe, is not easy. “It is easier said than done” is a cliché that certainly applies to Christian life. It is much easier to talk about God than to obey Him. Obeying Him can be risky and inconvenient.

We are surrounded by desperate human needs, but that gives us the opportunity to demonstrate our faith. James

urges us on toward spiritual maturity through a faith abounding in good works.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

In James 2:14 James speaks of a person having faith without deeds and then asks: “Can that kind of faith save anyone?” Do you think it can?

How does James’ example and conclusion in verses 15 – 17 answer his question in verse 14? What motivates believers to act?

Read Matthew 7:26-27. What does Jesus say about faith and works?

Read 1 John 3:16-18. Proper motivation is important in understanding the value of our deeds of faith. What are we being asked to do and why?

In your own words, explain the meaning of James 2:18. Does not verse 18 contradict what Paul teaches in Romans 3:28? Explain your answer.

What is the point that James wants to make when he says that even demons have faith (verse 19)?

How was Abraham's faith made complete by what he did (verses 21-24)?

How did Rahab's belief affect her (verse 25)?

Read Ephesians 2:8-10. Chronology is important when it comes to faith and works. What are the three steps involved?

According to verse 26, how do we know that a body is alive? What is the difference between genuine faith and mere religion? How does this verse summarize James's teaching on faith and actions?

How do you respond when the beliefs and actions of other people are far apart?

In what way do your actions demonstrate the reality of your own faith?

In what way do you need to bring your actions more in line with your beliefs?

CLOSING REMARKS:

This passage has caused debate for centuries because of the way in which James emphasizes the need for works. James never says that works without faith can save us – he has already stated in James 1:17 – 18 that salvation is entirely a gracious gift of God, by His grace.

However, there was a mistaken notion amongst Jewish Christians that, because righteous works and obedience to God was not a prerequisite for salvation, they were not necessary at all. Therefore, James wants believers to understand that the genuineness of one's faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour is seen more in what a person does than what he says.

John MacArthur says: *“Genuine, transforming faith not only should, but will, produce genuine good works, notably repentance and obedient submission to Christ’s Lordship. It will not be perfect obedience and repentance, but good*

works will be present. We might say that it costs us nothing to become a Christian, but everything to fully live as one."

PRAYER:

Reflect on what we learned from this passage.

Thank God for the privilege we have of being His representatives on Earth.

Thank God for the good deeds He has set aside for us to do in His name. Ask Him to help you see those opportunities.

Ask God to help you to become aware of where in your life and experiences, your faith needs to become action.

Thank God for the family of believers that you are a part of, who can spur each other on to love and good deeds.

CHRIST OUR PERFECT VISION

GROUP DISCUSSION

Prayer

Memory verse:

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

James 2:26 (NIV)

Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

Scripture Reading:

Read James 2:14-26, 1 John 3:16-18, Romans 3: 28 and Ephesians 2:8-10

Discussion questions

In James 2:14 James speaks of a person having faith without deeds and then asks: “*Can that kind of faith save anyone?*” Do you think it can? Motivate your answer.

Read 1 John 3:16-18. Proper motivation is important in understanding the value of our deeds of faith. What are we being asked to do and why?

Compare James 2:18 and Romans 3:28. Does James contradict Paul? How would you explain these verses to other people?

Read Ephesians 2:8-10. Paul explains the sequence of faith and works in these verses. What are the three steps and why is the chronology important?

Applying the text

Encourage each other to apply the text that we studied in our lives. Share and discuss the following personal questions with each other:

From a worldly perspective, why are deeds along with faith important? What influence can active faith have on non-believers?

How does this passage challenge your group not to become complacent but to show real faith in action? What do you need to change to put your faith into action?

Read Hebrews 10:24 and close in prayer

FAITH IN ACTION

Week **5**

Taming the tongue

Memory verse:

We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

James 3:2 (NIV)

DAILY WITH GOD 55

— A STUDY OF THE LETTER FROM JAMES



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CHRIST OUR PERSONAL STUDY PERFECT VISION

Read James 3:1-12

OPENING REMARKS:

In this passage, James elaborates on his earlier point that people who are truly “religious” will keep a tight control on their tongues (refer to James 1:26). Our words are powerful, although it is difficult to keep them under control.

The tongue is you in a unique way – it tells what is going on in your heart and discloses the real person. The genuineness of your faith will be demonstrated by what you say, because the tongue can only say what it is told to say by the heart.

There is no limit in what one can say, no built-in boundaries. No wonder that the misuse of the tongue is the easiest way to sin. John MacArthur says: *“In Scripture the tongue is described as wicked, deceitful, perverse, filthy, corrupt, slanderous, gossiping, blasphemous, etc. No wonder God put the tongue in a cage behind the teeth, walled in by the mouth.”*

We all know the saying, think before you speak, but in some way we all have failed to live according to it.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

Think of a time when you regretted what you have said. What did you do to try to set things right?

In James 3:1, James is warning fellow believers about becoming a teacher in the church. Why is he warning them?

What might be some of the reasons for stricter judgment of teachers in the church? (Also read Luke 12:48)

In verse 2 James says: *“Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.”* Is anyone on earth perfect? Why is James emphasizing being perfect?

How can we move closer to perfection? (See Psalm 55:17, Psalm 140:1-3 and Colossians 4:2)

How does James illustrate the power of small things (see verse 3-5)? How is the tongue like a rudder on a boat or a bit in a horse’s mouth or like a fire?

From what source does the tongue’s tremendous power for evil come (refer to James 3:6)?

Read the following verses and list the examples of an untamed tongue:

Proverbs 12:18	
Proverbs 12:19	
Proverbs 13:3	
Proverbs 16:27	
Proverbs 17:7	
Proverbs 18:8	
Proverbs 25:18	

If no human being can control the tongue (verse 8), why should we bother trying?

What is the main point of the illustrations in verses 11-12? How can our words reveal what is in our soul?

There is an old saying: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” It is true? Explain.

What type of speech generally rolls off your tongue? How does this passage motivate you to be more careful about how you use your tongue?

CLOSING REMARKS:

Nowhere is the relationship between faith and works more evident than in a person’s speech. John Mac Arthur says that a person’s speech can be seen as a reliable measure of his/her spiritual temperature, of his/her inner human condition.

It has become important in our culture to express our feelings. In the name of “honesty” we often blurt out hateful, hurtful words. There is a saying: “*If you can’t say something nice about someone, do not say anything at all.*” There is a time for loving honesty, but there is never a time or a reason to lash out with our tongues.

James teaches that true believers will possess a *sanctified tongue* and they must maintain it. He wants us to follow the example of Jesus and to be people who bless others. If we have trouble with our tongues, we need to go back and look at the spring from which the water flows. We need to repent, draw near to God, and ask Him to transform us.

PRAYER:

Reflect on what we learned from this passage.

Thank God for His desire to change us. Ask Him to forgive you for any sinful and hurtful things you have said recently. Ask God for a renewed spirit of self-control as you practise being slow to speak.

Pray for the teachers of God's word. Ask God to protect them and to give them His wisdom. Pray the same for yourself.

Ask God to make your tongue a source of life rather than a source of destruction.

CHRIST OUR PERFECT VISION

GROUP DISCUSSION

Prayer

Memory verse:

We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

James 3:2 (NIV)

Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

Scripture Reading:

Read James 3:1-12, Matthew 12:33-37, Psalm 141:3 and Proverbs 21:23

Discussion questions

James suggests that not many people should become teachers in the church (see verse 1). What examples come to mind of religious leaders or teachers whose lives are more strictly judged than others? Why are they judged in this way?

Why do you think the tongue has such control over our lives as to be compared to a bit and a rudder (see verses 3-4)?

One of the most distressing things is a fire out of control. The pain of seeing the resulting destruction can be devastating. Why is James comparing the tongue to a fire and a world of evil (see verses 5-6)?

Read Matthew 12:33-37. How does Jesus describe the relationship between the heart and the mouth?

Read Psalm 141:3 and Proverbs 21:23. How do we reconcile these verses with James's claim that no man can tame the tongue? What is our part and what is God's part?

Applying the text

Encourage each other to apply the text that we studied in our lives. Share and discuss the following personal questions with each other:

When are you most tempted to slander other people? What is the underlying problem and what can you do about it?

Read James 3:10-12 and discuss the question: Is everything 100% well with your relationship with Jesus if you still tend to swear or use dirty words from time to time – even if nobody hears you?

What positive words do your friends and acquaintances need to hear from you this week? How can you remember to say these things? How can your speech have a positive impact on the people you associate with?

Close in prayer

FAITH IN ACTION

Week **6**

CHRIST OUR Heavenly Wisdom PERFECT VISION

Memory verse:

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

James 3:17 (NIV)

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— A STUDY OF THE LETTER FROM JAMES



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CHRIST OUR PERSONAL STUDY PERFECT VISION

Read James 3: 13-18

OPENING REMARKS:

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines wisdom as the ability to use your knowledge and experience to make good decisions and judgements. The American Heritage Dictionary defines wisdom as an understanding of what is true, right and lasting. However, the Biblical understanding of wisdom goes a bit further.

James tells us that our knowledge of what is right, must influence our behaviour. He supports the truth revealed in the Old Testament wisdom literature (the book of Job to the Song of Solomon) that wisdom is divided into two realms - earthly and heavenly, man's wisdom and Godly wisdom.

People with intellectual gifts are often characterized by taking pride in their own ideas and by seeking constant praise for it. By contrast, the wisdom all believers should seek, is inseparably connected to a godly lifestyle.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

Read James 1:5-8. How does James describe wisdom in these verses?

In James 3:13, what does James say is the evidence of wisdom?

How does James describe earthly wisdom (See verses 14-16)? What is the result of earthly wisdom?

How might earthly wisdom provoke fights and quarrels?

How does James describe heavenly wisdom (see verse 17)? How does a wise person act?

What does heavenly wisdom produce (see verse 18)?

Compare James 3:17 with Galatians 5:22. What is the similarity that James shows between wisdom and being led by the Holy Spirit?

Read Colossians 2:2-3. What does this passage say about Christ and wisdom?

How can you tell if the wisdom you receive is man's wisdom or God's wisdom?

To what degree does the world's wisdom influence your thought, opinions and values? Explain your answer.

What are some concrete ways a Christian can acquire God's wisdom? Try to list at least 5.

What can you do today to become more passionate about pursuing God's wisdom and seeking it like a treasure?

CLOSING REMARKS:

Wisdom is more than having profound knowledge or insight. It is not a matter of intelligence or eloquence or persuasiveness. It comes from above and consists of a right understanding of God, us and others.

True wisdom will always be revealed by humility, gentleness, mercy and peacemaking. If we understand the greatness of God, our own sinfulness and the love that He has shown towards us, then envy, ambition and hostility can have no place in our lives.

PRAYER:

Reflect on what we learned from this passage.

Thank God for the comfort of knowing that when we come near to Him, He promises to come near to us.

Ask God to give you heavenly wisdom.

Ask God to help you to become aware of where in your life you rely on earthly wisdom and to allow the Holy Spirit to guide you.

Thank God for His Spirit that guides you and leads you.

CHRIST OUR PERFECT VISION

GROUP DISCUSSION

Prayer

Memory verse:

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

James 3:17 (NIV)

Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

Scripture Reading:

Read James 3:13-18, James 1:5-8 and Galatians 5:22-23

Discussion questions

Read James 1:5-8. How does James describe wisdom in these verses?

What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom? Discuss your answers.

What is the difference between earthly wisdom (verses 3:14-16) and heavenly wisdom (verse 17)? Where does earthly wisdom lead?

Compare James 3:17 with Galatians 5:22-23. Discuss the similarities between wisdom and being led by the Holy Spirit. Why is this significant?

Applying the text

Encourage each other to apply the text that we studied in our lives. Share and discuss the following personal questions with each other:

What life experiences increased your wisdom? Are you growing in wisdom? What signs are there in your life?

What damage can bitter envy or selfish ambition do to you?

What can you do this week to establish peace in a relationship or situation which has been troubling you? How can we encourage one another to plant peace?

Is heavenly wisdom possible without the influence of the Holy Spirit?

Close in prayer

FAITH IN ACTION

Week **7**

Humble submission and perspective

Memory verse:

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

James 4:10 (NIV)

DAILY WITH GOD 77

— A STUDY OF THE LETTER FROM JAMES



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CHRIST OUR PERSONAL STUDY PERFECT VISION

Read James 4:1-5:6

OPENING REMARKS:

During our study we have seen that James examines several everyday behaviours that can either authenticate our claim to faith or highlight the absence of true faith in our lives. He has challenged us to persevere in difficult times and to live wisely.

Now he continues by showing us how to sustain active, trusting faith. By humbling ourselves, recognizing our sin and staying near to our loving God, we will see His grace working powerfully in us.

Blaise Pascal once noted that humanity lives in a state of *“inconsistency, boredom and anxiety”*. These feelings often result in a desperate attempt to control our own lives and to make sure that we get “what we deserve”.

James shows us how futile these efforts are and how much we need God’s grace in our lives, to help us keep a true perspective of who we are and how we live.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

What does James identify as the source of quarrels and fights with others in verses 1-2?

What are the two main behaviours that James criticizes in verses 2-3?

What kind of prayer does God resist (see verse 3)? What is the right motive in prayer?

Why doesn't God always give people what they ask for? (Refer to Isaiah 55:8-9 and John 15:7)

Can we love both God and the world? What happens if we try to love both? (Refer to 1 John 2:15-16 and Matthew 6:24)

How can a Christian live totally for God in a corrupt world (verse 6)? (Also refer to Jeremiah 9:23-24 and 1 Peter 5:5)

In James 4:7-10 James offers ten exhortations. (A similar list of six exhortations is also found in 1 Peter 5:6-9.) List them below:

James 4:7-10	1 Peter 6-9

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What reasons does James give for not slandering or speaking against a Christian brother or sister (verses 11-12)?

If we judge the Law, what does this say about our attitude towards the Lawgiver (verses 11-12)?

In verses 13-17 James comes back to the subject of wealth and pride. What is the difference between pride and a sense of accomplishment?

Do you think James is opposed to planning? How would you describe the two attitudes towards the future found in verses 13-17?

In verse 14 James compares life to a mist (GNB: a puff of smoke). How does a sudden death, especially that of a person close to you, help us to realize this?

In what ways can we express our confidence that God is in control of our daily lives (verse 15)? How should this affect our plans and actions?

In Chapter 5:1-6 James comes back to the subject of wealth and pride. Do you think James is opposed to wealth? What is his main concern and his message to us about the dangers of wealth? (Refer to 1 Timothy 6:10 and Hebrews 13:5)

CLOSING REMARKS:

The Scriptures give many characteristics of a true Christian, such as love for God, repentance from sin, humility, devotion to God's glory, prayer, love for others,

separation from the world, growth and obedience. But the one characteristic that clearly stands out, is the desire to do the will of God. Therefore believers cannot pursue worldly things, as it goes against the will of God.

The Bible is not against wealth or pleasure, both are a good part of creation, given to us by God. However, the way we use money should be in a Godly way; generously and justly, as God is generous and just.

PRAYER:

Reflect on what we learned from this passage.

Thank God for the promise that if we come near to Him, He will come near to us.

Ask God to help you to learn how to walk humbly with Him.

Thank God for His goodness and ask Him to teach you to use your money wisely.

Ask God for patience and perseverance as we wait for Christ's return.

CHRIST OUR PERFECT VISION

GROUP DISCUSSION

Prayer

Memory verse:

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

James 4:10 (NIV)

Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

Scripture Reading:

Read James 4:1-17, John 15:9 and 1 John 2:15

Discussion questions

What does James say is the source of quarrels (James 4:1-2)?

James says that we should deal with our desires by asking God for what we want (James 4:2-3). Why do we sometimes resist or hesitate to ask God for what we want? Discuss.

Why can't we love both God and the world? (Refer to John 15:9 and 1 John 2:15)

How would you describe the two attitudes towards the future found in James 4:13-17? How does this impact our outlook towards planning for the future?

Applying the text

Encourage each other to apply the text that we studied in our lives. Share and discuss the following personal questions with each other:

We often have both Christian and non-Christian friends. How can a close relationship with non-Christians impact our relationship with God?

Are you aware of (or maybe part of) disputes or quarrels amongst the people around you? How can you be part of the solution to settle these disputes?

Close in prayer

FAITH IN ACTION

Week **8**

CHRIST OUR Patience and Prayer PERFECT VISION

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 person is powerful and effective.

DAILY WITH GOD 89

— A STUDY OF THE LETTER FROM JAMES



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James 5:16 (NIV)

CHRIST OUR PERSONAL STUDY PERFECT VISION

Read James 5:7-20

OPENING REMARKS:

There are many things in life which look odd to someone who does not know what is going on. Tom Wright says: *“Imagine watching someone make a musical instrument if you have never heard music in your life. You may wonder about all the effort and time put into it and the use of the object. Of course, when the moment comes and it is finished, all is explained. Sometimes you need to wait and be patient, to trust that things will become clear.”* In this passage, James uses different examples to underline the theme of patience.

James is constantly aware of us living within God’s story. God knows the full story and sees the full picture, while we only see part of it. Therefore, with the reality of Christ’s second coming, James urges us to continue in our walk of faith, with patience and persistent prayer, knowing that even if we do not know everything, our God is full of mercy and compassion. It is in this setting of our story within

God's story, that prayer, the most incomprehensible of activities, makes sense.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

What do you find yourself praying about most?

Throughout his letter, James talked about trials, pressures, problems and injustices. In the light of these, what attitude should the Christian maintain? For how long? (Refer to verse 7-8)

What is the parallel between the farmer waiting for the harvest and us waiting for the coming of the Lord? (Also read Galatians 6:9)

When James says in verse 8 that the coming of the Lord is near, does this mean that James thought that Jesus

would return in his lifetime and therefore was wrong?
(Also refer to Romans 13:11, Hebrews 10:25 and 1 Peter 4:7)

Why do you think James added the warning of verse 9?

How is Job an example for us of patience in suffering?
(Refer to Job 1-2:10) What does God want us to learn about Him through all our experiences in life?

In verse 12 James speaks out against taking an oath. Why? Why do we struggle with just letting our “yes” be “yes” and our “no” be “no”?

In what areas of our lives are we to involve God (refer to verses 13-14)? (Also refer to Philippians 4:6-7) What are we acknowledging about God when we pray and praise Him?

How can prayer make a real difference in the life of a struggling believer? (Refer to Psalm 27:13-14, Jonah 2:7 and 1 Peter 5:7)

In addition to private prayer, what other resources do we have as believers (verses 14-16)?

Verse 15 seems to promise guaranteed, instantaneous answers to prayers offered in faith. Does this mean when there is no healing, we lack real faith? Motivate your answer.

In verse 17 we read about Elijah's example of faithful praying. What do you learn from this example? (Refer to 1 Kings 17:1-7; 1 Kings 18:1-2 and 41-46). What can prayer accomplish?

In verse 19 James warns that you should not "wander from the truth". What does this mean? (Refer to John 17:17)

If a Christian begins to turn from the truth, whose responsibility is it to bring that person back? Why is this a privilege as well as a responsibility? (Refer to Matthew 18:15)

CLOSING REMARKS:

As in many letters in the New Testament, the closing of James's letter refers to prayer. Prayer must surround everything that we do, whether we are sad or happy, suffering or cheerful. When we pray in faith, a bit of heaven arrives on earth, a bit of God's future becomes real in the present.

When we maintain open, sharing and praying relationships with other Christians, it will give us the spiritual strength to have victory over sin. John MacArthur says: *“God has given to all believers the ministry of reconciling wandering souls to Himself. When the evidence indicates a professed believer's faith is not real, true Christians knowing the terrible threat of eternal death that person faces, must make it their goal to turn him back from his sin to genuine saving faith in God.”*

If a Christian you know is wandering in some way, it is your responsibility to call them back. It needs to be done carefully, prayerfully and lovingly, as it may save someone's life.

PRAYER:

Reflect on what we learned from this passage.

Thank God for His love and mercy – for the forgiveness He offers us. Ask Him to help you not to take it for granted. Spend time in prayer for people you know who are sick or struggling with unrepentant sinful behaviour. Pray that they may be saved and healed.

Ask God for His help and wisdom as you strive to receive His word and apply it in your daily life.

Ask God for His grace as you minister to others.

CHRIST OUR PERFECT VISION

GROUP DISCUSSION

Prayer

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 person is powerful and effective.

James 5:16 (NIV)

Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

Scripture Reading:

Read James 5:7-20, Romans 13:12, Hebrews 10:25, and 1 John 2:18

Discussion questions

Throughout his letter, James talked about trials, pressures, problems and injustices. In the light of these, what attitude should the Christian maintain? For how long? (Refer to verse 7-8). Do you find this easy? Discuss.

What did James teach about Christ's return (verses 8-9)? (Also refer to Romans 13:12, Hebrews 10:25 and 1 John 2:18)

How can prayer make a real difference in the life of a struggling believer?

Verse 15 seems to promise guaranteed, instantaneous answers to prayers offered in faith. Does this mean when

there is no healing, we lack real faith? Motivate your answer. Discuss in the group.

Applying the text

Encourage each other to apply the text that we studied in our lives. Share and discuss the following personal questions with each other:

Elijah was a person just like us, but he is an example of faithful prayer. In what ways do you struggle as you attempt to grow in prayer? Share and discuss possible ways to rectify your situation.

What changes have you seen in yourself since you began this study of James? What area(s) in your life is most in need of endurance and perseverance?

Close in prayer

CHRIST OUR PERFECT VISION

MEMORY VERSES

WEEK 1:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

James 1:2-3 (NIV)

WEEK 2:

God is never tempted to do wrong, and He never tempts anyone else.

James 1:13 (b) (NIV)

WEEK 3:

Do not merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

James 1:22 (NIV)

WEEK 4:

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

James 2:26 (NIV)

WEEK 5:

We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

James 3:2 (NIV)

WEEK 6:

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

James 3:17 (NIV)

WEEK 7:

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

James 4:10 (NIV)

WEEK 8:

Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

James 5:16 (NIV)

CHRIST OUR RESOURCES PERFECT VISION

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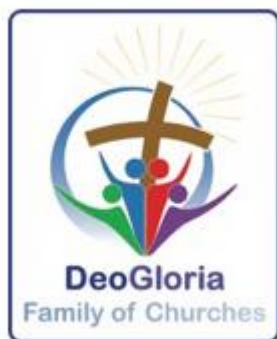
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