



FAITH IN ACTION

(5 BIBLE STUDIES)

EXAMINATION APPLICATION

BIBLE STUDIES

CONTENTS

Contents	page 03
Getting the most out of these studies	page 04
Introducing James	page 05
Study 1: James 1 – Wisdom in trials and temptations	pages 06-07
Study 2: James 2 – Wisdom in friendships and faith	pages 08-09
Study 3: James 3 – Wisdom in taming the tongue	pages 10-11
Study 4: James 4 – Wisdom for the humble and for the future	pages 12-13
Study 5: James 5 – Wisdom in wealth, patience and prayer	pages 14-15
Memory Verses	page 16

THE SMALL PRINT

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INTRODUCTION TO THIS BOOKLET

Your Commitment

I would encourage you to make a commitment to attending your group regularly. I realise that sometimes there are things that get in the way, but do prioritise studying the Bible with other. This will involve sacrifice, and effective use of your time, but I really believe that in doing so you will get the most out of studying the Bible and praying together in your small group.

Your Contribution

What you put into the group is going to determine what you get out of the group. I encourage you to contribute honestly to the discussion and workings of the group. I understand people come from different backgrounds with unique personalities & life experiences. But, we all have a big part to play, so I encourage you to be fully present and take ownership of your group.

Your Preparation

These materials are primarily for use in preparing and/or leading group discussions, but they will also be useful in keeping your thoughts together in one place. The materials provide you with the passage so that you can identify and highlight recurring themes and note down your own thoughts and questions. Also, the materials include questions designed to provoke thought, and help you reflect on what the passage meant, both at the time it was written, and also what it means for us now.

I would encourage you to make good use of these materials, as doing so will help you contribute and get the most out of the group discussions. The materials are, however, only “tools” – they are there to help you, and not to restrict you, or force you to think in a certain manner. I want to see God speaking to you through these passages, and if the questions or notes don't help you, simply don't use them!

I have also included within these materials an introduction to the book. Make of this what you will, but I hope that it is helpful in getting you started with these studies!

Your Leadership

Here are some useful pointers in how to lead your Bible study group. Be aware that included in this study guide are more questions than you can possibly ask and/or answer in one session. They are not designed to be used rigidly, and there will rarely be a need to ask every question! Make sure that you spend some time praying at the start and ensure you read & re-read the passages as much as possible. In relation to the passages, then consider the suggested questions with an open mind. There is rarely “a single right answer” and I would encourage you to share your thoughts with your group.

I have also included a number of quotations from relevant Christian literature, most of which are readily available online if you want to do further thinking or study. My prayer is that as you study together you would grow to love Jesus and experience Him more deeply.

I would appreciate your feedback and suggestions on how to make these materials even better!

*Steve McClure
Spring 2019*

INTRODUCING JAMES

Most identify the author of this letter as James, the brother of Jesus. James did not believe until after Jesus rose from the dead (Mark 3:21,31, John 7:5) and Jesus appeared to him personally (1 Cor 15:7). He was also present in the upper room with the disciples (Acts 1:14) and was probably married (1 Cor 9:5). Paul calls him a pillar but he was not one of the 12 disciples. He was the leader of the church in Jerusalem and was thus prominent at the council in Jerusalem in 49AD (Acts 15). Some date the letter around 60AD while others place it before the council at around 40-45AD. Either way we are clear that James was martyred in 62AD. James seems to be writing to early Jewish believing communities living away from Jerusalem: namely *the twelve tribes scattered among the nations* (1:1): his audience is probably predominantly Jewish Christians. James wanted to teach and encourage those Jewish Christians who had been scattered: those who would have more than likely faced their fair share of challenges and sufferings.

The letter of James is intensely practical and it written in the form of sermon notes often jumping quickly from one subject to another. This was a rabbinical technique used to keep the attention of the audience (pearls on a string). The letter includes many allusions to the Old Testament as well as a large number of instructions.

The people James was writing to were facing persecution and poverty. James writes to encourage them. Its main message is that we should live our faith. *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says (1:22)*. Martin Luther was a famous critic of this letter because he thought that James's message of faith in action conflicted with Paul doctrine of Salvation by faith alone. James says *...faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds (2:17-18)*. Rather than a conflict I think James actually complements Paul's writings. Faith should be practical but we are saved *for* good deeds rather than saved *by* good deeds. The two go hand in hand and so in that sense yes James is right: faith without action is dead. Real faith is a faith that works.

Another key theme is that of trials (1:2-4) which James describes as being given to test of our faith. Temptation on the other hand is not from God but from Satan (1:13-14, 4:7, 5:7-8) and James encourages patient endurance. The right response to such trials is prayer (1:5-7, 4:2-3, 5:13-18). James has a particular heart for the poor and the needy and has some challenging things to say to the rich (1:9, 27, 2:1-5, 15-16, 4:13-17, 5:1-6). James also raises issues of how we speak (taming the tongue in 3:1-12), rewards both here and to come (1:12, 2:5, 12-13, 3:1, 4:12, 5:1-9, 20) and contrasts wisdom *from above* as opposed to *earthly* wisdom (13:13-18).

Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: 'God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble.' **James 4:5-6**

James accuses them of worldliness which he describes as adultery with the world. God however is said to give grace to the humble while opposing the proud. As you wrestle with this most practical of books my prayer is that you would take these things to heart and put them into practice.

Steve McClure, Spring 2019

STUDY 1 – JAMES 1 – WISDOM IN TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS

INTRODUCTION: James begins his letter with a focus on wisdom in trials and temptations. In v1-18 he encourages us to persevere when we face trials of many kinds and to count it as joy to do so. Then in v19-27 he offers practical help on listening to others and to the Word of God and how to live it out.

SETTING THE SCENE: What do we know about the letter of James? What kinds of trials can we infer that his readers were facing (see esp. 1:9-11, 2:1-7, 2:15-16, 4:1-8, 5:1-6, 5:8-11)? What would you say are some of the biggest times of trial or testing that you have faced thus far?

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TRIALS OF MANY KINDS: How do you respond to the idea that we should “consider it pure joy” whenever we face trials of many kinds” (v2)? Do any of the trials that you’ve faced in the past help you understand the claim that the testing of faith produces perseverance, developing into maturity (v2-4)?

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TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS: What (if any) would you say are the differences between tests, trials and temptations (v2-18)? What role do we and God play (and/or not play) in any trials and temptations that we face (v13-18)? How do you respond to James’ claim that desire leads to temptation, which leads to sin, which leads to death (v14-15)? Would you say temptation is a sin? Why or Why not?

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TRIALS AND RICHES (v9-11): These verses imply that the trials of life do away with distinctions between the rich and poor; to what extent do you agree that this is the case (see illustration of the grass)? Which group (the lowly or the rich) do you identify most with and why?

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STANDING FIRM: Trials and temptations can leave us feeling discouraged and defeated; how does James challenge us about standing firm (v12, 1 Cor 10:13, Heb 4:15)? How does such a person contrast with the person described in v6-8?

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LESSONS FOR COMMUNITY (v19-20): Is anger always opposed to the 'righteousness of God'? How might being quick to listen and slow to speak help us to be slow to become angry? If we took these commands to heart what impact would they have on our community together?

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PUTTING INTO PRACTICE (v21-25): What prevents us from receiving God's word with humble hearts? In what ways can we be like the person who looks in a mirror and forgets what they see? In the context of this study, what does it mean for you to be both a hearer and a doer of God's word?

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PURE RELIGION (v26-27): What are some of the differences between religion that is 'pure and undefiled' and that which is not? How do you respond to James' definition of what 'true religion' really looks like? Which of the various aspects of 'faith in action' (presented by James in this chapter) have most spoken to you and/or give you most encouragement to work in over the coming weeks?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Talk about what God's been teaching you about some of the trials & temptations you've been facing over recent months. Ask God to give you wisdom, perseverance and the will to put these things into practice.

MEMORY VERSES: JAMES 1:2-4

STUDY 2 – JAMES 2 – WISDOM IN FRIENDSHIPS AND FAITH

INTRODUCTION: In chapter 2:1-3 James tackles the challenge not to demonstrate favouritism (specifically between the rich and the poor) before turning to the matter of how faith and works are inseparable (2:14-26). James is starting to flesh out what it means to put faith into action!

THE DANGER OF FAVOURITISM (v1-7): What is the nature and context of the favouritism forbidden here by James (see definition below)? What arguments does James present for why favouritism is contrary to the life of the believer? What is it that makes favouritism so harmful? Give examples.

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*Definition: **Favouritism** is an inclination to favour some person or group **or** unfair treatment of a person or group on the basis of prejudice. **Partiality** is a predisposition to like something **or** an inclination to favour one group or view or opinion over alternatives.*

Why do you think we fall into the trap of discriminating against and judging others so easily? What do you think that favouritism look like in practice today? In what ways might you show favouritism?

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THE ROYAL LAW (v8-13): What do you think that James means by the 'royal law' (v8)? Why does breaking one of God's laws make us guilty of breaking the entire law? How do you understand James' words in v12-13 about judgment and mercy?

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FAITH WITHOUT DEEDS IS DEAD (v17-20): Why does James say that faith without deeds is dead (v17) and useless (v20)? Do you think that the opposite is also true, that deeds without faith are also useless, and dead? What is James teaching us about faith and deeds here?

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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND DEEDS: How would you answer the claim that James' emphasis on deeds contradicts Paul's teaching of justification by faith alone (e.g. compare v24 with Rom 3:28, 5:1, Gal 3:26 or Eph 2:8-10)?

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EXAMPLES OF FAITH IN ACTION (v21-26): How then would you explain the relationship between faith and works? How does James use the examples of Rahab and Abraham to illustrate this (v21-26)?

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If you have time, look at the teaching of Jesus (see Matt 7:15-23, 23:31-46), Paul (Gal 5:6, 22-25, Rom 13:8-10, Phil 2:12-13) and John (1 John 3:10, 17-19) on the issue of faith in action.

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What do you think motivated James to write these words to these early Christians? To what extent have you seen in your own life that "faith without deeds is dead" (v26)? What would be the one thing that really sticks out for you about how God wants you to put your faith into action over the coming week?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Encourage one another about the faith you see demonstrated in action. Share about your struggles in the areas of prejudice and judging others. Ask God to help you demonstrate your faith by what you do and to show you areas of your life in which you need to take action.

MEMORY VERSES: JAMES 2:18-19

STUDY 3 – JAMES 3 – WISDOM IN TAMING THE TONGUE

INTRODUCTION: In chapter 3 James turns his focus to how we can learn to control our tongues. He begins by speaking to those who 'teach' but the focus soon broadens to include everyone; words are powerful, they can encourage, build up and teach or they can discourage, deceive and hurt.

WARNINGS FOR THOSE WHO TEACH (v1): Why do you think that James says that teachers will be judged more strictly and do you think that this is fair (see also Matt 12:33-37, 18:6)? In what ways would you say that you are a teacher or involved in teaching others?

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POWER OF THE TONGUE (v3-6): In what ways is the tongue like a horse's bit or a ship's rudder? What can we learn about what it takes to be mindful of what we say from the necessary skills needed to control both a horse and a ship?

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How much impact have you experienced 'what we say' and 'how we say it' to have on other people? Why do you think that James puts such great emphasis on our tongues and the control they can exert over our lives (see Jeremiah 17:9)?

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DEVELOPING THE IMAGERY (v7-12): How do you understand the application of the negative imagery that James uses to describe the impact that our words can have on others; e.g. 'forest fire' (v5), 'untamed animal' (v7) and 'restless evil', 'deadly poison' (v8)? Why do you think James uses such strong and forceful imagery to make his point here?

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BECOMING MATURE (v2): James says that we all struggle in many ways and implies that we should seek after perfection / maturity. How can we control our tongues and become mature (See also Rom 6:11-14, Matt 19:25-26 & James 1:5-8)?

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EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY WISDOM (v13-18): What are the differences between James' description of earthly and heavenly wisdom? What is the source, character and result of these kinds of wisdom? How have you experiences the two source of wisdom to create or resolve conflict? What practical steps can we take to reap a harvest of righteousness (v18) by peace-making?

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THE BIGGER PICTURE: What else does the Bible say about our speech (See Eph 4:25-32, Prov 12:18, 16:24, 18:21, Col 3:8-10 & 2 Cor 12:20)? What kinds of communication (including words, tone, body language, social media etc) do we need to work on and/or cut out of our lives?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Talk about some of the ways that your speech has got you into trouble or caused harm to others in the past. Thank God for the positive impact that we can have on others through our speech and ask that God will help us to control our tongues and avoid hurting others.

MEMORY VERSES: JAMES 3:17-18

STUDY 4 – JAMES 4 – WISDOM FOR THE HUMBLE AND FOR THE FUTURE

INTRODUCTION: In chapter 4 James turns his attention to wisdom for the humble (as opposed to those who quarrel and fight with, speak evil against or judge other people) and for the future (as opposed to those who boast about tomorrow).

WISDOM WHEN FACING CONFLICT (v1-3): In your experience what have been the common fights and quarrels you've found yourself part of? What are these "desires that battle within us" which James mentions and how do they create such conflicts?

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How might an attitude of humility have prevented or deflated such fights or quarrels? What holds us back from instead asking God for what we want? What are the factors James mentions here that impact on whether God will give us what we are asking for?

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SPIRITUAL ADULTERY (v4-5): How do you respond to James' assessment that "friendship with the world" is paramount to spiritual adultery (v4)? What does James mean when he speaks of God 'jealously longing for the spirit He has caused to live in us' (v5)? (See also Hosea 3:1)

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THE WAY OF HUMILITY (v6-10): James says 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'; how would you define pride and humility? Is pride always a negative characteristic, why or who not? How in practice should we submit to God and humble ourselves before Him (v7, 10)? How does pride impact on our relationships with other people (v1-3) and in turn how we relate to God (v4-5)?

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On the flipside we are to resist the devil and instead draw near to God but what does it look like (or indeed not look like) to actively do so (See also 1 Pet 5:6-11)?
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WISDOM FOR THOSE WHO MIGHT JUDGE (v11-12): How is “pride” evident when we speak evil against / judging others? What exactly is James trying to say in these verses (which are not easy) about who is the ultimate lawgiver and judge?
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WISDOM FOR THE FUTURE (v13-14): How is “pride” evident when we boast about tomorrow? Is it therefore wrong to plan ahead? How can we learn from and apply James’ wisdom about humility and about our perspective on the future?
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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Talk about any fights or quarrels that you have found yourself involved in during the past week. Thank God for the grace that He gives to the humble and ask Him to help you submit to Him and resist the devil.

MEMORY VERSES: JAMES 4:7-8

STUDY 5 – JAMES 5 – WISDOM IN WEALTH, PATIENCE AND PRAYER

INTRODUCTION: James finishes his letter by encouraging us to display wisdom in some of the different situations that we face; wisdom in how we use our wealth, wisdom in our waiting and in our suffering and wisdom that motivates us to pray in faith.

SETTING THE SCENE: Is there anything in this final chapter which surprises you either by inclusion or by omission? Why do you think that James ends his letter in such an abrupt manner?

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WISDOM IN OUR WEALTH (v1-6): How does James show that the “rich people” are living lives that are inconsistent with the truth of the gospel? What does James say (either directly or by implication) about how his readers could live humbly with riches?

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WISDOM IN WAITING AND SUFFERING (v7-12): What can we learn about patience from the example of the farmer waiting for the fruit of the earth and the example of Job standing firm under suffering? How should these examples help us to be patient as we wait for our Lord’s return?

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What difference does (or should) Jesus’ return have on our daily lives? What might it mean for you to be more patient in the face of suffering?

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WISDOM FOR EVERYONE (v13-16a): How would you sum up the wisdom James imparts for those in the various situations he mentions? What principles about healing can we derive here? NB: the word here relates to physical, psychological and spiritual healing.

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Looking particularly at these verses what would you say is the connection (if any) between sickness and sin? See also John 9:1-3, Mark 2:5, 1 Cor 11:29-32, John 5:14

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THE POWER OF PRAYER (v16b-18): What do you understand James to mean when he says that the prayer of the righteous person “powerful and effective” (v16-18)? How does the example of Elijah demonstrate this power and effectiveness in prayer?

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BRINGING BACK THE WANDERER (v19-20): What do you think he means in v19-20 by bringing back someone who has wandered from the truth? What does this look like in practice?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Talk together about your struggles in these areas and pray in faith for one another in these things. Ask God to help you grow in wisdom, increase in patience and be stretched as you pray and intercede for one another in faith.

MEMORY VERSE: JAMES 5:8

MEMORY VERSES

STUDY 1: JAMES 1 – WISDOM IN TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS

² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4

STUDY 2: JAMES 2 – WISDOM IN FRIENDSHIPS AND FAITH

¹⁸ But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.

James 2:18-19

STUDY 3: JAMES 3 – WISDOM IN TAMING THE TONGUE

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

James 3:17-18

STUDY 4: JAMES 4 – WISDOM FOR THE HUMBLE AND FOR THE FUTURE

⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

James 4:7-8

STUDY 5: JAMES 5 – WISDOM IN WEALTH, PATIENCE AND PRAYER

. ⁸ You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

James 5:8