



The Summit
Green Campus of Canton Baptist Temple

Resources for Your Life

The Book of James
13 Sessions

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Resource Guide

This resource was compiled from the personal Bible study and blog entries created by Tom Hogsed, pastor of the Summit in Green. You can find the original blog entries at www.tomhogsed.com.

The **introduction** to this book has been written so the reader has a better understanding of the Biblical author, his purpose in writing, and important points to understand before reading.

Following the introduction, each new page represents a **verse by verse overview** of the Scripture passage. The best way to study is to first read the Scripture verses from your Bible relying on the Holy Spirit to provide understanding and then to support your understanding with the commentary written below.

At the end of each Scripture commentary, there is a short **prayer** written so the reader can personally apply what has been discovered; however, it is suggested that you also pray from your heart in response to God's Word.

Feel free to make your own personal notes in your Bible, on this page, or even in a journal.

If this resource has helped you or you have further questions, please send an e-mail to tomhogsed@gmail.com.

Introduction to James

James, the oldest half-brother of Jesus and brother of Jude, wrote this letter to Jewish Christians who had been scattered all over because of harsh persecution under King Herod Agrippa 1 (AD 44). This persecution is most likely related to the events of Acts 12. James had become a leader in the church at Jerusalem, along with Peter and John (Galatians 2:9), but was eventually martyred around AD 62. During his lifetime James was known as one who walked in righteousness; furthermore, his life was characterized by that which he had written in this letter to the persecuted Jewish Christians. James' writing could easily be referred to as the "Proverbs of the New Testament" because of his emphasis on practical Christian living. Considering that the people to whom James was writing were being persecuted for their faith, he was penning these words in order to encourage them to continue living godly in the face of trials. Throughout the book there is a strong emphasis of enduring trials and keeping the faith. A person's faith in God's control will be able to sustain him during trying times and enable him to exemplify a Christian witness amongst believers and unbelievers alike. There will be valuable lessons we can learn from this writing of James and I trust that instead of only hearing the truth, we will live the truth (James 1:21-27).

Dear God, teach me as I read through the book of James. May my heart be open to change as You expose areas of my life which need to be transformed by Your truth.

James 1:1-8

Writing to the persecuted Christians who had been scattered throughout the region, James sends "greetings" hoping that his words would bring hope to their souls. These Jewish believers most likely had experienced severe persecution for their faith under the iron fist of Herod Agrippa 1. No doubt they were confused about their own future as they watched many of their friends, family, and church leaders beaten and even killed for their belief in Jesus Christ. In the midst of fear and uncertainty James wanted them to understand the potential positives which could result from enduring trials as a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. He writes "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect [mature] and complete, lacking nothing" (1:2-4). Instead of being sorrowful about their hardship, James was asking them to enter difficulty with joy knowing that the outcome produces patience and ultimately spiritual maturity. How can difficult circumstances bring spiritual growth? When a follower of Christ is faced with an obstacle, they have the opportunity to draw near to God for strength to persevere. This time of sorrow results in a deeper communion with God, knowledge He is in control, and assurance that we can handle anything which comes into our life (1 Corinthians 10:13). The message for the recipients of this letter from James was to look at this persecution as a chance to move closer to Christ. Many people question God during trials, but the mature Christian will use a trying time in order to rely on God for wisdom (the ability to put knowledge into practice). What we believe about God (knowledge) will affect our reactions in difficult times. Belief that God is in control brings hope, but faith in self results in fear. For this reason James continues to write "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God...and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting..." (1:5-8). Although God never promises to remove hardship from our life, He does assure the strength to endure. Trials lead to patience and patience leads to maturity.

Dear God, provide the strength to endure trials knowing You will produce spiritual maturity in my life.

James 1:9-18

Whether a person is rich or poor, trials are no respecter of persons and happen regardless of an individual's status (1:9-11). The rich and the poor alike should be fully dependent on God to sustain them during hardship...the poor should rejoice in their riches in Christ and the rich should remember the lack of contentment riches provide during times of sorrow. Those who persevere can look forward to receiving the "crown of life" which represents eternal life. James was trying to remind the Jewish believers that their trials were only for a time and could not compare with the glories which awaited them in heaven (1:12). The next few verses are kind of a "set the record straight" commentary James provides so his readers have the right perspective of their trials. James writes "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, not does He Himself tempt anyone" (1:13). Why does James mention this? There were probably some Christians who were questioning God's involvement in their time of persecution; in other words, they believed that God must be responsible for this. However, James clearly states that although God allows trials, He does not cause them to happen. Sin and evil are only a result of man's choice and were not a part of God's plan. James goes on to explain the process of trials and temptations: "each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (1:14-15). These Jewish believers could become bitter at God during their persecution, but James was challenging them to see the greater evil behind this circumstance - the evil world's system, sinful flesh, and the devil. God is only interested in providing "every good gift and every perfect gift" (1:17); therefore, we cannot blame God when trials enter our lives. Let us remember that evil is a result of our own choice and God cannot be held responsible for our willful act of rebellion against Him. Today, may we see trials as a direct result of man's sin.

Dear God, I know You are good. Help me not to blame You for any trial I experience, but rather may I look to You for the strength to endure.

James 1:19-27

After James had made the process of temptation and trials very clear to his readers, he then unveils to them some important qualities needed while experiencing difficulty. James writes "let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (1:19-20). Those who are going through trials should be quick to listen to the words of God and slow to react with their own words. A person's tendency is to immediately verbalize their deepest emotions during trials and temptations, but James says that we should have ears to hear what God is saying. Some people will even ignore the words of God because they have blamed Him for their hardship, but anger against God will not produce good behavior. Instead, a follower of Christ should lay aside all sin and receive the truth of God's word which is able to provide comfort and cleansing (1:21). James then details the two responses to hearing the word of God. First, there is the hearer only. This person hears the truth of God's word, but chooses not to take action (1:23-24). James compares the Bible to a mirror and declares that it will reflect a person's true self; in other words, Scripture exposes what is good, what is bad, how to correct wrong behavior, and how to keep on the right path (2 Timothy 3:16-17). A person who ignores it is unwise. The other reaction to the word of God is to be a doer. A doer is a person who not only hears the truth of scripture, but also takes action in his or her life (1:25-27). Obedience to the word of God is foundational to our faith. Without spending time in God's word, a person will not be able to fulfill the purposes of God. Take the advice of James - be doers of the word, and not hearers only..." (1:22).

Dear God, help me to carefully hear Your word and then give me the strength to obey it with my whole heart.

James 2:1-13

In this very practical writing, James provides some superb advice on how to live wise as a follower of Jesus Christ. He spent the first chapter dealing with having the proper perspective of trials and the importance of scripture in our daily struggles. James had just challenged his readers to not only be hearers of the word, but also doers. He will spend the remainder of the book writing practical ways a believer can practice their faith. In the first part of chapter 2, James addresses a very important issue within the church - favoritism. James illustrates his teaching by writing "if there should come into your assembly [synagogue] a man with gold rings, and fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes...have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?" (2:2-4). I believe every person can relate with this situation because we are constantly put in a position where we must judge who is most important. Most of the time we base our decision on the outward appearance of a person and maybe even the status gained by speaking to the richer or more well-known individual. James was very concerned that the church was becoming obsessed with only those who brought status to the gathering instead of treating everyone the same. God's perspective is that He sees everyone as equal and therefore deserving of the same treatment as the rich. James reminds his readers that "God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him..." (2:5). There was a genuine concern on the heart of James that the church would cater to the rich while ignoring the needs of the poor. The rich and the poor alike should be treated the same. James continues by reminding the church of the second great commandment - "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (2:8). The church should be consumed with meeting the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of all people instead of becoming judges of who is worthy of their attention. When a person shows partiality, they "commit sin" (2:9). This is plain speak. Showing favoritism is always sin because you are placing value on one person while minimizing the importance of another. Carefully examine your life and see if you are showing partiality.

Dear God, help me to treat all people the same. May I be interested in the needs of all people, not just the ones whom the world upholds as worthy. Help me to love others as You have loved me.

James 2:14-26

Throughout the book of James the author writes about the very practical side to faith in Jesus Christ. Subjects such as equality, perseverance, love for God's word, wholesome speech, humility, patience, and fervent prayer are addressed with the hope that believers will be obedient to God in these matters. But, can a person who is not concerned with obedience to God's word have a faith which is genuine? Apparently some of James' readers thought so. It seems that some people viewed faith as nothing more than a simple, mental belief in the existence of God with no desire to live a righteous life (2:19). James asks a glaring question to his readers: "if someone says he has faith but does not have works...can faith save him?" (2:14). He goes on to illustrate this by saying that a person who claims to have faith sees a person in need, but does not provide the things he needs (2:15-16). The real question James is posing is "Can a person who claims to have faith in Jesus Christ ignore His command to love others?" The implied answer is "no." Genuine faith in Jesus Christ will always produce good works. Before I go further, I did not say that faith will result in perfection, but true faith will manifest itself in a desire to obey God's commands, even if we do not always do what is right. A person who has no passion for doing what is right in the sight of God has not been saved by faith. Paul says that we were "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). James gives two very clear illustrations from the Old Testament of people who were saved by faith and that salvation was proven by their willingness to obey God – Abraham (2:21-24) and Rahab (2:25-26). Each of these two people was not perfect, but their faith was realized by their good works. Here is a simple way to summarize the words of James – works do not lead to faith, but faith leads to works. Faith is a gift from God and works are the byproduct of that faith. James says it well when he proclaims "faith without works is dead" (2:17, 20, 26).

Dear God, thank You for saving me from the power of sin. Now, would You please provide the desire to obey Your commandments and follow Your will?

James 3:1-12

In my opinion, the way a person talks says so much about the condition of their heart. An individual who is constantly slandering the character of others reveals a heart of jealousy and pride. Someone who regularly gossips and spreads rumors manifests a heart of bitterness and anger. The man or woman who speaks with perverted words proves that their heart is consumed with lust and immorality. A cursing mouth exposes a person's lack of control and hatred for wholesome speech. The list could go on, but you get my point - the words which come from the mouth are vivid reminders of the true condition of some one's heart. James sets aside a few verses to address the way a person speaks and relates biblical principles to guide us in saying the right words. First of all, James admits the complexity of controlling one's speech: "For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body" (3:2). Does this mean that we should just say whatever we want? Absolutely not. Although it is sometimes hard to control what we say, there should be a deep desire in the heart of the believer to speak words which reflect good. Next, James reminds his readers of the power of the tongue. He refers to the tongue as a small part of our body, but one which "boasts great things" and "is a fire...and sets on fire the course of nature" (3:5-6). He goes on to call the tongue "an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (3:8). Words can quickly destroy a person or kill their happiness. It is amazing that with the tongue "we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude [likeness] of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing" (3:9-10). To this reality James says "these things ought not to be so" (3:10). He illustrates the ridiculous nature of saying good and evil out of the same mouth by referring to a fountain and a tree. "Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree...bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh" (3:11-12). How can a Christian worship God but then turn around and talk bad about someone else? How can a follower of Christ worship God with their singing but then curse with their lips? These things should not be happening. How is your speech?

Dear God, "let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14).

James 3:13-18

James moves from the topic of speech (3:1-12) to a discussion of wisdom, which is defined as the application of knowledge. Wisdom is practical in nature because it will affect conduct and lifestyle choices, but James goes a little deeper distinguishing between the wisdom of man and the wisdom which comes from God. Man's wisdom is based on limited and experiential knowledge while God's is based on the truth. Paul also wrote much about this discussion in 1 Corinthians 1-2. James begins his writing with a question: "Who is wise and understanding among you?" (3:13) but he quickly answers his own inquiry by saying "let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom." True wisdom is reflected in our actions. He goes on to write "if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic" (3:14-15). Those who chose to use their knowledge and wisdom for self-promotion and notoriety are really not wise at all. So what does wisdom from God look like? James writes that it is "pure [moral], then peaceable [makes peace], gentle [patient], willing to yield [submission to God], full of mercy [compassion] and good fruits [good works], without partiality [fair] and without hypocrisy [belief and actions are consistent]" (3:17). There are many in our world who herald themselves as wise, yet they are only interested in others knowing their name. God desires His followers to stay away from self-seeking and rather use wisdom to live well before others. True wisdom affects not only ourselves, but also those around us causing them to look to the God who has given them life. Jesus says it like this in His sermon to His followers (Matthew 5-7): "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Dear God, may the knowledge I receive from You be turned into wise living. Help others to see the way I live that they may also become worshippers of You.

James 4:1-12

So far, James has been writing to Jewish Christians who have been dispersed throughout the region because of persecution. He began his letter by encouraging them to stand strong during their time of trial and in the end they would profit from this hardship (1:1-18). James then informed them that Scripture could sustain them through any circumstance and their duty was to faithfully obey it (1:19-27). In James 2 he tackled issues such as treating all people the same (2:1-13) and that good works are always the result of faith in Jesus Christ (2:14-26). Chapter 3 exposed the necessity of having the right speech (3:1-12) as well as the difference between God's wisdom and man's wisdom (3:13-18). Next James addresses a very relevant topic which faces every human being - pride. There appears to be some conflict happening inside the church but the exact situation is not documented. Although the specific circumstance is not known, we can assume through the words James uses that people were fighting because they were not getting their own way (covetousness) and pride was taking over. James asks the following questions: "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?" (4:1) Since the church is very diverse, there are numerous opinions and oftentimes these differences can lead to issues of pride and selfishness. However, when believers choose to argue and try to get their own way at any expense, the church becomes ineffective in its witness to the world. This is what causes James to write "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (4:6). Instead of being prideful, a follower of Christ should remain humble. Humility involves forgetting what I want and doing what is best for everyone. The cure for pride is to "submit to God...resist the devil...draw near to God...cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts...humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up" (4:7-10). There is no need to fight with others in order to get my own way when I am daily submitting my attitudes and actions to God. When I allow Him to take control of every situation, He will be able to accomplish His will through me.

Dear God, help me to resist a prideful spirit and be clothed with humility.

James 4:13-17

In the first part of James 4, he had mentioned a conflict which was current in the church. Although the specifics are not given, the reader can gather that people were fighting to get their own way. In the passage we are reading today, there seems to be another problem facing James' readers. This dilemma had to do with people who were making daily choices, but leaving God out of their thought process; in other words, they claimed to believe in God but were not willing to allow His word to shape their decision making. The particular situation James mentions here is that they were business people who were selfishly making financial ventures without considering God's perspective. It is as if these individuals were making their own plans with no regard for their faith in Jesus Christ. For this reason James warns "You do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (4:14). Although these people thought they had their future figured out, James reminded them that they were not even aware of what would happen tomorrow. Instead of selfishly planning their future, they should have declared "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that" (4:15). When a supposed follower of Jesus Christ ignores God's ways for daily life, are they really following Christ? Some people refer to this type of person as a practical atheist - with their mouth a person claims they have faith, but their actions do not represent God in any way. Life is too short to leave God out. He knows the beginning from the end and deserves to be first place in all the plans we make. Spending time reading God's word will make a person aware of His will. Prayer is an act of submission where we are asking God for strength to accomplish His work. Admit today that you do not know what will happen tomorrow, but make a fresh commitment to follow Christ right now.

Dear God, I know life is short so help me to consider You in all the plans I make.

James 5:1-6

After James had just addressed those who had been leaving God out of their daily lives (4:13-17), he turned his focus onto the rich. Now, no where in the Bible do you find rich people being condemned for having money, but most of the time they are rebuked for their obsession with money and their unnatural pursuit of it above all else. These verses seem to indicate that James was specifically targeting the rich who were professing faith in Christ, but ultimately worshipped their money and possessions. He writes in verses 3-5, "You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out...you have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury...you have murdered the just...." There is a progression here which James makes very apparent. Riches can bring misery (5:1) and are subject to loss (5:2-3). They can also cause a person to become stingy (5:3-4) and pamper themselves with a life of luxury (5:5) while many of their employees are being deprived of their fair wages. Lastly, James mentions that the pursuit of riches has caused the rich to take whatever measures necessary to sustain their lifestyle (5:6). So what warning is James giving to those who have misused their riches? He reminds them that God hears the cry of the oppressed implying that God will bring judgement upon those who mishandle their riches (5:4b). There is a two-fold application to this writing. First, if you are rich you should remember that God has entrusted you with those riches and you must not misuse your money. Secondly, if you are working for someone who is rich, but they are withholding what you deserve, allow the Lord to handle the wrongdoing. May all of us learn to handle our money with care and treat those who may be under our care with fairness and respect.

Dear God, teach us to be fair and graciousness when it comes to money. Remind us to keep You first in our hearts so that we will use what You have given us in the right way.

James 5:7-12

James returns to the familiar theme of patience (James 1:2-4) in his letter to the persecuted Christians who were scattered throughout the region. His readers were, no doubt, experiencing tremendous stress due to fear for their personal safety and this stress was even causing them to become irritated with each other. Instead of giving into the demands of this pressure, James wrote that they should "be patient" as well as "establish your [their] hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (5:8). It is significant to note that the focus of a person experiencing trials should be upon the future return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His kingdom. James is almost implying that the best is yet to come so endure the hardships of the present. Stress also has a way of breaking down relationships between individuals so he wrote "do not grumble against one another" (5:9). Many times people take their stressful circumstances out on other people, even those who are close friends and family. James reminded his readers about the Old Testament prophets and Job who both were patient during suffering (5:10-11). They could have turned their stress into anger against God and others, but they chose to remember "that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful" (5:11b). If we remember that God is good and gracious we will see our times of trial with a different perspective. We know that He only allows trials to come into our lives in order to bring maturity to our faith. James gives a stern warning to those experiencing trials - "do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your 'yes' be 'yes,' and your 'no,' 'no,' lest you fall into judgment" (5:12). Some people tend to make quick promises to God during times of trial, but James cautions them in this matter reminding them that they are obligated to fulfill whatever they promise to God. Trials are no easy thing to endure, but God will make the reward for endurance worth it all. Look forward to eternal life where God will put all things back together and restore peace and righteousness.

Dear God, help me to be patient in trials knowing that You have something beyond imagination in store for those who love You.

James 5:13-20

How fitting for James to close his letter out with the subject of prayer. After all, his readers were experiencing persecution for their faith which had led them to essentially give up hope; however, James' words had reminded them to keep focused on God's ways and to live out an example to those in their community. It would have been easy to quit and walk away from faith in Jesus Christ, but James challenged them to continue on and that God would provide strength for the journey. James lovingly asks "is anyone among you suffering?" He knew the answer to this question so he went ahead and gave them what they needed to do in response to their hardship: "Let him pray" (5:13). At the center of prayer is the recognition that a person needs God. Prayer is an act of humility where a person acknowledges complete dependence on God. James also poses the question, "Is anyone among you sick?" This question is not implying a physical infirmity, but a weakening under the pressure of persecution and trials. It could be read, "Is anyone tired, worn out, or ready to quit?" Those who answer "yes" should "call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him...and the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up" (5:14-15). Many were weakening under the pressure of persecution, but James commanded them to call for the leaders of the church to pray, support, and encourage them through prayer. When this is done, James promised that God would deliver them from their discouragement. If the person asking for prayer had known sin in their life, they should confess it first so the answer would not be hindered (5:15b). James then pointed to Elijah, the Old Testament prophet, who "prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit" (5:17-18). James reminded his readers that God answers prayer, especially those which are offered up fervently and by a righteous person (5:16). Regardless of what we are experiencing in our lives, God will give ear to those who faithfully pray from a pure heart and extend help to those in need. James closes with a few simple words regarding those who may have abandoned their faith during this time of trial: "if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (5:19-20). May we learn to stay focused when trials come our way and endeavor to live a life of faithfulness to God through the good times and the bad times.

Dear God, I pray that You would provide strength during times of trial and keep me focused on Your ability to give help and comfort in time of need.