

James for Families: Devotional Series for families on the lessons of James



*Living at the foot of the cross,
encouraging all women to see God in the ordinary*

James for Families
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The Book of James ~ A Bible Study for Families

Before you begin: I have written this study using The Message translation to make it easier for children to comprehend. However, as you go along please read the text from your favorite and more traditional translation (we like the NIV, Holman and ESV). You can break this up by chapter or by verses. Do whatever is best for you and your family. I pray the lessons in the book of James will be absorbed in all of your hearts as you study it together.

Chapter 1 – Faith Under Pressure

I, James, am a slave of God and the Master Jesus, writing to the twelve tribes scattered to Kingdom Come: Hello!

²⁻⁴ Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way.

James 1:1 shows us that James is writing a letter. Who is he writing to?

Where are they located?

Why do you think he wrote them a letter instead of going to see them in person?

James has great advice for the twelve tribes that we can learn from today. When you are under pressure to learn something new, speak in front of people, or have stressful things going on your life how do you feel?

However, James says we should feel great and consider it like a present. Why?

⁵⁻⁸ If you don't know what you're doing, pray to the Father. He loves to help. You'll get his help, and won't be condescended to when you ask for it. Ask boldly, believingly, without a second thought. People who "worry their prayers" are like wind-whipped waves. Don't think you're going to get anything from the Master that way, adrift at sea, keeping all your options open.

In verse 5 James tells what we should do if we need help. What is the verb he uses?

How are we supposed to pray?

9-11 When down-and-outers get a break, cheer! And when the arrogant rich are brought down to size, cheer! Prosperity is as short-lived as a wildflower, so don't ever count on it. You know that as soon as the sun rises, pouring down its scorching heat, the flower withers. Its petals wilt and, before you know it, that beautiful face is a barren stem. Well, that's a picture of the "prosperous life." At the very moment everyone is looking on in admiration, it fades away to nothing.

According to verse 9, when should we cheer?

When is someone down-and-out?

Why do you think James instructs us to cheer for the arrogant rich when they lose?

Talk about why James compares wealth and prosperity to a wildflower. Who are we supposed to cling to and count on above all else?

12 Anyone who meets a testing challenge head-on and manages to stick it out is mighty fortunate. For such persons loyally in love with God, the reward is life and more life.

If you hang in there through your challenges, what is the reward?

13-15 Don't let anyone under pressure to give in to evil say, "God is trying to trip me up." God is impervious to evil, and puts evil in no one's way. The temptation to give in to evil comes from us and only us. We have no one to blame but the leering, seducing flare-up of our own lust. Lust gets pregnant, and has a baby: sin! Sin grows up to adulthood, and becomes a real killer.

Does God do mean or evil things to us? Or is it our actions and decisions that cause bad things to happen to us?

Have you ever made a bad decision and gotten in trouble for it? Do you think God made you make that terrible decision or did you make it on your own?

16-18 So, my very dear friends, don't get thrown off course. Every desirable and beneficial gift comes out of heaven. The gifts are rivers of light cascading down from the Father of Light. There is nothing deceitful in God, nothing two-faced, nothing fickle. He brought us to life using the true Word, showing us off as the crown of all his creatures.

In verses 16-18, what two adjectives does James use to describe the gifts out of Heaven?

He calls God the Father of Light. Look up Genesis 1:3. Who created light? Do you think that is why James calls Him the Father of Light?

Act on What You Hear

19-21 Post this at all the intersections, dear friends: Lead with your ears, follow up with your tongue, and let anger straggle along in the rear. God's righteousness doesn't grow from human anger. So throw all spoiled virtue and cancerous evil in the garbage. In simple humility, let our gardener, God, landscape you with the Word, making a salvation-garden of your life.

When James says "post this at all intersections", what do you think he means by that?

Where should anger be kept?

Where are we supposed to put evil and bad habits?

What does James compare God to in verse 21?

How or why do you think God is the gardener of your heart and life?

22-24 Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear! Those who hear and don't act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like.

When James says don't fool yourself (v.22) into thinking you are a good listener, what do you think he means?

Do you feel like you are a good listener and follow directions well? Why or why not?

Why do you usually look in the mirror? Do you remember what you see after you walk away?

In the same way, after reading God's word (the Bible) do you walk away and forget it or do you remember what He told us to do and not do?

What are some things you could do to help you remember God's laws when you at school, playing with friends or out and about with family?

25 But whoever catches a glimpse of the revealed counsel of God—the free life!—even out of the corner of his eye, and sticks with it, is no distracted scatterbrain but a man or woman of action. That person will find delight and affirmation in the action.

What kind of life does God offer us (v. 25)?

Compare and contrast the differences between a scatterbrain and a person of action.

Which one do you think others think you are?

What two adjectives does James use to describe what a person of action will have? Define them and discuss their meaning.

26-27 Anyone who sets himself up as “religious” by talking a good game is self-deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world.

When you “set yourself up” you are pretending. Do you think it makes God happy when we stay we are religious but do not act like we are religious?

James says this kind of religion is only hot air. Does that mean the religion is real or fake?

What two things does James tell us show we are really a Christian/religious?

Can you think of any other ways?

Chapter 2 – The Royal Rule of Love

1-4 My dear friends, don’t let public opinion influence how you live out our glorious, Christ-originated faith. If a man enters your church wearing an expensive suit, and a street person wearing rags comes in right after him, and you say to the man in the suit, “Sit here, sir; this is the best seat in the house!” and either ignore the street person or say, “Better sit here in the back row,” haven’t you segregated God’s children and proved that you are judges who can’t be trusted?

According to James 2:1, what SHOULD NOT influence how we live or act?

What is public opinion?

Whether someone is rich, poor, smart, disabled, mean or nice, how are we supposed to treat them?

Have you ever been treated unfairly or different from others?

How did it make you feel?

⁵⁻⁷ Listen, dear friends. Isn't it clear by now that God operates quite differently? He chose the world's down-and-out as the kingdom's first citizens, with full rights and privileges. This kingdom is promised to anyone who loves God. And here you are abusing these same citizens! Isn't it the high and mighty who exploit you, who use the courts to rob you blind? Aren't they the ones who scorn the new name—"Christian"—used in your baptisms?

Does God follow the world and do things like others (v. 5)?

Who does God love, adore and promise His kingdom to?

James explains that we often treat those God has promised His kingdom to badly. Can you give an example of this from our world or your own life?

⁸⁻¹¹ You do well when you complete the Royal Rule of the Scriptures: "Love others as you love yourself." But if you play up to these so-called important people, you go against the Rule and stand convicted by it. You can't pick and choose in these things, specializing in keeping one or two things in God's law and ignoring others. The same God who said, "Don't commit adultery," also said, "Don't murder." If you don't commit adultery but go ahead and murder, do you think your non-adultery will cancel out your murder? No, you're a murderer, period.

What does James consider the Royal Rule of the scriptures?

Do we get to pick and choose which of God's laws we want to follow?

Do you think following some of God's laws makes it ok to break His other laws?

¹²⁻¹³ Talk and act like a person expecting to be judged by the Rule that sets us free. For if you refuse to act kindly, you can hardly expect to be treated kindly. Kind mercy wins over harsh judgment every time.

What should we expect others to treat us if we treat them badly?

Even when someone is mean to us, God tells us we are still supposed to love them like we love ourselves. Have you ever been nice to someone who was mean to you? Was it difficult or easy for you?

Faith in Action

14-17 Dear friends, do you think you'll get anywhere in this if you learn all the right words but never do anything? Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it? For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, "Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!" and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup—where does that get you? Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?

What does James tell us we have to add to our words to be a good Christian?

If we made it a math formula, it might look like this: **words + actions = Christian**

James gives us an example (vs.15-17) of using words with no actions. Can you give an example?

He says, God-t_____ without God-a_____ is nonsense. What is nonsense?

18 I can already hear one of you agreeing by saying, "Sounds good. You take care of the faith department, I'll handle the works department." Not so fast. You can no more show me your works apart from your faith than I can show you my faith apart from my works. Faith and works, works and faith, fit together hand in glove.

Can you only have actions/works without faith or faith with no action? Why or why not?

When James says faith and works fit together hand in glove – what do you think he means?

Can you give some other examples of how faith and works fit together? (i.e. like peanut butter and jelly)

19-20 Do I hear you professing to believe in the one and only God, but then observe you complacently sitting back as if you had done something wonderful? That's just great. Demons do that, but what good does it do them? Use your heads! Do you suppose for a minute that you can cut faith and works in two and not end up with a corpse on your hands?

Does calling yourself a Christian make you one? Why or why not? Can you find a scripture from another book of the Bible to support your answer?

If we cut faith and works and separate them what happens? What would it look like if we keep faith and works together? Illustrate what it might look like.

21-24 Wasn't our ancestor Abraham "made right with God by works" when he placed his son Isaac on the sacrificial altar? Isn't it obvious that faith and works are yoked partners, that faith expresses itself in works? That the works are "works of faith"? The full meaning of "believe" in the Scripture sentence, "Abraham believed God and was set right with God," includes his action. It's that mesh of believing and acting that got Abraham named "God's friend." Is it not evident that a person is made right with God not by a barren faith but by faith fruitful in works?

In the verses above, James refers back to Abraham and Isaac. Look back at Genesis 22 and read the story.

Do you think Abraham's faith and works were united or severed? Why do you say that?

Based on this story, do you think it will always be easy to keep your faith and works/actions united?

When James says we should have a fruitful faith (v. 24), what do you think he means?

Look up Galatians 5:22-23 and write out the fruits of the spirit that are listed. Star the one you think you do well and circle two that you think you need to work on.

25-26 The same with Rahab, the Jericho harlot. Wasn't her action in hiding God's spies and helping them escape—that seamless unity of *believing* and *doing*—what counted with God? The very moment you separate body and spirit, you end up with a corpse. Separate faith and works and you get the same thing: a corpse.

Rahab was a woman who put her life on the line to protect Christians from soldiers who were after them. If you have time, you might want to read her story with your parents in Joshua 2.

James says that Rahab had the unity of b_____ and d_____.

In verse 26, James mentions a corpse. Do you know what that is?

He explains that when you take a spirit from a body it means the person dies. When you separate faith from works you get the same thing. . . a corpse. No, you don't actually die, but your love, your heart and your faith grow cold to God and your faith suffers.

Chapter 3 – When You Open Your Mouth

¹⁻² Don't be in any rush to become a teacher, my friends. Teaching is highly responsible work. Teachers are held to the strictest standards. And none of us is perfectly qualified. We get it wrong nearly every time we open our mouths. If you could find someone whose speech was perfectly true, you'd have a perfect person, in perfect control of life.

James lists two reasons we should be slow to teach others. What are they?

Is anyone perfectly qualified to teach?

Do you ever feel like you need to be perfect? When and Why?

How does it feel when you succeed at something? How about when you fail?

Now consider how God adores and loves you no matter how many times you mess up, make the wrong decision or fail. How big does His love feel?

³⁻⁵ A bit in the mouth of a horse controls the whole horse. A small rudder on a huge ship in the hands of a skilled captain sets a course in the face of the strongest winds. A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything—or destroy it!

In verses 3-5 James uses two examples of small things that control larger things. What are those two large things? What controls these large objects?

⁵⁻⁶ It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell.

He explains that our words can seem small and insignificant but can cause destruction. How do you think words cause destruction?

Has someone ever used words to hurt you? When?

7-10 This is scary: You can tame a tiger, but you can't tame a tongue—it's never been done. The tongue runs wild, a wanton killer. With our tongues we bless God our Father; with the same tongues we curse the very men and women he made in his image. Curses and blessings out of the same mouth!

What is scary to James (v.10)?

What two things does He tell us can come out of our mouths? C _____ and
B _____

10-12 My friends, this can't go on. A spring doesn't gush fresh water one day and brackish the next, does it? Apple trees don't bear strawberries, do they? Raspberry bushes don't bear apples, do they? You're not going to dip into a polluted mud hole and get a cup of clear, cool water, are you?

We could turn verses 10-12 into a list of things that don't go together. For example:

Fresh water \neq salty water

apple trees \neq strawberries

What are the other two things that don't equal each other?

James is trying to tell us that a mouth that curses doesn't equal a mouth that praises God any more than an apple tree produces strawberries. We need to pick one. Should a Christian choose to have a mouth that curses or blesses others?

It's can't be both. This can be hard to do, but God can give us the strength we need to control our tongues.

Live Well, Live Wisely

13-16 Do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here's what you do: Live well, live wisely, live humbly. It's the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts. Mean-spirited ambition isn't wisdom. Boasting that you are wise isn't wisdom. Twisting the truth to make yourselves sound wise isn't wisdom. It's the furthest thing from wisdom—it's animal cunning, devilish conniving. Whenever you're trying to look better than others or get the better of others, things fall apart and everyone ends up at the others' throats.

What do you think it means to be wise?

In your life, who do you consider to be wise? Do you think wisdom makes this person a good one to ask advice?

What does James tell us we need to do to build a reputation of being wise?

Live _____, Live _____, and Live _____

What counts? What you say or what you do?

James lists several things that don't show wisdom. Make a list of those things and circle the quality that you struggle with the most.

Then, write out a prayer asking God to help you overcome this and live more wisely.

17-18 Real wisdom, God's wisdom, begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, not hot one day and cold the next, not two-faced. You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results *only* if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honor.

In these verses, James lists the qualities of wisdom. Make a list of those qualities.

What takes hard work (v.18)? Do you have a hard time with this or does it come easily to you?

Chapter 4 – Get Serious

1-2 Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way, and fight for it deep inside yourselves. You lust for what you don't have and are willing to kill to get it. You want what isn't yours and will risk violence to get your hands on it.

Have you ever stopped to consider why wars begin or people get into fights? What do you think starts them?

What reason does James give for others fighting?

Have you ever wanted something that wasn't yours? (i.e. a toy, house, shoes) What was it? Did you ever try to take it from the person who had it or convince someone to give it to you?

Look up the ten commandments (Exodus 10). What is the 10th commandment? To covet is to want something someone else has.

2-3 You wouldn't think of just asking God for it, would you? And why not? Because you know you'd be asking for what you have no right to. You're spoiled children, each wanting your own way.

When we want things others have James calls us "spoiled children".

Talk about wants and needs. What's the difference between the two? Give some examples of each.

4-6 You're cheating on God. If all you want is your own way, flirting with the world every chance you get, you end up enemies of God and his way. And do you suppose God doesn't care? The proverb has it that "he's a fiercely jealous lover." And what he gives in love is far better than anything else you'll find. It's common knowledge that "God goes against the willful proud; God gives grace to the willing humble."

When we act like spoiled children, who are we cheating (v.4)?

We are cheating God and He becomes our E_____.

How would it feel to know that God is your enemy?

7-10 So let God work his will in you. Yell a loud *no* to the Devil and watch him scamper. Say a quiet *yes* to God and he'll be there in no time. Quit dabbling in sin. Purify your inner life. Quit playing the field. Hit bottom, and cry your eyes out. The fun and games are over. Get serious, really serious. Get down on your knees before the Master; it's the only way you'll get on your feet.

James tells us how to stay close to God so He can work in us. What should we yell at the Devil when he tries to get us to move in the wrong decision?

What else could you say to him?

We are supposed to yell at the Devil, but we are supposed to w_____ to God and he'll be there. Think about it, when you do you whisper to someone? When they are far away or very close? God is always close to us. So close, we only need to whisper to Him.

Why do you think James tells us to get serious and get on our knees (v.10) so you can get up on your feet? Do you talk to God on your knees?

11-12 Don't bad-mouth each other, friends. It's God's Word, his Message, his Royal Rule, that takes a beating in that kind of talk. You're supposed to be honoring the Message, not writing graffiti all over it. God is in charge of deciding human destiny. Who do you think you are to meddle in the destiny of others?

James mentions the Royal Rule again in these verses. Do you remember what it is?

Who can you choose to love as yourself this week? How are some ways you will show them?

Nothing but a Wisp of Fog

13-15 And now I have a word for you who brashly announce, "Today—at the latest, tomorrow—we're off to such and such a city for the year. We're going to start a business and make a lot of money." You don't know the first thing about tomorrow. You're nothing but a wisp of fog, catching a brief bit of sun before disappearing. Instead, make it a habit to say, "If the Master wills it and we're still alive, we'll do this or that."

Do you or your family ever make plans to do things together? James reminds us that we should seek God in all our decisions and seek His plans for us because He is the only one who knows our future.

When you have a decision to make, do you ever ask God for guidance?

When we make plans without considering God's will for us do you think we are being selfish or faithful? Why?

16-17 As it is, you are full of your grandiose selves. All such vaunting self-importance is evil. In fact, if you know the right thing to do and don't do it, that, for you, is evil.

James tells us that self-importance (selfishness) is E_____. If we know the right thing to do and don't do it that is evil too.

Have you ever done something you knew you shouldn't? Did anyone find out? Did you ask forgiveness?

Close by praying together that God will give you the strength and wisdom to push the Devil aside and to seek God's wisdom and direction in all you do.

Chapter 5 – Destroying Your Life from Within

1-3 And a final word to you arrogant rich: Take some lessons in lament. You'll need buckets for the tears when the crash comes upon you. Your money is corrupt and your fine clothes stink. Your greedy luxuries are a cancer in your gut, destroying your life from within. You thought you were piling up wealth. What you've piled up is judgment.

What does arrogant mean?

It isn't bad to be rich, but arrogance is wrong.

What are luxuries?

It isn't bad to have luxuries, but greedy is wrong.

Why do you think James calls greedy luxuries a cancer?

4-6 All the workers you've exploited and cheated cry out for judgment. The groans of the workers you used and abused are a roar in the ears of the Master Avenger. You've looted the earth and lived it up. But all you'll have to show for it is a fatter than usual corpse. In fact, what you've done is condemn and murder perfectly good persons, who stand there and take it.

Who do you think the Master Avenger is that James is referring to?

James is reminding us that the Lord Almighty hears the cries of the people we do terrible things to. He hears what we say and sees what we do to others. He stands up for the lowly and does not like it when we treat others badly or unfairly to get ahead. Just the same, God hears and sees when we are hurt or mistreated too.

How does it make you feel to know God is on your side when you are mistreated?

7-8 Meanwhile, friends, wait patiently for the Master's Arrival. You see farmers do this all the time, waiting for their valuable crops to mature, patiently letting the rain do its slow but sure work. Be patient like that. Stay steady and strong. The Master could arrive at any time.

Who is the Master we are waiting for?

How does a farmer have to be patient? When do you have to be patient?

⁹ Friends, don't complain about each other. A far greater complaint could be lodged against you, you know. The Judge is standing just around the corner.

Have you ever talked about a friend (gossiped) to someone else? Or has a someone you called a friend complained about you to others?

How did it make you feel?

What do Proverbs 11:13 and Proverbs 16:28 say about gossip?

¹⁰⁻¹¹ Take the old prophets as your mentors. They put up with anything, went through everything, and never once quit, all the time honoring God. What a gift life is to those who stay the course! You've heard, of course, of Job's staying power, and you know how God brought it all together for him at the end. That's because God cares, cares right down to the last detail.

No one in the Bible is perfect, except Jesus, but God used them anyway. Can you name some people from the Bible and qualities they have that you should model?

Name some good qualities God has given you that you think God could use to honor Him.

¹² And since you know that he cares, let your language show it. Don't add words like "I swear to God" to your own words. Don't show your impatience by concocting oaths to hurry up God. Just say yes or no. Just say what is true. That way, your language can't be used against you.

In Exodus 20 (The 10 Commandments), what commandment says we should not take the Lord's name in vain?

Do you think this law is important to God? Why?

Prayer to Be Reckoned With

¹³⁻¹⁵ Are you hurting? Pray. Do you feel great? Sing. Are you sick? Call the church leaders together to pray and anoint you with oil in the name of the Master. Believing-prayer will heal you, and Jesus will put you on your feet. And if you've sinned, you'll be forgiven—healed inside and out.

What should you do if you are hurting?

What if you feel great?

What about if you are sick?

Have you ever prayed for a sick friend?

What will happen if you have sinned?

16-18 Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with. Elijah, for instance, human just like us, prayed hard that it wouldn't rain, and it didn't—not a drop for three and a half years. Then he prayed that it would rain, and it did. The showers came and everything started growing again.

James gives us a formula to practice daily.

1st we should C_____ our sins.

2nd we should P_____ for each other.

Where Elijah's prayers answered? Check out 1 Kings 17 to read more about Elijah's story.

19-20 My dear friends, if you know people who have wandered off from God's truth, don't write them off. Go after them. Get them back and you will have rescued precious lives from destruction and prevented an epidemic of wandering away from God.

Should we turn our backs on friends and family that have strayed from God?

What are some ways we can help them come back to God?

Make a list of friends or family you can pray for over the next year that have strayed from God.

Look up 1 Peter 4:8. Write it out on paper and illustrate it. Memorize this week.