



## BIBLE STUDY BASICS

# James

*Explore why and how our faith impacts our whole lives.*



**N**ot long after Jesus left Earth, James wrote this practical letter to the believers who were working out what their new lives as Christ-followers should look like. An excellent book for new believers or for mature believers to get back to basics, James holds challenging truth for Christians.

This Bible Study Basics study can be done in any number of sessions you'd like, with the ideal number being 5–7 sessions. It includes excellent discussion questions for the text, fun icebreakers and activities to engage group members, clear application points, great tips on leading discussion, and information on how to make the study work for all levels of spiritual maturity.



# How to Use Bible Study Basics

---

*We're so glad that you're using this study guide with your group. We know you'll gain a lot of wisdom through your discussion. Use this guide to make the most of this resource.*

## Decide How Many Meetings

Any of our **Bible Study Basics** can be covered as quickly or as slowly as you'd like. If the book you're studying has five chapters, you might plan on five meetings. Or to look at the passages more in depth, plan for ten meetings. Consider how long your group would like to meet to discuss this book of the Bible.

## Decide Which Themes to Cover

In this resource, each chapter is divided up into major themes that are covered in the text. As you discuss a chapter, you may choose to discuss only one of the themes or all of the themes in the chapter. Or you might focus most of your discussion on one theme and only briefly cover another. If you're going more slowly through the book, you'll be able to cover all of the themes more in depth. As you prepare for your study, consider what main idea or ideas you'd like your group members to walk away with.

## Choose 4–6 Questions

In the **Talk It Out** section, we've given you a variety of questions to choose from for your study, but please don't use them all! You simply don't have time to cover every single question we've written. Plan to cover 4–6 questions per meeting and choose them based on the themes you've chosen to cover. This will ensure you'll have enough time to discuss each of the questions thoroughly. If you have extra time, you can always ask additional questions.

## Do the Activity

Start your meeting with one of the **Start It Out** activities to engage your group members. If you're covering multiple themes in one meeting, just choose one activity. The Start It Out activities will get your group focused and thinking about the important themes of your study.

## Lead the Discussion

Use the tips and suggestions in “**Lead a Great Discussion**” and “**Engage Everyone in Your Group**” to make the most of your time together. This proven advice comes from the experts at SmallGroups.com.

## Identify Your Next Step

The **Live It Out** section provides a list of possible action steps to take as a result of your discussion. Applying what you've learned will be unique to each group member. Let group members choose one application step from the Live It Out section or come up with one on their own. You might also consider what your next step as a group will be.

## End With Prayer

Don't forget to share prayer requests. Pray that group members will follow through with their application. Thank God for all he's teaching you through your time together.



# Lead a Great Discussion

---

*For many, facilitating a group discussion—especially in a Bible study—can be intimidating. But the goal isn't to have all the right answers or even to get through all the material. To lead a great discussion, get all your group members involved, and help them connect the discussion to their lives. This is what leads to life change, and that's the goal. Here are a few tips for leading a great discussion with your group.*

**Get to know each other.** Take some time, especially at the start of a new group, to get to know one another. As relationships develop, group members will be more likely to share authentically, which will help your discussion lead to life change. Share a snack, devote the opening 15 minutes to small talk, or intentionally linger after the meeting.

**Create a safe environment.** Trust makes your group a place where genuine community can form. Group members need to be able to trust that the group is a safe place—a place where they can get real and know that they will not be judged, gossiped about, and so on. Let everyone know that what's shared in group should stay in the group.

**Ask follow-up questions.** Many people default to staying pretty surface-level with their answers, so get in the habit of not letting them off the hook.

Ask more questions that follow up on their responses. Here are some examples of good follow-up questions for the short or simple answers that people often give:

- What makes you say that?
- How do you feel about that?
- How do you think that would've affected you if you'd lived at the time this was written?
- How would you explain your answer to a non-Christian friend or neighbor?

**Make sure the rubber hits the road.** Tell your group that by the end of the night you'll each decide how to apply what you're discussing. Otherwise you'll just leave a little smarter, rather than with changed lives. So whatever it is you're discussing, make sure to end with some application questions. Help your group members consider what the passage has to do with their lives today and what one thing they'll do differently this week as a result of your discussion. Use the Live It Out section as a guide for some ideas.

**Affirm everyone who shares.** When people share in the group—no matter how much you may disagree, or how theologically incorrect they may be—make sure they feel affirmed about their answer in the moment. Thank them for sharing. Having the courage to share is a big deal, and you'll want to recognize it. If someone says something theologically off, consider talking with the person outside of group, one on one. And make sure to ask for clarification first. The person may have simply misspoken. If they still hold on to the incorrect belief, you can lovingly point out the truth to them.

**Lead, don't teach.** Empower others to discover the truth of Scripture for themselves by asking questions and refraining from lecturing. Allow the Holy Spirit to move in your group members.

**Wait 30 seconds.** While it may be tempting to ask a question and then immediately answer it, doing so will create an unsafe environment for sharing, and group members will come to expect your answers. It takes at least 20 seconds for many people to process a question, so allow them time to think. If there's still no answer, rephrase the question.

**Pray together.** As you dig into God's Word, don't forget to pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance. When you're finished with your discussion, pray for one another. Praying together not only brings your group members before God, but also allows your group members to care for one another.



# Engage Everyone in Your Group

---

*Studying the Bible is for everyone—from not-yet believer to mature Christ-follower. To ensure you're engaging everyone in your meeting, use these tips.*

**Dedicate time to small talk and casual conversation.** As counterintuitive as that sounds, people need to get to know each other socially so they can come to understand each other spiritually. One great idea is to build a meal into your small-group time or dedicate a portion of your meeting to coffee and refreshments. The casual conversation over food will help build trust and deepen relationships within the group.

**Incorporate icebreakers at the beginning of your study time.** While icebreakers may not seem to have much lasting value, they actually go a long way in setting up a healthy environment that will help group members develop authentic relationships. Be sure to use one of the Start It Out activities to begin your meeting.

**Read Scripture from multiple translations during your study.** Use both a more traditional translation and a modern translation. Consider the differences in how the words are translated and the changes in language over the years.

**Research the historical context or commentaries for passages that will be studied.** When you share the background information, you'll give all group members, regardless of their level of maturity, a common place to start. You'll find a great overview at the beginning of this study. Alternatively, have some of the more mature believers volunteer to do this research and present it at the meeting. Tap into their knowledge.

**Make it clear that all questions are welcome.** Whether they're questions of clarification or deeper analysis, members should feel safe asking what's on their mind. Deeper questions may push new believers to take the next step in their relationship with God; questions from new believers may prompt seasoned believers to take a second look at a familiar passage.

**Watch your language.** Don't assume everyone knows what *covenant* means—or any other “church” word, for that matter. Always clarify the meaning of these words with your group. Ask group members to explain the concepts to the rest of the group. This will both challenge mature believers to articulate their beliefs and help new believers understand biblical terms.

**Look for opportunities to break into smaller groups.** If your group is getting large, break into groups of three to five for portions of your discussion or prayer time. More people can share when there are fewer in a group.

**Empower those further along by asking them to help you in some way.** Allow them to organize aspects of the meeting, present background information on a passage, lead a discussion from time to time, or facilitate the group prayer.

**Let group members dig in at their own level.** As group members prepare for the meeting, make it clear you'd like everyone to read the passage you'll be discussing. Challenge more mature believers to read the passage each day of the week to see if they gain any new insights. Or challenge them to read the entire book for context (if it's a shorter book like an epistle). They could also incorporate journaling into their reading. Or assign a more challenging question ahead of time to mature believers to research and report back to the group. Stretch group members with homework that fits their stage, allowing them to choose for themselves which level is appropriate.

## Overview of James



### Why read this book?

If you're looking for practical ways to live as a Christian, you've come to the right book. James shows that it's possible to believe the right things, yet live the wrong way. This book will also show you how to turn right doctrine into right living.

### Who wrote this book?

No one knows for sure which James wrote this letter. Most believe the writer was James, Jesus' brother (Gal. 1:19).

### To whom was it written?

The twelve tribes (1:1), meaning either the people of Israel who had become believers in Christ, or the church in a symbolic sense (Gal. 6:16), including both Jewish and Gentile believers.

### Why was it written?

To warn believers of some habits they had developed that undermined the essence of what they believed—things such as favoritism, slander, pride, the misuse of wealth, and a lack of patience. Obedient living would increase their witness as those scattered among the nations (1:1).

### When was it written?

James may have been the first New Testament book to be written—perhaps between a.d. 40 and 50.

### What to look for in James:

This letter takes a no-nonsense approach to hypocrisy. James describes the evil of a tongue out of control, showing favoritism toward the rich, and boasting about plans for tomorrow. Don't look for pious platitudes here; expect a string of hard-hitting, specific, practical instructions to help you live an authentic Christian life.

—From the *NIV Quest Study Bible* (Zondervan, 2011)





## CHAPTER ONE

# Trials and Temptations

---

## James 1:1–18

### ► Start It Out

Break into groups of two or three, and give each group a sheet of paper and a pen. Set a timer for 90 seconds. Have groups come up with as many songs as they can that have “love” in the title. When the time is up, see which group has the most songs. Then have the winning group share their list. Discuss how group members accomplished the goal, how they felt under the time crunch, and how well they worked in a group. Discuss how competition and limited time can add to the pressure of situations. Does pressure tend to make you more or less motivated?

### ► Talk It Out

- Who is James, the author of this book?
- Why does he write that he is “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ”?
- Who are the 12 tribes scattered? And why are they scattered?

- James writes that we should consider it pure joy whenever we face trials—not if we face trials. What does this say to you?
- What is your normal reaction to trials?
- Name a time you've been under pressure. How did you handle the situation? How do you act under pressure?
- Verse 2 implies that God doesn't always rescue us from pain. Sometimes he allows it so we can grow in perseverance. When has pain led to perseverance in your life?
- Does the fact that God doesn't always rescue us from pain raise any questions in your mind? If so, what are they?
- According to verse 4, what is the goal of our growth? What does it mean to be "mature and complete, not lacking anything"?
- Summarize verses 6–8 in your own words. What is the point of this passage?
- According to verse 6, we are to ask God and then trust that he's handling it. When have you asked God for help but continued worrying about it? Why is it difficult to fully give our cares to him?
- Compare what James says about worry to what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:25–34).
- Why is being double-minded harmful?
- Verses 9–11 talk about being poor and being rich. How would you summarize this passage? What is the point James is trying to make?
- God doesn't want us to focus on those things that won't last (money, treasures, etc.). So what should we be focused on instead?
- How does verse 13 make you feel about God? Does it raise any questions?
- When you're tempted, do you tend to look inward or do you tend to blame people or situations? Do you agree with verse 14? Why or why not?
- Are our desires always bad? When have you been tempted to meet a healthy need in an unhealthy way (e.g., hunger is a good desire, but I ate fast food to meet that need; the desire for love is a healthy desire, but I dated someone who wasn't good for me)?
- What does it mean that all good and perfect things come from God (v. 17)? What other ways do we think we get good things?

- Verse 18 says God chose us to be his. We're his prized possession. How does this make you feel? How might this knowledge change the way you live?

## ► Live It Out

- Identify an area of temptation in your life and ask God for wisdom in navigating the temptation.
- Confess an area of sin in your life to God. Identify what triggers the temptation in your life and also the real desire that you're trying to meet in an unhealthy way. Pray for wisdom in this area.
- Reflect on a time when you grew as a result of a trial. Praise God for the ways he grew you during that time.
- Think of someone you know currently going through a difficult time. Identify two ways you can encourage him or her this week.
- Remind yourself of all the good and perfect gifts God has given you. Start a blessing journal and list ways God has blessed you. Keep it going and when you face a trial, refer back to your blessings.
- You are God's prized possession, and your life should reflect that. Identify one thing that needs to change in your life. What three things can you do this week to make that change?

# Listening and Doing

---

## James 1:19–27

### ► Start It Out

Tell group members to take off their watch and place it in their pocket. If they don't have a watch, ask them to put their phone where they can't see it. Then instruct them to draw their watch or phone in as much detail as possible without

looking at it. After a few minutes, have group members compare their drawing with their watch or phone.

## Debrief:

- It's too easy to look into God's Word and instantly forget it or set it aside. This results in people who are informed but not transformed. What can we do while reading the Word to ensure that we won't quickly forget what it says? What have you done that works?
- Taking a regular inventory of our spiritual lives can help us see if we're being transformed. Do you believe you're more or less judgmental than you were a year ago? Are you more or less approachable? Are you more or less energized in your spiritual walk?
- What can we do when we've lost our energy to pursue God's Word? What have you done when you've lost interest?

## ► Talk It Out

- Consider verse 19. How are you doing with this? What makes it difficult for you?
- According to verse 21, what should we get rid of? What is included in the description?
- What does it look like to "accept the word"?
- Summarize verses 22–25. What is James's point here?
- What do you do when you look in the mirror? What things stand out to you? What does looking in a mirror cause you to do?
- What is the value of knowing what we're supposed to do—knowing God's Word? Is it enough to simply know what the Bible says? Why or why not?
- Why is it so important for James to mention the tongue in verse 26?
- How does what we say reveal what's in our minds and hearts? What do your recent words reveal about you?
- How might what we say mean more than our religion—what we believe?
- Why does James pinpoint orphans and widows in verse 27? Why would these people need extra care at the time James was writing?

- Who are the people in your community that are powerless, without a voice, and in need of extra compassion?
- What does it look like to keep ourselves from “being polluted by the world”? How can we live in the world (not isolating ourselves from it) and yet not look exactly like the world (taking on all the popular values)?

## ► Live It Out

- It’s important to know the Word so we know what God calls us to do. Make a specific plan for getting into the Word more regularly. How will you do it? When will you do it? What tools (if any) will you use?
- Instead of simply knowing what the Bible says, choose to live out its values. Identify one area of your life God has been speaking to you about, and make a specific plan for how to change your behavior or thoughts in that area.
- Instead of simply learning from the Bible, live it out. As you read the Bible during your devotional time, end by asking, “What specific thing does God want me to do as a result of reading this passage?”
- Surround yourself with key life instructions. Write a verse (e.g., v. 19, v. 22) on an index card and tape it to your bathroom mirror, place it on your car’s dashboard, or display it in another prominent way.
- Identify the “orphans and widows” in your community—those people who are without a voice, power, or hope. Choose one way you as an individual or as a group will serve them. Make a specific plan.
- Identify groups and organizations that are helping the “orphans and widows” in your community. Learn about ways to help by researching the organizations, using their educational resources, and/or visiting them.



## CHAPTER TWO

# Favoritism

---

### James 2:1–13

#### ► Start It Out

It's been said that justice is getting what you deserve, mercy is not getting what you deserve, and grace is getting what you don't deserve. Give each group member a sheet of paper and markers or crayons. Group members have three minutes to draw a time when they experienced justice, mercy, or grace. For guidance, ask: "What happened? What did you 'deserve'? What did you get? How did that impact you?" Afterward, have group members share their drawings and the stories behind them.

#### ► Talk It Out

- Why is showing favoritism something Christians shouldn't do?
- Why do we show favoritism? When?
- What do we base our favoritism on (e.g., wealth, intellect, connections)?
- When have you experienced the negative side of favoritism (i.e., you were left out)?
- Why do you think James spent so many verses on this topic?

- Who is James quoting in verse 8? Where does it appear in the Bible?
- How does Jesus' response sum up the entire law in just two directives?
- How does what Jesus says promote mercy over judgment?
- What does it look like to "love your neighbor as yourself"?
- What does "the whole law" in verse 10 refer to?
- How does the law show us where we stand with God without grace?
- According to this passage, are there varying levels of sin? For instance, are there some sins that are worse than others? Why or why not?
- How do we treat different sins differently? Why do we do that?
- How can the law give freedom (v. 12)?
- Is James saying that if we don't show mercy, God won't be merciful? Why or why not?

### ► Live It Out

- Confess to God how you have been showing favoritism. Ask forgiveness of those you've hurt. Determine how you will avoid showing favoritism in the future.
- Which of your "neighbors" have you not shown love to recently? Choose one way you will show him or her love this week.
- Confess those sins in your life that you have downplayed as being not as bad as other sins. Pray for wisdom on how to live in new, healthier ways.
- When—in your work, at home, or with friends—have you shown judgment rather than mercy? Determine what step you can take this week to remedy the situation (if appropriate) or to ensure you show mercy in the future.
- God's ways bring freedom, not judgment. Confess to God how you have not allowed him to set you free. Pray that God will help you see and live out the freedom he has given you.
- Identify a person or group of people in your community who have been shown more judgment than mercy. Brainstorm ways you or your group can show mercy to this person or group. Make a plan to carry this out within the next four weeks.

# Faith and Deeds

---

## James 2:14–26

### ► Start It Out

Bring two pots, one with a live plant in it (preferably a bulb plant), and the other with soil and a dried bean buried just under the surface. Ask group members to observe the two pots. Which one has a living seed below the surface? How can you tell? What would happen if you were to water the bean and place it in the light? Could the light bring the bean to life, allowing a plant to grow? What are the signs that show we have a living faith? How might spending time with the Light bring our faith to life and keep it living?

### ► Talk It Out

- Summarize this section in two sentences. What's the point James is making?
- Who was Abraham? Remind us of his story.
- Who was Rahab? Can anyone tell us her story?
- Why do you think James chose to highlight the stories of Abraham and Rahab?
- Based on what we know about Abraham and Rahab, how do we know they had faith?
- Can you think of others in the Bible who showed they were faithful? Who? How did they show their faith?
- Who in your life has inspiring faith? What stands out to you about their faithfulness?
- How does this section compare to the message in Romans 3:21–31?
- Read Matthew 23:25–28. What does this passage have in common with James's message about faith and deeds?



- What should the relationship be between faith and deeds?
- Is it okay to do things out of obligation, even when our heart isn't in it?

### ► Live It Out

- Take an account of what your daily actions say about your faith. Where are you doing well? Where are your actions mismatched with your faith?
- Keep a journal over the next week. Each evening, write what your actions said about your faith. At the end of the week, consider how well your faith is reflected in your actions. Choose at least one thing you will do to help make your faith apparent in your deeds.
- Keep a journal over the next week. Each evening, write down those things you did out of obligation—things you did because you're supposed to, not because your heart was in it. Pray through these situations, asking God to engage your heart in your actions. Ask him to give you his heart.
- Spend time daily with Jesus so that your faith will grow and flow out in your actions. Schedule in time each day to spend time with him. How will you spend your time with him? When?
- Ask someone whom you love and trust to give you an honest account of how well your faith is represented in your actions. Then pray together that God will cause your faith to grow and overflow into your actions.
- Consider what God has been teaching you through this study or your own personal study over the last few weeks. Find one way to live out that teaching this week.



## CHAPTER THREE

# Taming the Tongue

---

## James 3:1–12

### ► Start It Out

Pass around a thermometer. Ask: “Why is the body’s temperature considered a vital sign of physical health?” (Because a higher than normal temperature is evidence of an infection.) Next ask: “What are some vital signs of spiritual health?” Read Luke 6:45: “A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.”

**Ask:** “What vital sign of spiritual health does this verse cite?” Emphasize this timeless truth: the tongue is the thermometer of the heart. What we say and how we say it reveals our spiritual condition and indicates whether or not there’s an “infection” the Holy Spirit needs to treat. Sins of the tongue—lying, slandering, gossiping, speaking harshly—are symptoms of a deeper malady.

**Spark conversation by asking:** “What kinds of words flow from a heart that’s spiritually cold? What are examples of words indicating one’s heart is spiritually healthy? Is learning to say the ‘right’ things the answer to becoming spiritually healthy? If not, what is the answer?”

## ► Talk It Out

- Why will teachers be judged more strictly? By whom will they be judged?
- How was Scripture learned at this time in history? Why would bad teaching be especially harmful at this time?
- Read Colossians 3:16, which talks about teaching. What two things does Paul write are important when teaching and admonishing?
- Do you think that James is overemphasizing the power of the tongue? Why or why not?
- When have you seen great good come from the tongue? When have you seen great harm done?
- Why is what we say so important?
- How does what we say reflect our faith—even when we're not directly talking about our faith?
- Why is it so difficult to tame the tongue?
- How can we control the tongue? What does it look like? What have you found helpful?
- If no one can tame the tongue (v. 8), why even try?
- Galatians 5:22–24 reminds us that if we have the Spirit within us, we will experience the fruit of the Spirit. How does this reminder give us hope for taming our tongues?

## ► Live It Out

- Next time you teach, pray that the message of Christ will dwell in you and that God will give you wisdom for teaching well.
- When have your words hurt someone this week? Confess this sin to God and pray that he will give you the strength and courage to tame your tongue. Apologize to the person you've hurt.
- Pinpoint the triggers in your life for your words wreaking havoc. When are you tempted to gossip, speak harshly, discourage, etc.? Who are you with when this happens? Pray for wisdom in handling these situations. Form a plan this week for overcoming this temptation.

- How have you been hurt by someone's words? If you haven't forgiven that person, begin to work through this process with God this week.
- What current situation in your life is getting the best of you? Identify at least one way to tame your tongue in this situation.
- Who in your life needs some encouraging words this week? Make a plan for encouraging that person.

# Wisdom

---

## James 3:13–18

### ► Start It Out

Use Psalm 37:30–40 as a responsive prayer. You can read the leader's portions, or you can ask someone else in the group to. After the reading, allow a few moments for silent reflection. Want to mix things up? Consider doing this activity at the end of the lesson.

#### Leader:

The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom,  
and their tongues speak what is just.  
The law of their God is in their hearts;  
their feet do not slip.

#### Group:

The wicked lie in wait for the righteous,  
intent on putting them to death;  
but the Lord will not leave them in the power of the wicked  
or let them be condemned when brought to trial.

#### Leader:

Hope in the Lord  
and keep his way.  
He will exalt you to inherit the land;  
when the wicked are destroyed, you will see it.

### Group:

I have seen a wicked and ruthless man  
flourishing like a luxuriant native tree,  
but he soon passed away and was no more;  
though I looked for him, he could not be found.

### Leader:

Consider the blameless, observe the upright;  
a future awaits those who seek peace.  
But all sinners will be destroyed;  
there will be no future for the wicked.

### Group:

The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord;  
he is their stronghold in time of trouble.  
The Lord helps them and delivers them;  
he delivers them from the wicked and saves them,  
because they take refuge in him.

## ► Talk It Out

- What has James previously said about wisdom?
- How is worldly wisdom different from the wisdom from heaven?
- When have you found that God's wisdom is at odds with worldly wisdom? How did you handle the situation?
- Consider large businesses and the wisdom they stereotypically use. What worldly wisdom do they operate on?
- If the wisdom from heaven is "peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere," what is worldly wisdom like?
- Will God's wisdom always make sense to us? Why or why not?
- Do you think non-Christians see God's wisdom as "peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere"? Why or why not?
- What have we done—good and bad—to communicate God's wisdom to non-Christians? Overall, have we given an accurate picture?

- Read 1 Corinthians 1:18–25. What does Paul say about wisdom in this passage? How does it compare to what James writes?
- How does verse 13 relate this section to the rest of James 3?

### ► Live It Out

- Identify a situation you are dealing with that needs God's wisdom. Pray for God's wisdom and that you will not resort to the world's wisdom.
- Consider an area of your life where you depend on worldly wisdom rather than God's. Confess this to God and pray for wisdom and courage to live in God's wisdom.
- In what situation in your life are you impatient and tempted to work with worldly wisdom rather than God's? Choose one way you will keep yourself focused on God's wisdom this week.
- How have you hurt someone by relying on worldly wisdom? Confess this to God and apologize to the person you've hurt.
- How have you been hurt by a Christian operating with worldly values? Begin or continue the process of forgiveness this week.



## CHAPTER FOUR

# Submission to God

---

### James 4:1–12

#### ► Start It Out

Sometimes nicknames are silly and fun. Other times, they're hurtful and based on someone's judgment of us. Tell us about a nickname you've had. How did you get it? Who gave it to you? Did you like it? How accurate was it?

#### ► Talk It Out

- How do our desires cause “fights and quarrels”? What are the desires that cause this?
- What desires do you have that make you want to fight or quarrel?
- What does *covet* mean? When have you heard this word used?
- What does “friendship with the world” look like?
- How does friendship with the world make us adulterous people?
- When is our loyalty divided between God and the world?

- Tell us about a time when you felt pulled in two directions: to do God's will and to do what the world expects.
- What advice does Matthew 5:13–16 have for living in the world?
- What does it mean that God is a jealous god? How does Exodus 34:10–14 further explain this?
- How do you think the advice in verses 7–10 will help with the problems discussed in this section: desires causing fights and quarrels and enmity with God?
- Why do you think we feel the need to judge others?
- When are we most likely to judge others?
- What law is James writing of in verse 11?
- How is speaking against a brother or sister speaking against the law?
- When have you felt judged? What was your experience?
- What advice is given in the Sermon on the Mount about judging (Matt. 7:1–6)?

### ► Live It Out

- Identify the desires that make you want to fight or quarrel (e.g., to be included, pride, revenge). Bring them before God in prayer. Decide what you will do when you begin to feel those desires bubbling up.
- Identify the desires that make you want to fight or quarrel (e.g., to be included, pride, revenge). Ask God to reveal to you where these desires are coming from. Are you trying to fill a void only God can fill? Spend time with God each day this week and pray through these desires.
- Explore the ways you have become “worldly.” Are you indistinguishable from the world? Confess this to God and pray that he will show you how to be more Christlike.
- Set up a regular time to spend with God so that you will know his heart. Make your plan specific.
- Read through this section each day this week, asking God to point out to you the specific phrases he wants you to act on.



- Confess to God how you have been judging someone recently. Explore why you feel the need to judge him or her. This will help you gain insight into your own heart. Ask God to give you a new perspective on this person.

# Worrying About Tomorrow

---

## James 4:13–17

### ► Start It Out

Jesus told his followers, “Do not worry.” He wasn’t saying we should be irresponsible or just blindly hope things will work out. Rather, he was calling us to trust. How might worry be a barrier to closeness with God? Even if you’re not worried about starving or going without clothes, how much time does thinking about your wardrobe or your menu take? What kind of things do you spend a lot of mental energy worrying about? How might that “thinking” time distract you from your relationship with God?

### ► Talk It Out

- Summarize the message of verses 13–17.
- How can discussing our future plans appear to be boasting?
- Is planning ahead bad?
- What is the balance between planning ahead and living in the present?
- Does verse 15 mean that we should literally say, “If it is the Lord’s will” anytime we’re talking about plans? Why or why not?
- How does knowing “you are a mist” make you feel? What are the pros and cons of this?
- How does this passage relate to Matthew 6:31–34?

- Why do you think James ends this chapter with the words in verse 17?
- What does verse 17 mean? How does it relate to James 1:22–23?

### ► Live It Out

- Pray about your future plans with God. Are your plans the same as his plans?
- Spend more time in the present rather than worrying about the future. Choose at least one thing you will do this week to spend meaningful time with the important people in your life rather than worry about the future.
- Spend less time worrying about the future. Write out verse 14 on a note card and place it somewhere you will regularly see it. Identify one thing you will do to stop worrying when you sense your mind is going there.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# Warning to Rich Oppressors

---

### James 5:1–6

#### ► Start It Out

Read Matthew 6:33–34 aloud: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

These words of Jesus come in the middle of a passage in which he tells us not to worry. What do you think it means to “seek first his kingdom”? What kind of kingdom is Jesus talking about? Describe how people seeking first the kingdom would act. What would you notice about their checkbook? What other defining characteristics would you see in them and in their lifestyle?

#### ► Talk It Out

- Is money or wealth a bad thing? Why or why not?
- When does money or wealth become a bad thing? Do you have an example?

- When have you seen the rich do good things? Bad things?
- How does this passage compare to Matthew 6:19–24?
- Look at Matthew 6:21. How can an accumulation of earthly wealth show that our heart is not with God?
- How can money stand in the way of a meaningful relationship with God?
- How have you experienced money enslaving you or someone you know?
- What can generosity do for our faith?
- What does this passage tell us about treating those in our care (at work or elsewhere)?

### ► Live It Out

- Enter into a fast to learn how your possessions have a hold on you. Choose a set amount of time to do a shopping fast (no shopping except for groceries), a media fast (no e-mail, social media, or TV), or a restaurant fast (no eating out).
- Educate yourself about the living conditions of people in developing countries.
- Sponsor a child through Compassion or World Vision to use some of your money to help a specific person in need.
- Serve individually or as a group at a local food pantry or homeless shelter.
- Identify possessions that you no longer use and donate them to a local charity or to individuals in need.
- Identify one or more ways you can treat those in your care (at work or elsewhere) better. Take steps to implement one change this week.

# Patience in Suffering

---

## James 5:7–12

### ► Start It Out

Break the group into two teams. Give each team a deck of cards and tell them the goal is to create the highest tower of cards they can in three minutes. Say, “Don’t start yet. I’ll tell you when to go.” Then wait 30–45 seconds in silence. If anyone asks when they can start, simply say, “Not yet.” After the 30–45 seconds, yell, “Go!” When three minutes are up, compare the height of the card towers and declare a winner. Debrief the activity by asking: “What were your plans? Did your original plans work? How well did you work together as a team? How did the time limit affect you?” Then debrief the waiting time before they were allowed to start, asking: “How did you feel when you had to wait to start? What thoughts went through your mind? How was the wait frustrating? How was the wait beneficial?”

### ► Talk It Out

- What does “the Lord’s coming” refer to?
- What kind of suffering were the original recipients facing?
- What kind of suffering do Christians face today around the world?
- What kind of suffering do American Christians face?
- Why do you think James pairs patience and standing firm in verse 8? How do they go together?
- How does suffering or waiting cause us not to stand firm?
- How might impatience show distrust in God?
- Why would James place verse 9 in this passage? Why is not grumbling against one another so important as he talks about patience and Jesus’ return?
- What is the story of Job? What did the Lord bring about in the end for him?

- When has your patience been tested? What was the situation?
- When have you had to wait for something? What was the waiting like? Did you try to do anything to move it along faster?
- James talks about swearing in verse 12. How does this relate to Matthew 5:33–37?
- Why would someone swear or make an oath? What might be the motivation?
- Why was swearing or making an oath such a big deal? Why would James include it here?

### ► Live It Out

- Identify a situation in your life where you are impatient. Confess your impatience to God and ask him to give you courage as you wait.
- Learn more about the suffering and persecution experienced by our Christian brothers and sisters around the world.
- Think of one person you know who is suffering. Choose at least one way to encourage him or her this week.
- Decide to stop grumbling this week. Choose something you will do instead whenever you have the urge to grumble.

# Faithful Prayers

---

## James 5:13–20

### ► Start It Out

Pass a bowl of M&Ms around the group and ask each person to take some. People can grab as many as they want, but they need to have at least one. (Also, remind them not to eat the candy yet.) Once everyone has at least one M&M,

have each person list a prayer request for each M&M they took. Conduct the prayer time as usual, and then ask some of these questions: “Did anyone feel like they had to list too many prayer requests? What was that like? Did anyone feel like they needed more M&Ms? How did that change your approach to the prayer time? Is it possible for us to pray for things that are ‘too small’ for God’s attention? Why or why not?”

## ► Talk It Out

- What does James say about prayer?
- When do you pray more: when times are good, or when times are bad? Why?
- Why do you think it’s important that we pray often?
- When have you experienced the power of prayer?
- Does this passage mean that whatever we pray for will happen? Why or why not?
- When have you experienced an unanswered prayer?
- How does Matthew 7:7–11 compare to what James writes?
- Verse 16 says we must confess our sins to each other. What does that mean? What does it look like?
- When verse 16 says we must confess our sins to each other, does that mean we must confess to a priest?
- What is the story of Elijah referenced here? Why did he pray for no rain?
- What lesson(s) can we learn from Elijah’s story?
- What do verses 19–20 tell us about relationships?
- How can we help each other live out our faith?
- When has someone reminded you of the way you were supposed to live when you were about to make a bad decision? What method helped their message get across?
- When has someone confronted you and helped you live a different way? How did he or she do so?

- What methods aren't as effective when trying to help someone see God's truth?
- Is there a correct time to talk to someone about his or her sin? If so, when?

### ► Live It Out

- Pray more intentionally. Set aside time each day to lift up your own needs and the needs of friends and family. Consider keeping a prayer journal to keep track of prayers and when/how they're answered.
- Pray especially for one person in your group going through a difficult time. Spend an extended period of time praying for him or her during your meeting.
- Commit to praying the hours (or the Liturgy of the Hours) for one week—praying at seven specific times each day.
- Identify one person (or group of people) in your life to whom you can confess our sin. If you have someone, thank God for him or her, and make sure to check in with that person this week. If you don't have someone, pray that God will reveal who can fill that role in your life.
- Do you know someone who needs correction? Figure out when and how you will confront your friend. Pray for wisdom and wait for the Holy Spirit's prompting.

—Study by Amy Jackson, managing editor of [SmallGroups.com](https://www.smallgroups.com). You can follow her on Twitter [@AmyKJackson](https://twitter.com/AmyKJackson).