

BOOK OF JAMES - NOTES FOR LEADERS

PREPARATION

1. It is good to study James in your own quiet times.
2. You may want to know more about the book of James. e.g. 'The Message of James' in the Bible Speaks Today series, by Alec Motizer. 'The Letter of James & Peter' by William Barclay.
3. Do pray for the members of your group. It is good to pray for one or two each day in your quiet time.
4. Each week you will be given questions to cover in your group. Work through these questions beforehand. Put them in your own words maybe. Sometimes it helps to put answers at the side. You don't have to answer all the questions.
5. Some weeks there is some preparation needed and special items to use. Read through the material in advance.
6. Do be prompt in starting, even if some are missing. Likewise finish on time. Better to finish while it is going well rather than go on and on and kill it. If some want to talk for longer, they can do so over coffee.
7. Try to include everyone. Think about the seating and make sure no one is out of it. Encourage those who are quiet, and don't let any one person dominate. A good way to involve all is to split into 2's to answer a question, particularly if it is personal, and then ask for contributions to share in the whole group.
8. It is good to open and close the meeting in prayer. Quiet people will often do this if you ask them during the week.
9. Each section has several questions. You do not have to attempt all the questions in each section. The questions are there to help you get your group discussing that area.
10. The studies and formats are suggestions. Feel free to adapt and change the material as you think appropriate.

Using the study series in your purpose group

The studies are broken down into different sections that each focus on one of St James in the City's values.

Live



The foundation for spiritual growth is an intimate connection with God and His family. The questions in the section will help you get to know the members of your group so you'll begin to feel a sense of belonging and family.

Grow



In this section, the questions are designed to bring you to a deeper understanding of the Bible and to help you consider how the truths of the Bible can impact your life.

Serve



Nothing is more fulfilling than using your God-given gifts to serve and help meet the needs of others in God's family. This section will help make that desire a reality. You will be encouraged and challenged to take steps to serve those inside and outside of the group.

Build



The thought of sharing our faith can be scary and relationally awkward. Such feelings are common and understandable. But God can and wants to use you to reach those around you for Christ. This section is designed to give you and your group practical, manageable steps for sharing Christ that can become a part of your everyday life.

Love



You were made for God's pleasure. In each house group session you will have the opportunity to surrender your heart to God and express your worship to Him. There may be various forms of small group worship in this section, including prayer, singing together and sharing what God is doing in your lives. This part of the session can be very meaningful for your group. If singing or praying in a group is new to you, feel free to not participate until you feel comfortable.

Introduction to the Book of James

We do not know for certain who James was.

His deepest concern is to teach others how Christians ought to live – so the book is very practical. As far as James is concerned a real Christian should have a set of hallmarks which people can see.

In chapter 1 v26-27, he lists three hallmarks, and these become the basis for the rest of the letter:

1. The Christian's attitude towards people in need (chapter 2).
2. How we speak and relate to others (chapter 3).
3. Whether we are friends with the world or with God (chapter 4 and first part of 5).

His introduction and conclusion deal with two other very important aspects of the Christian life:

1. Perseverance (chapter 1 v4, 12; chapter 5 v7-8)
2. Prayer (chapter 1 v5; chapter 5 v13)

Note:

Down the years some people have argued that St. Paul stresses justification by faith, whereas James stresses justification by works. But the fact is James knew that faith is basic. He simply wanted his readers to understand that true faith always shows itself in action.

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JAMES

Study 1 – Facing Trials

Chapter 1:1-11

Live



Who would play you in the film of your life?

Love



Place a cross or a picture of a cross in the middle of the room. Give each person a piece of paper and a pen. Ask them to write down what is the greatest difficulty they are facing at the moment.

Play a quiet piece of music while they hold their piece of paper.

After the music ask the members of the group to lay their problems at the cross.

Grow



Please note – verse 1 implies that the letter was not sent to any particular person or church, but was more like a tract for the whole Church.

1. What kind of trials do you think of when you read verses 2 and 3? How do you react to them? Why?
2. In verse 4 James seems to suggest that endurance is the way to become perfect and complete. Why is endurance so important in the Christian life?
3. Sometimes, especially when life is difficult, we feel in need of wisdom to know what is true and what decisions to make. Verses 5 and 6 show us that we can ask for it.

How is God described in verse 5 and how does this make you feel about asking God for anything? Do you ever feel driven like a wave in the sea? When?

4. Whatever the pressures of life James says in verses 7 and 8 that the undecided person should not expect to receive anything from God, but if we are single minded and committed God will help.

What helps you to stop feeling doubtful about believing that God will help?

Can the group help you in any way?

5. Two illustrations of contrasting situations, rich and poor people facing different pressures in life are given in verses 9 to 11. Do you think of yourself as rich or poor?

Think about:

- The good things we have in Christ and how this can lift up the poor.
- The security we have in Christ and what this means for the rich when God brings them down.

Serve



Ask if anyone would like to share what difficulty they wrote on the piece of paper at the beginning. Then pray for that person.

What practical ways can we support one another?

Build



Ask one member of the group to pray for us all this week that we will have eyes to see opportunities to talk with and help someone outside the church.

(Leaders: at the end of the meeting before people leave, make sure you tear up the papers used under the worship section)

JAMES

Study 2 – Breaking Free

Chapter 1:12-27

Live



If you could describe your week as a weather forecast how was the outlook?

Love



Focus on Jesus as the Bridegroom and us as his Bride. Play a song that speaks of our love relationship with Jesus, inviting people to reflect on the intimacy and passion of God's love. Then read out Revelation 19 v5-9.

Grow



1. v12 – What is the crown of life that James speaks of in v12? (see also 2 Timothy 4 v8, Revelation 2 v10).
Do we receive the crown of life because we endure or because we love him?
(Leaders: Answer: because we love him. It is however, our endurance, which shows that we do love him).

Should we think of heaven more than we do? How can we do it?
How would we be helped if we thought more about heaven?
2. v13-15 – Are you ever tempted to blame God for things? What kind of things? Why?
This passage says that God does not tempt us, but 1 Corinthians 10 v13 says that God allows us to be tempted. Is there any difference?
3. v19-21 – In what circumstances do you find it difficult to act like this?
Why do you find it difficult to be slow to speak but quick to listen?

4. v22-24 – In what ways can God speak to us through his word today?
How can we be better listeners?
In what ways could we put it into practice more efficiently?
Why does God bless us if we obey his word?
5. v26-27 – If being religious means taking care of widows and orphans and not being corrupted, what does it mean practically in our lives today?
How are we matching up to the demands?
James could have mentioned any area of sin, why does he particularly draw attention to the tongue in v26? (Leaders – we will be looking at this in detail when we come to chapter 3).

Serve



Consider if there is one housebound person or maybe people that you as a group could help in some way e.g. visit, shop for, organise to get to church each week?

Build



Map your neighbourhood: Draw the street where your home is. Draw a box for each house. List the people who live there with their children.

This gives you a personal prayer list. If you don't know who lives around you then start to get to know them.

Pray the names of people in your street that you want the Lord to move / that you want opportunities to get to know better.

JAMES

Study No. 3 – Take Care

Chapter 2 v1-26

Live



Who was your favourite childhood friend?

Love



Read out the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15 v11-24) to quiet background music and then invite people to respond to its message in open prayer.

e.g.

Thank you for your unconditional love.
Thank for your taking me out of the pigsty.
Forgive us when we run away from you.
Forgive us when we go it alone.
Help us to understand how you love us as children. Etc.

(Leaders: you could print these on cards and let members of the group choose one to read out).

Grow



1. v1-4 – Are you prejudiced? Do you respond differently to different people. Perhaps according to the way they dress, or the colour of their skin? As a church do we welcome people equally from all walks of life? Are there things we need to change or improve on?
2. v5-7 – It is interesting to read 1 Corinthians 1 v26-29 alongside these verses. Paul and James obviously agreed that the poor are very important. Who are today's poor? How might we be guilty of oppressing the poor? (Try to think of specific examples).

3. v8-13 – James goes on to explain the consequences of being prejudiced. What does he say they are? Verse 13 is very important, what does it mean?
4. v14-20 – Some people think that James and Paul contradict each other. They say Paul emphasizes faith (eg Romans 3 v28), and James here emphasizes works. Do you think James and Paul contradict each other? Does your faith show itself in actions? In what ways?

(Leaders: our faith should be seen through our works. Paul also agrees, see Galatians 5 v6).

5. v21-26 – James concludes this chapter with the example of two people whose faith was seen by their actions. If you have time you can look up the stories in the Old Testament: Abraham in Genesis 22 v1-14 and Rahab in Joshua 2 v1-24.

Build



Are we blinkered in our views of outreach? Who can we make contact with in Christian love outside our usual circle of influence e.g. elderly, young, sick, poor, homeless?

Pray for God's guidance to bring us into contact with those who need his love.

Serve



Light a candle and place it in the middle of the room on a table. Ask the group where their faith and their works don't meet up.

Allow for a time of quiet reflection.

Finish by singing or playing 'Abba, Father'.

JAMES

Study No. 4 – Taming the Tongue

Chapter 3

Live



If you could ask Noah one question what would it be?

Love

(Leaders: please note, preparation is needed before the meeting)



Cut some white paper into 24 squares about 3" each. Write one letter of the alphabet on each (except X and Z), then lay them on the floor.

To start worship, have each member select a square and think of something about the

Lord that begins with the letter they have chosen eg. F=faithful, A=awesome.

Play a quiet piece of music, and encourage members to speak out a sentence of praise to the Lord using their letter eg. 'Lord you are a faithful friend', 'Lord you are an awesome God'. (Some people may want to pick up another letter)

Grow



1. Chapter 1 v26 – James says that the ability to control the tongue is a hallmark of the Christian faith. Do you agree? Is this a bit extreme?
2. 3 v2-5a – Can you think of situations where you got into trouble or difficulties because of something you said? What happened? How did you sort it out? Have you learnt from the experience?
3. 3 v5b-6 – What does 'world of evil' mean? Is the tongue an actual power for evil? How can this be if we are God's children? (Quote by Mayer – The tongue is 'the enemy agent within God's rightful kingdom, a ready tool at the disposal of God's enemy').
4. 3 v7-8 – Is the tongue uncontrollable? In what ways have you found it to be so? How have you managed to control it? We can always look to Jesus as an example, read John 7 v46.

5. 3 v9-12 – How do you feel when you read these verses? Do they ring true? Is there any small way you can start controlling your tongue in the light of these verses?

Serve



It would be good this week to have a time of confession to follow on from the study. Play a confessional song eg. 'It's your blood that cleanses me', and encourage the group to own up to God, times when they have hurt people with their tongues. You may feel it right to encourage members to visit and say sorry this week.

Build



Often in life there are people who fit the E.G.R. (Extra Grace Required) category!

It's a good idea when dealing with these people to remember that Jesus died for them on the cross as well. When you visualize this truth, it will give you more patience in going the extra mile for the E.G.R.'s.

Are there people who need more of your patience where you need to go the extra mile? Pray for them and for you to be able to contact them this week

JAMES

Study No. 5 – God’s Friend

Chapter 4 v1-17

Live



If you were hosting a romantic dinner what would you cook?

Love



Choose a couple of well-known praise choruses. Have the words written out for members of the group. Play the music as loud as the neighbours will allow, so that no one is embarrassed to sing.

Grow



1. 4 v1-4 – In verse 1a James asks: ‘What causes fights and quarrels among you?’ Do you agree with the answers he gives? Would you add anything to his list?
2. 4 v5-10 – What does it mean in practical terms to submit to God? (v7). How do we resist the Devil? (v7) In your experience, if the Devil is resisted does he flee?
3. 4 v11-12 – What do these verses teach us about judging others? Is it always wrong to judge others? (Matthew 7 v1-5 may be helpful).
4. 4 v13-17 – (It might be helpful to consider this section in 2’s). The people James was addressing boasted about their business plans. What kind of things are you tempted to boast about? What effect does this have on others? What effect does this have on you?

Serve



Staying in your 2’s, pray for one another for the things you have just mentioned in No.4.

Build



Many of us have long-standing disputes and arguments with members of our family. Maybe this week would be a good time to

bury the hatchet, write a letter, make a telephone call, send some flowers, invite them over, etc.

JAMES

Study No. 6 – Waiting, Praying and Caring

Chapter 5 v7-20

Live



When was the last time you were aware of God's presence?

Love



Read one of the many healing stories in the gospels
e.g. Luke 5 v12-16.

Encourage members to meditate on Jesus, who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Grow



1. 5 v7-11 – What do you hope for?
What makes you impatient?
What makes patience possible?
What makes patience difficult?
The Bible is full of people who endured all sorts of things for their faith e.g. Job, Jeremiah, Saul. Can you think of someone who has endured and what was it that kept them faithful?
2. 5 v12 – What does verse 12 mean? Compare with Matthew 5 v33-37.
3. 5 v13-18 – It was the custom to anoint (or rub) wounds with oil when people were sick (see Luke 10 v34). The elders were the leaders of the church community.
What do you believe and DO about healing? Do you ever pray with others?
Are your beliefs and the practice of our church different in any way?
Do we ever confess our sins to one another? How can this be of value?
4. 5 v19-20 – These two verses are quite easy to understand, but more difficult to put into practice!
Has a fellow Christian ever rebuked you for your actions?

Have you ever rebuked someone else?

Why does James encourage us to do this?

Serve



Pray for one another.

You may wish to use some olive oil for those who are ill.

Build



Be aware of opportunities to pray for people this week.

Don't try to manufacture an opportunity but do be ready to respond if one comes along.

You may want to discuss in your group how you would go about this.