

Using these Bible Studies

The studies are broken down into different sections that each focus on one of St James in the City's values. We think this is a helpful way to have time together that focuses on many different areas of our lives as Christians, and not simply in getting more 'head knowledge' about God.



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 and help grow that sense of family which we are called into.



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 can feel awkward. Don't worry: this is a common feeling! However, God 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. Even when we gather as a smaller group, it is great to have the opportunity to worship and to surrender your heart to God. This could come in a variety of forms such as prayer, singing, or simply sharing what God is doing in your lives. Contribute as much or as little as you feel able to.

Introduction

“No profound theologian, James’ genius lies in his profound moral earnestness; in his powerfully simple call for repentance, for action, for a consistent Christian lifestyle”¹.

We do not know for certain who James was; he could be the Son of Zebedee mentioned in Matthew 4:21 or Jesus’ brother (Matthew 13:55-56). Jesus’ brother was known as ‘the first Bishop of Jerusalem’ so is probably the best candidate. What we do know is that the book was written primarily with Jews in mind and is likely written early on in Christianity’s history (probably 45-47 AD).

James’ readers/hearers were likely scattered Jews who now believed in Jesus but had fled throughout the Roman empire after persecution broke out against the church (Acts 8:1-5). They were mainly poor, and oppressed by the rich around them. He therefore writes a pastoral letter to his scattered church based on sermons likely preached to Jews initially in Jerusalem.

His deepest concern is to teach others how Christians ought to live – so the book is very practical. James’ concern is that the world is getting into the church: deference to the rich, critical speech, earthly wisdom with ambition, arrogance, double-mindedness in prayer, failure to put faith into action all seem to have taken hold in some way in the church.

As far as James is concerned a real Christian should have a set of hallmarks which people can see. “As important and necessary as is right belief, it is much less than true Christian belief if it is not accompanied by works”²

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)

If you want to go a bit deeper into James then we recommend the following books:

- James by Douglas Moo (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries). Not too big, but full of great insight and background.
- Early Christian Letters for Everyone by Tom Wright. A great introduction.

¹Douglas Moo, “James”, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (2015), IVP, p9.

²As above, p59.

Study 1: Facing trials (James 1:1-11)

Live

What is the biggest challenge you have done? How did you feel when you had completed it?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. 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

Read James 1:1-11 together.

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

- What kind of trials do you think of when you re 1:2-3?
 - How do you react to them? Why?
- In 1:4 James seems to suggest that endurance is the way to become perfect and complete. Why is endurance so important in the Christian life?
- Sometimes, especially when life is difficult, we feel in need of wisdom to know what is true and what decisions to make. 1:5-6 show us that we can ask for it.
 - How is God described in 1:5 and how does this make you feel about asking God for anything?
 - Do you ever feel driven like a wave in the sea? When?
- Whatever the pressures of life James says in 1:7-8 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?
- 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?
Discuss:
 - 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.

Study 2: Breaking Free (James 1:12-27)

Live

What is the most precious thing that you own? What would you do if something happened to it?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship.

Grow

Read James 1:12-27 together.

- 1:12 – What is the crown of life that James speaks of (see also 2 Timothy 4:8, Revelation 2:10)?
 - Do we receive the crown of life because we endure or because we love him?
 - Should we think of the new heavens and the new earth more than we do? How can we do it? How would we be helped if we did?
- 1:13-15 – 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 10:13 says that God allows us to be tempted. Is there any difference?
- 1:19-21 – 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?
- 1:22-24 – 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?
- 1:26-27 – 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? (We will look at this later in James 3 as well).

Serve

What practical steps can you take to help those mentioned in 1:26-27 (or others like them)? How might this work as an individual or as a group?

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.

Study 3: Take Care (James 2)

Live

Who do you look up to in your life and your faith? What is the best thing about them and how to you try to follow their example?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. You could use Luke 15:11-24 (the Prodigal Son) as a starting point for thanking God.

Grow

Read James 2:1-26 together.

- 2:1-4 – Are you prejudiced? Do you respond differently to different people?
 - As a church do we welcome people equally from all walks of life? Are there things we need to change or improve on?
- 2:5-7 – It is interesting to read 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 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).
- 2:8-13 – James goes on to explain the consequences of being prejudiced. What does he say they are?
 - 2:13 is very important: what does it mean?
- 2:14-20 – Some people think that James and Paul contradict each other. They say Paul emphasizes faith (e.g. Romans 3:28), and James here emphasizes works. Do you think James and Paul contradict each other?
 - Read Galatians 5:6 to see what Paul says.
 - Does your faith show itself in actions? In what ways?
- 2:21-26 – James concludes this chapter with the example of two people whose faith was seen by their actions. If you have time, look up the stories in the Old Testament: Abraham in Genesis 22:1-14 and Rahab in Joshua 2:1-24.

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.

Prayer

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.

Study 4: Taming the tongue (James 3)

Live

Can you think of a time or times when words have really encouraged you or have really cut you down? Who said it and why? Are you quicker to encourage or discourage?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. You could read Psalm 100 aloud as a way of using your tongue to worship God.

Grow

Read James 3 together.

- In 1:26 – James says that the ability to control the tongue is a hallmark of the Christian faith. Do you agree? Is this a bit extreme?
- 3:2-5a – 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?
- 3:5b-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 from Mayer – The tongue is ‘the enemy agent within God’s rightful kingdom, a ready tool at the disposal of God’s enemy’).
- 3:7-8 – Is the tongue uncontrollable? In what ways have you found it to be so? How have you managed to control it?
 - To look to Jesus as an example, read John 7:46.
- 3:9-12 – 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, and encourage the group to own up to God times when they have hurt people with their tongues.

Prayer

Close in prayer for each other: pray for the people we find hard to keep our tongues in control around!

Study 5: God's friend (James 4)

Live

What things/people/experiences give you the most joy in life? What gives you sadness?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. Thank God for the good things in the past week, ask him for help for the hard things that have happened.

Grow

Read James 4:1-17 together.

- 4:1-4 – 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?
- 4:5-10 – What does it mean in practical terms to submit to God (4:7)? How do we resist the Devil? In your experience, if the Devil is resisted does he flee?
- 4:11-12 – What do these verses teach us about judging others? Is it always wrong to judge others? (Matthew 7:1-5 may be helpful).
- 4:13-17 – 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?
 - It might be helpful to consider this section in pairs and then feedback.

Serve

Pray for what you talked about in pairs when discussing 4:13-17.

Build

Many of us have long-standing disputes and arguments with members of our family or colleagues at work or other friends. 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.

Pray for one of these people.

Study 6: Waiting, praying, caring (James 5)

Live

When was the last time you were really aware of God's presence? What did it look/feel/sound like?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. You could read one of the many healing stories in the gospels (e.g. Luke 5:12-16). Meditate on Jesus, who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Grow

Read James 5:1-20 together.

- 5:1-6 – These verses can be hard to read. Do they apply to us today? If so, how?
- 5:7-11 – 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?
- 5:12 – What does this mean practically?
 - Compare it with Matthew 5:33-37 – what is similar and what is different?
- 5:13-18 – It was the custom to anoint (or rub) wounds with oil when people were sick (see Luke 10:34). The elders were the leaders of the church community. What do you believe and actually *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?
- 5:19-20 – 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 each other, especially if someone is unwell in body, mind, or spirit. You could even anoint in olive oil (other oils are available...)

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.