



A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES

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FAITH APPLIED

Week 1

Endurance + Wisdom = Undoubting Faith

Introduction to James – James 1:1

The book of James has a distinctively Jewish nature that suggests it was written when the church was still predominantly Jewish. Verse one of the first chapter tells us that a man named James, who is a servant of Jesus was the one who wrote this small book. It is largely believed this was the James who was the brother of Jesus and was the leader of the Jerusalem Council. This probably then dates this book to about AD48.

The book of James is not a theology on Christianity. Instead it is just a practical book on how to live the life of faith. This is a book that gives you an easy outline on how we should conduct ourselves and what we should do while living the life of faith.

It was written to converted Jews who were scattered abroad, basically giving them a checklist to refer to now they are Christ followers. This is known by what James says in verse two. The letter is to the twelve tribes of Israel who are scattered abroad. This is a general book, meaning what is said can be taken literally and doesn't apply to just one setting or church.

Gifts of Pure Joy – James 1:2

After James has made his formal introductions he gets right to the point in verse two of what this book is all about.

James makes a statement that to him as the writer is so obvious. For James there is no debate about this statement, it is pure fact. The statement is, 'consider it all joy, my friends, when trials come your way'. Or the New Living Translations puts it, 'when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy'.

This statement to the natural mind does not make sense.

Discuss – Why should we consider it a joy or an opportunity of joy when we face trials and troubles in our lives?

The Statement Explained – James 1: 3-4

James doesn't wait like we have to debate and question his statement. He gives us the answer in verse three. The reason we should consider it a joy to face trials

and troubles is because it causes endurance. When your faith is tested, when it goes through the fire, out the other end comes a faith with an added on feature, or a plugin; faith now with endurance!

The reason endurance is needed in the life of faith is because it will perfect us. James tells us in verse four to let endurance have its way in our lives, because it will have a perfect result, this result will be that we are complete and lack nothing! Reading between the lines, James is saying, endurance will make us more complete in Christ. The more complete in Christ we become the less we need anything else.

The ultimate reward is a life that endures to the very end will one day receive a body and soul that is perfect in every way. How many want a perfect body?

Trials and troubles come in various ways. One of the hardest to overcome is when the trial of doubt comes our way. However, James is saying, it is okay to doubt! Why? Because the more we doubt, the more we realize this life is not about us, but about God.

All the great men and women of God were tested. They were tested in order to take the kinks out of their lives and to show that God is in control. So ultimately endurance is coming out the other end, looking back, seeing what God has done and how he has changed our lives.

This means that if you are going through a trial, God is more than likely using you and gearing you up for something incredible to come.

The Perfect Prayer – James 1:5-7

Discuss – Tell the people at your table the last three prayer requests you made to God.

The promise of being complete in Christ is that we will lack for nothing! However, we are not so foolish to think we never lack for needs. James wasn't this foolish either. He didn't just make some statement of never lacking and walk away. He continued to address what we should do if we feel we do lack.

The one and only thing we should do is pray! Prayer is the answer to all our needs. I do not fully understand it, but it works!

There are many types of prayer. James tells us how to pray, and I would almost guarantee not many of us listed this kind of prayer. James tells these Jewish believers to ask God for wisdom! If you feel inadequate, if you are lacking, if you do not know what to do then ask God for wisdom!

James tells us when you ask God for wisdom he will give it to you always. He won't look down on you when you ask, but will give as much as you want.

Example – This is like when a child asks their mother for some water! No mother will not give water to a thirsty child. However, if the child asks for soda, the mother will only give it as a treat and not at all times. This is like God! When you ask for wisdom it is like asking for water, he will always give it, but if you ask for a pay rise, it is like asking for soda.

You may not have had an answer to prayer in your life. Why don't you change your request, ask God for wisdom in that situation and watch how God will give unto you.

Discuss – Tell of a time when God gave you divine wisdom to endure through a trials?

Now when you ask of God, do not doubt! That is easier said than done. However, we do not lose the ability to doubt by doing some action. The only way we can stop doubting is by enduring! Knowing who God is! The one who doubts is like the waves of the sea. They are tossed about wherever the wind blows. God cannot use a person like this. The doubter becomes unstable and almost has two personalities. They think one thing then think another. Ask God for wisdom, trust that God will give it and do not doubt. Then you will lack of no good thing!

So the secret to joy is endurance. Endurance completes you in Christ. If you are finding it tough going through a trial, then pray to God for wisdom. This is the secret to a successful prayer life. When you ask of God, do not doubt and God will give you divine wisdom in abundance.

The reward of faith to those who endures is found in verse twelve, 'blessed is the man who perseveres under trials; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised those who love him'.

FAITH APPLIED

Week 2

Humility

What is Humility – James 1:9

Today we are going to look at the second way to practically live a life of faith, which is through the action of humility. Before we get started, let's look at what we think humility is!

Discuss – What is humility? How do we practice humility?

The Answer

In James 1:9 the writer tells us that those who have nothing now, will one day receive so many blessings in the future. Also the one who has a lot now will one day wither away and all he has will become nothing. As a flower is beautiful one day and dies the next, so to are the blessings of this life now. James is saying that we must be humble in this life as we are just a speck in time. Our lives don't affect the universe and so don't think this life is all about us! **See Luke 14:11**

In addition, when we get to heaven we will look back at our lives and think we were nothing and had nothing compared to who we are and what we have in Christ in our heavenly home.

James outlines four practical ways to live a life of humility.

1. Put Blame Where Blame is Due – James 1:13-15

The way to practically live a life of humility is to not blame God! How many times have we slipped up or gone through a certain trial and put the blame on God! Not only do we blame God, but how many blame others? The one we like to blame the most is the devil! However, here James tells us to look no further than ourselves!

He is basically saying that most of the bad situations that happen in our lives are a result of our own doing! The one who is humble will realize this and look at themselves before searching for blame elsewhere!

When you are tempted, to show humility you should search your own heart to see where the root of that temptation lies. Also your lust is the point of conception. The more you allow lust in your heart the more pregnant you become until a day comes when you give birth to your lust resulting in sin. At this point the sin grows to become death! The humble realize the lusts start in our own flesh!

2. Put Praise Where Praise is Due – James 1:16-18

James moves the attention away from ourselves unto God. Whereas the bad comes from our own lusts and desires, all the good in our lives come from God! At times we can be proud of our achievements and the things we do. When good things happen we rejoice and become happy. We sometimes marvel at how hard we worked. However, James tells us that every good thing comes from God. Everything is a gift and we really do not deserve what we are given.

The humble man realizes this and gives praise to God for every good thing. Humility isn't living in self pity, but it does give praise where praise is due!

Discuss – Knowing that all bad comes from you and all good comes from God. How does this make you feel?

Humility is focusing on God not ourselves.

3. Quick To Hear, Slow To React – James 1:19-21

James gives us the third practical way of living a life of humility. This is to be quick to listen or hear and then slow to speak. The word for hear basically means to comprehend or understand what is being said. He is saying don't just listen to the message of what was said but understand the root meaning of the message.

Humility is not reacting on what you think was said, but listen until you fully understand someone. The problem for us is that we listen to what we want to hear which causes us to speak quickly on situations. This in turn causes us to get angry and anger takes us away from God and the righteousness of God.

The one who is humble realizes everything they hear isn't always about us!

4. Quick To Hear, Quick To React – James 1:22-27

In human terms humility is about quickly listening and understanding and then holding your tongue. However, when it comes to our relationship with God it is just the opposite!

We are to listen, comprehend and understand the word of God then we are to quickly react and act upon it. The one who reads their bible and then forgets what they have read is like a man you looks in a mirror, turns away and can't remember what he looks like.

When you listen and understand the word of God you will act upon it.

Discuss – Tell of a time when you reacted quickly to someone’s words. Tell of a time when you heard God tell you to do something and you did it immediately.

The final verse of James 1 puts humility into one easy package! Guard your tongue, care for others and do not let this world corrupt you.

If we do these things God gives us three promises in verse 18, 21 & 25. These are that we will be God crown jewels, our souls will be saved and we will be blessed in all that we do!

So today go away knowing that humility is something you must possess to live a life of faith. Humility isn’t some distance thing but it is not making things about yourself, focusing on God, listening to what he tells us to do then doing it!

FAITH APPLIED

Week 3

Action

Today we will look at the third principle of faith James lays out, that is the principle of action with regards to faith.

If we have faith that a car can take us from A to B but never get in the car and turn it on and then wonder why we are not heading in the direction we want to go we would say that is foolish. However, many Christians do this all the time with their faith. So today are going to look at how to get in the car of our faith, turn the ignition on and head towards our destination.

James shows us four different things we must act on in order to drive our life of faith

1. Don't Treat Some Better Than Others – James 2:1-7

James gives us an illustration about treating some people with favoritism. He gives the story of a smartly dressed, wealthy man who walks into church for the first time. After him comes a family of rowdy children who have uncombed hair. The father is unshaven and smells like beer, the mother has clothes that are too tight and worn. She smells like an ash tray! The story goes on to say that the ushers take the well dressed man in to the best seat in the house and ignore the family. When it is time for the meet and greet, all the board members and staff welcome the man and nobody says hello to the family.

James is saying this is the way we act and this is judging others which is an evil way to act. James goes on to say that it is the poor of this world that has been the catalyst for Christianity over the years and even though it would be nice to have the wealthy man in our church, more than likely he will be the one who causes the problems. He will be the one who will not honor you and will not look out for you in times of crisis.

James tells us that the first way we should act in our faith is to treat everyone equally!

2. Show Mercy To All – James 2:8-13

James takes this action of faith a little bit further. He tells us it is good to practice the law of loving your neighbor. However, when you show partiality in your love then your love for the one is as useless as your love for the other you show no love to. This is because if you show love to one member of the church and not the other you are only fulfilling part of God's commandment. This means that you

have fallen short of God's request, which is that you would fulfill all his commandments.

James gives an example about someone who refrains from committing adultery, but instead commits murder. This person is then guilty of all. This is like a convict on a suspended sentence. The convict is free from all conviction unless he commits another crime. If he commits another crime then he will be charged for that crime and the others crimes he was originally free from.

So with this in mind, it is obvious that we are all guilty of all sin! Thus is why the grace of God is so important and so needed. Therefore James tells these Jewish believers to show mercy to all. Do not be unmerciful to others because then God will be unmerciful to you. So don't judge and think yourself more highly than others, show mercy, forgiveness, even if they don't deserve it, because you don't deserve it!

Discuss – Do you believe we should show mercy all the time? If not at what point is the cut off line between mercy and judgment?

3. Let Your hands Follow Your Mouth – James 2:14-17

From James 2:14 onwards James changes focus from our attitude and action towards others to acting on what we ourselves say.

He is pretty blunt. James says what use is it if we have this faith but we don't do anything with it! Then he tells us, it is of no use at all!

There are many people who can talk a good game. You just have to go down to Oriole park and hear the thousands who believe they can do better than the actual Orioles! However, I'm positive if those people who talk a good game in the stands suddenly found themselves in the dugout it would be a different story altogether.

We Christians do this a lot ourselves. We say we should do this and that, if only our church reached out, gave to the poor, started a fine arts program or built a gym we would be able to reach out to more. James is saying if you talk about it, do it. If you don't want to do it, don't talk about it.

It is no use to you, to the church or to others if you talk a good game. You have to get on the field and do it! This kind of faith is just as dead and the words spoken in the stands of the Orioles! However, when our hands follow our mouths, what had the potential to just be dead words is now alive!

4. Faith + Works = LIFE – James 2:18-26

There are three types of Christians in this world today. There are the ones who just have faith. They are the ones who sit back, sit on the word God has given them and just believe God will do everything. Then there are those who believe if they keep doing good works they will find their way to heaven. That God will be pleased with them and that is all they need to do. Both these types of people will either stay or find themselves very quickly in a place called death! They will get tired, worn out, burnt out and find no life in the things they do.

James tells us that these two types of people are just as foolish as the demons that believe in God but decide not to follow God!

James likens both of these examples to the body. He describes the body as faith. The body on its own is dead and useless. Unless we have a spirit in the body we cannot come alive. The good works we do is like the spirit! It awakens our body! Likewise what good is a spirit on it's own without a body. It is a Ghost that has no earthly function.

James gives us two examples of people in the bible that showed the third type of Christian in the world today. These are the types of people who are getting it done! The two examples are of Abraham and Rahab. Both of these had faith in God. Abraham that God would give him his promise, and Rahab that the God of Israel would protect her. If both of this had not shown works with their faith the bible would look very different today. However because these both acted on their faith, life happened! James is telling us that this life of faith is about action and when Faith + Works happens it equals life!

Discuss – Tell of a time when you have “talked a good game” but not followed through with your hands. Tell of a time when you have put your faith in action. How did these occurrences make you feel?

So today know that God desires that you live a life of faith. The way we apply this faith is to treat others equally, to show mercy even when mercy isn't deserved, to act on what your mouth speaks and to know that the only way to have real life is to put the spirit in your body, that is to add some works or action to your faith!

FAITH APPLIED

Week 4

Control

We have already studied three practical ways we should apply to our lives in order to live this life of faith. These applications are to live with endurance, show humility and do some action. As we move on in the book of James, the writer uses chapters three and four to highlight another practical way to live the life of faith, which is the practice of control.

Control is the one thing that many people lack and it gets them into trouble. We will see throughout these two chapters that James will highlight the fact that all of us have desires that are not exactly God natured. These desires want to expose us to something that is not good for us. However, James tells us that while it is difficult to flush these desires out of our lives completely, we do have the ability to control them, and the person who lives a God centered life is a person who can control their personal desires.

1. Control Your Tongue – James 3:1-12

The first part of our lives James tells us to control is something that is small, almost un-noticeable but can help us through the hardest situations or can lead us into horrible situations.

James tells us that everyone stumbles in some shape or form. In fact he compares us to a wild horse or a ship being tossed around on the sea. He goes on to say that the way you train a horse is to feed his mouth, once you control his mouth you can control the rest of his body. Likewise, a ship is turned by a small rudder. If you can control the rudder you can control the ship even through the biggest waves.

In the same way James tells us that we can control the rest of our bodies and lives through our tongue. When the tongue is not controlled it is like a wild fire and spreads wherever it wants. James makes the statement that no-one can tame or control the tongue. It almost has two personalities, praise and put down.

James instructs these Jewish believers that this cannot go on! To live a Godly life you cannot be half sweet and have bitter. The bitter will always pollute the sweet.

2. Control Your Heart & Motives – James 3:13-4:10

James does not stop at controlling the tongue which is a visible weakness. He also tells us we need to control our hearts and our motives. He states that if there is a little bit of jealousy or selfish ambition in you then this needs to be controlled.

He tells us to be wise in the ways of God. The message tells us the things that are not wise in the ways of God, these are: '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'

It is these types of actions and motives that get us into trouble. These result in conflicts with others, lust for things you do not have, envy, adultery, murder.

James becomes pretty intense and says that when your motives are selfish you become an enemy of God, even cheating on God. He says instead of becoming jealous why not ask God for the thing that you want. However, he says that the reason you do not ask is because you know you have no right to that thing!

Discuss – Looking at James 3:17-18 & James 4:7-10. How do you believe we are to control our tongues, hearts and motives so to live a life of Godly faith?

3. Control Your Mind – James 4:11-17

We have seen how our tongues, our hearts and our motives have got us in trouble and how we as believers of Jesus Christ must control these in our own lives; otherwise we will look like very different people than what we should look like. However, there is one more area of our lives that we must control in order to live a Godly faithful life. This is the ability to control our minds. In James 4:11-17 we are told of two thoughts our minds can take us off track. These are the thoughts of Judgment towards others and of your plans for tomorrow.

Our mind is more rational than our heart. However, it is often our mind that takes our heart away from God. Here James tells us not to speak bad about others. Do not back-bite and think badly of another brother. James uses the illustration of the normal citizen suddenly going and sitting in the judge's chair and casting judgment on what he thinks is right! That would never happen in the court of law. The prosecutor does not pass judgment on the defendant, it is the judge! James tells us, God is the one and only judge not us. Control your mind so you don't think yourself the judge.

James also tells us not to let your minds start planning for all the wonderful things we are going to do tomorrow. I believe it is important to plan, but it must be God's plans not ours. Furthermore, we must be open when God tells us no! Our minds dream up great blueprints for our lives, but the man or woman of faith controls these thoughts and seeks to do the will of God the father.

Discuss – Knowing what James tells us in James 4:11-17. What do you believe is the Godly way to show correction not judgment? What do you believe is the Godly approach to making our plans for tomorrow?

The person of faith is a person who can control three major parts of their lives. The tongue, the heart and the mind. It may seem easy, but this is probably the hardest principle of faith to follow. Our lives are sinful by nature, they are self absorbed by nature. We live in a culture where we are encouraged to say, think and feel how we want. However, God's kingdom is a little different. Instead of freedom of speech we are told to put in check what we really want to say! Instead of the American dream, we are told to submit to God's dream and instead of making a great business plan we are told to scrap it and wait for God to speak!

FAITH APPLIED

Week 5

Patience

As we move into chapter five of the book of James we have already discovered that this man James is very practical in his approach to living a life of faith. He starts the fifth chapter a little different to all the others. It seems that there is something within the Jewish culture that is bothering him. James spends six verse venting his frustration at the rich people! He doesn't vent because they are wealthy, but he vents at the ones who are living a life for themselves. These rich men have given low wages to their laborers and have got 'fat' themselves. They have put down the one who has humbled himself before God and elevated themselves. James tells these men that they are condemned and will suffer when the day of slaughter comes.

After James has let of steam he gets back into his flow of writing how to live a life of faith. In the closing verses of this book James leaves us with one more practical way to live this life and that is by patience.

1. Wait For God To Rescue – James 5:7-11

James tells us that everyone must be patient and wait for that great day when Christ will return! How many have ever said, Lord just take me? Well, it is in that line of thinking that God says, just be patient.

James gives an example, just as the farmer waits for the harvest after he plants the seed, so almost must we be patient in our lives with God.

For some of us God may have given us promises but we do not see them, James says, be patient. Some of us want tomorrow to come today, be patient.

The problem with waiting is that it can cause restlessness amongst the people of God. Waiting can cause us to complain against one another and even judge one another. James says, don't fall into this trap. When you feel discouraged or cannot wait any longer take comfort from the stories of the prophets. They suffered and endured with great patience and saw God do some incredible things. He even uses the story of Job and says, be like Job and watch what God will do.

Discuss – Why do you believe God sometimes makes us endure through sufferings before giving us what he promised?

2. Do What You Say – James 5:12

James takes another little detour when we get to verse twelve of the fifth chapter. He steps away from patience for a moment and talks about people who make oaths! Now oaths are a part of our society. We make oaths in court, in school, at work etc. However, James says, don't start making oaths with each other. Don't swear on the bible or on your life. However, instead of that, let people know that when you say you'll do something that you'll actually do it. When you say you won't then don't. Don't say one thing and do another, but let your yes be yes!

3. Wait For God To Answer Prayer – James 5:13-18

James probably leaves the most controversial action of patience until the very end. This is the principle of waiting for God to answer prayer. The reason I say it is probably controversial is because James states, that if anyone is sick, then he is to call for the elders of the church who will anoint him with oil, pray the prayer of faith and they will be healed. Now how many times has someone been prayed for and they have not been healed?

Before we get to that James makes a very clear statement. If you are suffering then pray about it. Many times we analyse it, try to think through the situation and sometimes try to get ourselves through the suffering, but James says to pray! It should be the first thing. The problem is that when we pray we often do not see results, so instead of trusting in God we do it our own way. James says, pray then pray again then wait and wait and wait for God until you see God work in that situation.

When we do this God will answer! If we take into account also what James told us in chapter 1, that is when we pray ask for wisdom, this all leads us to a promise of God that James explains. The effective (the patient prayer for wisdom) prayer of a man who is right with God will accomplish much!

James gives us the example of how Elijah prayed. He was effective in prayer and if we do what Elijah did we also will be effective in prayer.

Discuss – Read 1 Kings 18:42-46. What lessons do you believe we should take from the way Elijah prayed for rain? Knowing we should be patient in prayer, at what point should we stop praying about a situation?

The Patient follower of Christ is a strong follower of Christ. God's timing is not our timing. He sometimes lets suffering happen in our lives. However, this isn't to destroy us but to mold us to be more like him. When we patiently wait for God he will come. We may not know when he will come, but he will. Be patient in the situations that bother you in your life, be patient in prayer and above all trust in God and know what you have planted in God will one day bring you a harvest!

FAITH APPLIED

Week 6

Conclusion

Over the past five weeks we have gone on a journey through the book of James. We have discovered that this was a book that was written to people who were Jewish by birth but have converted to become Christ followers. These people were spread through the 'known world' and James writes a letter to be copied and sent throughout the Roman Empire so that Jewish believers could read, understand and follow some simple principles to help them in their walk with God.

We have seen how James is very practical, say compared with some of the writings of the Apostle Paul. James gives us a quick verse or two of theory and then spends many more verses explaining, giving examples and showing how to practically live out the principles he has set before us.

We have discovered that James tells us to be people who can endure trials and hardships. He tells us to be humble and to look to God first in everything and not look to ourselves. James continues to say believers of Jesus Christ are people of action. They don't just rely on their faith, but they add their faith and their work together to create life! James challenges these believers to be people of control; to control the tongue, control your heart and to control your mind. Then finally James encourages these believers to be people of patience; people who will wait for God and press on in their prayer and service in God.

1. A Final Challenge – James 5:19

Before James finishes his letter he throws in one more thought and instruction. In the very last two verses of this book James instructs believers not to just care after their own spiritual life with God but to guard and protect others.

His instruction is simple. If anyone is sliding away from their faith, go after them, grab them with your hand and pull them back into the boat! When you do this you will save that person from spiritually dying and you will stop sin feasting on that fellow brother or sister. The Message version puts it in a very descriptive way, *"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."*

James then tells us it is our duty as part of the body of Christ to not just go and make new disciples but also to stop others from sliding away. So when you see someone sinning and turning away from the truth of God we are to turn them back toward God.

I'm sure most of us have known people who have either 'backslid' or turned away from the truth of God. What did you do in that situation? Did you turn them back to God or did you let them slide?

Discuss – What do you believe is the 'right' way to turn someone back to God who has strayed from the truth? Use the following scriptures as starting points: Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1; 1 Corinthians 1:21-25; Proverbs 10:12

2. Faith Applied

So now we finish the book that James was moved by God to write. As already said this book is practical in every way shape and form. The five principles of living a life of faith are principles I believe we will have to work at until the day we find ourselves perfected and complete in Christ.

Below is a list of the five principles and how we should apply these to our lives of faith:

- **Endurance**
 - View trials as Joy's – they bring perfection and completeness
 - Let your prayer for wisdom be the first prayer to God
- **Humility**
 - Thank God for every good in your life
 - Recognize that your life is sinful because of you!
 - Listen to what people are saying to you and don't bite back!
 - Listen to what God is saying and act quickly on it
- **Action**
 - Show love to everyone, not just a select few
 - Show mercy and forgiveness to everyone – You don't deserve it but you have it!
 - Play the game, don't just talk a good game
 - Combine both faith and your service together to create life!
- **Control**
 - Keep control on your tongue
 - Keep control on your selfish motives
 - Keep control on what your mind thinks
- **Patience**
 - Wait for God's help in all that you do
 - Keep praying through all your struggles until God says stop!

Discuss – Look at the five principles of practical faith and what James instructs us to do in each of these. Which principle do you find hardest to achieve? Which principle comes naturally to you that you believe you can help others apply to their lives?

This life of faith is not an impossible life. It is a life that we need to work at, and we will continue to work at until we are perfected by God, which will be the day we bow before the throne of God in heaven. However, James has made this life of faith manageable. Just remember, what you do on this life for others and for God will be rewarded in heaven.