



SMACC

Making Disciples of Jesus Christ



Bible Study Series:

James



Our Mission:

*To glorify God together in response to his grace by making
disciples of Jesus Christ*

About These Studies

These studies were written by various SMACC leaders for use among university students. You are most welcome to use and adapt these studies for your own context. Where you do so please provide the following acknowledgment.

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Study 1: “Trials – Steadfastness or Sin” (James 1:1-18)

Big Idea: Wisdom and Steadfastness in trials is God’s good gift to us for our maturity.

Getting Us Thinking

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you were tempted to doubt God’s goodness or blame him?

Context

The primary theme of the book of James was for the church to live out one’s faith by not only being hearers of the Word but also to be doers of the Word. This theme developed in view of the social conflict between the rich and poor as well as the spiritual conflict in the midst of persecution that lead to factions within the church. James rebukes his readers for their worldliness and challenges them to seek divine wisdom in working out these problems and getting right with God.

Digging In

Read James 1:1-18

Split the passage into smaller sections and give them a title.

| Verses | Title |
|---------|--|
| 2 – 4 | Joy in suffering |
| 5 – 8 | Wisdom comes from God |
| 9 – 11 | Godly wisdom when it comes to riches |
| 12 | Reward of a steadfast life |
| 13 – 15 | Temptations in the testing of your faith can lead to sin and death |
| 16 – 18 | Do not be deceived but trust in God. |

Read James 1:1-4

2. Who is James writing the letter to?

James is writing to ‘the twelve tribes in the dispersion’, that is, all who are redeemed by God through Jesus and are waiting for Jesus to return in judgment and establish his kingdom.

The letter is addressed to **the twelve tribes**. In the Old Testament God’s people, the nation of Israel, were made up of the 12 tribes – the families descended from the 12 sons of Jacob, Abraham’s grandson. They were redeemed from slavery in Israel by the blood of the Passover lamb, to live as God’s people in the Promised Land. **James is using ‘twelve tribes’ as an expression to mean all of God’s redeemed people** – those who have been redeemed from slavery to sin by the blood of Jesus to live as God’s people now as they wait for heaven.

The dispersion – in the OT the dispersed referred to the Israelites who were exiled from the Promised Land (due to the nation’s sinfulness) and were waiting for the re-establishment of God’s kingdom, Israel. In James it refers to all believers as they wait for the Lord to return and establish his kingdom (James 5:7-9). **It could also be a reference to the dispersion of the many Christians after the persecution in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-4).**

The goal of this question is just to know that he’s speaking to Jewish Christians. The explanation is long because it’s interesting but doesn’t really add much else to the study unless you go very deep into it, which isn’t necessary.

3. What is the attitude James calls his readers to have in the face of suffering? Why?

He tells them to consider it joy when faced with trials of various kinds. Because these trials are a means to test one’s faith. And the testing of our faith produces steadfastness. Steadfastness is a life of faithful endurance amid troubles and affliction, and it is this process that produces a genuine faith in God that is unwavering.

The result of steadfastness leads to one being perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. However, as believers grow in holiness, this perfection will only be fully realized when Jesus returns. It is what we strive towards for the entirety of our lives here on earth.

Read James 1:5-8

4. In not lacking anything, what might someone still lack? (or in striving to be perfect, what might someone still lack?)

One way of looking at this part is that the passage reveals to us that even as a matured Christian, one might still lack wisdom. The other way of looking at it is that the passage addresses the believer that lacks wisdom. Whichever it is, we note that wisdom is important for the believer and more importantly, it is God who gives wisdom. As we see in Proverbs, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Therefore, wisdom can be understood as the God-given and God-centred discernment regarding practical issues in life.

5. What is God’s attitude towards someone that goes to him for wisdom? How does this affect how a person should approach God for wisdom?

God is generous in giving wisdom to those who ask of him. “Without reproach” means that he doesn’t want anyone to hesitate in coming to him for wisdom, which also means he won’t turn them away.

The one who asks should ask for it without doubting. This calls us to **undivided faith** when asking for wisdom from an ever-wise and all generous God. This is expressed in a single minded trust in God to give generously to all who ask. Should not be double-minded in their approach to God.

Follow up question: What does double mindedness in praying look like? And how does it cause instability in everything?

The passage describes it as a wave of the sea that is tossed to and fro by the wind. This paints us a picture of one that goes back and forth from trusting God and trusting the world or one’s

own abilities. This is an unstable character because this person would be torn between trusting God and trusting the world. He is unstable in all his ways, not know who to trust and what to do.

Therefore, the underlying problem to someone's doubt in prayer stems from a doubt in God's goodness in supplying everything they need.

Read James 1:9-11

6. In view of Godly wisdom and steadfastness, what should our perspective be on worldly wealth and riches?

We learn that wealth is as temporary and as fading as the fields of grass that withers and the flower whose beauty perishes at the rising of the sun. So those who spend their life in pursuit of wealth and riches will fade away along with it. It is something that can't save you from death, nor can it be taken with you in death. It is basically an empty pursuit.

7. How would this perspective resolve the conflict in the church?

This would resolve the conflict between the rich and the poor in the church because it equalizes everyone's position. The rich are humbled (brought down) because their wealth that they accumulated will go to nothing in the end. And if this is all they have been striving their lives for it is clear that their efforts **are in vain**. The poor is exalted (brought high) because they are rich in Christ and that wealth is something that will never fade or pass away.

Read James 1:12-15

8. What is the reward promised to those who remain steadfast under trial? How is this an encouragement to us when we undergo suffering?

The one who remains steadfast under trial and has stood the testing of their faith will receive the **crown of life (eternal life with its abundant blessings)**. This is a encouragement to us because it is God's promise to those who love him. And who are those who love him? Those who keep his commandments and obey his words.

9. How can trials have the opposite effect of its intended purpose? And what is the root cause of it?

Trials instead of producing steadfastness may in turn lead to temptation. Does that mean that God is tempting them by giving the trials? No, instead we learn that temptation comes when we are lured and enticed by our own desires. This means that it is our sinfulness that leads us to look at our own our desires in the trials rather than what God intends for us to do. In some sense it reveals our doubt in God's goodness for our lives even in the trials.

10. What fruits are we producing when we give in to our desires (or temptation)?

We see in verse 15 a flow chart of how temptation can lead to death. It begins from a desire that gives birth to sin and when sin is fully grown, it brings forth death. First we see the origin of sin, it begins with a desire in our hearts is birth forth from seeking our own benefit in the midst of trials instead of being obedient to God and trusting his goodness even when we're

going through hard times. Next, we see the process of sin that leads to death. It says in verse 15 that when sin is fully grown, it brings forth death. This gives us an idea of a sin that continues to be “fed”, causing it to grow, and resulting in death. This means it is not a one-time sin or a repented sinner struggling to put to death sin, that leads to death. But it is a sin that is continually practiced or done with no intention of stopping, letting the sin “grow” in influence and control over our lives that eventually leads to death.

Read James 1:16-18

11. Having known the origin and process of sin, how should his readers respond? And what assurance does he give them in dealing with trials and temptation?

They should respond by not being deceived into thinking that their sin is a result of their faith being tested by God (wrong: God’s fault for our sin) but rather it is our own desire that gives birth to sin (right: we cause our own sin in our failure to remain steadfast in trials)

Our assurance is in facing trials and knowing that every good and perfect gift comes from God the Father, and this includes trials. **So how should we respond when face with trials then?** We respond by trusting in God that this trial we are facing is within God’s plan for us and it is for the good of the maturing of our faith that leads to steadfastness and in the end, the crown of life. We see that trials in essential for our growth and that God is gracious in the trials that we face. **He isn’t evil or malicious in putting us through trials hoping that we will fail but rather he desires us to grow from shallow, untested obedience to a deep, wilful obedience.**

12. Desire might give birth to sin, but God has given birth (brought forth) us! How and why has he done this?

God **brought us forth by the word of truth** which speaks of spiritual salvation for us (believers) by the word of truth (the gospel). The idea of being brought forth is a metaphor for new birth.

God did this to make us a sort of **first fruits of his creatures** refers to the pioneer believers who are a prelude to further conversions that are yet to come. (cf. Rom 16:5 & 1 Cor 16:15) Most likely referring to the early Christian church.

Application

13. Again, what trials do you face that tempts you to doubt God’s goodness in your life? How has today’s passage help you persevere?

14. God is a generous God and is single-minded in giving, but we are often double minded in asking. How can you be more single minded in your praying?

Study 2: “Gospel Living with Obedience” (James 1:19-27)

Big Idea: Living out the gospel shows obedience out of love for God and his people which is reflected in speech, conduct and love towards others and keeping ourselves unstained from the world.

Getting Us Thinking

1. What is your attitude towards God’s word?
2. Are there moments in your life when you don’t practice what you say? Do share your experience to the group.

Context

James is encouraging believers to become mature and whole in their faith.

Faith in Jesus --> testing of faith --> steadfastness --> mature and whole, lacking nothing.

~ pray to receive God’s wisdom --> view life through the gospel, love God not sin

Digging In

3. Read James 1:19-27 and divide the passage into smaller sections by giving them a title

| Verses | Title |
|--------|---------------------------------|
| 19-21 | Gospel: Salvation and Obedience |
| 22-25 | Doers and hearers of the word |
| 26-27 | Pure and worthless religion |

19: Three commands

20-21: Slow to anger

22-25: Quick to hear

26-27: Slow to speak

Read James 1:19-21

2. James starts off by addressing his beloved brothers to “know this...”. What are they supposed to know?

James is not just addressing his beloved brothers but also sisters as well (according to NIV version). This message is for everyone and does not exclude people from knowing this. **What are they supposed to know?** According to my observation, (1) asking for God’s wisdom in trials and responding to temptations OR (2) application of the word of truth in v18 which focuses on their character, both individually and as a church. Most likely it’s the latter because of the continuation “ : “. There are three commands given by James which are (1) quick to hear (2) slow to speak and (3) slow to anger. On the surface, it looks like a “nice” Christian way of living but there is a deeper indication to why one should behave in a way. We’ll see more of these indications as we dive deeper into the study and following chapters. The book of James echoes Proverbs especially in the New Testament. Here are some cross references to help the members understand what they individually mean - **Proverbs 10:19; 14:29; 15:1; 17:27–28**

In summary, speaking and wrath link together whenever anger provokes hasty speech, and often both of these problems stem from inadequate listening.

3. What reason is given in verse 20? How would that look like in real life in solving anger issues?

The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. What does it mean? Does it mean it is wrong to be angry? **At this point, we might all dive into the realm of the emotional aspect of anger. But take note that the result of that emotions play a part in both internally and externally.**

Dissect what anger does to our relationship with others and with God. If we are told that the law is fulfilled in loving God and our neighbour, human anger is something that conflicts with this. Not all human anger is sinful (see Eph. 4:26). However, the quick-tempered, selfish anger of man shows a lack of trust in God and a lack of love for others. Even when directed against wrongdoing, anger cannot change another person’s heart. Thus it does not produce the righteousness of God. “Righteousness” here means conducting one’s life by the will of God, according to his standards (see Isa. 61:3; Matt. 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33).

How would that look like in real life? Discuss as this is an open-ended question. Offer helpful tips and tricks to manage and solve anger issues. Complete answers will deal with human-human and Human-God relationships.

4. A “Therefore”! What 2 actions then bring about righteousness? What is the result?

There are 2 actions that one needs to do. (1) To put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness (2) Receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save souls. **What does it mean to put away?** It means to get rid of it. It’s the same picture language as clothing in Colossians - Put off the old self and put on the new self (Col 3). **Filthiness** here refers to moral evil/defilement, of spiritual stains on our souls. Think of it like filthy clothes, stained and muddy. It’s just dirty. **Rampant wickedness** here refers to evil in character or sin that springs from bad attitudes within one’s spirit. The second action is to receive the implanted word with meekness. How? The implanted word which is the word of truth in v18 is a message of salvation. The attitude to receive the word is not of pride but of humility. **Meekness** according to Google is submissiveness/obedience/humility. By receiving the word in humility, it is to turn away from sin - evil desires, filthiness, wickedness - and to turn to God in repentance. **Implanted word** here refers to the gospel being planted in the heart of man by God. Look at cf. (Deut. 30:14, Jer. 31:33).

Follow up question:

- How do you put away what is evil and receive the word with meekness? Provide a concrete example.

Read James 1:22-25

5. Receiving the implanted word means hearing and doing. What does James's illustration tell us about those who just hear the word?

They would end up deceiving themselves. How? James gives us a picture of a man looking at his natural face "intently" in a mirror. But as he goes away, he forgets what he was like. How can one forget what he looked like after looking at a mirror? Especially looking very carefully and intently? Similarly, this shows the foolishness of examining oneself in God's "mirror," the "implanted word" (v. 21), but not changing one's behaviour based on what one sees there (v. 22).

Follow up question

- What does it mean being a hearer of the word and doer of the word? Provide a concrete example.

6. How should the perfect law act as an encouragement to persevere for those who hear and do the word?

V25 shows a contrast. The **perfect law, law of liberty** can be translated as the law of Christ. In James, the "law" and the "word" are two ways of describing the same thing. The "law" here refers to the OT as it has been interpreted and fulfilled in Christ. Together with the power of the Holy Spirit, it can change hearts. When one looks at Jesus who is the fulfiller of the law and gives us freedom from sin, we too are able to go through this, not alone but with God who sustains us in Christ by the work of the Spirit. The blessing here is a reward for those who are able to do the word rather than just hearing it. It is a promise in the end which is similar to v12 for those who perseveres under trial till the end. In light of that, those who are able to act as a doer and not forget as a hearer will be rewarded for their doing. **Doing** in the sense of actively living it out rather than passively. (We learn what obedience is like when we see Jesus in Phil 2:1-8)

Read James 1:26-27

7. What does James say about people who seem religious but do not act like it? Why?

These people are just deceiving themselves but this time to their hearts instead. This echoes in v19 about being slow to speak. The image of a bridle is normally used with horses. **Bridle** usually carries the active sense of putting a bit into an animal's mouth in order to direct it. We will see this more in James 3:2. Those who do not control their tongue or in other words, do not control and restrain what they say, it will bring consequences. Gossip is the most obvious example in this case. They are **deceiving their hearts**. Look at Mark 7:20-23 and Matthew 12:32-37 for more explanation. The result of this person's religion is **worthless**. This word has a range of meanings that "pertain to being of no use": "idle, empty, fruitless, useless, powerless, lacking truth." James insists that their religion proves so futile that it might as well be non-existent or lifeless.

In summary, a person who is a doer of the word will guard himself especially their heart to not be involved in an activity that will threaten and influence the godly way of living which is righteousness. If you don't, it is as if that religion has no meaning in guarding the way you live your life.

Follow up question

- How are they deceiving their hearts?

8. On the contrary, what are the characteristics of pure religion to God? Why?

A religion that is pure and undefiled before God has 2 implications - to care for the most helpless of the society and to keep oneself pure from the world. This would echo the 2 greatest commandments given by Jesus - to love God with all our hearts, mind, soul and strength and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

What does it mean? First requirement is **to visit orphans and widows in their affliction**. As Christ's followers, we must attend to people who are helpless to even help themselves. Not for the sake of doing it, but because they are also created in the image of God. We are to love these people no matter their societal backgrounds. The word "**visit**" implies not only going to see these people but also caring for them. Orphans and widows were particularly helpless in ancient culture, usually lacking anyone to support them (see Deut. 10:18; Isa. 1:17; Jer. 7:5-7). The **affliction** here implies that these people are in tribulation or pain, possibly experiencing societal pressure to fit in. Our concern for the helpless of society, including the ones who make us uncomfortable.

The second condition is **to keep oneself unstained from the world**. How? According to previous verses, it is by knowing the word of God because it is righteousness that we should pursue. To continue to fight sin everyday and not give any opportunity to fall into temptations. Is it easy? No, but as we look at the law of Christ and the way Jesus lives, we have comfort and assurance that even if we fail, we can still depend on God, especially asking him for wisdom to live a God-honoring life in this world. This includes being the salt and light to the needy. James uses the sacrificial language of "the lamb without blemish" (Ex. 12:5; 1 Pet. 1:19) to describe the pure religious person.

Summary of James 1

The two halves of the verse thus form a fitting summary of the three main points James will next unpack in more detail in the body of the letter. The right use of wealth, the implementation of God's speech ethics, and a godly response to trials and temptations all involve a personal dimension and societal element.

Think it through

9. Recently how has the word of God pointed out your sinfulness? If you are having trouble with this question perhaps your problem is pride and a lack of meekness. Pride makes us spiritually blind. When we are physically blind we know we can't see. But the big problem with spiritual blindness is that it makes us blind to our sin while convincing us we can see. How do you respond when your sin is pointed out? How are you going with loving God and loving others?

10. In light of our study, how are you caring for the physically needy in our community? Do you think you can help in any way especially during this period of time?

11. How can we be helping each other to not just be hearers but doers of the word? Are there any practical steps that we can take to help each other this week?

To think about for next week

- What are the social distinctions you use in your judgment of people? Who do you defer to in life?

What do you consider 'cool or uncool', 'in or out', 'high or low'?

- Think of someone you find difficult to love? Do you have fears about loving and caring for them?

What are they? How might knowing God and the good news of Jesus change your attitudes here?

Study 3: “Say No to Favouritism” (James 2:1-13)

Big Idea

Living out God’s word means that Christians should show no partiality / favouritism but to be driven by God’s love in their relationships with other people.

Pray

Getting Us Thinking

1. Think back to the times before MCO, how would you think of the person sitting next to you at church (if you are not sitting with people you are closed to) or the many groups of people who come and visit our church or in your Christian community?

2. Now, try to list the kind of people you would normally welcome and/or talk to. Would you choose to only do so to people you consider ‘cool’, ‘in’ or ‘high-class’? Why?

Leaders: Feel free to set a specific timeframe e.g. past 2 weeks, last 2 days, etc. if the group goes silent.

The intention of these questions is for us to be honest in evaluating our thoughts and actions, revealing about how we may show favouritism in life or make social distinctions in our judgment of people. It is also meant to identify any groups of people we might look down at in life.

Context

3. What has James been teaching us so far?

James is encouraging believers to become mature and whole in their faith.

Faith in Jesus → testing of faith → steadfastness → mature and whole, lacking nothing.

Study 1 (James 1:1-18)

Wisdom and Steadfastness in trials is God’s good gift to us for our maturity.

[Pray to receive God’s wisdom → view life through the gospel, love God not sin]

Study 2 (James 1:19-27)

Living out the gospel shows obedience out of love for God and his people which is reflected in speech, conduct and love towards others and keeping ourselves unstained from the world.

[Obey God’s implanted word → bridle tongue, **care for needy**, unstained by the world]

(today’s passage)

Leaders: It's worth spending some time to recall what James exhorts in the previous passage (1:19-27) and to identify words from 1:19-27 that are being repeated in today's passage e.g. 'my beloved brothers' (1:19) and 'the law of liberty' (1:25)

As James establishes that consistent Christian conduct comes only from a consistent Christian heart and mind, he now specifically turns to address a particular failing among his readers in their doing of the word: care for the needy / hospitality. Far from being a people characterized by a genuine love and concern for the helpless (James 1:27), they have actually fallen into showing partiality to the rich and powerful.

Digging In

Leaders: May consider breaking into smaller groups for Q 1-2, if the study group is large enough to do so.

4. Read through James 2:1-13 and divide the passage into smaller sections.

| Verses | | Title |
|--------|-------|--|
| 1-4 | 1 | Warning against favouritism |
| | 2-3 | |
| | 4 | |
| 5-7 | 5-6a | Favouritism is against God's character |
| | 6b-7 | |
| 8-13 | 8 | Favouritism is against God's law |
| | 9-11 | |
| | 12-13 | |

5. James begins the passage by addressing the particular problem of showing partiality among the believing readers (v. 1). According to this passage, what does it mean to be show partiality? In other words, how does it look like to show partiality?
(*Hint:* Identify the words that define / describe partiality and point out the verses)

Word search:

- '[making] *distinctions among yourselves*' (v. 4)
- '*become judges with evil thoughts*' (v. 4)

- 'dishonoured ...' (v. 6)
- not '[loving] *your neighbour as yourself*' (v. 8)
- '[transgressing] *the law*' (v. 9-11)
- '[shows] *no mercy*' (v. 13)

Preferring the wealthy over the poor

Read James 2:1-4

6. Verses 2-3 sketch out a hypothetical yet all-too-familiar scenario. What is the problem with partiality / favouritism and what does James conclude on this kind of behaviour?

Problem:

- Inconsistent with faith in Jesus (see 1:27)

Conclusion James made:

- '[making] *distinctions among yourselves*' (v. 4)
- '*become judges with evil thoughts*' (v. 4)

7. What do you understand of the phrase 'distinctions among yourselves'? // What does James mean by making 'distinctions among yourselves'?

- Recalling James 1:6-8 about 'doubting' The word 'doubt' there meant something like 'self-disputing,' or **being divided against oneself**, turned against oneself. While the word 'distinctions' here in James 2:4 is the same word.
- In other words, showing partiality when we claim to be Christians is simply an act of self-deception as Christians! Even worse is when we have such idea of being divided and turned against oneself created in the church or Christian community.

8. What does it mean to 'judge' someone here and why shouldn't Christians do it?

- Notice the description '*with evil thoughts*' – it's sinful, wicked and unrighteous
- (address only if this is brought up) Should not be confused with Jesus' command in Matt. 7:1-5

Reasons Why Showing Partiality Is Ungodly

Read James 2:1, 5-13

9. Why is partiality not a Christian conduct?

James gives at least 3 reasons:

- Our faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory (v. 1)
- Partiality is contrary to God's gospel (who he is and what he has done) (v 5-6) – notice the 1st 'but' (v. 6)
- Partiality is contrary to God's law (v. 8-9) – notice the 2nd 'but' (v. 6)

Leaders: If the group is unable to get all of these, it's okay to move on as they will be expounded further in the following questions.

10. What's the point of James calling the reader's attention to God's attitudes / character and actions in verses 5?
- (a) To show that partiality is contrary to the attitudes / character and actions of God. Since God shows mercy (not giving what we deserve) to the needy and undeserving, showing partiality is wrong because doing so is simply unlike God!
- The gospel is and utter impartiality in which **God has chosen** to give the gifts of faith and the kingdom to those who are **poor in the world's eyes**.
(the 2 contradicting bases: world's eyes and God's sight)
 - In fact, God has a long history in the Old Testament of showing special care and concern for the poor (e.g. Psalm 10:12–14).
 - It is those who are helpless to whom God shows special concern—those who are marked by **a recognition that they cannot help themselves**. And throughout Scripture, poverty tends toward this kind of humility more than wealth does.
 - While wealth or other strengths lead us to rely on those things rather than on God, weaknesses lead us to humbly lean on God.
- (b) Christians are called to imitate God, i.e. showing forth his attributes (doers of the word – received the Word properly). Show partiality implies improper receiving of the Word
11. Is James saying here that being materially poor automatically results in salvation?
- Carefully read James 2:5 till the end of the verse: To whom has God promised the kingdom? Is it to 'those who have little money'? No!
 - Also, there is a purpose of this calling:
 - (a) to be rich in faith; (b) to be heirs of the kingdom, (cf. 1:9-11, Luke 6:20; Matt. 5:3)
 - Therefore, we must not overstate the point. **James is not saying that the church is only full of the poor and weak, or that the wealthy are not worth trying to reach**. But both are pointing to a clear pattern that God chooses and calls people to himself in a particular way, and a striking feature of it is his propensity to do so from among the poor and lowly.
 - The verse also doesn't mean that God loves the rich less than he loves the poor, or that the poor somehow deserve the sacrificial death of Jesus more than the rich. **The point is that God chooses to bless the very people James's readers (then and now) tend to shun**.
 - As for verse 6, James is also not saying this to engender resentment towards the rich, but to point out the irony of Christians pinning their hopes on them
12. Does that mean he want them to show partiality to the poor?
- A careful reading of James 2:1-13 esp. v. 1 would suggest the opposite. We should show no partiality to either side.

Reflect

13. What attitude should we have to the materially rich and poor? How would that look like in practical?

14. What groups of people seem well respected at church and what groups are less respected? Are there ways that you might be guilty of favouritism especially at church? What needs to be changed?

Favouritism is against God's law

Read James 2:8-13

15. What is the point James intending to make in v. 8 by referring Leviticus 19:18 as 'the royal law according to the Scripture'?

- James sees the law (echoing the 'word' in chapter 1) as a unity, which he further explains in v. 10-11, that the law is not a menu to choose from but is like a pane of glass shattered by one breach.
- James does not see the law in isolation to relationship with the Lawgiver. The law is one whole because there is one lawgiver (v. 11, cf. 4:12) and therefore reflects the unity of the divine nature.

By calling it a '**royal**' law, James reminds the readers of who the lawgiver who is God, King of the universe. Therefore, showing partiality is a violation of the King's law.

- The word 'royal' is important in understanding which body of law James is referring to.
 - It is not the Old Testament law in itself, but rather the Old Testament law as interpreted and fulfilled by King Jesus. That's what makes the law royal; it belongs to the King! (cf. Matt. 5:17-18)

By saying that this law accords with the commandment 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' It means this law is summed up by the command in how we should relate in horizontal relationship, thereby affirming impartiality (another reason why showing partiality to the rich and powerful is wrong)

- At the centre of the law we are to 'love our neighbours as yourselves' – the law as the embodiment of God's love
- In other words, that commandment encapsulates and sums up the law that King Jesus gives to his people. (cf. Matt. 22:36–40, see also Mk 12:28-31)

16. How does showing favouritism break the law?

Just as breaking one commandment of the law makes a person accountable for the whole law, leaving that person guilty of breaking the whole law (v. 10–11), not loving one means we are not loving whole

17. Instead of showing partiality to the rich and powerful, what does James want his readers to do? Verse 12 (doing after the 'listening' in v 5)

- James lays particular stress on each of the verbs speak and act by using the correlative adverb (so) before each of them, i.e., 'in this way speak and in this way act'.

- The verbs are in the present tense, emphasizing that this manner of ‘speaking’ and ‘doing’ is to be a way of life. While this verse applies generally to all conduct, James undoubtedly thinks especially of the need to exhibit love through an impartial attitude towards all – a value that is radically different from the world.
18. We deserve judgment but have been given mercy. Yet we can be merciless judges with evil thoughts when we make distinctions among ourselves. How does James both confront and comfort us in 2:10-13?
- God is our judge; but be comforted that God is merciful - his mercy will triumph over our judgment.
 - Our mercy towards others will not save us but it will be evidence of our accepting God’s mercy (cf. Matt 6:14-15).
19. Going back to verse 1, James calls Jesus ‘the Lord of glory’. What do you understand as to how did Jesus become the Lord of glory and what does this teach us about impartiality?
- Christ humbled himself to the point of death even unto cross and saved sinners like us. Him being the Lord of all things doesn’t even have a place to rest while he was on earth.
 - What is his ‘glory’, then? – His death, resurrection and exaltation. Jesus was glorified as he died on the cross, for that is where he most brought glory to the Father. It is through the cross that God is glorified. The cross demonstrates his love (Romans 5:8), his wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:23-24), and his justice (Romans 3:25-26). It is here that the light of God’s revelation reaches its fullest midday height.
 - And yet the death of Jesus brought God glory through foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:23), lowliness (Philippians 2:7), and deprivation (2 Corinthians 8:9). It is in these things that we see God reconciling us to himself. Jesus allowed himself to hang in humiliation, nakedness and shame. This is the cross in which we boast. Jesus embraced poverty so that, in him and through him, we might become rich.

Understanding this utterly redefines what we consider to be glorious.

- When the cross of Christ becomes the benchmark, the world’s glory looks very unimpressive indeed.
- If it is the glory of Jesus—or rather, the Jesus “of the glory”—that we most long for, we will not be impressed or captivated by the riches and glories of the world around us.

Thinking It Through

20. Christians are under the ‘royal law’ (v. 8), which is also called as ‘*the law of liberty*’, or literally the ‘law that gives freedom’ (v. 12; Recap Study 2 on 1:25 ‘the perfect law, law of liberty’, i.e. the law of Christ). How, then, should this law change our words and actions? Have God’s love and mercy shaped our words and actions this last week? If not, how should we rightly respond to and apply the law to love

Other Parts of the Bible to Look at:

'You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbour.' ----- Leviticus 19:15, ESV

Exodus 34:6

Matthew 7:1ff

2 Corinthians 8:9

Read Matthew 5:17-26 in your own time and see what Jesus expects of the Christian conduct.

Summing Up

21. How does today's passage illustrate hearing and doing the word?

James is appalled by the behaviour of the believers who practice partiality—first, because it is so diametrically opposed to God's character; second, because it puts these Christians in the position of acting just like the ungodly world; and third, because it is a violation of our King's law! These believers' behaviour is no small issue. It puts them at odds with God's law, and therefore with God himself.

In other words, if we show partiality, we have not yet really understood the gospel...

Application

22. If you are a non-Christian, how might knowing God and the good news of Jesus change your attitudes here?

23. If you are a Christian, how could we constantly remind ourselves and others of the gospel and particularly against favouritism, knowing that we live in a very status-conscious society and we struggle to obey this teaching about partiality/favouritism in our church?

24. Check if you in danger of showing favouritism in some way and how. How, then, should the gospel to change your heart?

25. Are there particular people at church that you have been failing to love? How have the understanding of God's generous mercy to you challenged you today to change your attitude towards all people?

26. What are specific practical ways you can express God's mercy and love to people?

Some examples of different ways:

When you give things away consider giving away things that are the same standard as what you buy for yourself, not discarded second-hand items. Why not buy them something new as you would for yourself?

Prayer

1. Thank God for his wonderful grace in Christ and his mercy triumphs over our sinfulness and over judgement
2. Praise God that the poor in this life are eternally rich in Christ.
3. Ask God to keep you and your church watchful against favouritism.
4. Ask God to help you show a gracious and generous heart toward the needy.
5. Pray for wisdom, strength and obedience to show mercy to others.

To think about for the next study (2:14-26)

- If a non-Christian stranger were to look at your outward behaviour what do you think they would deduce about what you believe?

Study 4: “What is True Faith?” (James 2:14-26)

Big Idea: True faith in Christ is a faith that moves beyond believing what is true and will result in faithful good works.

Getting Us Thinking

1. Did you know of any friends who had been stuck alone at university during the MCO period? How had you responded?

This question is to help us reflect on whether we would act to help the person in need and how we find practical ways to do so.

Context

2. What has James been teaching us so far?

James is encouraging believers to become mature and whole in their faith.

Faith in Jesus → testing of faith → steadfastness → mature and whole, lacking nothing.

In last week’s study, James specifically turns to address a particular failing among his readers in their doing of the word: care for the needy / hospitality. Far from being a people characterized by a genuine love and concern for the helpless (James 1:27), they have actually fallen into showing partiality to the rich and powerful. Today, we will read how James continues exhorting us to obey the word by demonstrating what true faith is.

Digging In

Read James 2:14-26

3. James begins a new section by asking two questions to his brothers (v 14). What good is the faith to the person in question?

Faith (v 14) = faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory (2:1)

James writes that the person in question who “says” he has faith but does not have works is of no good / benefit. That kind of faith cannot save anyone. The faith under discussion is not genuine saving faith (“true faith”) but a deceived, inadequate self-declared faith (“false faith”) (1:22-23).

It is important to note that the formula is not “faith + works = salvation.” James does not say that works need to be added to faith in order for one to be saved (i.e. to earn salvation via work)

4. James gives 4 examples of faith, each with a principle. There is true faith and there is false faith. Read the verses below and fill in the table.

| Passage | What is the example of faith that James gives? | Is it an example of true or false faith? | What principle is James teaching about faith? |
|---------|---|--|--|
| 2:15-17 | A person learns about a needy brother or sister, says words of well-wishing without doing anything. | False | 2:17 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Faith by itself without works is dead ● Speaking our faith without doing our faith cannot meet practical needs. ● It is not wrong to wish someone the Lord's blessing of peace or to wish for the Lord to provide him with the clothing, food, and shelter he needs. What James is saying that is wrong is to wish such blessings upon people when you yourself are able to help meet those material needs but do nothing. |
| 2:18-20 | James' objector will insist that some people have faith; others have works. He asks for the objectors to show /put their faith on display without works. James continues to respond to the objector by approving of the statement that God is one. He adds that even the demons believe and shudder. | False | 2:20 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Faith without works is useless ● True faith is demonstrable through outward behavior. ● The demons demonstrate a mere intellectual affirmation or acknowledgement of God. Clearly, such belief is not true faith; it is inadequate, non-saving, useless, dead faith. The demons do not need to add works to their faith to be saved. They need a completely different kind of faith—a living, saving faith that "has works" inherently in it. |

| | | | |
|--|--|-------------|--|
| <p>2:21-24</p> <p>c.f. Gn. 15:1-6; 22:1-12, esp. v1, 12</p> | <p>Abraham offered his only son, Isaac as a sacrifice. The Scripture was fulfilled and it was counted to him as righteousness.</p> | <p>True</p> | <p>2:24</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faith <u>involves</u> works/ faith was <u>completed</u> (or “matured”) by works / faith was <u>active</u> along with works This is not the language of external addition; it is organic language intended to convey the truth that Abraham’s visible obedience emerged from his invisible saving faith. |
| <p>2:25-26</p> <p>c.f. Joshua 2:1-9, especially verses 8 & 9</p> | <p>Rahab received God’s messengers and helped them escape.</p> | <p>True</p> | <p>2:26</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A body without the spirit is analogous to faith without works. James means that any “faith” that doesn’t lead to works is dead (i.e. no faith at all). |

3. James has given examples of true faith and false faith. What is the significance of discerning true from false faith? (c.f. Gal 5:6)

James’ examples and explicit language is that faith either “has” or “does not have” works (v. 17). Faith is inherently either dead or alive. If it is alive, it is true faith as it contains works organically in itself and thus overflows with them in the visible world. On the other hand, false faith does not contain such works and is dead, useless, with no life at all. It cannot lead to salvation (v. 14).

Both Abraham and Rahab are examples of true faith where their sacrifices hold nothing back from God but obey Him whole-heartedly. Hence, faith in God is not merely a nominal faith (i.e. affirming the God of Israel as the true, righteous, and all-powerful Judge of all nations) – they acted on that belief.

Galatians 5:6 says that what counts with God is the kind of faith that by its nature produces love. So James’ concern is whether people have true saving faith or false faith. And the difference is that the false faith does not produce loving behavior and cannot justify anybody.

Thinking It Through

4. Read *James 2:21* and *Romans 4:2-3*. Is James contradicting Paul in what he says? Why or why not? (cf. Gen 15:6, 22:9-10).

a) *Was Abraham justified by works (James 2:21) vs by faith (Romans 4:2-3)?*

In Romans, Paul cites Gen. 15:6 to show that Abraham was justified by faith. James bases his claim on Gen. 22:9–10, where Abraham was willing to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. (Note: the sacrifice of Isaac took place as much as 35 years after Abraham’s justification by faith).

Thus James apparently has a different sense of the word “justify” in mind here. Paul uses “justify” to express being declared righteous by God through faith, on the basis of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice (Rom. 3:24–26). James seems to use “justify” to stress the way in which works demonstrate that someone has been justified. Paul emphasizes how one is justified; James focuses on what justification looks like in practice.

Further, James 2:22 sees Gen. 15:6 as having been fulfilled in Abraham’s offering of Isaac. James focuses on Abraham’s act of obedience and maturation of his faith, while Paul highlights God’s declaration of Abraham’s righteousness.

b) *Are we justified by faith alone (Romans 3:28) vs by works and not by faith alone (James 2:24)?*

James again seems at first to contradict Paul’s teaching that one is justified by faith alone but the two are compatible.

When Paul teaches in Romans 4:5 that we are justified by faith alone, he means that the only thing that unites us to Christ for righteousness is dependence on Christ. When James says in James 2:24 that we are not justified by faith alone, he means that the faith which justifies does not remain alone. These two positions are not contradictory. Faith alone unites us to Christ for righteousness, and the faith that unites us to Christ for righteousness does not remain alone. It bears the fruit of love. It must do so or it is dead, demon, useless faith and does not justify.

Both Paul and James agree that the basis of salvation is grace alone through faith. Works are not the basis of salvation but the necessary result (Eph. 2:10).

God’s grace > Saved through faith > Produces good works

Setting the context right

No! The bible does not contradict itself. It’s important for us to read these 2 passages in context. Paul is addressing the problem where some argued that certain works had to be done for God to declare someone righteous. Paul responded emphatically that justification is by faith alone apart from the works of the law. James is not referring to the kind of justifying faith that Paul points us toward - he is referring to the kind of faith that is inseparable from good works.

Hence, James was arguing against a wrong view of faith whereas Paul fought against a wrong view of works.

Application

5. What would you say to a Christian who thought that because we are saved only by believing in Jesus it does not matter much what we do now?

Note to leaders - This question is to address Christians who think that there is no need for them to do anything (completely ignoring the necessity of faithful good works) because they have been saved already.

NOT to address the necessity of good works for our salvation.

6. In what ways are you tempted to regard faith as a mere intellectual exercise? How can you show faith by your works this week?

Pray

- Pray that God would protect you from having a hollow faith of mere words.
- Pray that your faith and the faith of God's people at church would be active and consistent with the word of truth.

Study 5: “When Christians Speak” (James 3:1-12)

Getting Us Thinking

1. What would you feel and do when you see a fellow Christian brother/sister posting something that may damage their friend’s reputation on social media?

Context

a) James is encouraging believers to become mature and whole in their faith.

Faith in Jesus → testing of faith → steadfastness → mature and whole, lacking nothing.

b) ~ Pray for God’s wisdom → view life through the gospel, love God not sin

~ Obey God’s word → **bridle tongue**, care for needy, unstained by the world

In his introduction, James wrote:

‘If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless.’ (1:26)

In 3:1-12, James goes on to explain what it is to control our tongue.

Digging In

Read *James 3:1-12*. Divide them into sections and give them a short title each.

| Verses | Title |
|--------|---|
| 1-2 | Christians should practice what they teach, particularly in their speech |
| 3 – 5a | Speech can cause big influence |
| 5b – 6 | Speech can bring serious disaster and is hard to be controlled (Hence always think twice before speaking) |
| 9 – 12 | Christians should be consistent by avoiding bad and evil speech |

Main idea: Christians should not give evil speeches

2. Why did James say that not many should become teachers? (3:1-2)
 - Teachers here most likely refer to bible teachers, the ones who preach God’s word.
 - They will be judged (can be by God or by people around) with greater strictness: if they don’t practice what they preach but rather, they stumble (i.e. making mistakes/ doing wrong/ sinning).

- We all (even after we become Christians) stumble in many ways. But James particularly saying that if someone does not make mistake in his speech, he is perfect and able to control his whole body (spiritually mature, being Christ-like as mentioned in 1:4).
 - The point here is that, as Christians who preach God's word, we should first aim to make no mistake in our speech, i.e. harm no one in our speech whether intentionally or unintentionally.
 -
3. Why is it so important to bridle our tongue? (3:3-8)
- James gave 2 examples of having control of a small thing can lead to controlling big thing:
 - o Putting small bits into a horse mouth allows a rider to control the whole horse.
 - o Using a small rudder, a sailor can direct the movement of a huge ship.
 Similarly, the tongue as a small organ can make a big influence in its speech.
 - James continued to tell us how dangerous a tongue can be: it is like a small fire that can burn everything. An unrighteous speech may seem insignificant, but it could stain our whole person, bringing lives to the death.
 - Furthermore, it is untameable: All creatures on earth can be tamed by humans, but not the tongue. It brings unending evil and harm to people.
 - Speech can bring serious disaster to us and others, and it is hard to be controlled. Therefore, we need to always be careful about what we speak.
4. According to v9-12, what are the problems when a Christian doesn't bridle his tongue?
- Inconsistency – bless God, curse people (who are in God's image) with the same mouth.
 - Again, James gave 2 examples of inconsistency:
 - o Salt pond yields freshwater (when it's supposed to yield saltwater instead).
 - o Fig tree bears olive fruit (when it's supposed to bear the fruit of its tree).
 Similarly, Christians who curse or speak badly about others are inconsistent.
 - To curse people means we are not blessing God even though we may praise him another time. We cannot separate our love for God from how we speak to others. Our words to others show the true nature of our love for God and our hearts.
5. Read *Matthew 5:21-22* and *12:33-37*. What is the relationship between our words and our hearts?
- Matt 5:22 – Whoever insults others in speech, it is equivalent to committing murder (the problem is the hatred in the heart), and he deserves hellfire.
 - Matt 12:33 – Our speech reflects our hearts and hence reflects our identity.
6. *Controlling our tongue is indeed a very difficult task. How does the gospel of Christ's salvation help us to do it?*
- *On the cross, Christ did not only save us from the consequence of sins but also save us from the slavery of sin, that we may live completely without sin (when he comes again).*
 - *And God sent the Holy Spirit to sanctify us and to live out God's word in this current life.*
 - *Therefore, on one hand, as James tell us, we should work out and live our lives consistent with what we learn from the words and with our identity, on the other hand, we trust that the Holy Spirit would help us as we are doing this and we are not doing it alone.*

Application

7. Often, we hurt each other in our speech unintentionally. Were there any instances when you felt hurt by someone's speech, but that person didn't realize it? Have you spoken in that similar manner to someone else too?

8. Have you ever felt tempted to join in the conversation when your friends are gossiping about someone you don't like? If yes, why did you feel like joining them? If no, what would you do when your friends are doing that?

9. In our current generation, we communicate frequently using our social media. Are there any instances that something we post on social media may hurt or damage the reputation of someone or a certain group of people? If yes, with what intention are we doing that?

10. Sometimes when we face some relationship issues (with person A), we need to talk to someone else (person B) so that we can solve the issues together. As we are doing this, we may say something bad about person A. Is this considered gossiping? Let's discuss it.

Study 6: “Us Against the World” (James 3:13-4:10)

Big idea: Turn to God, who graciously works in us, so we pursue friendship with Him rather than the world, because worldly wisdom is demonic, yielding discord and evil.

Getting Us Thinking

1. In our Asian culture, what are some nuggets of conventional wisdom? What is considered wise living?

Some examples: Happy wife, happy life... get rich quick... prioritise career... etc.

Hopefully throughout the study it will become clear that earthly wisdom is self-serving and short-sighted. The aim is for the participants to realise that many, if not all, pieces of ‘conventional (earthly) wisdom’ follow this pattern. Often this leads to discord and evil, and we get to see some examples of this later in James 4.

Context

A unique feature of James is that it resembles the *wisdom* literature of the Old Testament (like Proverbs) – although beginning with an epistolary salutation, most of the following sections read like a collection of *wisdom* sayings. The resemblance does not end there. James 1 begins by reminding us that as Christians who belong to the faith in Jesus, we will all endure trials that tests our faith, producing steadfastness, leading to maturity in Christ. How? *Wisdom*.

Last week, we were reminded that Christians ought to guard our tongues. We see the impact of the speech on the body, both self and the church. Where does *wisdom* fit in?

Digging in

Read James 3:13-18

2. James begins by comparing two forms of wisdom – worldly wisdom and wisdom from above (verses 14-18). Fill up the table below.

| | Worldly wisdom | Wisdom from above |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| Origin | It comes from hell. | It comes from heaven. |
| Characteristics/motivation | It is motivated by self-centred ambition. | It is motivated by God-centred humility/meekness. |
| Results | It results in discord and evil. | It results in peace and righteousness. |

Earthly wisdom:

While, yes, this wisdom is ‘earthly’, its origins go much deeper. James’s style of ‘progressive/pattern growth’ (cf. James 1:15) is present again here. Worldly wisdom is described as unspiritual and demonic in nature. Motivation tied to worldly wisdom includes things like ‘bitter jealousy’ and ‘selfish ambition’. Worldly wisdom is concerned with self. It is all about ‘me’. It measures everything in the world by how it affects ‘me’.

Supplementary question to aid study flow: How would self-centred ambition lead to discord and evil?

Such attitude could only result in discord and evil. You are never satisfied, for nothing worldly can truly satisfy. There will always be more you desire. People who inconvenience you are not worth your time, and people who are ahead of you, you envy. Anger, bitterness, resentment, divisions... this could pour out into our actions, sowing 'every vile practice' (cf. James 4:1-3).

Wisdom from above:

From the name alone, we see that the kind of good wisdom James is writing about is of heaven, furthered strengthened by James 1:5-6 (which we will look at later). This kind of wisdom is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial (cf. James 2:1-13), traits that God-centred, displayed in our perfect Christ. And as far as relationships go, these are other-centric characteristics. The result of this kind of wisdom is peace and righteousness.

3. How is wisdom from above and the Christian life linked (cf. *Matthew 5:3-12*)?

Wisdom from above is the solution to the sin of dissension present in James 3:1-12 and 4:1-12. These merely serve as examples, showing us that wisdom from above ultimately guards us through the trials of this world. Remember, James 1:2-5 teaches us that wisdom is key to steadfastness through trials. The book of Proverbs tells us that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge/wisdom over and over again. In simple terms, godly wisdom is the act of living with God as the boss. There is an order to creation, God gives us the law to teach us how that order is to play out, and obedience to the Word as well as all good works are only done rightfully when God is the focus. And keeping God at the forefront of our lives is key to the Godly living James prescribes.

The beatitudes (*Matthew 5:3-12*) do not present different characters and their rewards/blessings for their characteristics, rather, they present *the blessed Christian man*. This is what Jesus culture should look like, this is how radical Christians should appear. Note that the traits share similarities with the 'fruit' of heavenly wisdom.

Purity – 5:8; Peaceable – 5:9; Gentle/meek and open to reason – 5:5; Full of mercy – 5:7; Full of good fruit – 5:6.

As a summary, wisdom from above helps us to live the way God intends for us to live.

4. How do Christians attain this wisdom from above (cf. James 1:5, Proverbs 2:1-8)?

Ask God! Godly wisdom can only come from God. And praise be to God, for He gives freely. How can we get this wisdom, if it is from heaven, through worldly means? You cannot get it from intellectual effort or life experience. You get it from spending time with God, as you pray, read the Bible, and meditate on Scripture. Remember that asking God for wisdom is not a one-off transaction; the attitude displayed in Proverbs 2:1-8 shows us king Solomon's deep desire for God's wisdom. We too ought to seek God constantly in prayer and quiet time. And as you work to apply the things you learn as you spend time with God in your life, you grow in a wisdom the world can never offer.

Application

5. How can we ensure that we are truly wise? Is there a test we can conduct on ourselves?

James did not write his letter expecting perfection out of his readers (cf. James 3:2) However, James does teach us that a good indicator of genuine faith in Christ is our fruit. So, when we reflect on this question, we ought to ask ourselves, "What is my trajectory in my walk with God? Am I growing, or straying farther away?"

An honest reflection may be reassuring or sobering. Either way, remember that growth in our works is something we should desire if we want to be wise.

One obvious way to assess ourselves is to determine if we are causing disorder and committing vile practices (evil practices in our public and private lives). Or are we as verse 17 portrays?

Read James 4:1-10

We just read in James 3:13-18 that heavenly wisdom leads to peace among believers. Hence, quarrels and fights among the “brothers” is certainly indicative of a deep issue.

6. What leads to quarrels and fights among the believers (verses 1-3)?

Flowing directly out of James 3:13-18, we see that worldly wisdom, culminating in self-centred ambition, stirs up passions and desires within us. “Covet” in verse 4:2 is the same as “jealousy” in verses 3:14,16. These sinful desires of the flesh are at war within the Christian.

James tells us that friends of the world are lovers of pleasure. In our sin we gravitate to the indulgences of the flesh. When we cannot get what we want, we murder. As much as it may be a hyperbole, Jesus’s words on the sermon of the mount (cf. Matthew 5:21-22) tell us that anger, which is a close friend of envy and jealousy, is tantamount to murder. These sinful desires are very dangerous indeed.

Notice how in the pursuit of pleasure, even the spiritual aspects of our lives are deeply affected. Either they do not go to God in prayer when they desire something, or they only seek God to get more out of the world for self when they do. It is no longer, “Your will be done,” but, “My will be done”. We cannot get our way (that is, to make ourselves god). Hostility towards others, borne out of selfishness, is really hostility towards God (cf. verse 4).

7. Let’s consider:

- a) What is the result of being driven by self-indulgent desires (verse 4; cf. Jeremiah 3:20)? Think about the language being used by James here.

All this while, James has been addressed to the “brothers”. Now, James calls the hearers “You adulterous people!” The image is that of spiritual adultery.

As Christians, we are invited into a deep unity and friendship with God. But, when we seek our own pleasure first, and the luxuries of this world, we tell God, “You are not enough.” As the church, it is as though we are cheating on God with the world. Friendship with the world is enmity with God. The pain and heartache involved in adultery are all wrapped up in this image.

- b) How has the good God responded (verses 5-6)?

God, on the other hand, is a loving, jealous husband. In light of the context, verse 5 should be probably understood as James saying God jealously longs for the spirit he put in us. God is jealous for our affections the same way a husband is jealous for the affections of his wife. This is a very good thing! It’s not about God being scared we’ll find something better in the world (there is nothing better anyway), but that God wants to spare us from a fatal relationship with the world. Best of all, just like that jealous husband, we can be sure God will oppose with divine power anything that threatens this relationship.

Supplementary question to aid study flow: How does this section give us hope?

God has taken the first move in Christ, and is continually doing so, because 'he gives more grace'! Please give this section careful attention, as James may weigh down on the participants feeling that it's too difficult. It is so easy to slip back into the ways of the world, but we can take heart for God is merciful, gracious, all loving, willingly supplying all the grace we need, and then some. Whatever we may forfeit when we pursue selfish ambition, we cannot forfeit our salvation, because there will always be more grace. What a wonderful point in James!

We may struggle daily to fight the urge to become friends with the world, but God is the one who actively invites us to be friends with Him. You might want to emphasise *humbly* returning to God results in him pouring out his grace on us (verse 6).

c) Lastly, how should we respond? What is the result of friendship with God (verses 7-10)?

We respond in submission to the authority of God (verse 7a). James give us a few imperatives that demonstrate what this submission looks like.

We resist the devil (verse 7b) instead of resisting God. Recognise that worldly wisdom is demonic and desire nothing to do with it. Ask God for wisdom daily as we *seek God repentantly (verse 8a)*. Daily repent, for daily we stray from God; God is gracious to draw near in return. *Pursue holiness (verse 8b)*, both internally (purify your hearts) and externally (cleanse your hands). By God's grace we are clean inside and out – live in light of that. *Recognise sin for what it is and take it seriously (verse 9)*. This verse may sound depressing, but it really means those who live in friendship with the world need to take this issue seriously. It is not trivial – on the contrary, grieve over this. Love God and despise sin. Finally, *humble yourselves before the Lord (verse 10)*, for God gives grace to the humble (verse 6) and raises them up

Note that of this could also be James's explanation of what it means to humble oneself, as they are sandwiched between verse 6 and verse 10.

Turn to God and live in humility towards God as the boss, for this is truly wise.

Application

8. Reflect on your own life. In what ways are your selfish desires and friendship with the world damaging your Christian walk?

9. Think about your prayer life – what sorts of things do you pray for to “spend on your own passions”? How can you draw near to God in your prayers and humble yourself, requesting more grace and wisdom?

Pray

Thank God for sending His Son to pay the penalty for our folly. Repent for our spiritual adultery and ask that He would grant us wisdom from above to endure our trials this week through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Ask that we would love Him more than the world.

Study 7: “Are You Ready to be Judged?” (James 4:11–5:12)

Big Idea: Having received God’s grace, we must put away sin, including sinful speech, arrogance and idolizing wealth at the expense of others, but instead persevere in godly suffering, so that we can be prepared for the day of judgement.

Getting Us Thinking

1. What are some of the problems that can arise for a Christian who is rich? What about one who is poor?

(The original question was: How do the rich and the poor in this world normally behave? Do you think the status quo is acceptable?) or which do you think is better – to be rich or to be poor?

Context

Throughout the book of James, certain issues are addressed – steadfastness in trials, favouritism, hearing but not doing the word, speech that is sinful. In this passage, he addresses a certain group of people – the rich and the poor.

Having received Christ Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, James’ readers ought not to continue on in sin but be consistent with their faith instead. Today, we will see how James continues to prepare his readers for the day of the coming of the Lord.

Digging in

2. *Read James 4:11 – 5:12.* Divide the passage into smaller sections and give them each a title.

| Verses | Title |
|---------|---|
| 4:11-12 | Do not judge the law by speaking evil |
| 4:13-17 | Do not boast about tomorrow in arrogance |
| 5:1-6 | Do not lay up treasures on earth at the expense of the poor |
| 5:7-11 | Persevere in suffering |
| 5:12 | Vows are a serious matter |

We see the idea of judgement throughout the passage. How can Christians prepare to be judged when Jesus comes again? **This is meant to be answered in the discussion.**

Read James 4:11-12

3. In the previous passages, James talked about the many reasons why speaking evil against one another is ungodly. What is another reason here?

James equates speaking evil against one another with judging one’s brother and speaking evil against the law. Ultimately, doing so means to judge the law, which is not right, since the law is for us to follow and not for us to judge. Those who inappropriately judge others break God’s law and show contempt for God.

James concludes the argument by saying, “who are you to judge your neighbour?” This follows after James establishes the fact that there is only one lawgiver and one judge, he who is able to save and to destroy, not us. It does not make sense that human beings who are powerless in this regard should judge the law, since this will likely result in being judged by the true judge. So, who are we to judge our neighbour by speaking evil against them?

For more, you may read Lev. 19:16 which leads to 19:18 – “... you shall love your neighbour as yourself...” James also calls this the royal law in James 2:8. It is the complete opposite of slandering, and is how we as sinners saved ought to treat one another as it is the royal law.

Elsewhere in Romans 2:1 and 1 Corinthians 4:5, it is clear that with the judgement we pronounce on others, it will be used against us.

Read James 4:13-17

4. What is wrong about planning for tomorrow? Especially in a business sense?

* Here, the sin of the tongue is in boasting. Recall James 3:5.

There is nothing wrong in the action itself. In fact, this sounds like good business practice since they are not sitting idly waiting for wealth to come but are actually working hard for it. But this group of people James is addressing are in fact believers (v17), rich, who know the “right thing to do” (v15), but yet fail to do it. It is their attitude and underlying desires behind such actions that should be brought into question, not the action itself, since in planning for tomorrow they are most likely also **boasting** about it in **arrogance**, without regard for God’s sovereign will. Such planning masks a secular worldview that ignores God. They appear to try to control the events of life and fail to recognise its brevity, which is like a mist vanishes after a while.

So planning and investing are not wrong, but arrogant self-confidence and boasting are. Besides, we have established the fact that God is the lawgiver and the judge, who saves and destroys. This sovereignty of God automatically disables one’s presumptions and arrogance in making plans. In light of this, it should be clear for the rich Christians about who is in control and that there is no certainty in boasting about tomorrow.

5. Instead, what should be the attitude towards the future?

One should say “if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” In saying this, it shows that a person has regard for God’s sovereign plans and puts them before his own plans. So there is nothing wrong with planning for tomorrow, but Christians ought to do it the right way by keeping in mind God’s plans, that is, every business decision must be made in submission to God’s will.

For more, read Luke 12:13-21 on attitude towards wealth.

6. Now that James’ readers know the right perspective to have when making plans, why is it important to keep it in practice?

V17 – so whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. It is like rejecting God and his righteous law by receiving it but ignoring it. It is not only what we do that matters, the good that we fail to do is equally important to God.

Read James 5:1-6

7. What (will) has happened to the rich and why does it happen?

Note that this group of people James is addressing are most likely not believers.

The miseries that are coming upon them are referring to the final judgement rather than miseries of this life, and they are

- V2 – their riches and garments will be destroyed.
- V3 – their gold and silver will corrode. The next second half suggest that these things will feed the very flames of fire in hell.
- V4 – the lord has heard the cries of the labourers who are oppressed.

This is God’s judgement upon the oppressors, those who lay up treasures on earth at the expense of the poor. This happened because they:

- V3 – laid up treasure in the last days, failing to see the temporary nature of life.
- V4 – kept by fraud the wages of the laborers
- V5 – they lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence, and have fattened their hearts. “in the day of slaughter” means the “day of judgement”, and suggests that the rich indulged themselves but did not realise that they were heading for the final slaughter.
- They have condemned the and murdered the righteous person. Recall James 2:6-7.

God judged the rich according to their sinfulness, not because they are rich.

8. What does this

- say about our treasures?
- teach us about our accountability to God?

Christians must be careful not to fall into the danger of acquiring wealth at the expense of others, although this will only be relevant when we start working. In fact, our treasures should not be laid up on earth, but in heaven instead.

It also reminds us that we are accountable for our every action and the motivation behind them. God will judge them at the day of judgement.

9. How is this both a warning and an encouragement?

Will he who is sovereign and just continue to let the poor be oppressed by the rich? Certainly not. This serves as a warning that God will indeed judge, not only the rich, but everyone, according to their actions. It also serves as an encouragement that God will vindicate those who experience injustice.

Read James 5:7-12

This part of the passage instead addresses those who are faithful but suffering. They are possibly the poor who are oppressed.

10. Having lived out godly lives, what should be the attitude of those who are suffering or persecuted?

Christians, especially when suffering, must wait patiently for the Lord to return and vindicate us. James goes on to give examples of the prophets and Job, how they remained steadfast for the purposes of the Lord to be revealed and be brought to fruition. They suffered for doing the right thing but were vindicated by God.

This is a repeat of James 1:2-18, where James exhorts his readers to remain steadfast in trials. God used testing to strengthen the faith of the prophets, he will also do the same for us.

11. How does verse 9 relate to this part of the passage and conclude the whole passage?

Sometimes in suffering, we end up turning against each other and grumble. This, as discussed earlier, is sinful, and we are called to resist it. We know that it is in fact not just grumbling that we have to resist, but every other sin as well. This is so that we may not be judged for committing them. We ought to remain steadfast and keep in mind the reality and imminence of judgement day and therefore guard ourselves against sin as we wait for the day to come.

Leaders, v12 will not be discussed but briefly explain what it means if questions arise – making a vow a serious matter to God, that is why we should be sure about our speech and action by letting our “yes” be “yes” and “no” be “no”.

Application

12. According to the issues addressed in this passage, how might we:

- have sinned in our speech against those around us?
- be busy making plans without regard for God’s sovereign will and thus sin in arrogance?
- have started to lay up treasures on Earth instead of in heaven and thus be in danger of idolising wealth?

13. One day we will have to give an account of all our dealings on Earth for the lawgiver to judge. How should God’s judgement affect our lives?

14. How does knowing Jesus help us in our attitude toward?

- tomorrow?
- treasures?
- the final judgement?

15. Verse 11 tells us that God is compassionate and merciful. In response to God's grace, how can we be reminded to live faithfully especially during this time when we may be suffering in one way or another?

Pray

- Thank God that he has saved us from slavery to sin.
- Pray that God will help us to repent from our sins and to live out godly lives instead.
- Pray that God will help us to persevere through suffering and be reminded that the day of judgement is both a warning and an encouragement to us.

Study 8: “Pray! Pray! Pray!” (James 5:13-20)

Big Idea: Prayer and confession is the hallmark of the Christian life.

Getting Us Thinking

1. Thus far in James, how has everything we learned show us our need for humble prayer and confession?

For this question, get the students to look back on James to recall everything James has been talking about thus far and see how it points us to our need to pray. This study isn't very long so you don't have to feel like you need to rush through this.

Context

From the beginning of James, we saw how James encouraged the church to endure trials and suffering by praying to God for wisdom. And this wisdom was meant to help them resist sin and temptation by understanding the nature of how sin works and contrast it with the goodness of God and his plans for us in our suffering (testing of our faith). He then moves on to the practical aspect of what that wisdom looks like by calling his readers to not just hear the word but to also obey the word because faith without works is useless and dead. This is seen in how we treat fellow Christians (impartiality & care for the needy), how we speak (bridle our tongue), being unstained by the world (friendship with the world = enmity with God) and how we work (arrogance and pride over others)

Digging In

Read James 5:13-20

2. In what circumstances does James encourage us to pray in verses 13-15?
 - V13 – When someone is suffering
 - V14 – When someone is sick
 - **Why does James ask them to call for the elders to pray when someone is sick? What connection do we see between sickness and sinfulness?**
 - Is it because as Christians we don't need medical attention? But in Luke 10:34 & 1 Timothy 5:23 we see incidences where medical help was of use and even recommended. Then why?
 - We learn that there is an aspect of healing besides just healing the body and we see that when James links sickness and sin in the next verse. **Because sickness is caused by our sinfulness in the general sense of our fall as humanity, but it also brings to our awareness our own sinfulness and fragility in our failure to live rightly with God.**
 - Falling sick especially for a long time or in an intense way can really discourage you and bring you to deep depression (not in the medical depression sort of way) in a way that gets you to reflect and see your weaknesses. **It can be a real test of your faith in some sense and that's why as Christians we need to be constantly reminded of God's grace and our forgiveness in him in these times.** And the prayer and encourage of other believers (or in this case the elders) is meant to do just that.
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3. What reason does James give his readers to pray when someone is sick?

- a. "The prayer of faith will **save** the one who is sick" This may carry a double meaning. 1) The sick person may be healed or 2) the sick person may also experience spiritual salvation or growth in the blessings of salvation. This is seen in their sins being forgiven.
- b. We commonly see in Jesus' healings that both physical and spiritual healing takes place and that's what James might be pointing towards. However, he is not saying that all illnesses will be healed if people would simply call on the elders or try to make themselves have enough faith or pray with conviction. **This is because we know that physical healing isn't the greatest need of the sick person but for that their sins be forgiven.**
- c. Healing when it does come, is always a gift from God, who is sovereign over all circumstances.

4. How are we to pray in verse 16?

In verse 16 we see that both confession and prayer comes hand in hand. And **this is for the reason that the person who is in sin may be healed.** Again we see here how healing is approached from a spiritual sense.

Follow up question: **What connection can we draw between confession and spiritual healing?**

When we are living with secret, unconfessed sin, a lot of the times we can feel sick with guilt and shame. So here we see that confession along with prayer with other saints can give us a sense of spiritual healing and liberation from the guilt of our sins.

5. What does Elijah's example teach us about prayer and how we should pray?

Does it mean that if I pray fervently for the rain to stop, it will stop too?

I don't think the descriptive scenario of his prayer is meant to be prescriptive to what we should expect when we pray but rather to show us the attitude to how we ought to pray and the privilege to pray knowing that it can achieve only what God can do. We see in Elijah's case that God could change the weather. But from the context of this passage, we see how God can 1. Heal a person from spiritual sickness (v16a) and 2. Forgive their sins (v15b). Which is far greater than what Elijah prayed for.

6. In conclusion of everything James has talked about, what is he most concerned about? What does he want his readers to do? (Verses 19-20)

Here we see James calling the community to action in helping those who have fallen into the ethical sins dealt with previously in his letter. This closing section acts as a summary of the various sins and their solutions.

He is primarily concerned about their salvation. If anyone wanders from the truth, the saints ought to be vigilant to bring him back.

Follow up question: **What does this call to bring them back have to do with everything he has talked about?**

After writing a full letter about right living in accord to the proclamation of our faith, it is no wonder he wants his readers to be alert. They would've learned from James' letter what it means to live in accordance to their faith. Therefore, he wants them to know what it looks like

for someone to wander from the truth whether it be in themselves OR in the church. And his concern and plea for them is to bring them back.

For a sinner that returns to the truth is covered for a multitude of sins because God will forgive them.

Application

7. Consider your prayerfulness. What stops you from praying? How does today's study & the book of James encourage you to be fervent and faithful in prayer?

8. Consider your sinfulness. Do you confess your sins to others? If not, what's stopping you?

9. Consider your concern for others. Do you know anyone that may have wandered away from the truth? How can you help bring them back in a godly and helpful way?

Reflecting on James

10. In what specific ways have you been challenged to deal with your sinfulness and grow to become mature and whole in your faith?

11. In what ways have you made progress towards this goal?

12. What can we be praying for you as you work on these things?