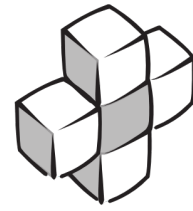




SMACC

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)

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

Read James 1:1-4

2. Who is James writing the letter to?

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

Read James 1:5-8

4. In not lacking anything, what might someone still lack?

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?

Read James 1:9-11

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

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

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?

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

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

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?

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

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)

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

Read James 1:19-21

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

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

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

Read James 1:22-25

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

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

Read James 1:26-27

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

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

Thinking it through

11. 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?

12. 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?

13. 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)

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?

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)

Digging In

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

Verses	Title

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?

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?

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

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

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*'?
16. How does showing favouritism break the law?
17. Instead of showing partiality to the rich and powerful, what does James want his readers to do?
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?
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?

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?

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 has 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?

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)

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?

Recap

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?

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			2:17
2:18-20			2:20
2:21-24 c.f. Gn. 15:1-6; 22:1-12, esp. v1, 12			2:24
2:25-26 c.f. Joshua 2:1-9, especially verses 8 & 9			2:26

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)

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)?*

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

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?

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

2. Why did James say that not many should become teachers? (3:1-2)

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)

Getting Us Thinking

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

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		
Characteristics/motivation		
Results		

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

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

Application

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

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)?

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.

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

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

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)

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?

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

We see the idea of judgement throughout the passage. How can Christians prepare to be judged when Jesus comes again?

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?

Read James 4:13-17

4. What is wrong about planning for tomorrow? Especially in a business sense?
5. Instead, what should be the attitude towards the future?
6. Now that James' readers know the right perspective to have when making plans, why is it important to keep it in practice?

Read James 5:1-6

7. What (will) has happened to the rich and why does it happen?
8. What does this
 - say about our treasures?
 - teach us about our accountability to God?
9. How is this both a warning and an encouragement?

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?

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

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)

Getting Us Thinking

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

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?
3. What reason does James give his readers to pray when someone is sick?
4. How are we to pray in verse 16?

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

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

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?