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## **Study 1: Overview**

In your group read through the whole of the book of James.

As you do, note down:

- ❖ Any themes you notice (words or phrases that are repeated often)
- ❖ Any verses you don't understand
- ❖ Any verses that stand out to you
- ❖ Any questions you want answered

Discuss the following questions.

1. What themes did you notice? What topics does James keep coming back to?

2. From this first reading of James, is there anything God is challenging you about or encouraging you with?

Pray together about the challenges and encouragements shared above.

## **Study 2: Wisdom and Knowledge**

### **Read James 1:1-18**

The opening verses of James give us a challenging perspective on trials.

1. What attitude does James urge his readers to have?
2. How does he want them to respond?
3. What is the end goal?

Although the fully mature person may lack nothing, along the way we may lack wisdom!

4. What is Biblical wisdom?
5. What should we do if we lack it?
6. How is God described here?
7. The word “doubt” in verse 6 describes being unable to decide between 2 options (hence “double-minded” in verse 8). How does this double-mindedness toward God lead to instability in everything?

Verses 9-11 apply the principles of godly wisdom and steadfastness to the issue of riches.

8. What perspective on worldly wealth does James commend?

Verse 12 echoes verses 2-4.

9. In addition to maturity of character, what further blessing does James describe for those who are steadfast under trial? (See also Revelation 2:8-10)

Trials (which provide opportunity for blessing) can become temptations.

10. What imagery does James use to describe the process of temptation in verses 13-15?

James urges his dear recipients to no longer be deceived, having now understood the origins and process of sin.

11. What assurance is given in verses 17-18?

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

**Word into action:**

1. God is “the giving God” (v5). He is single-minded in giving, but we are often double-minded in asking. How can you be more single-minded in your praying?
2. Are you undergoing a trial? How can today’s passage help you persevere?

### **Study 3: Be Quick to Hear**

#### **Read James 1:19-27**

1. What principle is given in verse 19?
2. What reason is given in verse 20? What does God desire for us (see NIV)?
3. Verse 21 begins "Therefore". What 2 actions *do* bring about righteousness?
4. Receiving the implanted word means hearing and doing. What does James's illustration tell us about those who just hear the word?
5. What is promised to those who hear and do?
6. What is said in verse 26 about the person who seems religious, but who isn't quick to hear and slow to speak?
7. What are the characteristics of pure religion? (See also Deut 14:26-29, Psalm 146:9, Isaiah 1:17,23)

#### **Read James 2:1-13**

8. Verses 1-3 sketch out an all-too-familiar scenario! What is James' verdict on this kind of behavior?
9. Verses 5-7 give one reason why it is wrong to discriminate. What is it?

10. Verses 8-11 give another reason. What is it?

11. What is the relationship between the believer and the law to love?

12. Why do you think James calls this the law of liberty?

13. How does this section illustrate hearing and doing the word?

**Word into action:**

1. How can we help each other be quick to hear God's word?
2. What opportunities do you know of to practice the pure religion described in James 1:26?
3. We live in a very status-conscious society. Do we sometimes struggle to obey this teaching about partiality/favouritism in our church? How can we help each other do better at obeying the royal law to love?

#### **Study 4: Believe and Do**

James has been setting out for us how deceptive it is to think we can just hear God's word and not put it into practice. He continues this theme in today's passage, exploring the relationship between faith (belief in the truth about God) and works (acting upon that truth).

**Read James 2:14-26.**

Example 1: verses 15-17

What kind of "faith" is being illustrated here? What good is it to either person?

Example 2: verse 19

What kind of "faith" is being illustrated here? What good is it to the demons?

Example 3: verses 21-24

Read Genesis 15:1-6 and 22:9-18.

In what way is Gen 22:9-18 a fulfillment of Gen 15:6?

What kind of "faith" is being illustrated here? What good is it to Abraham?



Example 4: verse 25

The Rahab story is in Joshua chapter 2.

What kind of “faith” is being illustrated here? What good is it to Rahab and the spies?

Just as those who hear the word need to do it, so belief must be acted upon.

In verse 14 James asks, “What kind of faith saves?” In verse 18 he answers, “The faith that is lived out in works.”

Notice that James is not saying that works save us! But he will not allow us to think that faith which never drives us to action is true faith. As John Calvin commented on this passage, “We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone”.

**Word into action:**

How can you show your faith by your works this week?

## **Study 5: Be Slow to Speak**

### **Read James 3:1-12**

1. Why do you think teachers will be judged more strictly?
2. How does James describe a person who can control their speech? Why do you think he says this?
3. What do the examples of the horse's bit and ship's rudder teach us about the power of the tongue?
4. What does the next example of the spark that ignites a forest teach us?
5. What does he mean that the tongue stains the whole body? (See also Isaiah 6:5)

6. James uses very strong language to describe the tongue! List what he says about it in verses 6-8.

7. Look up Psalm 5:9; 12:1-4; 34:12-13; 140:1-3 and Proverbs 16:27. Summarise how scripture regards the speech of the ungodly.

8. What shocking truth does James acknowledge in verses 9 & 10? How do his illustrations in verses 11&12 help drive home his point that these things ought not to be so?

9. Why does James expect better of us? (See also Matthew 12:34.)

**Word into action:**

1. Why do you think our speech is one of the last things we learn to control?
2. Can you think of an example of a time someone's speech steered things in a positive way?
3. How can we be helping each other to be godly in our speech?

**Study 6: Be Slow to Anger**

**Read James 3:13-18.**

1. How will we know who the wise and understanding are among us?
2. James contrasts earthly and heavenly wisdom. Use the following table to help see the differences.

|                 | Earthly Wisdom | Heavenly Wisdom |
|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Origin          |                |                 |
| Characteristics |                |                 |
| Results         |                |                 |

3. How do we pursue heavenly wisdom? (Recall James 1:5)

### **Read James 4:1-12**

4. What does James see at the heart of conflict?
  
5. Verse 4 is especially strong when we recall Israel's past. See Isaiah 54:5 and Jeremiah 3:20. Why does James call these believers adulterous?
  
6. What does friendship with the world mean?
  
7. If convicted of acting as God's enemies, what a relief to be reminded of grace! (verse 6) What process does James outline to submit ourselves once again to God?
  
8. Humble repentance is a private matter. What are we warned not to do to our brothers and sisters in Christ in verse 11?
  
9. Why does James speak about the law here? (Recall James 2:8, 12-13)

### **Words to Action:**

1. As a congregation do we treasure heavenly wisdom?
2. When you identify harbor jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, what will you do?
3. The next time you find yourself judging your neighbour, what will you do?
4. How can we be friends with non-believers without becoming a friend of the world?
5. How can we help each other stay faithful to God?

## **Study 7: Living in the Last Days**

### **Read James 4:13-17**

1. What attitude does James target in this section?
2. What is the right perspective to have when making plans?
3. Now we know this, what warning does verse 17 contain?

### **Read James 5:1-6**

4. What do these verses teach us about our accountability to God?
5. Why are these verses in a letter to Christians?

### **Read James 5:7-12**

6. What is the right attitude for Christians being oppressed?

7. Considering verse 9, how might suffering negatively affect relationships between believers?
  
8. What characteristics of God does James remind them of as an encouragement to remain steadfast?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. At the end of this whole section James comes back again to our speech – this time as a reflection of our character. See also Matthew 5:34-37 for Jesus’ teaching on this. Why is it important to be women of our word?

**Word into Action:**

1. It can be uncomfortable to be confronted with our lack of control over our lives! Is this something you struggle with?
  
2. How can we ensure that we don’t just tag “God willing...” onto our own plans to sound more humble?
  
3. James 5:1-6 might be a word of judgment, warning or encouragement. It probably depends on how rich you think you are! How do you need to hear this word today?
  
4. Are you a women of your word, whose “yes” is yes and “no” is no? How can we help each other to improve in this area?

## **Study 8: First Responses**

### **Read James 5:13-20**

1. What are the different circumstances addressed in this passage?
2. What is to be the believer's first response in suffering?
3. What is to be the believer's first response when glad in heart?
4. What is to be the believer's first response when sick?
5. What assurances are given to the one whom the elders pray over?
6. What kind of community is described in verse 16?
7. What do you think makes the righteous person's prayer powerful? (Recall James 1:5-8; 4:3)



8. How is Elijah described in verse 17? What encouragement does that give us to pray?

9. What responsibility do we have to each other according to verses 19-20?

**Word into Action:**

1. Are any of you in trouble or suffering? Pray for each other now!
2. Are any of you cheerful? What song will you leave here singing?
3. Are any of you sick? What will you do?
4. Is there anyone you need to confess a sin to and pray with so the relationship can be healed? When are you going to do that?
5. Is there someone you know who is wandering from the truth? How will you try to bring them back?
6. Reviewing the whole of James, share one thing that has challenged or encouraged you. Pray together about these things.