

JAMES:

Guidelines for a Joyful Christian Life – Part 1

3Ps Christian Ministries

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY May 7th – June 11th, 2020

Table of Contents

From Trouble to Triumph.....	2
Understanding Temptation.....	4
Belief That Behaves.....	6
Favoritism In the Church.....	8
Dead Faith.....	10
Faith That Passes the Test.....	12

Part 1: May 7 th – June 11 th , 2020	
Session 1: From Trouble To Triumph	James 1:1-12
Session 2: Understanding Temptation	James 1:13-18
Session 3: Belief That Behaves	James 1:19-27
Session 4: Favoritism In The Church	James 2:1-13
Session 5: Dead Faith	James 2:14-20
Session 6: Faith That Passes The Test	James 2:21-26
Part 1: June 25 th – June 30 th , 2020	
Session 7: Taming The Tongue	James 3:1-12
Session 8: True Wisdom	James 3:13-18
Session 9: Friendship With The World	James 4:1-12
Session 10: Responding To The Will Of God	James 4:13-17
Session 11: Riches, Trials, and Oaths	James 5:1-12
Session 12: Righteous Praying	James 5:13-20

Historical and Theological Themes

James, with its devotion to direct, pungent statements of wise living, is reminiscent of the book of Proverbs. It has a practical emphasis, stressing not theoretical knowledge but godly behavior.

James wrote with a passionate desire for his readers to be uncompromisingly obedient to the Word of God. He uses at least thirty references to nature (e.g., “waves of the sea” [1:6]; “reptile” [3:7]; and “heaven gave rain” [5:18]), as befits one who spent time outdoors. He compliments Paul’s emphasis on justification by Faith with his own emphasis on spiritual fruitfulness demonstrating true faith.

From Trouble to Triumph

Lesson Text: James 1:1-12

Reference Scriptures: 1 Peter 1:6-9; Proverbs 3:5-6

Icebreaker: James opens his book by emphasizing the reality of hard times.

- How do you usually respond to trials or setbacks in your life? Why?

Learning & Development:

- What do you want to learn from this study?

Ask God to open your heart and mind to be receptive to the no-nonsense approach to living out your faith.

James 1:1-12

1 James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad:

Greetings.

2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.


4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.



9 Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation,

10 but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away.

11 For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.

12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Discussion Questions:


- In what way do trials prove our faith is genuine?
- How does having faith in what we have “not seen” make a difference in difficult times?
- Read Hebrews 11:1-6. What do these verses say about the role of faith in our dealings with God?

Truth for Today

To test the genuineness of a diamond, jewelers often place it's in clear water, which cause a real diamond to sparkle with special brilliance. An imitation stone, on the other hand, will have almost no sparkle at all. When the two are placed side by side, even an untrained eye can easily tell the difference.

In a similar way, the world can often notice the marked differences between genuine Christians and those who merely profess faith in Christ. As with jewels, there is a noticeable difference in radiance, especially when people are undergoing difficult times.

Many people have great confidence in their faith until it is severely tested by hardships and disappointments. How a person handles trouble will reveal whether his faith is living or dead, genuine or imitation, saving and non-saving.



Understanding Temptation

Lesson Text: James 1:13-18

Reference Scriptures: Genesis 3:1-12; Romans 7:8-25

Icebreaker: One of the chief characteristics of sin is the propensity to pass the blame.

- What are some creative “excuses” you have heard people give for doing something that is clearly wrong?

Think of a time when you have done something wrong, big or small, and to cover it up. What makes it so hard to own up to our own guilt?

James 1:13-18

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.


16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

Discussion Questions:

- What do you learn about God’s nature in this passage?
- Describe the progression from temptation to sin? Can you think of any other instances in scripture where the progression is shown?

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- James warns the believers not to be deceived. In what ways can we be deceived when it comes to temptation?
 - What does James mean when he says that in God there is “no variation or shadow of turning” (v. 17)?

Truth for Today

When a person becomes a Christian, God gives him a completely new spiritual and moral capability that a mind apart from Christ could never achieve. The new birth results from God’s sovereignty coming down to a sinner and by His grace cleansing him, planting His Spirit within him, and giving him a completely new spiritual nature.

He then has “put on the new man, which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24). After Augustine was converted, a woman he had formerly lived with called to him as he walked down the street, but he did not answer. She persisted and finally ran up to him and said, “Augustine, it is I.” To which he replied, “I know, but it’s no longer I.”



Belief That Behaves

Lesson Text: James 1:19-27

Reference Scripture: Colossians 3:1-10

Icebreaker: Rank the following behaviors in order of how reliable they are in pointing out true saving faith (1= mark of a genuine believer; 10= nothing to do with truth faith).

- _____ wears Christian T-shirts and jewelry
- _____ has Christian bumper stickers on the car and drive the speed limit
- _____ gives regularly and sacrificially to the church
- _____ participates in missions and outreach efforts
- _____ sings with the praise team
- _____ Studies God's Word regularly and seeks to live it
- _____ attends church faithfully
- _____ has healthy, loving relationships with friends, family, coworkers, and church members
- _____ prays fervently for the lost
- _____ read a lot of Christian books and listens to sermons on the radio

Why did you rank the items as you did! What do you think are the best indicators of true, saving faith?

James 1:19-27

19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;

20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;

24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.

27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Discussion Questions:

- What are true believers admonished to do in (vs. 19-22)?
- In the arena of faith, how are the actions of "hearing" and "doing" different? How are they related?
- What is the right response of a child of God to the Word of God?
- What examples does James give as behavior indicative of true faith?

Truth for Today

As important as the proper reception of the Word of God is, without obedience to its truths it is not only without benefit, but also becomes a further judgement against its readers. Obedience to the Word is the most basic spiritual requirement and is the common denominator for all true believers. The bottom line of true spiritual life is not a momentary feeling of compliance or commitment but long term obedience to scripture.

Genuine believers receive Christ and continue in Him. They hear His Word and do it. They know His commandments, and they keep them. They do not claim to know God yet deny Him with their deeds. The validation of salvation is a life of obedience. It is the only possible proof that a person really knows Jesus Christ. If one does not obey Christ as a pattern of life, then professing to know Him is an empty verbal exercise.

Favoritism in the Church

Lesson Text: James 2:1-13

Reference Scripture: Matthew 22:34-40

Icebreaker: It has been said that the most segregated time of the week in this culture is the Sunday morning worship hour. In what ways, if any, have you ever seen this to be true?

- Have you ever experienced negative prejudicial treatment from someone? How did it feel?
- Have you ever experienced positive prejudicial treatment from someone? How did it feel?
- Have you ever accomplished something you didn't think you could do?

James 2:1-13

1 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.

2 For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes,

3 and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool,"

4 have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

5 Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?

7 Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well;

9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

11 For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

12 So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.

13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Discussion Questions:

- According to James, why is showing partiality incomparable with faith?
- What reaction did the poor often get when they visited a Christian assembly? Why did James remind his readers about the poor? (Lev. 25:35-37; Ps. 41:1)
- How does James use the law to explain the problem of partiality (vv. 8-10)?

Truth for Today

There will be no poor in heaven in any sense, no second class citizens. Everyone will be rich in the things that matter eternally. Every believer will receive the same eternal life, the same heavenly citizen in the Kingdom of God, and the same perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to them by the Father. Every one of His children will live in His house and bask alike in His presence and love (John 14:1-3).

Dead Faith

Lesson Text: James 2:14-20

Reference Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

Icebreaker Questions:

- How do you define faith?
- How would you explain to a child why we do “good works”?

James 2:14-20

14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,

16 and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?

17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.


18 But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble!

20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

Discussion Questions:


- What two examples does James cite to show the futility of faith without works (vv. 15-16, 19)? How are these good examples of dead faith?
- Do you think James proves his point, why do you think so?
- Is James suggesting that helping the poor and hungry is a prerequisite to salvation?

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- What did James mean when he said that the “demons believe”? How does this emphasize the difference between dead faith and genuine saving faith?

Truth for Today

It cannot be stressed too often that no one can be saved by works. Salvation is entirely by “grace through faith, and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). If works could have any part in salvation, it would no longer be by God’s grace. But neither can it be stressed too often that, as James declares in the present passage.

“Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (2:17). Genuine, transforming faith not only should, but will, produce genuine good works, notably repentance and obedient submission to Christ Lordship. This is the expression of the new nature, created in the new birth (2 Cor. 5:17). It will not be perfect obedience and repentance, but good works will be present. We might say that it costs us nothing to become a Christian but everything to live fully as one.



Faith That Passes the Test

Lesson Text: James 2:21-26

Reference Scripture: Romans 4:1-25

Icebreaker Questions:

- What is the greatest step of faith you have ever seen someone take?
- Do you think some Christians have a greater capacity for faith than others? If so why?
- When in your life have you taken a great risk and followed what you believed to be God's will, even though some friends and family felt your decision to be foolish? How did you feel in the midst of that time? What finally happened?

James 2:21-26

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?

23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.


24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

25 Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?

26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Discussion Questions:

- What three illustrations does James give to continue illustrating his point that faith without works is dead?

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- Paul taught that we are justified by faith alone. James says that Abraham and Rehab were justified by works. When you look at the whole of what James has been saying about faith and works, you can see how the paradox resolves itself. How would you explain this seeming contradiction to someone else?
 - Why is it significant that Abraham was called “the friend of God”?
 - How would you answer the person who argued from James 2:21 that our works (or behavior) do play a role in our salvation?

Truth for Today

Abraham was not a perfect man, either in his faith or in his works. After many years had passed without Sarah’s having the promised heir, he took matters into his own hands, having a son, Ishmael, by Hagar, his wife’s maid. His wavering trust in the Lord led him to commit adultery. In those and other cases, such as when he lied twice about Sarah being his sister (Genesis 12:19; 20:2), his works obviously did not justify him before men.

But James point is that, in the overall pattern of his life, Abraham faithfully vindicated his saving faith through his many good works, above all else by offering Isaac as a sacrifice. When a man is justified before God, we will always prove that that justification before other men. A man who has been declared and made righteous will live righteously. Imputed righteousness will manifest practical righteousness. In the words of John Calvin, ***“Faith alone justifies; but the faith that justifies is never alone.”***

