

GOSPEL GRIT - The Book of James

Initial Series Overview - 5 Weeks / 5 Chapters

- AUTHOR: James the Brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3). Four folks named James (Or actually Jacob in the Greek) are mentioned in the NT, but Jesus' brother seems to be the most likely candidate and most historically accepted author. He was an early church leader we read of in Acts 12 among other places (15:13, 21:17-19). By and large most accept his authorship. Some think it was one of the earliest, if not earliest, letter written in the NT. 45-55 A.D. with James killed in the 60s.
- INTENT/CONTENT: Was written addressed to the 12 Tribes scattered among the nations. We get the idea that this is quite possibly more a label describing those in the church at the moment than actually the tribes themselves. Those in the church were likely experiencing widespread trials and persecution. Most authors suggest it was at least through hardships and exclusions for those following Jesus because of their isolation, exclusion and call to living differently than those around them. Generally it the book is a gritty, in your face, but practical letter surveying any number of 12 themes, many of which are accounted for in the first chapter (an intro of sorts) and then further dealt with in the final 4. The author seems quite familiar with Jesus' teachings and the book of Proverbs.
- WORTH SAYING/NOTICING: Some would suggest that James contradicts Paul's message of salvation by faith with his doubling down on faith's relationship with works. Rather it would seem that they support and illustrate a common theme. That faith is essential and works will always accompany and testify to true and lasting faith.

WK 1 OF JAMES — MESSAGE HIGH POINTS

- Into/Setup of Book and Author
- CH. 1 - Gives us some instructions on how to see Trials, Temptations and Tagging out too early the way God sees them. In some very practical ways it corrects some questions or assertions we sometimes make as Christians.
 - Trials / "My happiness is most important to God." (**James 1:2-4**)
 - God is able and will use our trials/suffering in our personal growth and his Kingdom. / God's desire for us is Holiness.
 - Temptations / "God tempts us." (**James 1:13-18**)
 - God does not tempt us, rather we find it ourselves and fall prey to it. / Understanding the life cycle of "desire" can help us root out and navigate temptation.
 - Tagging out early / "It is enough for me to show up and listen or hear God." (**James 1:22-25**)
 - Hearing God is only part of the puzzle. / Opening ourselves to and pursuing follow-through is part of following Jesus.
 - **THE GOSPEL CONNECTION**
 - James isn't just calling us to pull up our bootstraps and do it all in our strength. We'll need the Holy Spirit's help, Jesus' example & voice, and trusting Father's provision to make it. The pursuit and effort in these areas are often where we find how weak we are and powerful our God is. Thus, a grand opportunity to strengthen and grow in our faith.

WK 1 OF JAMES – DISCUSSION ?'S

NOTE: THERE IS NO SHORTAGE OF CONTENT WHEN YOU TAKE A WHOLE CHAPTER LIKE WE ARE. YOU AS A LEADER ARE FREE TO SEE WHERE YOUR STUDENTS SEEM MOST ENGAGED OR IN NEED, AND TAKE IT THAT DIRECTION. PART OF SURVEYING A BOOK WITH OUR STUDENTS IS TO SHOW THEM A. IT IS DOABLE AND B. IT CAN SPEAK TO YOUR LIFE TODAY AND TOMORROW.

- Trials / **(James 1:2-4)**

- WHY DO YOU THINK JAMES DIDN'T INTRODUCE HIMSELF AS THE BROTHER OF JESUS? WOULDN'T IT HELP TO SAY, "I KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT, BECAUSE I KNEW JESUS LIKE A BROTHER—IN FACT, I AM HIS BROTHER"?
- ACCORDING TO JAMES 1:2 AND THE FOLLOWING VERSES, HOW SHOULD WE REACT WHEN TIMES GET TOUGH?
- WHY? WHAT IS THE END RESULT OF THIS "TESTING"?
- DO YOU THINK PEOPLE EXPECT GOD TO MAKE THEM HAPPY? IS THAT A WRONG IDEA?
- IF YOU MADE THIS THE "GOAL OF YOUR LIFE," TO GROW IN HOLINESS EVEN IF IT MEANT SUFFERING, HOW WOULD THAT CHANGE YOUR LIFE? WHAT DECISIONS WOULD YOU MAKE DIFFERENTLY? HOW WOULD YOU HAVE TO ADJUST YOUR PRIORITIES?

- Temptations / **(James 1:13-18)**

- VERSES 14–15 DESCRIBE SOMETHING WE MIGHT CALL THE "LIFE CYCLE OF DESIRE." WHAT ARE THE STAGES?
- DOES "EVIL DESIRE" ALWAYS BRING FORTH "DEATH"? HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN? WHAT EXAMPLES COULD YOU GIVE?
- WHY DO YOU THINK JAMES SUDDENLY STARTS TALKING ABOUT "EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT" IN VERSE 17, AFTER TALKING ABOUT EVIL DESIRES? IS HE JUST CHANGING THE SUBJECT (WHICH HE DOES SOMETIMES), OR IS THERE A CONNECTION?
- WHY DOES HE CALL GOD "THE FATHER OF LIGHTS"? WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH GIVING GIFTS?

- Tagging out early / **(James 1:22-25)**

- JAMES TELLS US TO BE "QUICK TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK." HAVE YOU HAD SITUATIONS WHERE YOU DID THE OPPOSITE—SLOW TO HEAR, QUICK TO SPEAK? WHAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH THAT?
- MOVING ON TO JAMES 1:22, HOW DO WE "DECEIVE OURSELVES" BY JUST LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD? WHAT IS THAT MIRROR THING ALL ABOUT (IN JAMES 1:23–24)?
- DO YOU THINK IT'S REALLY "WORTHLESS" TO HEAR GOD'S WORD WITHOUT DOING IT? WHY OR WHY NOT?

FOLLOWING PAGE HAS SOME APPLICATION / REAL LIFE SUGGESTIONS FOR STEPPING OUT AND PRACTICING ANY OF THESE. IF A STUDENT FELT PARTICULARLY CONVICTED BY ONE SUBJECT OR ANOTHER THEY MIGHT PICK OUT THAT SECTION OR RANDOMLY DRAW ONE? EITHER WAY, FELT LIKE IF WE'RE TALKING ABOUT DOING MORE THAN LISTENING WE OUGHTA PROVIDE SOME OPPORTUNITIES TO LIVE IT OUT.

— SOME APPLICATION SHEETS WE'LL HAVE HANGING OUT...

■ LIVE IT OUT

The book of James emphasizes the active side of our faith, so let's consider several ways we might put its teaching into practice.

Conversation: Some of us complain a lot. What if we followed James and started considering our troubles "pure joy"? Who could you contact this week—by email, phone, text, or in person—and instead of complaining, tell them about the way God is helping you grow?

Journaling: Write about your struggles. Don't hold back. Complain all you want. But then go back to your journal the next day and jot some notes in the margins about how God might be making you "mature and complete."

Memorization: Learn James 1:2-3, and maybe verse 4. This will be a powerful support to you in your toughest times.

Prayer: Consider others you know who are going through difficulties. Ask God to help them grow.

Influence: Have you seen spiritual growth in someone else who has gone through trials? Tell them so.

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Memorization: Learn 1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 4:15-16; Matthew 26:41; Psalm 51:10; and/or another verse that applies to a particular temptation you struggle with.

Journaling: Write about your temptations and how you respond, but also about the joys you experience when you resist temptation. How does your relationship with God grow and soar when you trust Him?

Prayer: Think about others you know who are being tempted. Pray that God will strengthen them. But don't let these be proud prayers—"watch yourself, or you also may be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). Include The Lord's Prayer in this devotional time, with special focus on "Lead us not into temptation."

Accountability: Look for others you can share your struggles with. Can you arrange to meet with them every week or two, and let them know how you're doing? Fighting temptation can be a lonely business, but it doesn't have to be. When you know there's someone else holding you accountable, it might give you additional strength.

Joining or Volunteering: Our culture is full of temptations, and there are many whose lives have been ravaged by greed, lust, pride, or addictions of various sorts. There are also ministries that help those strugglers. Is there one you could connect with—as a volunteer, donor, or fellow struggler?

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Memorization: Learn James 1:22. Perhaps you could write it out on a card, which you put (appropriately) on your mirror.

Conversation: Do you need to develop the ability to be "quick to hear, slow to speak"? Is there a particular person in your life with whom you should do more listening? Work on this. You might even think of some questions to ask in your next conversation. Focus on them, not on your own responses.

Journaling: If you have a Bible study journal, add this component. If not, try journaling this week. Take the next six pages and put four headings on each page. Read. Think. Pray. Do! Then select Scriptures to read each day. As you do, record your thoughts on the text, write out key words of a prayer, and then—because of James—figure out something God would like you to *do* in response to that text. Oh, yeah—and then do it.

Prayer: Pray specifically about two things this week. (1) Your anger. (Even if you're not hot-tempered, do you "stuff" your anger and let it turn into bitterness?) (2) Soul pollution. Ask God to show you ways you might be getting "polluted" by the world.

"Widows and Orphans." In many parts of Scripture—and here in James—we are urged to care for the neediest members of society. In your area, who are these people, and how can you help? It's possible they are, literally, widows and orphans, having suffered the loss of a family member. But also consider the homeless, the hospitalized, retirees, special-needs children and adults, the unemployed, immigrants, prisoners, etc. See if your church has a ministry you could support and become involved with, but also consider parachurch ministries and other charities.