

INTRODUCTION TO JAMES

For 2000 years, Christians have turned to the book of James for its rich wisdom and insight. Each new reading challenges us in ways we often find uncomfortable. James challenges our source of wisdom, speech, relationships, and how we handle suffering and trials, urging us to remain patient and even joyful. This book confronts us, hits us right where we live, and exposes the darkest parts of our hearts. Surprisingly, the book comes with some unique complications. It only mentions Jesus two times, one of which is in the very first verse. The book seems to have no thought-out or organized structure, unlike the rest of the New Testament books. It never mentions the death or Resurrection of Jesus (a central theme in Scripture), and when compared to the teachings of Paul, it raises many challenging questions concerning what it means to be saved by faith alone.

None of these things should concern us once we understand how to approach the book of James. If you are looking for a complicated lecture on theology that stimulates your mind, or an inspiring psalm that leads you into worship, James is not your guy. This is not so much a book we read as much as it's a book that reads us! If you are ready to get to work, to wade into the gritty reality of the everyday life of a follower of Jesus, this is the book you need. James cares about what we do, not just what we say we believe. He cares that we work, not to earn our salvation, of course, but to show that God's Word has taken root in our lives, and that we have truly come to believe in the "glorious Lord Jesus Christ" (2:1). If we have, our lives will show it. If we truly believe in the finished work of Christ for us, that truth will shape our lives at every turn.

James himself had to go through this massive shift. When we first meet him in the New Testament, he doesn't believe his older brother Jesus is truly the Messiah (John 7:5). But once we move into the book of Acts, we see that he is a leader in the church in Jerusalem, instructing the early disciples on how to continue in their devotion to Jesus (Acts 15:13-21). What changed? After the Resurrection, the Lord Jesus appeared to his brother (1 Corinthians 15:7). Can you imagine this encounter? What did Jesus say to him? How did James react? We aren't sure. What we do know is that James no longer doubted and came to refer to himself as "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). His letter, written to Christians scattered all over the world, functions much like Proverbs in the Old Testament. It is punchy and direct. His style is sharp and quick, cutting right to our hearts. Filled with metaphors, numerous real-life illustrations, and frequent parallels to his older brother's teaching, James comes at us with an urgency and immediacy that demands our attention. The question is not only, "Will we listen?", but more importantly, "Will we take action?" We might summarize the entire book with the phrase: Let's get to work. For James, real faith, the kind that truly saves us, works.

QUESTIONS

1) If possible, read the Book of James in one setting.

2) Write 3-4 things that stand out to you.

3) Write 3-4 things that are confusing or unclear to you.

4) How would you summarize the Book of James in a few sentences?

5) James says a lot about wisdom, prayer, joy in suffering, the tongue, conflict, living faith, humility, and patience. Which of these areas do you need the most growth in right now?

OUTLINE & BIBLE READING PLAN

CONTINUE STUDYING THE BOOK OF JAMES WITH THE BIBLE READING PLAN AND DAILY DEVOS.

1. James 1:1-18 | Joy in Trials | Monday, September 29: "Wisdom That Works"
2. James 1:19-2:13 | How to Listen | Tuesday, September 30: "Mercy Wins"
3. James 2:14-26 | Faith That Works | Wednesday, October 1: "Living Faith"
4. James 3:1-18 | Taming the Tongue | Thursday, October 2: "Faith Speaks"
5. James 4:1-12 | Returning to God | Friday, October 3: "Draw Near"
6. James 4:13-5:20 | Wise Planning, Patient Suffering | Saturday, October 4: "Working in the Waiting"

SCRIPTURE

Write which passage of scripture you are reading.

OBSERVATION

What is this text saying? What is the context? How does it fit with the verses before and after it? Are there any commands or instructions?

APPLICATION

How can you apply this verse to your life? What does this mean today? What is God saying to you?

PRAYER

Respond to the passage in prayer. Ask God to help you apply this truth to your life and spend some time listening to what He may be telling you.
