



Materials for lifegroup use & personal reflection

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January to March 2021

Quoteable quotes

“True faith means holding nothing back. It means putting every hope in God's power to keep His Promises.” Francis Chan

“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.” James 1:12

“He said "Love...as I have loved you." We cannot love too much.” Amy Carmichael

“God tests faith by attitude and action!” Matthew Henry

“James is filled with direct commands to help us pursue a life of holiness, action and joy!” Charles Swindoll

“What you are is God's gift to you, what you become is your gift to God.” Balthasar

“Faith does not eliminate questions. But faith knows where to take them.” Elisabeth Elliot

“Worrying is arrogant because God knows what He's doing.” Barbara Cameron

“Focus on giants - you stumble. Focus on God - Giants tumble!” Max Lucado



Introduction

Do you ever open your Bible and ask any of the following questions?

- 'I don't really understand what this chapter means?'
- 'How can this be applied to my life?'
- 'Do these ancient cultures and traditions still have meaning today?'
- 'I can't understand what God is saying to me through His Word?'

As Christians we don't always read the Bible on a regular basis. Why? **Because in the pressures of daily living we struggle to find a connection between the timeless principles of Scripture and the ever-present problems of day to day living.** God urges you and I to apply His Word to our lives, and in James letter shows us how to put into practise what we have learned. Applying God's Word is, I believe, a vital part of our relationship with God and is the evidence that I/we are obeying Him. In these times that we are living in right now and with all that we are faced with, has there ever been a more urgent time to connect with God and trust Him to guide us through this rough terrain and navigate us through these stormy seas?

This book of James is a very practical letter, full of excellent instructions for our everyday living - how to bear struggles and afflictions, how to hear the word, how to take care in what we say to others, how to have humility and peacefulness, to name but a few that struck me as I have read this letter again. At the time this was written James was directing the people to live the Christian life in the midst of a pagan world; it reminds us of consistent, daily, Godly behaviour that is applicable and helpful whatever season or time we live in – it is as helpful and applicable now as it was then. **We trust that you will find journeying in James together something that is of practical benefit as well as spiritual encouragement over the next ten weeks, through to Easter.**



Background

James, the author of this letter is generally accepted as James, Jesus half-brother. He was not at first a follower of Jesus (John 7: 2-5) but he is individually mentioned in one of Jesus' resurrection appearances (1 Cor 15:7). He became a pillar of the church (Gal 1:19) and the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13) and is probably writing to Jewish believers who had fled Jerusalem because of persecution. It was most likely written in about AD 49.

It is a practical epistle and a main theme for me is that genuine faith will inevitably produce good deeds; the proof of the reality of our faith is a changed life. This led Martin Luther to question whether James was saying that we are not saved by our faith in Christ alone, but, by our good deeds? Whilst James is clearly not saying this, we clearly cannot claim to have faith in Christ if it does not bring about a change in our lifestyle. (Jam 2:18)

Much of the letter is practical advice and there are at least fifty direct instructions on how we should live as Christians. The main themes of the letter include **1) a living faith** - we are doers not just hearers of God's word; **2) trials** - which we can overcome and will produce maturity; **3) the Law of Love** - although we are not saved by obeying the Law, we are given a special command to love one another; **4) Wise speech** - which demonstrates both Godly wisdom and self-control and **5) wealth** - which can be a great problem if we adopt a worldly attitude, are not generous and only impressed by riches.

James wanted the people to grasp a truth taught by Jesus: "A tree is known by its fruit" (Matt. 12:33; compare James 1:9-11, 3:12-18; 5:7-8, 17-18). For James, religion was not about church membership, financial contributions, or even teaching in the Sunday school. The real test of true religion is how we live, not just what we hear and what we say.

This letter is of unique and of particular significance to us because it comes from the one who probably knew more about the Lord Jesus than any other human being. James, the half-brother of Jesus, was raised in the same home in Nazareth, grew up with Him and lived with Him through all those silent years of which we have no record. Many of us would, I'm sure, like to know what happened during that time when James looked upon Jesus as nothing more than his brother.

So, as we spend the next 10 weeks studying God's Word together in the book of James, and praying and zoom-fellowshipping together in our Home Groups, let us be prepared for Him to do exceedingly abundantly above, all that we ask or think.

Prayer: 'Lord give us the gift of Wisdom, and teach us how to be wise. Help us always to put into practise what we have learned'. Amen.



Week 1 - 17th January

James 1 v 1-11

Tears of despair to tears of joy

Introduction

Towards the end of the New Testament (starting with the book of Hebrews) several books are concerned with the theme of 'faith'. The whole idea of these 'faith books' or 'faith letters' is to explain to us what faith is and how faith works. Each letter makes its unique contribution to that theme. **James is the second book that deals with faith. 'When your faith is tested, then your endurance has a chance to grow'...**

James teaches us how we can be joyful in times of testing and trials because we know that God can use them to make us '*mature and complete*'. In NT Greek the word for trials, testing and temptation is the same, '*peirasmos*'. In Malachi 3:3 we are told that God will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver and, when we like silver are purified in the flame, God can see in us the reflection of His Son.

Questions and reflections

1. Read James 1v1-11 in two different bible versions. Dwell on them for a few minutes. Ask God to reveal His wisdom to you as you read them – how can we apply these truths?
2. 1v2 'When troubles or trials of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy'. Wow! Do we? That is a tough one for us isn't it. How do we normally feel when we have to face problems and trials? As Christians, do we expect to escape these as Jesus promised us life in all its fullness?
3. 1v3 'For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow'. How have you felt this last year coping with the Covid-19 pandemic, what particular trials have you encountered? Have you been able to trust in God and have faith that He will carry you through?
4. 'Endurance' means to get through a difficult or unpleasant process or event, without giving way – if our endurance grows it means that we have become just a little bit stronger. Has yours grown? Because of your own strength? Or because of leaning on Him?
5. In 1v4 it says that when our endurance is fully developed, we will be perfect and complete and we'll need nothing. If we can 'weather the storms' (by having faith) we'll always be ok. Can you think of times when this has been your experience?
6. Physical and mental suffering truly test our faith. Read 2 Cor 12 v 7-10. Is Romans 8 v 28 'all things work together for good' our experience?
7. 1v5-8 'If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and He will give it to you'. What does wisdom have to do with facing trials?
8. 1v10-11 Wealth presented a problem in the early churches as it can also today. What do these verses teach us about possessions and riches? In what way does a poor man become rich? What is the challenge for us about how we manage our 'treasure' today?
9. What is your takeaway thought or prayer from today?

Points to ponder on

We can be tossed around in this world can't we, with our emotions, the news and what we tell each other. And then we read or hear a word of scripture and we feel more at peace because God's way brings us back to Him. Then we wrangle with the world again and it can go round and round in circles. Do you feel tossed around in the ocean on rocky waters, or are you gliding on a calm sea? If we ask for God's wisdom and stand firm with Him, we can break this cycle and find peace.

'Happiness depends on happenings; joy depends on Jesus' Sue Haward 2019.

Song: Who am I? – Casting Crowns [Who Am I - Casting Crowns \(w/ lyrics\) - YouTube](#)



Week 2 - 24th January

James 1 v 12-18

Yield not to temptation or 'free cheese is available in mousetraps!'

Introduction

Turning us sinners from the errors of our ways is a vital part of the Christian life. God inspired James to provide us with certain theological teachings about the Christian life with special emphasis on patiently enduring tribulation, steadfastly seeking God's wisdom, consistently putting faith into action by doing what is right and, abstaining from what is wrong, by persistently praying for ourselves and others.

Remember this – we are His prized possessions – whatever is good and perfect is a gift to us from our Father in Heaven. **Temptation comes only from our own desires which entice us and drag us away.** We must not yield to our desires which can lead to sinful actions.

Questions and reflections

1. Does God tempt us? Does he allow us to be tested? Does temptation come from God, from Satan, or from ourselves? How do we respond? How does this passage help us know how to respond in the right way?
2. What is the promise of v 12?
3. Do you ever watch the Oscars where statuette prizes are awarded for great artistic works? Or watch trophies being raised for sporting wins. They are an honour to receive aren't they. What do we understand by 'the crown of life' being our reward?
4. 1v13 How do we respond when we are tempted/face trials and times of testing (all the same word in NT Greek)? Have you ever blamed someone else for your actions? Sadly, in the current days we live in, we seem to be more and more shy of taking responsibility for our mistakes. How can we prevent ourselves 'falling into sin' when we are tested see also 1 Cor 10 v 13)?
5. What does the bible say about confessing our sin and asking for forgiveness? How easy/difficult do we find this?
6. 1v14 says 'Temptation comes from our own desires'. The flesh, the world and the devil can have a very strong pull over our lives. Our own weaknesses and desires can pull us in the wrong direction. Can you recognise yours? Is there a situation you can share where you have overcome temptation maybe during COVID times? How can we help each other resist future temptation?
7. Ephesians 6 v 11-13 reminds us to put on the whole armour of God to overcome evil; what does that look like on a daily level today and how might it help resist temptation and manage trials and testing better?
8. What does 1v17-18 teach us about the nature of God? What does it mean to us to be God's prized possession? Do we believe it and act like it? What helps or hinders us in getting this truth to the core of our being?

Points to ponder on

Take comfort – Paul wrestled with temptation (Romans 7v15 - 19). Paul recognises that this is the sin rising up in him. He answers his own question in v 24-25 that God is the one who rescued Him. We have that same hope that God will help and rescue us.

Songs: Amazing Grace - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tvt6E9N7AQw>;
Rescue by Lauren Daigle <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=9PugD11k3JU&list=PLIR2qQ86ilO3UL-W2D2VwKKReyVBK6qlq&index=176>



Week 3 - 31st January

James 1 v19-20

Holes in the fence

Introduction

James' teaching emphasises that faith without putting that faith into practise is not all that faith is intended to be. It's not enough to just know the right thing to do, that's often the easy part - we need to 'act out' our faith and actually 'do' the choices. When we are asked to be quick to listen and slow to speak and not get angry; it's not easy – we know how hard it is at times to control ourselves but if we don't, it affects our whole being. Gaining control of our anger can show our maturing character. A Christian couple sitting in their garden after Sunday morning service, were discussing the service, the sermon, the music and all that was wrong with the church. Then they heard their neighbours through a hole in the fence whisper 'why do they bother to go if it's so bad'?

Questions and reflections

1. v19 – 'Be quick to listen'. We all know the well-known saying that 'We have two ears and one mouth for a reason'. Whilst this may not be a profound statement it can certainly remind us that we would do better spending more of our time listening than speaking.
Do you prefer to listen or to speak?
2. v19 tells us the standard required. Do we excuse ourselves by saying 'this is unattainable, unachievable ... as long as I'm as good as most people, that's ok'?
3. Are some people more placid by nature? If we are more impassioned, can Christ really change our personality or do we have to battle daily with ourselves? What type of personality are you?
4. v19 – 'Be slow to speak'. The words coming from people can build one another up or crush one another down. What kind of speaker are you? Are you an encourager? or are you a fault-finder? What do you ask God to change about you?
5. Whereas people's words can be destructive, God's word is thoroughly and uniquely beneficial – it is written for our good. It exposes our need and it demands our response. What do you feel God is calling you to hear, and to attend to today?
6. v19 – 'Be slow to get angry'. Now there's a challenge for us all! How do you feel when the person in the car in front of you cuts you up on the motorway? Or you are in a long queue waiting to buy the last loaf of bread, or certain meal on the menu, only to be told that the last one has just been sold? How do we deal with our anger – do we take it to the foot of the cross or suppress it so that it eats away at us and makes us bitter?
7. How does anger and inappropriate speech impact the gospel message? See Ephesians 4:31-32.
8. v19-20: Does our communal life together reflect this? What needs to change if not?
9. What is your prayer and action as a result of today?

Points to ponder on

If we are asking God for Wisdom, we need to listen for His answers. We talk about having quiet time with God but many of us find it really difficult to just sit and listen 'to that small still voice of calm'. Just like Elijah found it hard to discern God's calm voice amongst the wind and earthquakes (1Kings 19:11-13). We need to be still before Him – and really listen.

How can we take that time this week?

Song: Be Still <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZugvUQ4m90U>



Week 4 - 7th February

James 1 v 21-27

Bible-based faith or 'Don't talk the talk if you can't walk the walk'.

Introduction

As important as it is to read the Bible, James teaches us that it is not helpful unless we do what it says. It's been said that it's not enough to "talk the walk" we must "walk the talk". That's the concern James has for us. As important as it is to know God's Word, to be eager learners in personal Bible study and in church, it is equally important to be living out what we believe. Genuine faith will evidence itself in some very practical ways: in righteous living, godly speaking, and compassionate care. Does your life style reflect your Christian faith? Whether you are at church, at a neighbourhood gathering, or in the marketplace, people should see a consistency between what you say and how you live.

Questions and reflections

1. As ever read the scripture in two different versions of the Bible – what strikes you?
2. 1v21 says, 'Get rid of all filth and evil in your lives' – God asks us to keep ourselves clean (not just in washing ourselves but) in mind, body, soul and spirit. It may be tempting to have a bit of banter or have a laugh at certain jokes but there is a line that we feel uneasy crossing. Entertaining wrong thinking does not feed our souls with goodness and godliness. Can you remember a time when you have been less than impressed with yourself for your wrong behaviour?
2. 1v21 What does James tell us can save us? What does this mean?
3. 1v22 'Don't just listen to God's word but also do what it says'. Revelation demands response! It says, don't fall into the trap of reading or listening to the Bible and then not putting it into practice. What will be your plan for reading your bible daily? How will you act that out?
4. The word is instructing us to do something – we must be obedient and do it. Will our deeds be the proof of our repentance?
5. 1v25 'What is 'the perfect law'?
6. 1v26 What does our speech say about us? See Ephesians 4 v 29; Colossians 4 v 6; Matthew 15 v 11, Psalm 141 v 3, Proverbs 15 v 1-4 and 16 v 24.
7. What reward awaits those who hear the word of god and out it into action?
8. v 27 Why did James choose orphans and widows as those whose care defines 'true religion'? What do you and I do about this today? What example of 'true religion' would James use if he was writing this letter in 2021?
9. What does/should 'social action' look like for us? Should/do we only give money to Christian relief charities?
10. Christianity is not about getting a ticket to heaven; its about becoming an instrument of God to transform the world'. Tony Campolo. Discuss.

Points to ponder

What we do must confirm what we say. A changed life is one that has added Christ and subtracted sin. Obedience is the proof. In what sense is God's Word planted in us? How does this implanting take place? How do believers deceive themselves by just listening and not acting on God's message? And what might be the effects in the life of a person who reads the Bible week after week but never puts any of the truths into practice? Food for thought isn't it?

Song: Word of God Speak – Mercy Me https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4JK_6osCH74



Week 5 - 14th February

James 2 v 1-13

It makes no difference to God

Introduction

We are not simply to have faith; we are to practise it in our daily lives. James wanted to help us practise God's Word, so he gave us a simple test. He talks of two visitors going to a church service, a rich man and a poor man; and he asks to see how they would be treated. Similarly, the way we behave toward people indicates what we really believe about God! We cannot separate human relationships from divine fellowship. "If a man says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" (1 John 4:20)

We must treat people according to God's values and not by the world's standards, so we cannot show favouritism to the rich, the famous or those with worldly importance. James teaches about our attitude to the rich and the poor. He says that we are all law breakers if we break any of God's laws but we do right if we obey the Royal law.

Questions and reflections

1. Read the scripture in two different versions – what immediately comes to mind?
2. v 1-4: What example does James give of Christians showing favouritism in the church? How do we treat those who are not the same as us?
3. What does Lev 19 v 15 teach us about favouritism?
4. v 5 What are the poor promised? This is an example of God's perspective – how does it challenge how we see the world and treat others? Is our attitude to the rich or the poor a problem in the world today?
5. v 8 – mentions the commandment 'Love your neighbour as yourself' but if you favour some people over others, aren't you guilty of breaking that law? What things besides money make people feel unwelcome in our church? What is our attitude to those who are single, divorced, LGBTQA, BAME?
6. v 8 Why does James single this 'royal law' out to be so important? Where else in Scripture is it referred to?
7. v 10 can hurt! What does it teach us about 'big' sins and 'little' sins?
8. v 12 What are you and I judged by according to this verse?
9. v 13 What does this mean? How do/can we express mercy to others in the way that God has demonstrated mercy towards us?
10. What are the three specific actions that you can take to reach out to others with God's love?

Points to ponder on

Hearing God's Word and talking about God's Word can never substitute for doing God's Word. Every believer has some statement of faith or personal expression of what he believes. Most churches have such statements, and members are asked to subscribe to the statement and practice it. Most churches also have a "covenant" that they read publicly, often when they observe the Lord's Supper. Statements of faith and church covenants are good and useful, but they are not substitutes for doing God's will.

Song: The Blessing <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUtlI3mNj5U>



Week 6 - 21st February

James 2 v 14-26

Faith with legs attached or by grace alone, through faith alone and in Christ, alone!

Introduction

Faith is a key doctrine in the Christian life. The sinner is saved by faith (Eph. 2:8-9), and the believer must walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7) and, without faith, it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). Faith is not some kind of vague feeling that we work up; it's having the confidence that God's Word is true, and being convicted that acting on that word will bring His blessing.

There has been much theological argument on the subject of faith and works. How are we reconciled to God? How are we saved? James teaches that although we are saved by our faith in Christ, this faith must show itself in deeds (or works). If we are in a new relationship with God, we are a new creation and our thoughts and actions must change. We certainly can't earn our salvation; it is a free gift from God (Eph 2:8-10).

Questions and reflections

1. Read the scripture and spend some time being quiet before God, meditating on these verses. What has God drawn your attention to, specifically?
2. What does faith in Christ mean for you?
3. v14 What is the relationship between faith and deeds? How do we act out our faith in kindness?
4. v14 – 16: What is 'dead' faith? What kind of faith really saves a person? See Eph. 2:8-10.
5. v18: Real faith affects a person's deeds; when you believe in something wholeheartedly you will act upon it. What have you believed in recently, that has made you act?
6. v21: What illustration did James use to explain how real faith affects a person's deeds?
7. v21-26: In what ways are Abraham and Rahab different? In what ways are they similar?
8. v 23: Why do you think Abraham was called God's friend? Jesus called His followers 'friends' in John 15 v 14. What does this actually mean?
9. What do you consider the greatest example of faith you have ever seen?
10. Some people are really good and willing to sacrifice their lives for others but would not call themselves Christians. Surely that's enough? Discuss.
11. What would you want others to say about your faith on your death and why?

Points to ponder

James offers Abraham and Rahab as two examples of genuine faith. What did Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac prove? (Genesis 22:12, James 2:22-23). Abraham showed faith by holding nothing back from God, not even his most valued treasure, His son. God did the same for us didn't He, He gave His only son. Are you holding anything back from God? Is there anything in your life that you wouldn't sacrifice for Him?

Song: Faithful One <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PjSO5lhI0M>



Week 7 - 28th February

James } v 1-18

Beware!

Introduction

In this part of the book of James, he tells us that a Christian's speech is another test of maturity. We read and hear many words every day and forget what a wonderful thing a word is! When God gave us the gift of speech, He gave us a tool to build with. It can however also become a weapon of destruction! Will we ever be able to control what we say? James 3v8 says that the tongue can corrupt the whole person, can set the whole course of life on fire, is a restless evil, and cannot be tamed. Yet we should not give up trying! God can change our hearts and our tongue can be used to praise our God and Father, encourage and build up others.

Questions and reflections

1. Read the passage and spend some time in quiet reflecting on what you have said and done this past week – where have you needed Gods help particularly in relation to your words and behaviour?
2. v1 - What unique responsibility does a teacher bear and why? In what ways will teachers be judged more strictly?
3. V 3-5: How can we control our tongue? The tongue is a small organ in our bodies which can lead to mighty speeches – good or bad! Have you ever made a speech that you are proud of? Have you ever spoken words out that you are definitely not proud of now?
4. Why isn't the 'tongue problem' solved when people become Christians? In what ways do you struggle with the tension between your 'old tongue' and your 'new tongue'?
5. V 5-8 'Sticks and stone may break my bones but words can never hurt me'. Do we believe this? What kind of damage does an uncontrolled tongue do to a family? To a marriage? To children? To a church? Should our tongues need to be controlled or should our hearts always speak truth and love?
6. What would you say to someone who professed faith in Christ but was either unwilling or seemingly unable to control his or her tongue? Would you say anything at all?
7. V 13: What does godly wisdom look like and produce? See Matt 11 v 29.
8. The passage talks of two types of wisdom – what are they? How are they the same and how do they differ? How do we cultivate godly wisdom and good fruits?
9. In what ways can we sow seeds of peace?
10. Think about your week ahead – in what situations may you need Gods help and wisdom in light of this passage.

Points to ponder on

The difficulty with the tongue is that it is connected to the heart. As Jesus said in Matthew 12:34, 'For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks'. A tongue problem is really a heart problem. But here's the good news! God specializes in heart problems, giving each Christian a new heart, one that is alive to God's Spirit and sensitive to His leading. Apart from God, no person can control the tongue, but with a new heart we can find a new strength to use our tongue to glorify God and build up people around us.

Song: Refiners Fire - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLYQAx8DpBI>



Week 8 - 7th March

James 4 v 1-17

War and Peace

Introduction

This chapter makes it clear that there were carnal divisions and disputes among these believers. One cause was the selfish desire of many to be teachers, but the basic cause was disobedience. There was a lack of true separation in the lives of the people. It is tragic when brothers and sisters live together in conflict instead of unity. These problems arise when Christians exchange friendship with God for that of the world. As with all of the evil treacheries, the world's friendship might sound good at first, but it will soon bring a harvest of sin, jealousy, hatred, and self-centeredness. The good news is that Christians have an alternative, to return to God in confession and dependency. James paints a picture of those who are at war with God because they have chosen to be friends of the world. He gives us practical answers to put this right.

Questions and reflections

1. Read the scriptures in two different versions – what immediately strikes you from the passage?
2. v1-3: What does the Bible mean when it says a war is waging inside of us? What are the desires that battle within us? How do they express themselves in our lives?
3. When we ask God for things, why do we not always get what we want? What are the wrong motives for prayer?
4. V4-5: What is the connection between our relationship with God and our relationship with people? Why is it impossible to be a friend of the world and a friend of God too?
5. From your own personal experience and your knowledge of the Word, what are some of the symptoms of friendship with the world?
6. V6-7: How does pride affect our work? Our home? Our church? Our community?
7. v7-10 give us 10 commands to put ourselves right with God and root out pride. What are they? What can we do this week to help us bring more humility into our lives?
8. v11-12 talk about our relationship with and attitude to, others. Why is speaking out against a brother or judging him speaking against the law? Is it ever right to 'call someone out' on their behaviour?
9. v13-17 talks about the fact that God alone knows what is going to happen tomorrow – and we don't. How should we then plan for the future?

Points to ponder

God never tires of welcoming home His wayward children and of lifting them up when they humble themselves before Him. If you find yourself constantly engaged in disagreements and arguments, take a close look at your heart, and come home to friendship with God.

Song: Humble Yourselves – Dave Bilbrough https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7kASOw_d9eE



Week 9 - 21st March

James 5 v 1-12

Strengthen your heart

Introduction

If money talks said a popular comedian, 'all it ever says to me is good-bye!' But money was not saying 'good-bye' to the men James addressed in this section of his letter. These men were rich, and their riches were sinful; they were using their wealth for selfish purposes, and were persecuting the poor in the process. Jesus spent a lot of time talking about money because there is a close connection between the heart and material possessions.

James has a warning for the dishonest rich about the perils of their wealth. He then turns to teach about patience and endurance while we wait for the Lord's return

Questions and reflections

1. Read these verses in two different versions of the Bible. What does God want to impress upon you again this week?
2. Why has James returned again to the problems of wealth?
3. In Matthew 16:26 Jesus asks what it would benefit a man if he gained the whole world and lost his soul? In vs 1-5, James makes the same point using powerful and dramatic images. What particular problems does James mention that the rich encounter? What is the link between money, power and oppression?
4. The Bible only condemns the rich who store up their wealth instead of using it to reach the lost, feed the hungry, cloth the naked, shelter the cold and homeless, nurse the sick and sound the glorious news of salvation around the world. Do you have your possessions, or do your possessions have you?
5. What is the danger in desiring to become rich? See I Tim 6 v 9-10; Matt 19 v 23-24.
6. v7 is an encouragement to be patient but in and for what? How patient are you? How can we grow in patience?
7. How can we as Christians experience patient endurance as we wait for the Lord to return? How does God use others to build patience in our lives?
8. What are the examples in scripture that you can think of, of patience? What can we learn from the farmer in this passage and from Job?
9. What do the gospels teach us about the lords return?

Points to ponder on

Why does James speak so strongly against self-indulgence? What examples of self-indulgent activities are occurring in life right now, and why is this inappropriate for believers? What are you and I investing in? Compare the descriptions of the rich in this passage with the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. How is this an encouragement to you? How can you use money to accumulate treasure in heaven? What do you possess that money cannot buy?

Song: We will Wait upon the Lord – Chris Tomlin <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBbE6k7DeH8>



Week 10 - 28th March

James 5 v 13-20

Prayer is where the action is!

Introduction

The gift of speech is a wonderful blessing if it is used to the glory of God. As we have read previously, James told us of some wicked uses of the tongue, but he also named some of the highest uses of the tongue - proclaiming God's Word (5:10) and praying and praising God (5:13). Prayer is certainly a high and holy privilege. To think that, as God's children, we can come freely and boldly to His throne and share with Him our needs!

James again gives practical instructions... pray at all times, in trouble, when happy and in sickness. The prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective (v16). Prayer can bring about healing and forgiveness, and when we come to the Father, praying in accordance with His will, our prayers are answered.

Questions and reflections

1. Spend some time in quiet inviting God to speak to you before you read and meditate on this passage for a few minutes.
2. Why do we need to pray?
3. Is prayer my first or last option? What answers to prayer have you seen in the last week?
4. v15: James describes believing prayer as a dynamic and powerful activity of the Christian life. It is an instrument of healing and forgiveness and a mighty weapon for spiritual warfare. What does Phil 4 v 6, Col 4 v 2 and Rom 8 v 26 teach us about prayer?
5. What special instructions are given about praying for the sick? What is the importance and significance of anointing with oil?
6. v16: Do we have to confess our sins so that we can be healed? How does prayer make a difference in the lives of believers?
7. Vs 17-18: What is the point of James' illustration about Elijah? How is Elijah a good example of how God answers prayer? How have you seen prayer bring changes in people or their circumstances?
8. Vs 19-20: What causes Christians to wander? How do we help someone in this situation? What is our responsibility?
9. Reflect back on the last ten weeks of teaching in James. What are your three big ideas and what needs to happen going forward?

Points to ponder on

Do I naturally depend on prayer when I find myself in some kind of trouble?

Am I the kind of person that others seek for prayer support?

What is my attitude toward the wandering brother?

Song: The Lord's Prayer – Hillsong <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kUjLd6k6uXk>



Final thoughts

In his comprehensive and practical letter, James covers many excellent instructions, not only for the believers of his time but his teachings are still as relevant for us today. Interestingly, James was rather in opposition to Jesus during the early days of Jesus' ministry but was finally converted by the resurrection of the Lord. The Apostle Paul tells us that after the resurrection, the Lord appeared to James (1 Cor. 15:7).

Having reviewed what James is saying throughout his book, it is a good idea for us to examine how well we are doing in applying the many principles to our lives. **The purpose is not for self-condemnation but for encouragement and growth. It is worth us having a little check-in with ourselves ... try these and see how you are doing ...**

- **Am I becoming more and more patient in the testing of life?**
- Do I play with temptation or resist it from the start?
- **Do I find joy in obeying the Word of God?**
- Are there any prejudices that bind me?
- **Am I able to control my tongue?**
- Am I a peacemaker rather than a trouble maker?
- **Do people come to me for spiritual wisdom?**
- Am I a friend of God or a friend of the world?
- **Do I make plans without considering the will of God?**
- Am I selfish when it comes to money?
- **Am I unfaithful in paying my bills?**
- Do I criticize and gossip, or do I seek to restore them in love?
- **Do I believe that prayer is the answer in times of trouble and celebration?**
- It's a bit of a list eh? Be kind to yourself and watch yourself grow.

So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though we have to endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that our faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold! So, when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honour on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. **You love Him even though you have never seen Him. Though you do not see Him now, you trust Him and you rejoice with a glorious inexpressible joy. The reward for trusting Him will be the salvation of your souls.** 1 Peter 1:5-9