

# Bible Study Discussion Guide

## James

The book of James is short letter which stresses the importance of having a living faith. James emphasises action and urges his readers to be do-ers of the Word and not simply hearers. The book of James has been described as the 'Proverbs of the New Testament'. It contains many short pithy statements and contains many parallels with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. James is concerned that his audience understands the nature of genuine faith.

The Knowing God Bible study discussion guides are provided to facilitate small group Bible study. We encourage everyone in the group to read or listen to the Bible text about ten times over the course of the study. We recommend providing a copy of these notes to each member of the group and selecting an individual to lead each week's study.

The book of James takes approximately 15 minutes to read.

This discussion guides provides questions for four sessions.

### Principles for use:

1. Encourage everyone in the group to read the book of James many times.
2. Trust God to help you understand and apply his Word.
3. Focus on what the book reveals about God/Jesus.
4. Focus on what it clearly reveals about how God wants us to live.
5. Don't get bogged down on minor, uncertain or controversial issues.

For further copies, visit the Bibleworld website and follow the link to Bible Study Resources. The notes can either be printed off or if you prefer to remain paperless, you can view the questions online.

[www.bibleworld.org.nz](http://www.bibleworld.org.nz)

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life,  
by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

James 3:13

## Introduction

The author of the book describes himself as 'James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ'. The New Testament records a number of men named James, including two of the disciples. It is generally believed that the author of this letter was James, the half-brother of Jesus who became the leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15).

The letter from James is believed to be one of the earliest New Testament letters, possibly written as early as 46 – 49 A.D. The letter is written to Jews as an encouragement to endure in their faith. James provides simple instructions for young believers.

## Session One: Wisdom in Facing Trials

What are your initial impressions about the book of James? What words would you use to describe the book? What stood out to you as one of the most important instructions in the book of James?

James begins his book with a surprising command: 'Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds' (James 1:3). Pure joy? Trials of many kinds? What are the kinds of trials or suffering that most common in your life and in the lives of your friends? What are the advantages of enduring trials? Why does perseverance matter for a Christian (1:4)?

Can you describe a time when you have deliberately chosen to see a trial you have faced as an opportunity for growth? What did you learn through the process? What can you learn about God through a time of trial?

'Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial' (James 1:12). What might you say or do to help others facing trials? How might you pray for yourself or someone else who is facing a time of trial?

James warns us not to see temptation as coming from God (James 1:13-15). How would you describe the process of temptation to others? How does this understanding then help us deal with temptation?

## Session Two: Wisdom in Speech

James is pretty realistic about the challenge of controlling the tongue. He appears to be expressing his own frustration with wanting to say the right things but knowing that no-one (including himself) can tame the tongue (James 3:8). Why then should we even try to tame the tongue?

James warns against slandering or judging others (James 3:9; 4:11; 5:9). He indicates that those who judge others will be judged (James 2:12-13). What is so dangerous about judging others?

In what situations or with what people do you find it most challenging to control your tongue? Have you found anything that helps you to control your speech?

The tongue can be used for good. James makes quite a few references to prayer (James 1:5; 3:9; 4:2-3; 5:13-18). What can we learn about prayer from the book of James? James encourages us to pray for wisdom (James 1:5). In what situations could you apply this in your daily life?

In chapter 5:13-19 the tongue is used to bring healing and restoration. In what situations might God be calling you to bring healing and restoration? What are some positive ways in which we can use our tongues?

## Session Three: Wisdom in Action

James admits that we all stumble in many ways (3:2). But he urges us to live a life of good deeds (3:13). Why do our actions matter?

Martin Luther famously called the book of James 'an epistle of straw'. He argued that people are saved by faith and not by works. How would James have responded to this statement?

'Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God' (James 4:4). In what areas of life do we find conflict between the practices of the world and the way God wants us to live?

'Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you' (James 4:8). What is the connection between coming near to God and resisting the devil? What can you specifically do this week to come near to God?

## Session Four: Wisdom with Money

When you read in the Bible about the rich and the poor, which group do you most readily identify with? Have a look at [www.globalrichlist.com](http://www.globalrichlist.com) and see how your personal income compares with the rest of the world. What is your response to this perspective?

James seems to be hugely concerned about the behaviours of the rich who are oppressing others (James 5:1-6). What practices does he oppose? What are the dangers of wealth?

James is also concerned with favouritism toward the rich (James 2:1-7). What is the problem with favouritism? How does favouritism contradict the 'royal law': "Love your neighbour as yourself" (James 2:8)?

What does James say about the rich in 1:10-11? How should this affect the way we handle our money and possessions?

James seems to suggest that there are advantages in being poor (James 2:5; 1:9). What advantages or blessings might come from being poor?

In conclusion, what have you learnt from the book of James that is helping you to change your life for the better?