



8 Studies in the book of James

Please Note the following:

1. It is not necessary to look up all the Bible cross references listed in a particular question; your Growth Group Leader will summarize these Bible cross references for you.
2. Just a reminder that sometimes in our Growth Groups, people feel comfortable sharing very personal and sensitive things about their lives. This information **MUST BE CONFIDENTIAL and NEVER LEAVE THE GROUP**

Introduction to James

Of the four men named James in the New Testament (NT), there are only two candidates for authorship of this epistle. No one has seriously considered James the Less, the son of Alphaeus (Matt 10:3; Acts 1:13) or James the father of Judas, not Iscariot (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13). Some have suggested James the son of Zebedee and brother of John (Matt 4:21), but he was martyred too early to have written it (Acts 12:2). That leaves James, the brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3) and brother of Jude (Matt 13:55) who also wrote an epistle (Jude).

James had at first rejected Jesus as the Messiah (John 7:5) but later believed (1 Cor 15:7). He became the key leader in the Jerusalem Church (cf. Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal 2:12), being called one of the “**pillars**” of that church, along with Peter and John (Gal 2:9).

James is also known as James the Just, because of his devotion to righteousness, he was martyred circa 62AD, according to the first century Jewish historian, Josephus. Comparing James’ vocabulary in the letter he wrote which is recorded in Acts 15 with that in this epistle corroborates his authorship of this epistle.

Background and Setting

The recipients of this book were Jewish believers who had been dispersed, i.e., 12 tribes (1:1); possibly as a result of Stephen’s martyrdom (Acts 7, circa 31-34AD), but more likely due to the persecution under Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12, circa 44AD). James refers to his audience as “**brothers**” (Greek: adelphos) 15 times (James 1:2, 16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14; 3:1, 10, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 9, 19, 12, 19), which was a common nickname among the first century Jews. Not surprisingly, then, James’ epistle is Jewish in its content. For example, the Greek word translated “**meeting**” (2:2) is the word for “**synagogue**”. Furthermore, the book of James contains more than 40 allusions to the Old Testament (OT), and more than 20 references to the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

Historical and Theological Themes

The book of James has not always been appreciated in the church. In fact, Martin Luther called it ‘a right strawy epistle’ (referring to 1 Cor 3:12), because it did not

sound like Paul nor mention Luther's chief concern, salvation by grace. However, the book is extremely important in the church today.

The first point to note is that the book is written to a church under pressure.

Christians were not necessarily being martyred, but they were suffering economic persecution and oppression, and the church was breaking under the pressure. There are two ways church members can respond to extreme pressure. They can either pull together and help each other or they can compromise with the world and split apart into bickering factions. James wanted them to do the former, but it was the latter that was actually happening, as people struggled to 'get ahead' in the world. These problems make the book very relevant for the church today.

Secondly, the book is filled with the teaching of Jesus. No other letter of the NT has as many references to Jesus per page as this one does. It is not as though James quotes Jesus directly, although sometimes he does (5:12), but normally he simply uses phrases and ideas which come from Jesus.

The book of James is devoted to direct, powerful statements on wise living; and is reminiscent of the book of Proverbs. It has practical emphasis, stressing not theological knowledge, but godly behavior. James wrote with a passionate desire for his readers to be uncompromisingly obedient to God's Word. He complements Paul's emphasis on justification by faith with his own emphasis on **spiritual fruitfulness demonstrating true faith**.

Outline of the Book

- 1:1 Greeting

- 1:2-27 Opening Words
 - 1:2-11 First part: testing, prayer and wealth
 - 1:12-27 Second part: testing, gifts, and listening and doing

- 2:1-26 Testing through generosity
 - 2:1-13 Partiality and love
 - 2:14-26 Generosity and faith

- 3:1-4:12 Testing through the tongue
 - 3:1-12 The evil in the tongue
 - 3:13-18 The antidote for the tongue
 - 4:1-10 The source of evil and its cure
 - 4:11-12 Concluding appeal

- 4:13-5:6 Testing through the wealth
 - 4:13-17 The test of the wealthy
 - 5:1-6 Testing by the wealthy

- 5:7-20 Conclusion
 - 5:7-11 Summary on patience endurance
 - 5:12 Oaths
 - 5:13-18 Prayer for health
 - 5:19-20 Purpose statement

Challenges in the Book

There are at least 2 major challenges in the book:

1. In 2:14-26, what is the relationship between faith and works? Does James emphasis on works contradict Paul's focus on faith?
 2. In 5:13-18, do the promises of healing refer to the spiritual or physical realm?
- Hopefully, we can work through these challenges together in our studies...

Study 1 – Trials and Christian Maturity

James 1:1-18

(Sermon on 02-Feb 2025)

Read James 1:1

1. Who is James? Who are the 12 tribes? (cf. Gal 6:16; 1 Peter 1:1; 2:9)

*James is the brother of Jesus [although he humbly refers to himself as **servant** [slave] of God and the Lord Jesus Christ].*

*There are several men named **James** mentioned in the New Testament, but reliable tradition assigns this book to the one called **James the Just**, the half-brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55) and the brother of Jude (Jude 1), who led the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13). James also experienced a special resurrection appearance of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:7).*

Other men named James are: a) the brother of John and son of Zebedee, the first apostle martyred and aka James the Less (Matthew 10:2; Mark 15:40; Acts 12:2); b) James the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3); c) James the father of the “other” apostle Judas (Luke 6:16)

Galatians 6:16 – Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to **the Israel of God**.

1 Peter 1:1 – Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To **God’s elect, exiles scattered** throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,

1 Peter 2:9 - But you are **a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation**, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

What James meant by this reference to the 12 tribes is difficult to understand. The question is whether James wrote a letter to only Christians from a Jewish background or to all Christians. Certainly, this letter applies to all Christians; yet James probably wrote his letter before Gentiles were brought into the church, or at least before Gentile Christians appeared in any significant number. Yet, the Bible references from Galatians 6:16 and 1 Peter, refer to Israel being all elected Christians.

At this time, the Jewish people were scattered all over the world and there was a Christian presence among most Jewish communities throughout the world. Regarding the extent of the dispersion, Josephus wrote: “There is no city, no tribe, whether

*Greek or barbarian, in which Jewish law and Jewish customs have not taken root.”
(Cited in Barclay)*

Read James 1:2-4

2. How do you handle, or have you handled trials in your life?

When I face a severe trial – I often find it all-consuming and it is difficult to hand it over to God. I “try” to hand it over to God – and pray about it – only to “take it back” and “hand it back” to God several times. I wrestle with God and wrestle in prayer; until eventually I “let it go completely and leave it to God!” Sometimes it’s difficult to get the trial out of my head and so I can go through a range of emotions: ‘it’s unfair’; ‘it’s too hard’; ‘what am “I” going to do, rather than what is “God” going to do’. From experience; I find that if I use Philippians 4 properly – ‘do not be anxious – but pray and hand it over to God – and get the peace that surpasses all understanding’ then I can really let go of the problem. But rarely does this happen immediately!

3. How can James say we should count it joy (literally feel blessed) to face trials of many kinds in v2?

We can count it joy when (notice, James says when, not if) we face trials of many kinds because a) whatever is going on in our lives, we have the joy of knowing our faith in Jesus means we are forgiven, have the certainty of eternal life and the JOY of Heaven to look forward to; and b) the trials will produce beneficial character traits in us like patience, self-control and peace of God.

4. What’s being tested and what’s the intended outcome of this testing process (v3)?
It’s our faith in the Lord that is being tested to see if its genuine (fair-dinkum). The intended outcome of this testing is to produce faithful perseverance.

5. What is the goal in the production of perseverance in v4? And is this goal attainable in our lifetime?

*The goal in producing perseverance in us is to ‘**make us mature and complete Christians, not lacking anything**’. Note: trials do not produce faith – our faith comes by hearing and hearing God’s Word (Romans 10:17) and is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8). The goal specified is an eschatological (end of time when Jesus returns) gift –*

something that Christians strive towards with all their being but will not in fact be attained until the culmination of our salvation when Jesus returns. Only then will Christians be mature and complete and don't lack anything. The idea is that as we face trials we learn to be mature and complete and don't lack anything, trusting in God's wisdom, provision and help, rather than being immature and caving in under the trial and giving into sin. **It's like believers are steel place in the fire and the impurities of our character are burnt off and the believer becomes mature.**

Spurgeon puts it this way "The natural tendency of trouble is not to sanctify, but to induce sin. A man is very apt to become unbelieving under affliction: that is a sin. He is apt to murmur against God under it: that is a sin. He is apt to put forth his hand to some ill way of escaping from his difficulty: and that would be sin. Hence we are taught to pray, 'Lead us not into temptation; because trial has in itself a measure of temptation'; and if it were not neutralized by abundant grace it would bear us towards sin."

Read James 1:5-8

6. How's your prayer life? Regular, irregular, non-existent, just a shopping list when you need something, heartfelt, full of hope, or something else?

Our recent study on the Old Testament Book of Daniel, has improved my prayer life and even has me sometimes on my knees, like Daniel. My prayers are regular now and not just a shopping list. Our prayers should consist of the acronym A-C-T-S (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication).

7. What do you make of James' command to ask God for wisdom in v5? (Hint: prominence of wisdom literature in the OT: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Songs of Solomon and Ecclesiastes)

*James is emphasizing the importance of seeking wisdom, particularly in times of trials and making importance decisions. **When we do seek God's wisdom and follow it, we become mature and complete and do not lack anything** (v4) **God desires our progress to maturity and therefore, will not withhold from us the wisdom we need!** **Proverbs** presents wisdom as the foundation for living a life that pleases God. **Job** wrestles with the problem of suffering and learns to trust in God's wisdom rather than listening to the limited wisdom of his friends.*

Psalms often reflect the wisdom of God, especially seeking God's guidance, recognizing God's authority and trusting in God's goodness amid suffering. *Ecclesiastes* explores the futility of life without God's wisdom.

Remember God told **King Solomon** to ask for whatever he wanted; **Solomon asked God for wisdom! (1 Kings 3)**

8. **Ponder:** what would wisdom be useful for (see v2)?

James is saying "when you face trials of many kinds" (v2) the best thing to do is ask God for wisdom!

9. How can James say God gives generously in v5 (cf. see also Psalm 51:6; Daniel 1:17; 2:21; cf. Matt 7:7)

Psalm 51:6 – Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. David is saying that God's wisdom was imparted to him even in the womb; i.e., from birth!

Daniel 1:17 – To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. God gave Daniel and his friends great knowledge and understanding to make them excel in exile in Babylon. And God gave Daniel wisdom to understand visions and dreams that no-one else in Babylon could understand.

Daniel 2:21 – He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. Daniel says God imparts wisdom upon wisdom.

Matthew 7:7 - Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. Jesus promises that if we ask, seek and knock [and the tense is to 'keep on' asking, seeking and knocking; God will give generously!

So, because David, Daniel and Jesus say how generous God is in giving what we ask for; James can say God gives generously!

10. V6 says we should ask in faith without doubting. What would this look like in practical terms? (cf. Heb 11:1; Matt 21:21; Mark 11:24)

Hebrews 11:1 – Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. Asking in faith without doubting looks like – being confident and assured in what we are asking for even though we can't see it. It's believing without seeing! Walking by faith, not by sight.

Matthew 21:21 – Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done” Jesus is saying it's not the quantity of your faith but the quality/genuineness of your faith.

Mark 11:24 - Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Again, Jesus is saying it's not the quantity of your faith but the quality/genuineness of your faith.

11. Do you pray with faith without doubting? If not, does this passage help?
Sometimes I pray doubting God will really help. I forget all the other times that God has answered my prayers. This passage shows that doubting is actually the complete opposite of faith; and should have no place in our thinking!

12. Why would James use the imagery of a wave for someone who doubts in v6?
*The experience of a wave whipped up by the wind and blown about would have been all too familiar to a Galilean James (Mark 4:37).
A wave is constantly moving, shifting, and changing direction, influenced by external forces like the wind. Similarly, someone who doubts lacks firm conviction and is tossed between belief and disbelief, lacking stability in their faith. Doubt causes a person to be **unsure and inconsistent**, much like a wave that doesn't have a steady course.
Just as a wave is moved by the wind, a doubter is easily influenced by external circumstances or conflicting thoughts. Their faith isn't anchored, and they are **vulnerable to whatever happens around them**. In the same way that the sea is at the*

mercy of the wind, the doubter's faith is at the mercy of their doubts and doubts may shift based on their emotional or mental state.

*Waves are not grounded; they are part of the water's surface, which is fluid and ever-changing. In contrast, a strong faith is rooted and grounded, not tossed about by fleeting doubts. James emphasizes that faith must be unwavering to receive wisdom and blessings from God (James 1:5). The doubter **lacks that solid foundation** and remains unsettled.*

13. What should a doubting person expect from their prayers in v7?

A doubting person shouldn't expect anything from their prayers; so that is a massive reason not to doubt when praying

14. In v8 a doubter is described as double-minded (literally double-souled). This is like having a divided heart towards God. What does the OT say about this in Psalm 12:2 and Hosea 10:2; and what does OT and NT say about loving God (Deut 6:5 and Matt 23:27)?

Double-minded literally means facing both ways!

Psalm 12:2 – Everyone lies to their neighbor; they flatter with their lips but harbor deception in their hearts. The psalm describes the double-mindedness of people – how they say one thing but in their heart they have another. Hypocrites!

Hosea 10:2 – Their heart is deceitful, and now they must bear their guilt.

The Lord will demolish their altars and destroy their sacred stones. The Lord will demolish the altars of their worship because their hearts are deceitful. In other words, they can't genuinely worship God with a deceitful heart. It's nonsense.

Deuteronomy 6:5 – Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. God tells the people through Moses, that they must love God with their whole being. It has to be genuine, un-doubting love of God with the whole heart, not divided hearts.

Matthew 23:27 - "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are

full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean” – Jesus warns the Pharisees about their divided hearts and hypocrisy; they appear to the people as godly on the outside but in their hearts they are corrupt and deceitful, even plotting to kill Jesus. That’s why Jesus describes them as whitewashed tombs – nice and bright and white on the outside but dead and corrupt on the inside!

The bottom line is: God wants our undivided loyalty and faithfulness; not divided hearts!

Read James 1:9-11

15. In what sense are believers in humble circumstances in a high position? (cf. Matt 23:12; Gal 3:28)

In the sense that God and His Son, Jesus, are the God of reversals. Those who have tickets on themselves will be humbled, like the Pharisees; and those who are humble, like Mary, will be exalted. Other examples: Joseph goes from prison to prime minister and Nebuchadnezzar goes from throne to crawling in a field!

*As Jesus says in Matthew 23:12 - **For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.***

*And as Paul says in Galatians 3:28 - There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, **for you are all one in Christ Jesus.***

16. In what sense are the rich in “**humiliation**” in v10? (See v2 again, also Matt 23:12 and Phil 2:8)

The rich are not immune to the trials on verse 2. They will face trials and be humbled and humiliated just like everyone else!

*As Jesus says in Matthew 23:12 - **For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.***

Even Jesus, the King of Heaven and Earth, humbled Himself and left the glory of Heaven to become a man and die on a cruel cross, as Paul says Philippians 2:8 - And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!

17. What point is James making about riches in verses 10 and 11? (cf. Job 14:2; Ps 103:15, 16; Isa 40:6-8; 1 Cor 7:31; 1 Peter 1:24; Matt 20:12; Ps 102:4, 11)

James' point is that riches mean little as our time on Earth is fleeting just like the flowers of nature! And whatever riches we have on this Earth cannot be taken with us to Heaven; which is why Jesus tells us not to build up treasures on Earth but build up treasures for Heaven! (Matthew 6:19-21).

Job 14:2 – They [human beings] spring up like flowers and wither away; like fleeting shadows, they do not endure.

Psalms 103:15-16 –¹⁵ The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field;¹⁶ the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.

Isaiah 40:6-8 -⁶ A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. ⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."

1 Corinthians 7:31 – those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

1 Peter 1:24 – For, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall,

Matthew 20:12 – 'These who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' In Jesus' parable, those who worked only an hour are just as rich as those who worked all day! This emphasizes James' point ' the rich will fade away even while they go about their business'

Psalms 102:4 - My heart is blighted and withered like grass; I forget to eat my food.

Psalms 102:11 - My days are like the evening shadow; I wither away like grass.

Read James 1:12-15

18. In verse 12, the Greek word for blessed actually means happy! Believers who successfully endure trials are truly happy (cf. James 5:11; Heb 10:36; Matt 5:4, 10, 11) and receive the "**crown of life**". This "**crown of life**" is like the crown put on the victor's head after ancient Greek athletic events. What might this mean for us

as a believer who has stood the test? (cf. 1 Cor 9:25; 2 Tim 4:8; 1 Peter 5:4; Rev 2:10; 3:11)

If we stand the testing of our faith and persevere and truly LOVE God (v12), we will receive a crown of glory (righteousness) in Heaven! And we will be blessed (happy) and fulfilled. Remember, how Abraham was tested in Genesis 22 and having survived the testing; he was given Genesis 22:15-18 and God said to Abraham ‘Now I know that you fear God’ (Genesis 22:12)

1 Corinthians 9:25 - *Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to **get a crown that will not last**, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.*

2 Timothy 4:8 - *Now there is **in store for me the crown of righteousness**, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

1 Peter 5:4 – *And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive **the crown of glory** that will never fade away.*

Revelation 2:10 – *Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you; the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and **I will give you life as your victor’s crown.***

Revelation 3:11 – *I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, **so that no one will take your crown.***

19. What is wrong with saying “**God is tempting me**” in v13? (cf. Hab 1:13; Lev 19:2; Isa 6:3). What is really tempting a person in v14?

God is a holy God and He doesn’t tempt people to sin or do evil; he tests people’s faith, as He did with Abraham. Remember how Adam blamed God because God gave Adam the woman, Eve!. Remember, the Israelites complained and blamed God in the wilderness (Exodus 17:2, 7)

*Habakkuk 1:13 – **Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.** Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?*

Leviticus 19:2 – “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy’”

Isaiah 6:3 – And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

People are really tempted, v14, by their own evil desires and enticed. The word for evil desires in Greek is epithymia. It means desire, craving, longing, desire for what is forbidden, or lust. The KJV of the Bible translates it with the English word concupiscence [derived from the Latin word "concupiscentia," which means "strong desire" or "lust."], which we don't use much these days. The definition of concupiscence is: strong sexual desire; lust. Often used to describe the unnatural sexual desires people have in same sex attraction or transgender desires. Concupiscence, in biblical terms, refers to the inner human tendency or inclination towards sin. It is often associated with the desire for earthly pleasures that are contrary to God's will or the Ten Commandments.

20. What does sin grow up into in v15? (cf. Gen 2:17; 3:6; Job 15:35; Ps 7:14; Isa 59:4; Rom 6:23)

*When these desires grow up, they grow up into sin and then grow into death; both physical death (we all die one day) and spiritual death (a broken relationship with God) – **and if there is no repentance, this death becomes eternal death!***

*Genesis 2:17 – but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it **you will certainly die***

*Genesis 3:6 – When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. **She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.***

*Job 15:35 – They conceive trouble **and give birth to evil**; their **womb fashions deceit**.*

*Psalms 7:14 – Whoever is pregnant with evil conceives trouble and **gives birth to disillusionment**.*

*Isaiah 59:4 – No one calls for justice; no one pleads a case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments, they utter lies; **they conceive trouble and give birth to evil**.*

*Romans 6:23 - For the **wages of sin is death**, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Read James 1:16-18

21. In contrast to the evil things brought about by our desires, what sort of gifts does God give (v17)?

God gives every good and perfect gift. He only gives us good things; He is not the author of evil!

22. What might the expression “**Father of heavenly lights**” in v17 refer to? (Gen 1:16; Ps 136:7; Dan 2:22; 1 John 1:5). How is God described here?

Genesis 1:16 refers to God as the Creator of all things and His creation is good as He says after each day. On the fourth day - God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. These are the Heavenly lights He created!

Psalms 136:7 says God made the heavenly lights - who made the great lights—His love endures forever.

Daniel 2:22 says God is the source of light as opposed to the darkness of evil - He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.

1 John 1:5 says God is light (the truth=the good) as opposed to the darkness (the lie=the bad/evil)- This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

In this verse, God is unchanging; He is not like a shadow that shifts around. God is the same, yesterday, today and forever!

23. What sort of birth is James talking about in v18 (cf. John 1:13; John 3:3-8; 1 Peter 1:23-25)

*Jesus is talking about **spiritual birth** – when we become a Christian through the power of God’s Word and God’s Spirit. This new birth is a theme throughout the Bible: Jeremiah 31:31-34 speaks of God’s law written on hearts; Ezekiel 36:26 speaks of God giving a heart of flesh, instead of stone; 2 Corinthians 5:17 speaks of being a new creation; John 3 speaks of being born again, born from above, born from above! It’s a supernatural birth. And notice in v18 – He [God] chose to give us this supernatural birth! Just as God said “let there be light” (Genesis 1:3), God says to us “let there be life’ thus bringing this new birth!*

John 1:13 - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but **born of God**.

John 3:3-8 - ³ Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are **born again**." ⁴ "How can someone be born when they are old?"

Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are **born of water and the Spirit**. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be **born again**.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone **born of the Spirit**."

1 Peter 1:23-25 - ²³ For you have been **born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable**, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, ²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

24. In what sense are we kind of first fruits in v18? (cf. Jer 2:3; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Rom 8:19-23)

Jeremiah 2:3 - Israel was holy to the Lord, the **firstfruits of his harvest**; all who devoured her were held guilty, and disaster overtook them," declares the Lord.

2 Peter 3:10-13 - ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. ¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to **a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells**.

Rom 8:19-23 - ¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the

children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have **the firstfruits of the Spirit**, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

Here's the sense in which we are considered "firstfruits" in this verse:

1. **New Creation in Christ:** In the broader biblical context, the "firstfruits" were the first part of the harvest that was offered to God as a token of gratitude and dedication. Similarly, believers, having been spiritually reborn through the "word of truth" (the gospel), are seen as the first and most important part of God's new creation. Just as the firstfruits were consecrated to God, believers are set apart as holy and belonging to Him.
2. **Evidence of God's Plan:** This term suggests that believers, by coming to faith in Jesus, are evidence of God's larger plan of salvation. The "firstfruits" are a **preview of what is to come — a fuller harvest of souls that will come in the future**. This connects to the idea of a future resurrection and the fulfillment of God's promises. As the "firstfruits," believers are the first of many who will be redeemed.
3. **End Times Significance:** The firstfruits are also linked to the end times, where Christ's resurrection is described as the firstfruits of those who will be resurrected (1 Cor. 15:20-23). Similarly, believers are the "firstfruits" of all believers who will one day have resurrected bodies when Jesus returns. Christians are the first evidence of God's new creation that is to come (1 Peter 3:10-13) and enjoy in this new life a foretaste of future glory.

Read Proverbs 3:1-12

25. How does this passage relate to James 1:1-18?

Proverbs 3:1-12 has the following similarities:

- Proverbs 3:1-6 encourage us to **trust in God and rely on His wisdom** just as James 1:1-5 does
- Both Proverbs 3:11-12 and James 1:2-4 view **hardship/trials and testing of our faith as part of God's loving work in the life of every believer**. Whilst trials and testing are difficult, they are **means of growth and purification**

- *Proverbs 3:9-10 and James 1:12 emphasize that **living rightly according to God's wisdom leads to divine blessings. This ultimately leads to eternal blessings and an eternal reward (crown) for steadfastness and perseverance in our earthly life.***

What's the **BIG IDEA** of James 1:1-18?
Perseverance through trials



What light globe moment did you have?

What **questions** do you have about the passages in this study?

Share the verse that had a special meaning to you in this study?

James 1:5

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."

Finish in prayer: Pray for each other as we face trials in our lives; pray that God will grant us patience and perseverance. Pray also that our prayers will be heartfelt and without doubting. Praise God for all His good and perfect gifts.

Study 2 – Listening and Doing

James 1:19-27

(Sermon on 09-Feb 2025)

In the last study James told us to ask for wisdom from God (1:5).

What will be the result of this wisdom received in God? Read on...

Read James 1:19-27

In the book of Galatians, Paul said our Christian life was all about grace through faith in Jesus, expressed in love. Paul argued strongly against “**working**” our way to a right status before God.

1. As you read this passage from James 1:19-27; is James contradicting Paul? James seems to use the word “**do**” in several places (1:22, 23, 25, and 26). James also uses the law in v25. How are we to reconcile James’ and Paul’s ‘**apparent**’ contradictory teaching?

James and Paul are not contradicting each other but rather complementing each other’s teachings. James emphasizes that true faith in Christ is lived out in action, while Paul teaches that salvation is by grace through faith, not by works. James’ emphasis on "doing" is about the practical outworking of the faith that Paul speaks of. Salvation is through faith alone, but that faith, when genuine, will produce works as evidence of the transformation that has taken place.

Both James and Paul uphold the central truth of the gospel: salvation is a gift of God’s grace, and true faith will result in a life that reflects that transformation. James is concerned with how faith manifests in everyday life, while Paul is concerned with the foundation of salvation itself.

2. How’s your listening skills?

My listening skills depends on my context and concentration levels. On Sundays, sometimes I’m a little drained from preaching and so it’s difficult to keep switched on to listening. I have a lot of people talking to me on Sunday and it’s sometimes difficult to keep up with all the conversations. In a counselling setting, I am much more focused on listening. I definitely need to pray about this!

3. Are you ready to jump in without letting people finish what they are saying?

Again, depending on my context, I have a tendency to jump in instead of stopping and listening. I definitely need to pray about this too!

4. Are you busy thinking about your next reply or comment, whilst the person is still speaking?

Sometimes the things people say remind me of a possible solution or a similar story and I start to think about this whilst the person is still speaking. It is a matter of having better concentration. One of the fruit of the spirit is “patience” and another “self-control”. Again, work needs to be done!

5. What’s James’ 3-pronged command in v19?

*James 3-pronged command is to be: **quick to listen** – **slow to speak** – and **slow to be angry**. We can learn to be **slow to be angry** by first learning to be **quick to listen** and **slow to speak**. Much of our anger and wrath comes from being ‘self-centered’ and not ‘others-centered’ and wanting to jump in and defend ourselves or to go on the attack without giving the other person a fair hearing. **Quick to listen** and **slow to speak** are ways to be others-centered.*

*God did not give us two ears so that people’s words go in one ear and out the other; he gave us two ears, so that we are **fully equipped to be quick to listen!***

“But hath not Nature taught us the same that the apostle here doth, by giving us two ears, and those open; and but one tongue, and that hedged in with teeth and lips?” (Trapp)

In relation to being slow to speak: “A closed mouth, catches no flies!” (Patrick O’Rourke – my Dad!)

A parent’s anger is much more likely to be met with stubborn resistance by a child. The accent of love is more likely to have power than the accent of anger! (Barclay)

Honey is better than vinegar (unknown)

6. What's the problem with anger in v20? (cf. Matt 5:21-22)

*In light of the nature of temptation and the goodness of God, we must take special care to be **slow to anger**, because our wrath does not accomplish the **righteousness of God**. Our **anger** almost always simply defends or promotes our own agenda. Anger does not exhibit the fruit of the spirit and is often destructive!*

Jesus talks about the problem of anger in the Sermon on the Mount.

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Jesus' point is that when we are angry, we can murder people in our hearts!

The MSG version puts it this way, which is helpful:

*²¹⁻²² "You're familiar with the command to the ancients, 'Do not murder.' I'm telling you that anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder. Carelessly call a brother 'idiot!' and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell 'stupid!' at a sister and you are on the brink of hellfire. **The simple moral fact is that words kill.***

7. What's the two actions James requires in v21?

***a. Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent.** The Greek is to "put off" like putting off filthy clothes. And of course, instead, we are to clothe ourselves in righteousness [clothe ourselves in the Lord Jesus Romans 13:14 says] by applying God's Word.*

Moral filth: "The stinking filth of a pestilent ulcer. Sin is the devil's vomit, the soul's excrement, the superfluity or garbage of naughtiness [wickedness]... as it is here called by an allusion to the garbage of the sacrifices cast into the brook Kedron, that is, the town-ditch." (Trapp)

b. Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

*As the Apostle Paul says “Holy Scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation” (2 Tim 3:15); in other words, God’s Word tells us that we must **repent** of our sins and **believe** in Jesus’ death and resurrection (Mark 1:15); and that Jesus is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). James says we must humbly accept God’s Word planted in us; and through His Spirit and being born again (John 3) become followers of Jesus, so that we are saved for Heaven.*

*To humbly accept God’s word is to be **teachable** rather than to think we know it all already!*

*In essence **James’ two actions in v21 echo Jesus’ call to “Repent and Believe”** in Mark 1:15.*

8. What’s so important about the Word in v21?

It saves us for Heaven – the alternative is Hell!

9. What’s the difference between hearing and listening?

*The difference between **hearing** and **listening** lies in the level of conscious effort and engagement involved:*

- ***Hearing** is a passive, physiological process. It's the act of perceiving sound through the ears, a natural function of the auditory system. You don't need to focus or pay attention to hear sounds; it's something that happens automatically as long as you're awake and your hearing is intact.*
- ***Listening**, on the other hand, is an active process. It involves paying attention to, interpreting, and understanding the sounds you hear. Listening requires focus, concentration, and often an intention to engage with the message being communicated.*

*In short, **hearing** is something you do with your ears; while **listening** is something you do with your mind and your heart!*

10. What does James say listening is in v22? (cf. Matt 7:21)

*James says we must receive God’s word as **doers**, not merely **hearers**. To take comfort in the fact you have heard God’s word, when you haven’t done it, is to deceive yourself. The word for deceive in Greek is used in mathematics for when*

someone has miscalculated. Professing Christians who are content only with hearing the word of God and not do it, have made a serious spiritual miscalculation!

It was common in the ancient world for people to hear a teacher. If you followed the teacher and tried to live out what the teacher said, you were called a **disciple** of that teacher. Jesus called disciples who were **doers**, not mere hearers.

Jesus said this in Matthew 7:21: ²¹ *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven”.*

Jesus used this same point to conclude His great Sermon on the Mount. He said that the one who heard the word without doing it was like a man who built his house on the sand, but the one who heard God’s word and did it was like a man whose house was built on a rock. The one who both heard and did God’s word could withstand the inevitable storms of life and the judgment of eternity (Matthew 7:24-27).

“A teacher or preacher may give an eloquent address on the gospel, or explain ably some O.T. prophecy about Christ, but when the sermon is done, it is not done; something remains to be done by the hearers in life, and if they content themselves with sentimental admiration or with enjoying the emotional or mental treat, they need not imagine that this is true religion.” (Moffatt)

*“I fear we have many such in all congregations; admiring hearers, affectionate hearers, attached hearers, but all the while unblest hearers, because they are not **doers of the word**.” (Spurgeon)*

v. *“You know the old story; I am half ashamed to repeat it again, but it is so pat to the point. When Donald came out of kirk sooner than usual, Sandy said to him, ‘What, Donald, is the sermon all done?’ ‘No,’ said Donald, ‘it is all said, but it is not begun to be done yet.’” (Spurgeon)*

*James does well to remind us that what we hear in the **holy place** must be lived in the **market place**; or there is no point in hearing it at all (Barclay)*

11. What analogy does James use in verses 23 and 24 for someone who doesn’t listen to the Word?

James uses the analogy of a mirror. He says that the person who only hears God's Word without doing what God's Word says is like a person who looks in the mirror and then completely forgets what they saw in the mirror. They might as well have not bothered to look in the mirror, likewise the person listening to God's Word without doing it, might as well have not bothered to listen to God's Word. The information they received did not do any good in their life!

12. What might the perfect law be that gives freedom (v25) (cf. Matthew 5:17; 7:24-27; John 8:32; Rom 13:10; Gal 2:4)

The perfect law that gives freedom is God's Word. God's Word is the absolute truth and there is freedom in following the truth as opposed to following the 'false truth' of this world!

*"The whole doctrine of Scripture, or especially the gospel, called a law in Romans 3:27, both as it is a rule, and by reason of the power it hath over the heart; and a law of liberty, because **it shows the way to the best liberty, freedom from sin, the bondage of the ceremonial law, the rigor of the moral, and from the wrath of God.**" (Poole)*

God's Law has freedom because a) it shows us how we can be free from sin through Jesus rather than any effort of our own, since we can't keep the law perfectly ourselves; b) it frees us from the bondage of trying to keep the law and failing; so that we can be free to live a life that pleases God knowing that we are already saved by Jesus c) it frees us from the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament because Jesus has fulfilled all the law perfectly; d) it frees us from God's wrath over sin; and e) it frees us from Hell!

Matthew 5:17 – Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

Matthew 7:24-27 – ²⁴ "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his

house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

*John 8:32 - ³² Then you will know the truth, and **the truth will set you free.**”*

Romans 13:10 - Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.

*Galatians 2:4 - This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on **the freedom we have in Christ Jesus** and to make us slaves.*

Verses 26-27 show the outworking of a truly godly person; people will know them by their lifestyle. If they have uncontrolled tongues (and so are often exploding in anger or quarrelling or gossiping or being hyper-critical) then all their religious practices are worthless! They really don't love God with all their heart.

13. What two things in v27 is God looking for in a truly “**religious**” person in the correct sense? (cf. Matt 25:36; Rom 12:2; James 4:4; 2 Peter 1:4)

The two things that show a person is truly religious are:

- a. To look after orphans and widows in their distress*
- b. To keep oneself from being polluted by the world*

What James is saying is to be doers of the word, we must a) show mercy and compassion to people; and b) not get sucked in by the evil/wicked practices in this world! That's the genuine outworking of our faith!

A genuine walk with God shows itself in simple, practical ways. It helps the needy and keeps itself unstained by the world's corruption.

Note: religion is not the best translation in v27 – the Greek word (thrēskeia) is better translated “worshipping” or “religious worshipping”

*“The Biblical Ritualism, the pure external worship, the true embodiment of the inward principles of religion is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. **Charity and purity are the two great garments of Christianity.**” (Spurgeon)*

“True religion does not merely give something for the relief of the distressed, but it visits them, it takes the oversight of them, it takes them under its care. It goes to their houses and speaks to their hearts; it relieves their wants, sympathizes with them in their distresses, instructs them in divine things, and recommends them to God. And all this it does for the Lord’s sake. This is the religion of Christ.” (Clarke)

All through history humankind has tried to make ritual and liturgy a substitute for sacrifice and service. They have made religion splendid within the Church at the expense of neglecting it outside the Church. This is by no means to say that it is wrong to seek to offer the noblest and the most splendid worship within God’s House; but it is to say that all such worship is empty and idle unless it sends a man out to love God by loving others and to walk more purely in the tempting ways of the world! (Barclay)

*Matthew 25:36 – I needed clothes and **you clothed me**, I was sick and **you looked after me**, I was in prison and **you came to visit me**.*

*Romans 12:2 – **Do not conform to the pattern of this world** but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

*James 4:4 – You adulterous people, don’t you know that **friendship with the world means enmity against God**? Therefore, **anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God**.*

*2 Peter 1:4 - Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having **escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires**.*

14. In what way would orphans and widows be vulnerable?

- a. **Emotional vulnerability** – Orphans experience the loss of their parents, while widows may experience the loss of a spouse. This grief can lead to emotional instability, depression, anxiety, and trauma. Both orphans and widows may feel socially isolated, particularly if they lack strong family or community support systems.
- b. **Economic vulnerability** – Orphans may lose the financial support they received from their parents, leaving them in poverty or at risk of being unable to meet

basic needs. Widows may also struggle financially if they were dependent on their spouse for income, especially if the widow does not have any income of their own!

- c. **Social and legal vulnerability** – Both orphans and widows are at risk of exploitation. Orphans may be subject to abuse, trafficking, or forced labor, while widows may be vulnerable to exploitation by relatives or others who take advantage of their situation. In some cultures, widows, especially those who are childless, may lose inheritance rights or property, leaving them homeless or destitute. Orphans may face challenges in terms of guardianship or inheritance as well.*
- d. **Health vulnerability** – The emotional stress of losing a loved one can manifest physically, leading to conditions such as chronic illness, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Orphans may not have access to healthcare or proper nutrition, especially if they are living in institutions or under the care of relatives who are unable to provide adequate care.*

Widows and orphans are the most needy segment of the Church. Since they are unable to reciprocate in any way, caring for them clearly demonstrates true, sacrificial, Christian love!

15. Could looking after orphans and widows extend further than our local community? If so, how?

Yes, it can extend beyond our local community and can even include people or communities in Australia and overseas who live in poor conditions: lack of food, water, shelter, education and finances. Also, victims of natural disasters like famine, flood, volcanoes, earthquakes and cyclones, need our help!

Examples of organizations we could support: World Vision, UNICEF, OXFAM, PRESAID, JERICO ROAD, ALLOWAH, Samaritans, Bible Society and APWM. Also, support of war-torn countries like Palestine and Ukraine.

Also, some of our Mission Partners like Mick Alley in Kenya are in situations where they are constantly in contact with the vulnerable; hence our sponsorship of the little Kenyan boy, Senteyio.

16. What's the danger of us living "in" the world?

The dangers of living in the world are:

- a. We compromise our moral and spiritual standards in a desire to fit in with non-believing friends and family (Romans 12:2). We please people ahead of pleasing God!*
- b. We can be distracted by the world and chase too much after wealth, possession and success – and try to please two masters (Matthew 6:24)*
- c. We neglect our witness – we are God's treasured possession, a royal priesthood, a holy nation' (1 Peter 2:9) and we are called to make disciples (Matthew 28:16-20)*
- d. We give into the temptations of the world and fall into sin (1 John 2:16)*
- e. We can get led astray by false teaching (2 Timothy 4:3-4)*
- f. We can build up treasures on Earth instead of treasures in Heaven (Matthew 6:21)*
- g. We can neglect our quiet times with God in prayer and reading His Word*
- h. We can give up meeting together (Hebrews 10:25) and replace this with worldly pursuits.*

17. Read the following Old Testament passages and explain how they relate to **James 1:19-27**...

Micah 6:6-8

***Micah 6:6-8** focuses on the idea that God does not desire empty sacrifices but seeks true humility, justice, mercy, and walking humbly with Him. It calls for an authentic, heartfelt relationship with God that goes beyond ritualistic acts.*

***James 1:19-27** similarly highlights the need for believers to not only hear God's Word but to act on it. James urges Christians to be "doers of the Word" and live out their faith through practical acts of kindness, self-control, and purity, emphasizing that faith should be reflected in how we live.*

Together, both passages stress that genuine faith and relationship with God require more than external observances. True devotion exhibits humility, righteous living and active obedience to God's commands.

Isaiah 1:16-17

Isaiah 1:16-17 and James 1:19-27 both call for a faith that is active and rooted in righteousness, rather than mere ritual or outward appearances.

***Isaiah 1:16-17** condemns empty religious rituals and calls for moral transformation. God desires His people to seek justice, defend the oppressed, care for the vulnerable, and live in a way that reflects His holiness, rather than offering meaningless sacrifices.*

***James 1:19-27** similarly emphasizes that true religion is not about just hearing the Word but doing it. James instructs believers to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and to care for orphans and widows, reflecting the kind of practical righteousness God desires.*

Both passages highlight that true devotion to God is shown through actions—living out justice, mercy, and purity—not just through religious observances.

Zechariah 7:8-10

***Zechariah 7:8-10** speaks to God's desire for justice, kindness, and humility. It warns against oppression, deceit, and selfishness, urging the people to show mercy, care for the vulnerable (like orphans and widows), and stop harbouring evil in their hearts.*

***James 1:19-27** similarly stresses the need to act on God's Word, not just hear it.*

James emphasizes practical righteousness, urging believers to control their speech, care for the needy, and live in purity, reflecting God's values in their actions.

Both passages stress that true devotion to God involves living justly and mercifully—caring for others, especially the vulnerable—and aligning one's actions with God's will. It's not enough to go through religious motions; faith must be expressed through tangible acts of righteousness and compassion.

Psalms 15:1-5

***Psalms 15:1-5** describes the characteristics of those who can dwell with God: they speak truth, live with integrity, avoid harm, honour others, and act justly. It highlights the inner and outer qualities of a righteous person, including honesty, fairness, and integrity.*

James 1:19-27 similarly calls believers to live out their faith through righteous actions. James urges them to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, embodying virtues like humility and self-control. He also stresses that true religion is marked by caring for orphans and widows, and by keeping oneself unstained from the world.

Both passages teach that true devotion to God is demonstrated through moral actions—living with integrity, truth, and justice—rather than mere external rituals. Faith must be reflected in how we treat others and live our daily lives.

Note: The number one thing non-Christians say about Christians is that Christians are hypocrites – they say Christians don't practice what they preach and don't practice what they stand for. That's why our actions have to be pure and match the behaviour of the One we follow, Jesus! WWJD!

*Jesus says in Matthew 7:16 - **By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?***

What's the **BIG IDEA** of James 1:19-27?

Genuine faith is active and demonstrated

OR

True Christianity is seen in its works



What light globe moment did you have?

What **questions** do you have about the passages in this study?

Share the **verse** that had a special meaning to you in this study?

James 1:22 - Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

Finish in prayer: Pray that we would be people who listen (not just hear) to God's Word and respond accordingly. Pray that we would model ourselves on Jesus' teaching, keeping a tight rein on our tongues. Pray that we would reach out to the needy in our community (and beyond) and avoid the '***pollution***' of this world.

Study 3 – Partiality and Love

James 2:1-13

(Sermon on 16-Feb 2025)

Before we begin, read Luke 10:25-37

In this parable the ‘expert’ in the law asks Jesus “who is my neighbour” (v29) and notice how Jesus answers the lawyer’s question with a question of his own: “**Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?**” (v37).

Don’t you just love the way Jesus turns things upside down – it’s not a matter of “**who is my neighbour**”, but “**who am I a neighbour to**”!

Jesus always turns things upside down and answers the ‘expert’ in the law’s question with His own question. It’s great how Jesus does that.

The end of the parable would have been quite a shock to the ‘expert’ in the law. After the priest and the Levite had failed to help the man who had been beaten and robbed; the ‘expert’ might have expected Jesus to say that a Pharisee or ‘expert’ of the law was the one who helped the poor man. But no! Jesus turns things completely upside down by saying a Samaritan (an enemy of Jesus’ Jewish listeners) is the one who helped the poor beaten man! You can imagine the people gasping as Jesus finishes the parable – “A Samaritan helped, surely not!”. Jesus taught everyone that it’s not a question of us choosing who our neighbour is based on their socio-economic or political status or race but us choosing to be a neighbour to EVERYONE. In being a neighbour and showing the love of Jesus to everyone, we will win people for Jesus.

1. Who have you been a neighbour to lately? Have you been selective in who you regard as your neighbour?

If we look at the neighbours around our church building; they are of varied demographic: poor; comfortable; unemployed; employed; educated; uneducated; mental health challenges; addicts; Indigenous, Australians and migrants.

We should not be selective who we are neighbourly to; we need to show the love of Jesus to all our neighbours, regardless of their status.

Read James 2:1-4

2. If the Prime Minister and a homeless person come to church on Sunday, will you welcome and treat them the same? Why/Why not?

The Bible clearly teaches (see verses below) that we should show the love of Jesus to ALL people regardless of socio-economic status. A person's worth is not defined by their job title; wealth; or situation but by their inherent dignity as a human being made in God's image!

The Prime Minister and the homeless person should be welcomed and treated exactly the same if they attend our church on any given Sunday!

*James 1:1 – “My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.” **James calls Christians as believers in our Lord Jesus not to show favouritism in any way.***

This is well supported by the following verses...

*Deuteronomy 10:17 - For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, **who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.***

*Acts 10:34 - Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that **God does not show favoritism**”*

*1 Samuel 16:7 - But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. **The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.**”*

*Galatians 3:28 - “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for **you are all one in Christ Jesus.**”*

*1 John 4:20-21 - “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: **Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.**”*

Proverbs 14:31 - "Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God."

*Matthew 7:12 – The **Golden Rule** - "So in everything, **do to others what you would have them do to you**, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."*

3. The context of verses 1-4 could well be a dispute between a rich believer and a poor believer, and the dispute is being heard at a meeting (v2) of the church. And it's not a fair hearing; the rich man gets a good seat (v3), but the poor man has to stand or sit at the feet of those hearing the dispute (v4). How quick are we to judge a book by its cover? How quick are we to pre-judge?

The situation described in verses 1-4 is an unfair one. The rich believer is identified as such by his gold ring (In Roman society the wealthy wore rings on their left hand in great profusion. A sign of wealth, rings were worn with great ostentation. There were even shops in Rome where rings could be rented for special occasions) and fine clothes and is given preferential seating whilst the poor believer is either made to stand or sit at the feet of the person listening to them in the assembly.

*To favor the **rich man** over the **poor man** in the way James described shows a deep prejudice among the Christians in the Assembly; they have judged purely on physical/outward criteria and not spiritual/inward criteria.*

We can too quickly judge by outward appearances without getting to know a person. It's all too easy to write people off by how they "look" without getting to know who they really are.

As Jesus says in John 7:24 – "Stop judging by mere appearances but instead judge correctly."

As Peter says in 1 Peter 3:3-4 - "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight."

4. How should a true church operate in this regard?

The true church should welcome all people as God's children – all are equal in God's eyes.

*The Church should operate as in Galatians 3:28 – “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for **you are all one in Christ Jesus.**”*

And also, Colossians 3:11 – “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.”

And Romans 2:11 – “For God does not show favoritism.” Therefore, neither should the church!

Read James 2:5-7

5. In what way are the poor who love God rich?

*Though it is easy for us to show favouritism to the rich, God doesn't show them favouritism. In fact, their riches are an obstacle to the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:24), so there is a sense in which God specially blesses the poor of this world. Because the poor are **chosen to be rich in faith** because the **poor of this world** simply have more opportunities to trust God. Therefore, they may be far more **rich in faith** than the rich man. The rich man **might** trust God; but the poor man **must**... the poor man has no fortress in which to hide, except the two strong arms of God. The poor don't have the obstacles of wealth in their way and obstacles to dilute their faith in God. The rich tend to depend/rely on themselves; the poor have to depend/rely on God!*

6. Who's dragging who into court?

James reminds his readers that the rich often sin against them (they exploit you... they drag you to court). This is often because the love of money is the root of every kind of evil (1 Timothy 6:10).

7. How are 'they' (James' readers) dishonouring the poor? (v5)

They dishonour the poor by showing favouritism to the rich; but it's the rich who are exploiting them and dragging them to court; not the poor! And besides the poor, as we have said, are equal to the rich, in God's eyes.

They are also dishonoring the poor by insulting the very ones God has chosen!

8. In what way was/is the church becoming like the '**world**'? (v6-7)

The Church in James' time were:

- **Showing Favouritism Toward the Rich:** James is criticizing the church for showing favouritism toward the wealthy. This reflected the culture's tendency to elevate the rich and powerful while marginalizing the poor. In the world, wealth often brought status, respect, and influence, and unfortunately, the church was mirroring this pattern by treating the wealthy with special honour. This was a worldly mindset, rooted in outward appearances and social standing, rather than the values of the Kingdom of God, where humility, justice, and love are paramount.
- **Exploiting the Poor:** James points out the irony that the wealthy, whom the church was favouring, were often the very ones who were oppressing the poor. The rich were taking advantage of believers by dragging them into court and blaspheming God's name and the name "Christian", while all the time the church was elevating them based on their status. This shows how the church was adopting the world's values, focusing on external wealth and power rather than God's justice and mercy.
- **Dishonouring God's Name:** By treating the wealthy with preferential treatment, the church was dishonouring the very name of Christ they claimed to serve. The rich were often the ones responsible for exploiting others, and by elevating them, the church was, in effect, overlooking this behaviour. This mirrors the "worldly" system that often tolerates or even rewards injustice when it is wrapped in wealth or power.

The Church TODAY:

- **Follow Worldly Standards of Success and Power:** The church today can sometimes fall into the trap of valuing outward success, wealth, and status, much like the secular world does. This can manifest in treating certain people with more respect or giving them leadership positions based on their wealth, influence, or social status, rather than evaluating people based on their Christian faith, character, love, or devotion to Christ.
- **Neglecting the Poor and Marginalized:** Like in James' time, churches today can sometimes neglect the poor, the marginalized, or those without power. The "world" often values people based on their economic or social standing, but the

Kingdom of God calls us to value humility, justice, and love, regardless of a person's wealth or position.

Read James 2:8-11

9. What is the 'royal law'?

*The "royal law" is the **law of love**, specifically the command to **love your neighbour as yourself**. This command is often called the **Great Commandment** and is found in both the Old and New Testaments:*

- **Leviticus 19:18** (Old Testament): "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord."
- **Matthew 22:37-39** (New Testament): "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

The term "royal" suggests that this law has a special, kingly authority. It is the law of the King—God Himself. Jesus not only gave this command but also modeled it through His life and sacrificial death. It is "royal" in that it comes from the highest authority (God) and should therefore be held in the highest regard.

The law of loving your neighbor as yourself is considered the essence of living in accordance with God's will and is central to the Christian faith. James is saying love becomes the guiding principle for how believers act towards others, transcending all other commands.

If we love our neighbour as ourself

- **Selfless love** - We care for others with the same concern and care we have for our own well-being. This involves selflessness, putting others' needs above our own desires or comfort
- **Equality and Compassion** - It means treating **all people** with dignity and respect, regardless of their background, status, or condition. Everyone is deserving of love because they are created in the image of God.

- **Practical** – Our love for others is not just a feeling or an abstract ideal—it's a **practical, actionable love**. It means helping, serving, and showing kindness in tangible ways, as Jesus demonstrated in His own ministry.

10. How is showing favouritism contrary to the '**royal law**'?

*Showing favoritism is contrary to the **royal law** because it violates the command to "love your neighbor as yourself." Favoritism treats some people better than others based on outward appearances, wealth, or status, while the royal law calls for **equal love and respect** for all people, regardless of their external circumstances. Favoritism shows partiality, whereas the royal law demands impartial, unconditional love.*

11. What's the problem with trying to keep the law?

We can't pick and choose which commands in God's law we keep and which commands we ignore or don't keep. We can't play favourites with which law we keep.

*We can't say, "I like God's command against murder, so I'll keep that one. But I don't like His command against adultery, so I will disregard it." God cares about the **whole law**. We have to keep all of the commandments; and James says if we break one of the commandments, we've broken God's Law. God requires us to keep the Law perfectly and because we can't keep the Law perfectly, we have to come to the only **ONE** who can obey the law perfectly; namely Jesus!*

12. Is there partiality in the law? (v10-11)

God does not have a favourite commandment; they all must be kept. "You shall not commit adultery" is just as important as "You shall not murder".

13. **Ponder:** perhaps James chose "**you shall not murder**" for a reason in v11.

Wouldn't mistreating the poor and showing favouritism to the rich, be paramount to '**killing**' the poor? What do you think?

*James' reference to "you shall not murder" in verse 11 might be intentional to emphasize the severity of showing favoritism. **Mistreating the poor and favoring the rich** can be seen as a form of **spiritual or social "killing"**—devaluing and oppressing the poor, denying them dignity and justice. By ignoring or marginalizing their needs,*

the church may effectively "kill" their opportunities for care, respect, and equality. This highlights how serious favoritism is, as it dehumanizes others and goes against the core of God's love, which upholds the value of all people.

Read James 2:12-13

14. What's the point being made by James in verses 12-13? (cf. Matt 7:15-23; Luke 6:43-45; Deut 4:31; Micah 6:8; Zec: 7:9; Mat 5:7; 7:2; Matt 6:14-15; 18:21-35) *James reminds believers that they will be judged by God's law, which is rooted in **mercy**, not just legalism. This law brings freedom because it sets us free from the bondage of sin and calls us to live with love and mercy towards others.*

*James stresses that if we are **merciful** toward others, God will show us mercy when we are judged. But if we are **harsh** and **unmerciful** (e.g., showing favoritism), we will face **judgment without mercy**.*

*Our actions and words should reflect the **mercy of God**, especially in how we treat others, particularly the poor and marginalized. If we show mercy, we align ourselves with God's heart, and mercy will "triumph" over judgment when we stand before Him.*

*Matthew 7:15-23 - ¹⁵ "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, **by their fruit you will recognize them.***

*²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, **but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.** ²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'*

*Luke 6:43-45 - ⁴³ “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. ⁴⁴ Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briers. ⁴⁵ **A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.***

*Deuteronomy 4:31 - For the **Lord your God is a merciful God**; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your ancestors, which he confirmed to them by oath.*

*Micah 6:8 - He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? **To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.***

*Zechariah 7:9 - This is what the Lord Almighty said: ‘**Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.**’*

*Matthew 7:9 - **Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.***

*Matthew 7: 2 - For in the **same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.***

*Matthew 6:14-15 - ¹⁴ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But **if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.***

*Matthew 18:32-35 - ³² “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. ³⁵ **“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”***

*In essence James 2:12-13 echoes the Golden Rule from Matthew 7:12 - **So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.***

15. Read the following Old Testament passages and explain how they relate to **James 2:1-13...**

Genesis 37:1-4

Genesis 37:1-4 is the start of the amazing story of Joseph in Egypt. The story would not have even gotten off the ground if Jacob had not played favourites and loved Joseph more than his eleven brothers and one sister. He showed this favouritism by giving Joseph a special multicolored ornate robe. This fueled Joseph brothers' hatred of Joseph and led to Joseph being sold into slavery in Egypt and led to his brothers lying to their father, Jacob, and telling him that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

The story of Joseph is a classic example of the terrible harm showing favouritism can cause!

Leviticus 19:15-18

Both Leviticus 19:15-18 and James 2:1-13 emphasize justice, impartiality, and love for one's neighbor, particularly the poor. Leviticus teaches that there should be no partiality in judgment, while James addresses the specific sin of favoritism within the church. Both passages uphold the royal law—to love your neighbor as yourself—as the standard for Christian conduct, urging believers to treat all people with equal respect and dignity, regardless of their social or economic status. Showing favoritism is not just unjust but is a violation of God's command to love all people equally.

Isaiah 58:6-9

*Both **Isaiah 58:6-9** and **James 2:1-13** call God's people to a faith that is not just about external rituals or beliefs but about **living justly** and **loving others**—particularly the poor and oppressed. Both passages denounce favoritism and injustice, calling for a faith that actively cares for the marginalized and treats all people with dignity and respect. The **true worship of God** is shown in how we live, how we treat others, and how we **reflect His mercy and justice**.*

What's the **BIG IDEA** of James 2:1-13?

Impartial love reflects true faith

OR

True faith shows no favouritism



What light globe moment did you have?

What **questions** do you have about the passages in this study?

Share the verse that had a special meaning to you in this study?

James 2:8 – "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right."

Finish in prayer: Pray for God's wisdom in how we deal with people. Pray that we are not people who are judgmental nor people who play favourites. Pray that we are merciful, compassionate and kind to all.

Study 4 – Faith and Deeds

James 2:14-26

(Sermon on 23-Feb 2025)

Read James 2:14

1. In this verse, James poses two very important questions. What answer do you think he is expecting to these questions?

Answer 1: *The first question James poses is: ‘What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?’. The answer James is expecting is that ‘faith that has no deeds is useless!’*

Answer 2: *The second question James poses is: “Can such faith save them?”. The answer James is expecting is ‘no, such faith, can’t save them’*

2. What are your answers to these questions?

Answer 1: *If a person is “faith-centric” or listens to the Reformers, then salvation is by faith alone (sola fide). They might be inclined to express that faith is an internal, personal matter that does not require external proof.*

Answer 2: *Some might answer “Yes, faith alone can save”, adhering to the idea that salvation is based entirely on belief and deeds or works are totally irrelevant to the salvation process. This is a common answer for people who follow Paul’s teaching on justification by faith alone; especially someone like Martin Luther, whose context was to ‘protest’ (hence protestant) against the Roman Catholic’s work-based salvation.*

James seems to challenge the idea that faith can exist in isolation without deeds/works. James’ teaching here highlights the tension found in the Apostle Paul’s writings which talk about justification by faith apart from the works of the law (e.g., Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 3:28). However, James and Paul would both agree that genuine faith leads to a transformed life and in turn to righteous actions, but James focuses on visible fruit.

Also, it's fair to say that works of the law (as Paul would put it) is different from showing evidence of your faith (which is what James is talking about).

James wrote to Christians from a Jewish background that discovered the glory of salvation by faith. They knew the exhilaration of freedom from works-righteousness. But they then went to the other extreme of thinking that works didn't matter at all.

Read James 2:15-17

3. What example does James use to illustrate his point?

He uses the example of someone saying to a person without clothes and food, "go in peace, keep warm and well fed" but doesn't help the person at all!

4. What's James' argument by using this example?

James' argument is how can someone have faith and not take any action in such a situation as this; he argues that the person's faith is a dead faith! That is, it is not an active faith!

5. **Discuss:** Doesn't Paul argue in Galatians 5 that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus – and not by works? Is James saying something different? Maybe Galatians 5:6 will help?

In the context of Galatians 5, Paul is arguing that we have freedom in Christ and he is arguing against the idea that the Galatians Gentiles should be circumcised so that they become "Jews" when they are already following Jesus. Paul says that circumcision is working to obey the Law which they can't fully keep; only Jesus can. Therefore, all that is necessary is that they have faith in Jesus and not get bogged down in the Law of the Old Testament, that the Jews follow. Paul is arguing that obeying the Law won't save them because no-one can keep it fully. The only thing that will save them is to have faith in the one they follow; namely Jesus.

*However, in verse 6, Paul says what really counts is '**faith expressing itself through love**'. So, in essence Paul and James are saying the same thing. James says, 'faith without deeds is dead' and Paul says, 'faith needs to be expressed through love'. This lines up with Jesus teaching in Matthew 25 verse 40 '**Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me**' and*

verse 45 *'Truly I tell you, whatever you **did not do** for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'* – there needs to be some sort of proof of our faith to show it's genuine and not mere words/lip service.

Read James 2:18-19

6. James now gives his '**theological**' argument, and it requires balancing the arguments of scripture. Take some time reading and discussing the following passages, before drawing conclusions on James' argument:

Romans 3:28

*For we maintain that a person is **justified by faith** apart from the works of the law. Note: the works of the law are: observing ceremonial laws such as sacrifices and feasts; following purity laws such as dietary restrictions and cleanliness laws; and keeping the moral laws of 10 commandments. The works or actions James is talking about are the outworking of our faith like showing the love of Jesus to people and he is not referring to works of the law that Paul is referring to.*

Hebrews 11:1-40

This chapter is a catalogue of how various Old Testament characters' faith was accompanied by actions/deeds. For example, Abel offered a better sacrifice, Noah built the Ark, Abraham obeys God's call etc.

Matthew 7:16-17

¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. Jesus is teaching that people will know we are Christians by the spiritual fruit we produce. This teaches that our faith must be accompanied by actions/deeds.

James 3:13

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 is teaching that with

wisdom and understanding, comes a good life which is demonstrated by humble deeds. Again, teaching faith is accompanied by actions/deeds.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

By saying the “Lord our God, the Lord is one” – it emphasizes that there is only one true God and we live for Him alone; and so, our life of faith must be lived out (with actions/deeds) for Him!

God calls Israel (and us) to love Him with all of our being; this implies some sort of actions/deeds.

Mark 12:29-30

²⁹ “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ Jesus is repeating what Deuteronomy 6:4-5 says.

1 Corinthians 8:4-6

⁴ So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that “An idol is nothing at all in the world” and that “**There is no God but one.**” ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), ⁶ yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and **for whom we live**; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and **through whom we live.**

Paul is warning against idolatry and confirming there is only one true God, **through whom we live** and one Lord Jesus Christ, **through whom we live! We must live our life of faith through God and His Son; so, our faith is active!**

Matthew 8:29

What do you want with us, Son of God?” they shouted. “Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?”

While this verse doesn't directly speak about the relationship between faith and works in the human sense, it does offer a contrast. The demons, recognizing Jesus as the "Son of God," express belief in His divine authority and power. However, their "faith" is not accompanied by any transformation or obedience to God's will. They acknowledge His identity, but their belief doesn't lead to any change in their actions or alignment with God's purposes. **Any belief in Jesus must have some transformation action to prove it's a genuine belief.** As James says in James 2:19 – "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder"

Luke 4:34

Go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" Same answer is Matthew 8:29.

7. How would you summarize the teaching of '**faith and works**'?

*Faith and works are profoundly connected in the Christian life. Faith is the trust and belief in God, especially in the person and work of Jesus Christ for our salvation, while works are the actions that naturally flow from our faith. Genuine faith is not just intellectual acknowledgment but is **always active**, expressing itself in obedience to God's commands and in loving others. As James 2:26 says, "faith without works is dead," which means that genuine faith results in a transformed life that produces good deeds.*

Read James 2:20-25

8. What's James' argument regarding Abraham being considered righteous?

James' argument is that Abraham's faith in God was proven by His willingness to do whatever God said (even sacrifice his son, Isaac) no matter how crazy it might seem. Abraham's faith was such that he trusted God had a plan – as he says, "God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering" (Genesis 22:8). And the fact that Abraham obeyed God in faith and did exactly what God said offering Isaac on the altar; was the reason that God considered Abraham righteous (right with God and approved by God). Abraham's faith was accompanied by works.

9. What's James' argument regarding Rahab?

James has a similar argument about Rahab. She hid Joshua's spies and made sure they were not discovered. Rahab too, had faith in God's plan and her faith was accompanied by actions. Even though it put her life in danger; she trusted God would protect her; which He did.

The lesson from Abraham is clear: if we believe in God, we will do what He tells us to do. The lesson from Rahab is also clear: if we believe in God, we will help His people, even when it costs us something.

"He designedly put together two persons so different in their character, in order more clearly to shew, that no one, whatever may have been his or her condition, nation, or class in society, has ever been counted righteous without good works." (Calvin, cited in Hiebert)

Read James 2:26

10. James gives a short and clear summary of his teaching in v26. What do you think about this summary?

V26 - As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. This is a perfect summary. Our faith has to be more than head or intellectual knowledge; it has to be heart and hands too!

11. Has your view on faith and works changed now that you have completed this study?

My view has not changed. I have always held that our faith must produce fruit and show a transformed life of service!

12. **Digging deeper: Read Ephesians 2:1-10.** Do verses 8-10 help us with understanding James and Paul's teaching? Are they the same?

*VV8-10 - ⁸ For it is by grace you have been **saved, through faith**—and this is not from yourselves, it is the **gift of God**— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Paul is saying we are saved by grace through our faith and even our faith is a gift from God. Paul says we can't work our way to Heaven; our works cannot save us. However, Paul goes on to say that we are God's handiwork, created in Jesus to do good works, that God has already prepared for us.

So, a good way to state this is that we are saved BY GRACE, THROUGH FAITH, FOR GOOD WORKS. All three work together, grace, faith and good works. But they have to be in that order.

Read Genesis 22:1-18

13. How does this passage relate to James 2:14-26?

In Genesis 22:1-18, Abraham is commanded by God to sacrifice his son Isaac. And remember, Abraham had waited 25 years for God to fulfill the promise of a son; and now God tells Abraham to sacrifice this son!

Abraham's faith in God led him to obey God's command, even when it seemed impossible, trusting that God would fulfill His promises. This act of obedience demonstrated that Abraham's faith was not just belief but was actively expressed through his willingness to sacrifice Isaac.

James 2:14-26 parallels this by teaching that faith without works is dead. James uses Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac as an example of faith made complete by action. Both passages highlight that true faith is not passive; it results in obedience and works that align with God's will. In both cases, the faith is proven through actions—Abraham's trust in God led him to obey, and James teaches that our faith must be proven by our actions for it to be genuine.

What's the **BIG IDEA** of James 2:14-26?

Genuine faith is proven by our love and obedience to God



What light globe moment did you have?

What **questions** do you have about the passages in this study?

Share the verse that had a special meaning to you in this study?

V26 – As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

Finish in prayer: Pray that our faith would be expressed through love and that we would be receptive to the Spirit's leading as we live out our faith doing the good works that God has prepared in advance for us to do.

Study 5 – Taming the Tongue

James 3:1-12

(Sermon on 02-Mar 2025)

Before we start...

Have you ever wished you hadn't said something?

Have you ever wished you could take back what you said?

Plenty of times! We need to take on board what James said in chapter 1:19 – “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry”

Words are like putting nails in the fence – even when you take the nails out – there are holes left behind. Our unkind words can leave holes in people too.

Words are also like a tube of toothpaste – you can't put the toothpaste back in the tube – likewise you can't put words back in your mouth – you can't unsay what you said!

Have you witnessed (firsthand or otherwise) the damage caused by the tongue?

Share your experiences (if not too painful) with your group.

One prime example of what the words of the media did was to stockbroker Rene Rivkin who was convicted of insider trading and sentenced to weekend detention. The media went to town on him; not realizing he suffered from bi-polar and he eventually took his own life.

We also see the damage cyber bullying on social media has on teenagers who at best then have low self-esteem and at worst take their lives.

The saying ‘stick and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me’ is a nice ideology but unfortunately completely untrue. What people say to us, and especially if it is unkind, unfair or untrue, really really hurts.

I've witnessed in my extended family more times than I'd like, where words have meant family members don't talk to each other, and sadly didn't reconcile before one or both passed away!

Personally, I have been the victim of verbal bullying and unfair criticism in ministry and I can tell you it's not easy to deal with; can bring you down; and lead to self-doubt and affect one's confidence.

Read James 3:1-2

1. What is James' warning about in v1 and why?

James is warning to think twice about being a teacher, because when you are a teacher, you are scrutinized more closely and judged more strictly; you can't afford to teach something invalid or else you will be jumped on. Being a teacher opens you up to being judged, criticized and attacked. Remember what happened to Jesus when He taught; and He was the fount of all truth; but many couldn't handle the truth!

2. Does James' observation about judging teachers more strictly still apply today? (cf. Luke 12:48b)

James 3:1 and Luke 12:48b both affirm that those who teach or lead others in faith are held to a higher standard. The truth they impart is not only about conveying knowledge but also about living in a way that aligns with God's will. Therefore, the responsibility is great, and the judgment is stricter for those who influence others' spiritual lives. Personally, each Sunday, I agonize on what I say and pray it lines up with what God's Word says!

3. Would that same observation apply to those who want to become counsellors or mentors?

Yes, it would also apply to counsellors and mentors. The words and guidance they provide have a significant impact on others, especially in spiritual and emotional matters. They must be careful to offer advice that aligns with God's truth, with wisdom and humility. Their advice can shape people's lives – and so they too must be careful of the message they convey.

4. Only Jesus was fully perfect; so, what is James saying in v2?

*James acknowledges that **we all stumble in many ways**, recognizing that no one is perfect, including himself. However, James is saying that **if someone is able to control what they say**, they demonstrate maturity and self-discipline, which is a mark of spiritual growth. The tongue, though small, has immense power, and mastering it is a sign of a well-controlled life. James is not saying perfection is possible, but rather that **striving for self-control and perfection**, especially in what we say, is essential in our spiritual journey.*

5. Why is James emphasizing perfection in v2?

Self-control is one of the fruit of the spirit; as Christians we need to strive to display all fruit of the spirit, especially as we grow and mature as Christians. Our goal should be toward perfection but understanding we can't become perfect until in this life.

Philippians 3:12-14: *"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, **I press on toward the goal to win the prize** for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."* Paul says perfection is a goal to pursue but not fully attainable in this life.

1 John 3:2 says: *"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. **But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him**, for we shall see him as he is."* The Bible teaches that **we will become fully like Christ** in our glorified state when He returns. This is when true perfection, or complete Christlikeness, will be realized.

6. How can we move closer to perfection? (cf. Psalm 140:1-3; Psalm 55:17; Col 4:2)

Psalm 140:1-3 asks for God's protection and rescue from evildoers, the violent, those who have evil plans in their hearts, those with poisonous tongues (like vipers!)

¹ *Rescue me, Lord, from evildoers;*

protect me from the violent,

² *who devise evil plans in their hearts*

and stir up war every day.

³ *They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent's;*

the poison of vipers is on their lips.

Psalm 55:7 – King David says, he cries out to God in His distress and God hears him: Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.

In Colossians 4:2 Paul advises us to be devoted to prayer and be watchful and thankful: Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

So, in summary, devotion to prayer brings us closer to God and closer to His will for us; and hence closer to perfection!

Read James 3:3-6

7. What four analogies does James use for demonstrating a small thing controlling or overpowering a large thing?

- a) A bit in a horse's mouth which can turn the whole animal around*
- b) A small rudder on a ship can turn the whole ship around even in stormy weather*
- c) A tongue is a small body part but it can cause damage to the whole body and make great boasts*
- d) A small spark can cause a huge forest fire!*

8. Why is the negative example of the fire emphasized more than the positive examples of the horse's bit or ship's rudder? (cf. Matt 15:11; 18-19)

The negative example of the fire is emphasized because of the damage that one spark does; similarly, the tongue can say something outrageous and cause major problems in families, churches and amongst friends.

As Jesus teaches in Matthew 15:

*V11- What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but **what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them***

*VV18-19-¹⁸ But the **things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them.** ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.*

James' point is what we say can cause enormous damage!

9. What are some examples of an untamed tongue? (cf. Proverbs 12:18-19; 13:3; 16:27; 17:7; 18:8; 25:18; Matthew 7:15)

*Proverbs 12:18-19 - The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment. **Reckless words are like stabbing someone with a sword!***

*Proverbs 13:3 - Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly will come to ruin. **Rash words bring ruin!***

Proverbs 16:27 - A scoundrel plots evil, and on their lips it is like a scorching fire. Evil plots are like a scorching fire. Look what happened with the Pharisees evil plot to kill Jesus!

Proverbs 17:7 - Eloquent lips are unsuited to a godless fool - how much worse lying lips to a ruler! This emphasizes the damage of lying!

Proverbs 18:8 - The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts. This is saying a person listening to the gossip is also affected by the gossip, not just the person being gossiped about! The MSG version says – it's like they've eaten junk food which is no good for them!

Proverbs 25:18 - Like a club or a sword or a sharp arrow is one who gives false testimony against a neighbor. This is saying the one who tells lies about someone; it's like they've used violence with a weapon against them!

Matthew 7:15 - Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. This is saying that those who say false prophecies are like ferocious wolves – they are very dangerous to the sheep (God's people)!

Read James 3:7-8

10. A couple of sayings: **“Loose lips sink ships”** and **“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me”** – how true or not are these sayings? *“Loose lips sink ships” is TRUE – if someone gossips, lies, slanders or teaches falsely in a church – it could cause great disunity in the church – especially if many believe in these false words. This could lead to a church even closing down or at best declining. Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me” – is TRUE when we think physically, sticks and stones can hurt us physically but names can't. But it is FALSE, when we think emotionally or spiritually – words can cause great damage to our emotional and spiritual well-being!*

11. Surely, it's impossible to control the tongue (v8), why bother?

Several reasons why we should bother to try and control our tongues:

- a. The tongue is so powerful in can cause great damage. As Christians we should not ever be wanting to cause damage with what we say. Therefore, we need to apply self-control*

- b. Part of our spiritual growth and goal is to become more like Jesus (Romans 8:29). If we have self-control with our tongue, it is a sign of growing more Christ-like. Do we want to be like Jesus or not? The answer hopefully is YES.*
- c. Back in James 1:5 – James called us to ask God for wisdom. We can ask God for wisdom to control what we say and think before we speak. What a novel idea!*

12. Why do you think James describes the tongue as '**restless evil**' and '**full of poison**'?

James using the metaphor "restless evil" to show the tongue is constantly active and unpredictable and unable to be controlled. It also reflects how our speech can be impulsive, erratic and often can lead to harm (intended or unintended).

James using the metaphor "full of poison" to show the toxic nature of words. Just like poison can cause slow and devastating harm to our bodies, likewise malicious and careless words inflict lasting damage on relationships, reputations and even on people's spiritual lives. Also poison spreads much like gossip, slander or any form of harmful speech. Also, the effects of poison are not always visible immediately, likewise the effects of poisonous speech might only be obvious over time.

Read James 3:9-10

13. Have you ever used your tongue in a contradictory manner as described in verses 9-10?

I think we have all had days where we have on the one hand prayed and/or sung God's praises and later in the same day cursed someone who has annoyed us; likewise, out of our mouths comes praise and bad language? James, rightly says, this should not be; it is hypocritical behaviour and if witnessed, may have people questioning whether we are a Christian with such behaviour.

14. Which speech pattern is your true identity?

I would like to say that praising God is my true identity but sometimes sadly the "former" me surfaces!

Read James 3:11-12

15. In these 2 verses James uses two examples to make his point; what are they?

James uses the example of fresh water and salt water flowing from the same spring; which is a contradiction. This is James' point praising and cursing from the same mouth is a contradiction.

James also uses the example fig trees bearing olives; and grapevines bearing figs. This is impossible and James' point is it should be equally impossible for Christians to be both praising and cursing!

16. If we are saying blessings to some people and saying curses to others; what does this say about the true person inside? And what does it say about the genuineness of the good stuff we say?

It says our hearts are not right and we are disingenuous. King David prays in his confession in Psalm 51, asks God to create in him a pure heart.

17. **Think it through:** If your tongue has caused hurt or started a '**forest fire**' of trouble. What can you do to rectify this if anything?

We can make it right with God and make it right with the person we have offended...

***Matthew 5:23-24 says** - "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."*

***Luke 17:3-4 says** - "So watch yourselves. If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying 'I repent,' you must forgive them."*

***Proverbs 28:13 says** - "Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy."*

***1 John 1:9 says** - "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

18. **Ponder:** You are in a group and person A says something to person B, which person C and D find offensive or hurtful, whereas person B who it was said to is

not offended in the least. Should person C and D be offended? And should person A do anything to rectify the situation?

*Person A needs to apologise to person C and D because they have been offended, regardless of the fact that they were not being spoken to directly; only person B was. **Ephesians 4:29** says “Do not let any **unwholesome talk** come out of your mouths, but **only what is helpful for building others** up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”*

***Romans 14:19** says “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”*

*And the **Golden Rule from Matthew 7:12** says - So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you*

19. Read the following Old Testament passages and explain how they relate to **James 3:1-12...**

Numbers 12:1-15

Both passages teach that our words have great power and can cause harm when misused. In Numbers 12, Aaron and Miriam’s criticism of Moses led to severe consequences – Miriam became leprous and was cast out of the camp for a while, whilst in James 3, the destructive potential of the tongue is highlighted. Both passages warn against careless speech and call for humility, respect, and control over our words.

1 Samuel 14:24-30

*In **1 Samuel 14**, Saul's careless words led to unnecessary conflict and almost caused harm to his son. Similarly, **James 3** warns that careless words, even if well-meaning, can result in major consequences. Both passages show how speech, when not thought through or controlled, can have far-reaching negative effects.*

2 Samuel 24:1-17

*In **2 Samuel 24**, David's prideful decision to carry out a self-serving unauthorized census, influenced by his thoughts and words, brought great harm to the nation. Similarly, **James 3** teaches that unchecked speech, particularly from those in authority, can cause destruction. Both emphasize the need for humility,*

repentance, and responsibility in leadership, whether in speech or action, to avoid negative consequences.

What's the **BIG IDEA** of James 3:1-12?

The tongue is powerful and must be controlled, as it can either build up or destroy.



What light globe moment did you have?

What **questions** do you have about the passages in this study?

Share the verse that had a special meaning to you in this study?

James 3:5: *"Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark."*

Finish in prayer: Pray for each other asking God for wisdom and self-control in all that we say to others.

Study 6 – Two Kinds of Wisdom

James 3:13-18

(Sermon on 09-Mar 2025)

Before we begin...

1. What's the difference, if any, between **knowledge** and **wisdom**?

*Knowledge is the accumulation of facts, information, and understanding. It's about **knowing** things—learning, studying, and memorizing details. Knowledge answers "what" and "how," providing the intellectual foundation for understanding the world around us.*

*Wisdom, on the other hand, is the ability to apply that knowledge effectively and appropriately in real-life situations. It's about **judgment**, discernment, and making sound decisions based on understanding. Wisdom answers "why" and "when," guiding us in how to use knowledge in a way that leads to good outcomes, personal growth, and harmony with others.*

Example: knowledge is knowing the stove is hot and wisdom is avoiding touching the hot stove, so you don't get burnt.

Example: knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit and wisdom is to not put tomatoes in a fruit salad.

2. Think of a time in your life when you didn't act wisely. Did you consult God before acting? Did you act in a Godly manner? Looking back on that event, how could you have acted more wisely? What was lacking in what you did? What lessons did you learn?

I can safely say that every time I have acted unwisely, it has been because I have not prayed before hand and have not sought His wisdom and guidance or I have not prayed for Him to put His armour on me (Ephesians 6).

Looking back, I would read and apply Proverbs 3:5-7 and James 1:5-7 and pray before taking any actions. What was lacking? Any proper consultation with God and no prayer seeking wisdom. Also, no checking if the planned action lined up with God's word!

3. What did we learn from James previously about wisdom (see 1:5-8)?

James 1:5-8 gives us some sound advice on seeking wisdom.

James 1:5-8 says - ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶ But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸ Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. James' advice is to pray and ask God for wisdom and to pray believing God will answer and to pray without doubting!

4. **Ponder:** Last study we talked about taming the tongue. Is it a coincidence do you think that James now talks about wisdom here? Is wisdom perhaps the **antidote** to the tongue? What do you think?

It is no coincidence that James started the letter in chapter 1 stating we need wisdom. We need wisdom to a) understand trials are actually helpful; b) to practice being godly; c) not to choose favourites and d) as in the previous study, to tame the tongue. What we are meant to see is that wisdom is paramount for living an authentic Christian life.

Read James 3:13

5. What does James say is the evidence of wisdom in v13?

*James says evidence of wisdom is: a **good life** exhibiting **deeds done in humility**.*

***Good Life:** The evidence of true wisdom is seen in how someone lives their life—characterized by moral integrity, righteousness, and actions that align with godly principles.*

***Deeds Done in Humility:** True wisdom is also demonstrated in humble actions. Wisdom is not about boasting, self-promotion, or pride, but rather about serving others and acting selflessly, in humility.*

Read James 3:14-16

6. According to James what are the characteristics of '**earthly**' wisdom in verses 14-16?

The characteristics of earthly wisdom are to: harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in our hearts and boasting about it. Such wisdom is unspiritual and demonic, James says. Such wisdom manifests disorder and every evil practice. This just goes to remind us that this world is fallen and broken and occupied by people with a fallen condition.

7. What parts of your life contain aspects of bitter envy and selfish ambition?

Going into ministry has been a personal sacrifice, so sometimes when things get really tough, it's easy to yearn for the 'old' life.

In general terms, here are some attitudes that can appear in people's lives:

- **Work:** *Wanting to outshine colleagues or being focused solely on personal promotion.*
- **Friendships:** *Feeling threatened by others' successes or constantly seeking validation.*
- **Family:** *Wanting to be the centre of attention or making decisions based on personal desires rather than the good of the family.*

8. What does '**earthly**' wisdom lead to in v16?

It leads to disorder and every evil practices

Read James 3:17-18

9. According to James what are the characteristics of '**heavenly**' wisdom in verses 17-18?

The characteristics of "heavenly" wisdom are: pure, peace-loving considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Essential everything that "earthly" wisdom is not.

10. What does '**heavenly**' wisdom lead to in v18?

"heavenly" wisdom leads to peacemakers who sow in peace a harvest of righteousness. That is a harvest of people who are right with God and approved by God and are therefore on the same page – namely, Jesus' page.

11. **Compare and contrast** James' '**heavenly**' wisdom in v17 and Paul's fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). Are they the same, why/why not?

V17 – purity, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, good fruit, impartial and sincere.

Galatians 5:22-23 – love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Are They the Same?

- **Yes, in essence:** Both the wisdom James describes and the fruit of the Spirit are rooted in godliness, humility, and love. They both emphasize godly living that reflects God's nature in the world and promotes peace, purity, kindness, and integrity.
- **No, in focus:** While they overlap significantly, James focuses on **wisdom** as the manifestation of a godly and humble life, whereas Paul's list is more about the **inner transformation** by the Holy Spirit that produces godly virtues.

12. **Ponder:** In this short section of James (3:13-18), James has given us an inventory of '**earthly**' wisdom and '**heavenly**' wisdom. Spend some time individually doing a checkup on the healthiness of the wisdom you follow in your life; is it mainly '**earthly**' or '**heavenly**'? Is it obvious to others you know that your wisdom is based on '**earthly**' standards or '**heavenly**' standards? Share the results of your checkup with the group if you're game enough?

It's difficult when doing any self-assessment to be entirely objective. Sometimes I can be guilty of envy; there are always people who seem to have it together better than me; or have greater wisdom than me; or are better off. At such times, I have to remember that God has me exactly where I am meant to be and He doesn't make mistakes.

13. How might we gain this 'heavenly wisdom' based on the following passages?

Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. Having a reverent fear of the Lord is the way to gain heavenly wisdom.

Proverbs 3:7, 13

V7 - Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil.

V13 - Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding

Not being wise in our own eyes; having reverent fear of the Lord; shunning evil and genuinely seeking God's wisdom is a way to gain heavenly wisdom!

Proverbs 4:1-9

This passage insists that a person should get God's wisdom at any cost. In this passage it amounts to:

- *Seeking God's wisdom through instruction and teaching*
- *Applying humility and discernment*
- *Pursuing wisdom as a lifelong commitment*
- *Having reverence for God and recognizing His authority in our lives*

Proverbs 13:1

A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a mocker does not respond to rebukes.

To gain heavenly wisdom, we need to heed the teaching of our godly father. Assuming our father is godly!

Proverbs 19:20

Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise.

To gain heavenly wisdom, we need to listen to advice and accept discipline; then eventually we will be counted among the wise.

Ecclesiastes 2:26

To the person who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

To gain heavenly wisdom, we need to be living a life that pleases God; this amounts to being obedient to God's word.

1 Corinthians 1:25

For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

To gain heavenly wisdom, we must recognize the limitations of human wisdom. We must also embrace the “foolishness of the cross” which to the world seems like foolishness or weakness. Whereas to us as Christians, the cross is the ultimate wisdom and power of God. Heavenly wisdom is rooted in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus – i.e., the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus.

What’s the **BIG IDEA** of James 3:13-18?

True wisdom is humble, pure, and peace-loving, unlike worldly wisdom, which leads to disorder.



What light globe moment did you have?

What **questions** do you have about the passages in this study?

Share the verse that had a special meaning to you in this study?

James 3:17:

"But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere."

Finish in prayer: Pray for each other that God will grant you the **wisdom** needed for each and every situation.

Study 7 – Submit Yourself to God and depend on Him

James 4:1-17

(Sermon on 16-Mar 2025)

To begin with...

How's your family situation – are there fights and quarrels?

If so – what are they normally about?

Read James 4:1-12

1. In James 4 v1, who's fighting and quarreling?
2. What does James say is the root cause of fights and quarrels between people in v2? (cf. Proverbs 4:23; Ecclesiastes 5:10)
3. What two types of behaviour are James concerned about in verses 2 and 3?
4. Does God always give people what they want? Why/Why not? (cf. James 4:3; Isaiah 55:89; 2 Peter 3:8; Philippians 4:7-7; and John 15:7)
5. James says in v4 – that friendship with the world makes us enemies of God. What does Jesus say about God and the world in Matt 6:24 and John 15:18-19?

6. Why do you think James uses the term “**adulterous**” in v4? (cf. Hosea 3:1; Jeremiah 3:20)
7. What’s so important about what dwells inside us (v5)?
8. What’s the ‘**more**’ grace that God gives us in v6? (cf. Proverbs 3:34 and Matt 23:12)
9. In verses 7 to 10 – James gives us ten commands – let’s name them:
1. _____ yourselves
 2. _____ the devil
 3. _____ to God
 4. _____ your hands
 5. _____ your hearts
 6. _____
 7. _____
 8. _____
 9. _____ your laughter
 10. _____ yourselves before God
10. What do you make of the promises of verses 7 and 8? Do they encourage you? (cf. 1 Samuel 15:22; Micah 6:8)

11. Jesus summed up all the law with 2 commandments. How? (f. Matt 22:37-39)
12. What is James saying in verses 11 and 12? (cf. Matthew 7:1-7)

Read James 4:13-17

13. What's so wrong with boasting anyway?
14. From verses 13-17, does James have a problem with planning ahead or something else? (cf. Proverbs 19:21; Proverbs 27:1; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Job 17:11; Luke 12:16-21)
15. What is James' message (or warning) to these businessmen?
16. When James speaks of a '*mist*' in v14, he is referring to Hosea 13:3. Why?

17. What is the sin that these businessmen are practicing?
18. **Notice** James moves directly from the sin of boasting to another type of sin in v17; what is it?

What's the **BIG IDEA** of James 4:1-17?



What light globe moment did you have?

What **questions** do you have about the passages in this study?

Share the verse that had a special meaning to you in this study?

Finish in prayer: Pray that each one of us would submit to God's authority and that we would learn to depend on Him for all of our needs.

Study 8 – Warnings and Encouragements

James 5:1-20

(Sermon on 23-Mar 2025)

Read James 5:1-6

1. At the start of v1 James addresses a new audience in a “***new tone of voice***”. Who is the audience and what is his tone?

2. What do you make of James’ tone here? Is there a reason for it?

3. Do you think James is opposed to wealth per say? (cf. 1 Timothy 6:10; Hebrews 13:5)

4. What is James’ message to us as 21st century Christians?

5. What does Jesus teach in the Sermon on the Mount on the subject of wealth? (Matt 6:19-21)

Read James 5:7-12

6. Depending on your translation why does James 5 v7 begin with: “***therefore***” or “***then***”?

7. What's the analogy being used in v7?
8. What is the parallel between the farmer waiting for the harvest and us waiting for the coming of the Lord? (Galatians 6:9)?
9. When James says in v8 "***the Lord's coming is near***" (or at hand) does this mean that James thought that Jesus would return in his lifetime and that he was wrong? (Hebrews 10:25, 1 Peter 4:7, Romans 13:11)
10. **Ponder:** In v9 James says, "***don't grumble***". He doesn't say it's okay to grumble if you have a good reason. Is there a place for grumbling? What do you think?
11. What does James say will happen if you grumble against your brother? (Matthew 7:1-5)
12. Why does James connect suffering (v10) with being patient until the coming of the Lord? (cf. 2 Chron 24:20-22; Jeremiah 26:20-23; Acts 7:51-58)

13. Why do you think James mentions Job in v11?
14. What's the characteristics of God that we can always rely on at the end of v11?
15. What are we to make of James' advice about "**swearing**" (making an oath) in the light of passages like: Heb 6:13; Matt 26:63-64; Romans 1:9; 9:1?

Read James 5:13-20

16. If you had to summarize your prayer life, what format does it take?

How much of it is adoration and praise of God?

How much of it is confessing your sin?

How much of it is thanking God?

How much of it is asking God for something?

Read James 5:1-13

17. Does the start of v13 sound familiar (hint: 1:2-3)?

18. What's the 2 actions involved in v13?

19. Verses 14-15 can cause people a lot of angst. Is James talking about physical or spiritually healing?
20. In what circumstances should the elders be called into praying for someone who is sick?
21. What do you make of v15? It seems to say prayers offered in faith will make the sick person well? What if it doesn't? Is this our lack of faith?
22. In whose name are the elders doing the anointing in v14?
23. Who is doing the healing in v15?
24. Why would James suggest we confess our sins to each other? (cf. Matt 6:12)
25. What encouragement is there about prayer at the end of v16?

26. Why do you think James gives us an example of Elijah's prayer life? (cf. 1 Kings 17; 1 Kings 18:41-45)
27. Why does James emphasize bringing someone back who has wandered from the truth? (**Hint: 2 Peter 3:9**)
28. If you have to **summarize the Book of James** in one sentence or paragraph, what would it be? Share your answer with your group.

What's the **BIG IDEA** of James 5:1-20?



What light globe moment did you have?

What **questions** do you have about the passages in this study?

Share the verse that had a special meaning to you in this study?

Finish in prayer: Pray for each other in your daily walk with the Lord encouraging each other to persevere until the coming of the Lord. Pray for those who need physical and spiritual healing.

**Studies prepared by Paul O'Rourke
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Resources:

The MacArthur Study Bible
New Bible Commentary (Carson, France, Moyter & Wenham)
James (Douglas Moo)
The Letter of James (William Barclay)
The Message of James (Alec Motyer)
Matthew Henry's Commentary