

A top-down view of a wooden workbench with various tools scattered across it. In the top left, a yellow and black tape measure is partially visible. Next to it is a hammer with a dark metal head and a yellow handle. A screwdriver with a black handle and a metal shaft lies diagonally across the top. Several silver-colored nails are scattered in the center. To the right, there's a metal block with a slot. In the bottom left, a yellow pencil, a nut, and a metal hook are visible. The wood grain of the workbench is clearly visible, running diagonally from the bottom left to the top right.

JAMIES

A WORKING FAITH

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Introduction

James is a cracking little letter written by the brother of Jesus likely to a group of Jewish Christian churches. Unlike a lot of the other letters in the new testament James doesn't unpack the gospel, what Christ has done for his readers. Rather it appears that he assumes his readers have the gospels or at least are familiar with the gospel story and in particular the teaching of Jesus. So, instead of going over familiar territory James dives straight in to helping his readers live out the Christian life. This is why James is very practical. However, we have to remember all the way through that what James is assuming is that his readers are genuine believers, they already know they're sinners saved by grace through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. He's not telling them how to be saved. Rather he's telling them how to live out the salvation already achieved through Christ's work. As we read this letter we have to keep this in mind otherwise we will gain a distorted view of what James is saying.

If you're interested, a fascinating thing to do is read through the whole of Jesus' sermon on the mount in Matthew 5-7 then read James. It seems that James is simply applying Jesus teaching to the specific challenges that his churches are facing.

On the way through there are three major themes that James keeps coming back to over and over. They are the need to think rightly about the various trials we face, the tension between rich and poor and the need for wisdom in every area of life.

It's great punchy little letter and I hope you find it helpful reading through it and seeing how to live out the Christian life Christ has won for you.

1 Joy in trials

James 1:1-11

Getting started

1. Can you share a time when going through some difficulty lead to growth in some area of your life?

Explore

Read James 1:1-4

2. What does James say to do when we face various trials? Why?

3. How do trials produce maturity?

Read James 1:5-8

4. In verse 4 James equates maturity with not lacking anything. There is the assumption here that we do all lack something. What do we lack?

5. What should we do about this lack? How?

6. What is it about God that gives us confidence to ask him for this?

Read James 1:9-11

7. What should believers in humble circumstances do? Why? (cf. Luke 6:20-23)

8. What should the rich do? Why? (cf. Luke 6:24-26)

Apply

9. When facing trials how can you specifically grow your appetite for maturity so that it trumps your desire for mere relief?

10. What specific areas of your life would you like God to give you wisdom?

11. Do you need to take pride in your exaltation or your humiliation more? How can you specifically do that?

Pray

2 Trials and temptations

James 1:12-27

Getting started

1. Can you share a time when you went through something hard yet looking back you've seen how God grew you through it?

Explore

Read James 1:12-18

2. How should we think about the various trials in our lives?
3. According to verse 13 what seems to be a danger when we face various trials?
4. In verses 13-18 what things does James remind us of to combat this danger?

Read James 1:19-27

5. James 1:19 is the topic sentence for everything that comes after it. What does it say?
6. How does James in verse 20-21 show us how and why to be slow to anger?

7. In verse 22-25 what does it look like to be quick to listen?

8. How does verse 26 further urge us to be slow to speak?

9. James 1:27 could be a summary sentence of the entire letter of James. Summarise his view of the Christian life in your own words.

Apply

10. When you next face some trial what do you need to remind yourself so that your trial becomes a test to pass rather than a temptation to sin?

11. Do you find yourself quick to anger? How can you fight against that temptation?

12. How can you be cultivating a slowness of speaking and a quickness of listening?

Pray

3 No favouritism

James 2:1-13

Getting Started

1. Have you ever been discriminated against?

Explore

Read James 2:1-4

2. What does James say believers must not do? Why?

Read James 2:5-11

3. What is God's attitude toward the poor and discriminated against?
4. What other reasons does James give for why it's not right to dishonour the poor?
5. What law does showing favouritism violate?

Read James 2:12-13

6. What should we remember when we speak and act?

7. What is it we should always be working hard to show to others?

Apply

8. We all show partiality/favoritism to some extent and it's not always to rich/poor. Which group of people do you find yourself instinctively treating favourably or unfavourably?

9. What things can you practically do to extend love to those you don't instinctively favour?

10. When do you find it hardest to show mercy to others? In those times how can you be reminding yourself of God's mercy toward you?

Pray

4

A working faith

James 2:14-26

Getting Started

1. If someone claimed to be a football player, what evidence could they present to convince you that they are?

Explore

Read James 2:14-17

2. What is James trying to convince his readers of in this section?
3. Verse 16 seems to be a prayer for the one in need “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed”. What’s good about this prayer?
4. In this particular instance what does the one praying fail to grasp about the way God answers prayer?

Read James 2:18-26

5. There seem to be those claiming that faith and work are separable. What examples does James give to refute this?

6. How does Abraham and Rahab serve as examples of true faith?

7. Read Romans 3:21-31 and 4:1-5. Is James contradicting Paul at this point? Why/Why not?

8. How would you summarise James' point in this whole section?

Don't read this until you've wrestled with question 7 first. There have been those who have claimed that James is contradicting Paul here. However, if you understand that they are speaking to very different circumstances then you can understand that they aren't contradicting each other at all. Paul is speaking to those who think their obedience is what makes them right with God and he's arguing that no it's purely trusting in what Christ has done that's able to do that. Whereas James is speaking to those who claim to have faith but don't seem to be living like Christians exhibiting the kind of mercy to those around them Christ did. He's not saying they're saved by their obedience he's saying that true saving faith evidences itself in obedience and mercy to those around them.

Apply

9. How does this passage make you feel about the genuineness of your faith?

10. Is there areas in your life you want to grow in? How can you look to Christ for the strength to live out your faith more fully?

Pray

5 Taming the tongue

James 3:1-18

Getting Started

1. Can you think of a time you've regretted something you've said?

Explore

Read James 3:1-12

2. What shouldn't many of James' readers become? Why?
3. How does verse 2 add to why many shouldn't become teachers?
4. What is verses 3-4 telling us about how we speak?
5. What does verses 5-8 warn us about?
6. In verse 9-12 why is it important that we be careful how we speak?

Read James 3:13-18

7. How does true wisdom express itself in our lives?

8. What is evidence of 'earthly' wisdom?

Apply

9. What times do you find it hardest to control what you say? In those times how can you be looking to Jesus for strength to control your tongue?

10. What areas of true wisdom do you want to be growing in?

11. What areas of 'earthly' wisdom do you want to be turning away from?

Pray

6 Green eyed

James 4:1-17

Getting Started

1. Can you remember something you really, really wanted? What did you do to get it?

Explore

Read James 4:1-10

2. What is the problem in verse 1?

3. What is the underlying cause that James points them to?

4. What is this kind of behaviour evidence of? (v. 4-5)

5. What does James say is the solution? What does he call us to do in response to that?

Read James 4:11-12

6. What shouldn't Christians do? Why?

Read James 4:13-17

7. What is the danger of thinking you're in complete control of your life?
8. What's a better posture to have toward your life?

Apply

9. What ungodly desires in your life seem to cause you the most grief? How can you practice mourning over those desires and humbling yourself before God?
10. What flaws in others do you most delight to point out? How can you turn away from that?
11. What plans have you made lately without any thought to God? How can you bring those things to God?

Pray

7 Rich and poor

James 5:1-20

Getting Started

1. Can you think of a situation in your life that really tried your patience?

Explore

Read James 5:1-6

This section is likely written to wealthy non-Christian landowners who were exploiting members of the church James is writing to.

2. What does James want exploited people to know about God's attitude and response to their exploitation?

Read James 5:7-12

3. What does James call his readers to do in this section? Why?
4. What examples of patience does James hold out to us? How can they help us be patient?

Read James 5:13-20

5. What situations in life should prompt us to come to God? Why?

6. How can we help each other come to God?

7. How does the example of Elijah help us?

Apply

8. When do you find it hardest to be patient? What do you need to remind yourself of in those times?

9. What aspect of coming to God do you most want to grow in? Praying? Confessing? Praising? What steps can you take to put that desire into practice?

Pray

